

Discussion Guide for the Video

KEEPING THE FIRE ALIVE

Navigating Challenges in
the Spiritual Life

FOR USE WITH THE VIDEO

Keeping the Fire Alive

with

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PARACLETE PRESS

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To enhance your experience of this video and to foster discussion, the following is a suggested format to be used in a 90-minute adult faith formation program:

1. Gathering with Suggested Scripture Reading (5 minutes): *The reading situates the topic of the presentation in Scripture.*
2. Pre-view Table Discussion (15 minutes): *This gets participants thinking about the topic and sharing their wisdom and experience.*
3. Video Presentation (30 minutes): *Fr. Albert shares his wisdom and experience on the topic.*
4. Coffee Break (15 minutes): *Mother Nature has her needs.*
5. Post-View Table Discussion or Large Group Discussion (20 minutes): *Whether done in a small group or a large group, this offers the participants an opportunity to respond to the presentation.*
6. Concluding Prayer and Dismissal (5 minutes): *It is wise to have a copy available for each participant to pray together before dismissing them.*
7. It would also be ideal for you to have at least one copy on hand of Fr. Haase's book *Catching Fire, Becoming Flame: A Guide For Spiritual Transformation—10th Anniversary Edition*. Some of the material in these video presentations comes from that book—and the book is referred to occasionally in what follows.

NEAR OCCASIONS OF GRACE AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION



1. Read 1 Samuel 3:1–10
2. Table Discussion: *What does this reading tell you about the voice of God in your life? Why was Eli an important figure in this Scripture passage?*
3. Video Presentation #1
4. Coffee Break
5. Table Discussion/Large Group Discussion: *What has been your experience of the near occasions of grace in your life? How has spiritual direction helped or hindered that experience?*
6. Concluding Prayer: see Prayer at the Hearth of the Heart in *Catching Fire, Becoming Flame: A Guide For Spiritual Transformation—10th Anniversary Edition* pp. 263-264.

RESISTING TEMPTATIONS



1. Read Luke 4:1–13
2. Table Discussion: *What strategies do you employ to resist and overcome temptations? How helpful have you found them? When have they proven to be least successful?*
3. Video Presentation #2
4. Coffee Break
5. Table Discussion/Large Group Discussion: *What did you find new, inspiring, or helpful in Fr. Albert's presentation?*
6. Concluding Prayer:

Loving God, you are the source of all good things. I try my best to live with the awareness that everything is a grace, gift, and blessing. Open up my eyes, my ears, and my heart so that I might become more deeply aware that every moment is a near occasion of your grace. Break through my blindness, my stubbornness, and my hardness of heart.

Because you are the source of everything, in your presence I can claim nothing as my own—except my sins. And they are too many, Loving God, because I so easily give in to the temptations that come my way. For this, I ask and trust in your compassionate forgiveness.

I ask that your Spirit give me a deeper self-knowledge of the cracks in my soul and my weaknesses. I also ask for the patience and persistence to come to know the wisdom expressed in Scripture. That knowledge will help me to put on the mind of Christ and to change my thinking.

I try hard, Loving God, not to be duped and deceived by temptation. Give me the quickness of heart and strength to stand firm. And when I find myself tempted again and again, let me resist and resist and resist with the confident awareness that my Baptism allows me to share in the power of Christ's resurrection.

May I have the courage to live a life of love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, generosity, and self-control, for a life of virtue offers protection against the wiles and tricks of the Evil One. And in those moments when I am tempted to discouragement, may I not worry, knowing full well that my greatest enemy is "only the devil."

I ask this in the Name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

THE FOUR D'S OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE



1. Read Luke 22:39–46
2. Table Discussion: *Jesus struggled in his prayer so much so that in anguish “his sweat became like drops of blood.” Think back to a time when you struggled with your prayer life. Did anything good come from it? What seemed to be the dominant feeling you had during this period of time: anger, frustration, confusion, discouragement, or anxiety? What, if anything, did you say to God about these feelings?*
3. Video Presentation #3
4. Coffee Break
5. Table Discussion/Large Group Discussion: *Name a personal “take away” from this presentation. Why do you find it meaningful and helpful?*
6. Concluding Prayer

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. (Thomas Merton)

MAKING SENSE OF SUFFERING



1. Read Matthew 14:22–33
2. Table Discussion: *Why does God allow us to experience emotional storms and suffering? What has been your experience of them and how did you manage to navigate through their stormy waters?*
3. Video Presentation #4
4. Coffee Break
5. Table Discussion/Large Group Discussion: *What did you learn from the video presentation? What feelings arose as you listened to Fr. Albert share his thoughts on the Gospel reading?*
6. Concluding Prayer: see the Prayer of Abandonment by Charles de Foucauld in *Catching Fire, Becoming Flame: A Guide For Spiritual Transformation—10th Anniversary Edition*, p. 219.

LIVING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT



1. Read Luke 1:26–38
2. Table Discussion: *Someone once said that this Gospel reading shows that Mary was “wide awake.” What do you think that means? Besides her being the pure, chosen mother of the Son of God, what else does this Scripture reading say to you about the spiritual attitude and personal disposition of Mary?*
3. Video Presentation #5
4. Coffee Break
5. Table Discussion/Large Group Discussion: *Spend 8 minutes practicing the 4-step method of Living in the Present Moment:*
 - a. Recollection (bringing your awareness to the present moment)

- b. Attention (experiencing and delighting in what your five senses are registering)
 - c. Reflection (what is God saying to you or asking you?)
 - d. Adoration-in-Action (how will you respond?)
Share your initial experience of this prayer technique. How helpful or challenging was it? What did you discover?
6. Concluding Prayer

Loving God, you grace me with the opportunity to stand at the doorway of the sacrament of the present moment. Through its portal You and Your angels continue to walk in and out of my life. Grace me with the awareness that this ordinary, humdrum moment is a sacred moment wrapped in the mystery of Your presence and love. It will never, ever happen again.

Slow me down, Loving God, and allow me to dilly-dally right now, right here in the joys and challenges that this sacred moment reveals: the need that is left unmet, the duty that needs attention. I trust that in responding to the outstretched hand, the crying child, the confused, elderly parent, or the call to embrace a betrayer, I am pleasing you. Help me to remember that every moment I live through is an ambassador that declares Your will.

You come in disguise. You always surprise. As I intentionally stand at the portal of this sacrament and respond to its need or duty, may I live with the wonder and awe that this moment is a brick that paves my road to Eternal Life.

I ask this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

THE AGENDA OF THE EGO



1. Read Matthew 5:38–48
2. Table Discussion: *How difficult is this teaching from the Sermon on the Mount? What basic challenge is Jesus proposing in this teaching?*

3. Video Presentation #6
4. Coffee Break
5. Table Discussion/Large Group Discussion: *Fr. Albert discussed the two lungs that feed the ego's self-obsessions. One lung obsessively acquires the "empty P's" and the other obsessively avoids pain, blame, criticism, disgrace, and loss. Which lung is most operative in your life? Name a practical way you can stop feeding it.*
6. Concluding Prayer

Loving God and Father, the restless longing of my heart is endless and unceasing. It demands recognition. It insists upon satisfaction. I am always feeding it with toys and trinkets as I live with the belief that things like power, prestige, possessions, popularity, praise, and pleasure will bring me a happiness lasting forever. Time and again I fall for this seduction and lie of the ego.

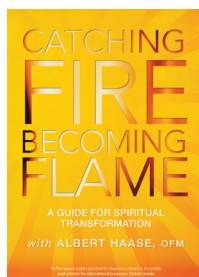
Shatter my blindness with the wisdom that a blessed life is found in simplicity, meekness, and acceptance of what you have graciously provided for me. May I never frantically seek or obsessively hoard anything. May my life proclaim You and You alone as the satisfaction of all human desires.

I run from pain and criticism. I avoid blame. I fear disgrace and loss. I desperately try to dodge anything that would bruise my ego or reputation. Time and again I discover this leads to self-imposed frustration and anger that consume me.

Give me courageous patience to surrender and accept the cross in whatever way it finds me. May I bear it with love until the day all my longings are satisfied in the vision of Your glory.

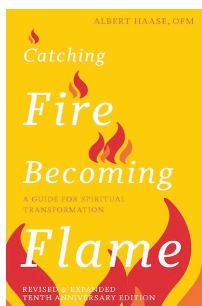
I ask this in the Name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

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