

Study Guide

by Leslie H. Stobble

Working through a study guide about ordering our private worlds may seem a peculiarly activist response to a call for more inner-directed living. Yet most of us need something to help us develop a more disciplined approach to ordering our private worlds as believers.

The author reflects, “I found that one practical way to learn to listen to God speak in the garden of my private world was to keep a journal. With pencil in hand ready to write, I found that there was an expectancy, a readiness to hear anything God might wish to whisper through my reading and reflection.” (p. 175).

We hope this study guide will aid the reader in establishing a reflective writing as a habit. Some questions are designed to get you to think through the implications of the author’s suggestions and to write down your responses. Others we hope will trigger life responses.

* Questions with an asterisk have been inserted to facilitate discussion in group settings.

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Readers who do not wish to write in their book may download a copy of this study for printing on a PC printer for noncommercial use.

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Chapter One: The Sinkhole Syndrome

1. In what ways has your life during the past year illustrated the author's words: "Our outer, or public, world is easier to deal with. It is much more measurable, visible, and expandable"?

- * 2. What might be described as a "sinkhole experience" in your life?

3. The author writes that the private world "is a centre in which choices and values can be determined, where solitude and reflection might be pursued." What else can happen there as well, according to the author? See page 22.

- * 4. Which public worlds are screaming for your attention? Put an asterisk beside the ones to which you've capitulated.

4. What set Mary Slessor apart from others of her generation? See page 37.
- * 5. From your circle of friends and people you have read about, who would be your best contemporary model of inner orderliness? Why?
- * 6. What are the two most important choices you can make to gain this kind of inner “bridge”? See page 36.
- a)
- b)

Chapter Three: Caught in a Golden Cage

1. Christ separated people out on the basis of their tendency to be driven or their willingness to be called. He dealt with their motives, the basis of their spiritual energy, and the sorts of gratification in which they were interested. He called those who were drawn to Him and avoided those who were driven and wanted to use Him. Assuming this to be true, would you have qualified as one of Jesus' disciples? If not qualified, why not?
2. Make an attempt to sort out and catalogue the motives that energize you as an involved Christian. Take time to listen to the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit and begin to write.
3. What are some of the negative components of stress in your life today?

- * 4. List the stresses the apostle Paul experienced in his life of ministry as described in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28. Reflect upon them by comparing them with the negative components of stress that you listed for the preceding questions.

5. How did Paul gain the inner resilience needed for his stress level? Using a concordance, isolate the words pray and prayer in the apostle's letter for the inner ordering of his world.

6. List the characteristics of the driven person that are obvious in your life from your perspective.

7. Now ask your spouse or your closest friend to pinpoint those characteristics in your life.

* 8. With what three assets had God blessed Saul at the time he became king? (see pages 56-59) What advantage did they gain him?

a)

b)

c)

9. As you read the account of Saul's experience, write down the parallels in your own life.

10. Now lay these before the Lord, asking Him for insight into action you can take to get out of the golden cage. List action points below as they come to you.

* 11. How can we help Christian leaders trapped by the golden-cage syndrome?

Chapter Four: The Tragic Tale of a Successful Bum

1. Reflecting on the story of the driven husband that opens the chapter, examine experiences during your formative years that may have shaped your present attitudes. Describe each with a one-sentence statement that pinpoints the key issue. If they were positive, take time to thank God for each one.

- * 2. Make a two-column chart. In the first column list the external goals of the driven man (see p. 64) and in the second column the parallels you recognize in your life.

- * 3. List the motivational basis for people you know who may be driven, drawing on the reasons given on pages 64-68.

4. Which of these motivational mainsprings shape your inner world? Describe how they affect your actions.

5. What experiences does the author consider critical to changing the lifestyle of the driven person? See page 68.

- * 6. Identify the key elements in Peter's interaction with Jesus that produced change. Consider Matthew 14:25-30, 16:13-17, 26:31-35, and John 21:15-22, among others.

7. Whom do you need to forgive for the drivenness in your life? What action will you take to gain the release that forgiveness can give you both?

- * 8. Do all of us have to experience a classic confrontation with Jesus as Paul did before we can change from being driven persons to called persons? If so, why? If not, why not?

Chapter Five: Living as a Called Person

1. According to the author, what is the difference between a driven person and a called person? See page 72. What category do you seem to fit?

- * 2. How do the disciples of Jesus match the apostle Paul's description of the called in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31?

3. When do we see the difference between John the Baptist and King Saul most vividly? See page 74.

- * 4. What are the characteristics of the called person, according to the author? See pages 75-80.

5. If you were to measure yourself according to those characteristics, what is your weakest link? Set aside a specific time to be before the Lord and let the Holy Spirit do His gracious work in you. Either make a journal entry or record your experience here.

f) I do not experience intimacy with God on a regular basis.

g) My personal relationships are suffering.

h) I really don't like myself, my job, or much of anything else.

2. None of us can effect improvement in that many areas at once. We need about three weeks to break a habit and another three to feel comfortable with a new one. So set your sight on changing the area that you consider most critical at this time in your ordering of your private world. Then mark on your calendar when you will focus on the second area. Below, note the two areas you have selected for improvement.

a)

b)

- * 6. Moses had forty years in the wilderness; David, his years of exile from the court of Saul; Jesus, thirty years to begin His ministry. Describe what you could consider a similar, usually unexplainable delay in getting on with your mission in life. Can you list discernible benefits from that time?
7. Jesus invested His life in twelve disciples. In whom are you investing your life as a parent, as a businessperson, as a leader in your church, as a professional? What are you trying to achieve in your discipling role?
- * 8. What can you do to multiply your ministry as Jesus did?

3. If you are in a group, share some of these.

List two of your tasks that you could pass on to your spouse, associate, lay leader (if you are a pastor), secretary, son, or daughter without detracting from what you do best. (This may be a task you really enjoy doing, but one you know is not central to your life mission.)

a)

b)

4. Suggest why the “strong people” in your life rob you of valuable time you could give to your family.

5. What are you doing for the sake of public acclaim? You may need to work out this answer before the Lord in a special time with Him.

6. What would happen if you were to implement John 9:4 in your life?

Chapter Eight: The Better Man Lost

- * 1. What is the greatest danger of flabby thinking (see p. 123) in a church or in a society? If there is a specific example in your life, describe the situation.

2. Describe a situation in which you were mentally ready for the challenge because you had developed mental toughness.

- * 3. What request by the apostle Paul indicates he was determined to stay mentally tough even while in prison? See 2 Timothy 4:13.

4. What could be considered danger signals that indicate you are a fast starter, a personal quality you have considered a positive benefit until now?

5. What provides you with the mental stimulation you know you should be getting, but you have not given it priority? (see next page)

5. List the four steps in becoming a listener. Then describe what you can do to personalize these steps in your listening process.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

6. Describe a situation in which listening to God or to another person helped you take a major step forward.

7. What book have you wanted to read for a long time and just never got to? When can you get it into your schedule?

8. What set Ezra apart from other leaders of his day? Turn to Psalm 119:33-40 and describe the characteristics of this kind of student.

Chapter Ten: Order in the Garden

1. If you were confined to a prisoner-of-war camp without a Bible, how effective would you be in recalling Scripture? What can you do to learn more Scripture?

2. If you were totally honest with yourself, how would you describe your inner communion with God?

- * 3. The author writes, “If we are ever to develop a spiritual life that gives contentment, it will be because we approach spiritual living as a discipline, much as the athlete trains his body for competition.” Do you agree or disagree? If you disagree, write out your reasons.

- * 4. What are some of the metaphors you would use to describe your inner spiritual centre?

5. Write out the five privileges we lose if we do not have a disciplined approach to inner spiritual development (see pages 162 - 164). Now check off those you sense are missing in your life.
 - a)

- b)

- c)

- d)

- e)

6. What pressure situations in life helped you begin the development of your inner spiritual life?

7. What is the deepest desire of your heart for your inner life with God? What can you do to have that desire satisfied?

* 8. What did David gain from his communion with God, as described in Psalm 27?

Chapter Eleven: No Outer Props Necessary

1. If you were to be left helpless by a physical disability, where would you turn for the strength to survive?
2. What was the secret of E. Stanley Jones's serenity when he was disabled by a stroke?
3. Write out the four spiritual exercises recommended as critical (see p. 170) and give yourself a rating from 1 to 10 on each (with 10 as the best).

a.		b.	
c.		d.	

4. Describe some of the noisy intrusions in your life that rob you of the silence and solitude the author recommends.

- * 5. What can we learn from the silence/solitude of Zacharias; his wife, Elizabeth; and Mary, the mother of Jesus?

6. The author describes the difficulties in quieting the inner self to attain solitude. Try it and write down the results.

- * 7. What aids do you employ to listen to God in your private world?

8. What is the key contribution of a personal journal?

9. What are some of the things the author records in his journal? See page 178-182.

10. Use this space to make your first journal entry if you have not yet started journaling. Let it be your experiment.

Chapter Twelve: Everything Has to Be Entered

1. Describe a time in your life when neither the inner strands nor the outer props were strong enough to hold you up. If you have not had such an experience, describe how you avoided such a time.
2. Describe an experience you or someone you know has had that is similar to that of Samuel in the Old Testament (see page 189).
3. What does the author call the “enter” key for effective internalization of what we hear in silence and solitude?
4. What happens in meditation, according to the author? See page 190.

Chapter Fourteen: Rest Beyond Leisure

1. What provided the “check and balance” in William Wilberforce’s life in the face of “risings of ambition”? (see page 216). If you have had a similar experience, make a journal entry of it.

- * 2. What is the paradox the author notes about our leisure society? See page 217.

- * 3. How did God “close the loop” on His creation activity?

- * 4. What is the foremost purpose for the rest instituted by God?

- * 5. The author writes, “Work that goes on month after month without a genuine pause to inquire of its meaning and purpose may swell the bank account and enhance the professional reputation.” What will it also do for all of us?

