

THE SPACIOUS HEART

Study Guide by Alicia Buhler

This study guide to *The Spacious Heart: Room for Spiritual Awakening* by Donald Clymer and Sharon Clymer Landis may be used for your personal reflection or as a discussion guideline in a small group setting. A centering verse is taken from each chapter and could be used as an opening. The questions provided are intended to deepen your reflection on the lessons of each chapter and your consideration of how the material in this book applies to your own life. A journal in which to capture your thoughts may be helpful.

If you will be meeting with a small group, you may choose which reflections to share with others and which insights are for you alone. A prayer invitation is offered for each chapter and is another way for you to engage more fully with the material. The prayer invitation may be used as either an opening or a closing to a group study session. The authors are both spiritual directors and write of their experiences of both giving and receiving spiritual direction. If any of the material in this book raises questions or concerns for you, a spiritual director is someone who is equipped to help you process your questions. Blessings as you set out to make room for spiritual awakening.

..... INTRODUCTION

Each of us is surrounded by God experiences, whether or not we are aware of them. God is continually providing us with opportunities to notice. Don and Sharon wrote this book in response to what they were noticing in their own lives. I trust that you have come to this book—or perhaps the book has come to you—for a particular reason in this season of your life.

Take a moment to notice what draws you to *The Spacious Heart*. If you quiet yourself and listen, what is God's invitation to you at this time? What is your intention as you set out to discover room for spiritual awakening in your life?

..... CHAPTER 1: BASKING IN THE PRESENCE OF DIVINE LOVE

*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete. —JOHN 15:11 NIV*

1. Sharon shares a story of herself as an open, innocent young child and describes a moment of wounding in which she closed herself off. If you are able, recall a time of innocence in your life before cynicism and skepticism settled in. How does your pre-cynical posture of openness influence how you view and engage with your world?
2. “Underneath every cynic lies a disappointed idealist” (Mazella, *The Making of Modern Cynicism*, p. 4). Does this statement ring true for you? What ideals, if any, have you given up on?
3. Have you experienced a crisis of spirit? If so, what questions did you wrestle with? What were you invited to let go of? What were you invited to turn toward?
4. In your desire for a more spacious heart, what spiritual practices have you engaged in? Are there new practices that you would like to try?

Prayer Invitation:

Settle in your seat and take a few deep breaths. Engage your active imagination and turn your attention inward. Become aware of the many pieces of your life’s story. Now expand your awareness to God’s presence. Notice the qualities of that presence—is it loving, peaceful, grace-filled, light, or do you sense some judgment or anger? Is there a particular image of God that comes to you? If you feel you are ready, place some or all of the pieces of your story into God’s presence. How does God hold and respond to your story? If you’re not ready to trust God with your story, that’s okay. Perhaps you can ask God to heal any woundedness that prevents you from trusting, and await a new image of God to emerge as you are ready.

..... CHAPTER 2: ROTTEN GRAIN AND FILTHY LUCRE

*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.
I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,
whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.
I can do all this through him who gives me strength. —PHILIPPIANS 4:12-13 NIV*

1. Name a time when you responded out of scarcity rather than abundance. Looking back, what do you know now that you wish you had known then?
2. Recall an advertisement that has had an effect on you and stuck with you. Identify any lies used in the advertisement. How did those lies play on your fears?
3. What are your internalized fears of scarcity? What are you afraid will happen if your fear of “not enough” comes true? What are you afraid an exposure of being “not enough” will say about you?
4. In what way might you be called to trust in God rather than in material possessions at this point in your life?

Prayer Invitation:

Along with cultivating gratitude, the truths found in Scripture provide another antidote to the lies of scarcity that bombard us every day. Reflect on the Beatitudes using *lectio divina*, a prayerful way of reading and listening to Scripture.

- *Lectio* (reading): Read Matthew 5.1-11 in a slow and attentive manner.
- *Meditatio* (meditation): Ponder what was read and wonder how the Scripture passage connects with your life.
- *Oratio* (prayer): Allow the prayer of your heart to flow to God.
- *Contemplatio* (contemplation): Open your awareness to how God is speaking or responding to you.

..... CHAPTER 3: IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. —MATTHEW 6:34 NIV

1. Children model for us how to live fully and joyfully in the present. What lessons have you learned from the children in your life?
2. Don's students compiled a list of three things to help them stay present in the moment (p. 59). How do you celebrate life where it is found? What is on your list of practices?
3. Describe an experience of heightened awareness from your own life. What feelings or insights were you aware of as you were fully present in the here and now, not dwelling in the past and not rushing ahead to the future?

Prayer Invitation:

There are many variations of the *consciousness examen*, “a prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern his direction for us” (p. 231). The following is a five-step daily prayer practiced by St. Ignatius who was the first to practice and teach this form of prayer.

Become aware of God’s presence.
Review the day with gratitude.
Pay attention to your emotions.
Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
Look toward tomorrow.

From www.ignatianspirituality.com

..... CHAPTER 4: LESSONS FROM THE WEEDS AND THE FLOWERS

One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God. He kneeled at Jesus' feet, so grateful. He couldn't thank him enough—and he was a Samaritan. —LUKE 17:14B-16 THE MESSAGE

1. Sharon offers us two gardening metaphors—that of picking berries with her granddaughter and her attempts to eradicate bindweed—to demonstrate gratitude and resentment. What stories from your own life may serve as a metaphor of either making room for gratitude or being caught in resentment?
2. Having too many choices and the psychological phenomenon of adaptation are simply realities of living in North American society that can easily lead to resentment. What choices are you being called to make to cultivate an attitude of gratitude in your own life?
3. Become aware of a current dissatisfaction in your life. It may be large or small—perhaps you can identify within yourself a longing for a new appliance, article of clothing, vehicle, job, life partner, and so on. What would your response to this longing look like if you responded to it out of *chronos*, or clock time? How would your response differ if you responded out of *kairos*, or God's time?

Prayer Invitation:

In the same spirit of praise that the Samaritan returned to Jesus, “shouting his gratitude, glorifying God,” find a way to express your gratitude for what God has provided. Perhaps you will sing a hymn, pray a psalm, create a piece of art, embody your praise through movement, write a poem. The possibilities are endless!

..... CHAPTER 5: INVITE YOUR DEMONS TO TEA

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. —1 JOHN 4:16, 18 NIV

1. Anthony de Mello is quoted as saying, “[T]here’s not a single evil in the world that you cannot trace to fear” (p. 95). Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. The authors suggest a number of ways in which perfect love drives out fear: trusting in God rather than money, systems of security, the media, and so on; detachment; loving your enemies; becoming still before God; inviting your demons to tea. Do you sense a personal invitation to one or more of these practices? Are there other ways in which you may be invited into perfect love?
3. How do you respond to the question, “Will you trust even when there is no reassurance?” (p. 101)

Prayer Invitation:

Detachment and quieting our souls are two essential practices for cultivating trust rather than fear. Take some time to be in prayerful silence, or what is called “centering prayer.” This form of prayer is an invitation to simply sit in God’s presence, rather than trying to communicate something through prayer (see p. 231). Set aside five, 10, or 20 minutes; you can use a timer if watching the clock is a distraction. Sit in a supported, comfortable position but not so comfortable that it will encourage sleep. You may choose a word or phrase to help you to center and focus; perhaps *trust*, *perfect love*, or some other word that comes to you. As you begin, become aware of God’s presence and invite Divine Love to reveal itself to you. You may choose to simply practice being present in the silence or you may repeat your chosen word or phrase to yourself. As you sit in the quiet your mind is likely to wander. Gently bring yourself back to the quiet using the word or phrase that you have chosen. As you end your time of silence, give thanks to God. Detachment, quieting your soul, and prayerful silence all require practice so don’t be discouraged if you haven’t mastered this form of silent prayer after only one session.

CHAPTER 6: WHAT IF SHE IS A CRAZY MYSTIC AND LEVITATES OR SOMETHING?

Now we see only a dim likeness of things. It is as if we were seeing them in a mirror. But someday we will see clearly. We will see face to face. What I know now is not complete. But someday I will know completely, just as God knows me completely. —1 CORINTHIANS 13:12 NIRV

1. If you were to create a scale with “either/or thinking” on one end and “both-and thinking” on the other end, where on the scale would you place yourself, your family and friends, your church, your school or workplace, your province or state, your country?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Either/Or Black-and-white certainty					Both/And Gray ambiguity				

Notice which contexts nurture black-and-white thinking and which contexts draw you into the gray areas of life. The authors suggest that releasing the black-and-white need to know, and welcoming gray ambiguity or mystery is one way to a more mellow heart. How might you surround yourself with more both-and influence?

2. What spoken or unspoken rules were you taught as a child that now as an adult you can see have been creating an unnecessarily heavy burden? What legalism or either/or way of thinking might you be invited to relax to become more in tune with Jesus, who often critiqued legalism?
3. “Pope John XXIII summed up dealing with ambiguity this way: ‘In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things, charity’” (p. 112–13). What are your essentials? Given those essentials, how might you practice charity in your family and faith community?
4. Who—if any—have been the safe and open people in your life who have welcomed your questioning, practiced charity, and loved you so much that you were able to begin truly loving yourself?

Prayer Invitation:

You cannot force the ways in which God comes to you but you can invite a new image of God or truth to come to you by preparing yourself to be open and receptive. Begin your prayer by opening yourself to God and asking if there is anything that you need to surrender—perhaps outgrown ways of thinking or old images of God that are no longer serving you. Take a moment to notice what rises to the surface. Either through words spoken silently, a gesture, or through an image in your mind's eye, release what is no longer yours to carry. Now ask what new truth or image God has for you today. Receive what comes. Two ways that you can discern whether what you have received in prayer is truly from God is by checking this new truth against the truths of Scripture and inviting a trusted spiritual director, pastor, friend, or small group to discern together with you.

..... CHAPTER 7: CONNECTING HEAVEN AND EARTH WITH OPEN HEARTS

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. —PHILIPPIANS 4:7 NIV*

1. According to Don, the main causes of existential loneliness and restlessness are a loss of community, too much time on our hands, a loss of faith, separation from and exploitation of nature, and fragmentation (p. 125–29). Are there any other causes that you would add to this list? Give an example or two of how these losses have affected you personally.
2. “Are you at peace with God, with yourself, with your fellow human beings, and with nature?” (p. 129–30). Where in your life are you sensing God calling you to make peace?
3. Sharon introduces the Welcoming Prayer by Father Thomas Keating as one way of making peace with ourselves, others, nature, and God by allowing what *is* to *be*. What is your reaction to this prayer? What parts of the prayer draw you? What parts challenge you?

Welcome, welcome, welcome.
I welcome everything that comes to me today
because I know it's for my healing.
I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons,
situations, and conditions.
I let go of my desire for power and control.
I let go of my desire for affection, esteem,
approval and pleasure.
I let go of my desire for survival and security.
I let go of my desire to change any situation,
condition, person or myself.
I open to the love and presence of God and
God's action within. Amen.

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Prayer Invitation:

Read Isaiah 55 using the tools of *lectio divina* that were introduced in this study guide under chapter 2.

..... CHAPTER 8: WHERE IS YOUR HEART?

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. —MATTHEW 10:39 NIV

1. In what ways are you tempted to maintain control in your life or in the lives of others? What situations make you feel out of control?
2. What are you being invited to let go of right now in your life?
3. Where do you draw the line between the self-emptying and surrender that are an important part of opening your heart, and destructive forms of self-denial that lead to shame and further wounding of the heart?
4. What is one change that you may be drawn to make in your own life in order to become more like Jesus?

Prayer Invitation:

Meditate on these words, adapted from Philippians 3:12: “Not that I have already obtained all this [*Gelassenheit*], or have already arrived at my goal [total surrender], but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

..... CHAPTER 9: GETTING OVER OURSELVES

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. —1 PETER 3:8 NRSV

1. St. Benedict offers 12 steps to developing humility (p. 166). Is there anything you would add or take away from this list? Are there any steps that are particularly challenging for you?
2. Have you practiced footwashing? If so, how has washing another's feet affected you and in what ways has practicing the posture of bending down extended (or not extended) to your everyday life? If you have not practiced footwashing, what is your impression of the act, and is it a practice that you feel drawn to?
3. What is your response to the questions posed in the chapter: “Are there ways that we can show humility in simple, symbolic actions? Are there ways to wash the feet of others in our daily lives?” (p. 170)
4. How do you differentiate between true humility—as modeled by Jesus—and put-on humility that misses the mark? What common characteristics do you notice in humble people? How do these people approach life, and what can you learn from them?

Prayer Invitation:

The Jesus Prayer is a short prayer that has been prayed by Christians throughout the centuries. Those who engage with this prayer put themselves in a position of humility by asking for God's mercy. It is often used as a mantra by those who are trying to pray without ceasing. Repeat these words to yourself either silently or aloud: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* You may choose to repeat the phrase for a specific amount of time set aside for prayer or pray as you go about the tasks of your day.

..... CHAPTER 10: WHEN GOD DOESN'T SHOW UP

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. —MATTHEW 5:7 NIV

1. Both Don and Sharon share stories of when they have received unmerited forgiveness and mercy. Share your own story of receiving mercy. How did it feel to receive what you needed rather than what you thought you deserved?
2. Identify a current personal, communal, national, or global justice issue. What is already being done about this issue? How might mercy and forgiveness play into the equation? How might you be an agent of mercy in the situation?
3. When have you been disappointed, frustrated, or angry with God? Did you consider (or have you considered) forgiving God? What did (or what would) extending mercy toward yourself look like in this scenario?

Prayer Invitation:

The Book of Common Prayer used in the Anglican/Episcopal church offers the following prayer of confession:

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Chapter 11: A Laughing Jesus

Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. —MATTHEW 18:3 NIV

1. How old were you when you outgrew the light-hearted play of childhood? What messages—either direct or implied—did you receive about play and about taking life seriously?
2. What activities or holy hobbies help you to get in touch with your soul? Are there any hobbies that you'd like to try but haven't yet? What would it take for you to introduce more of this type of play into your life?
3. Have you ever laughed with God? How does the image of a light-hearted God align or clash with your image of God?

Prayer Invitation:

Consider play as prayer. Find something that you enjoy or perhaps an activity that was left behind in your childhood, such as coloring, playing a game, or walking through a park (and stopping at the swing set). As you play, notice God's presence and how God may be joining you in your play.

..... CHAPTER 12: LETTING MY SOUL CATCH UP WITH THE REST OF ME

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. —JAMES 4:8A NRSV

1. The authors make a distinction between being drawn and being driven. How do you know when you are crossing the line between engaging in a healthy activity and being so driven that it has become an unhealthy compulsion or addiction? What are your warning signs? What type of accountability or checkpoints might you put in place to keep you from crossing that line?
2. God is both-and (i.e., both masculine and feminine, both comfort and justice, etc., p. 224); however our personal images of God are often lopsided. Can you identify any lopsidedness in your image of God? What corrective is needed to heal your image of God?
3. How are you being invited by God to choose life right now? What changes are you being invited to make to create more room for freedom and love?

Prayer Invitation:

Take five, 10, or 20 minutes to be still and allow your soul to catch up to you. You may choose to sit in silence. You may use your breath or a centering word as a focal point. Or you may pray the following Scripture text from Psalm 46:10, saying one line at a time with a moment of silence and room to breathe in between each phrase.

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am.
Be still and know.
Be still.
Be.



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