

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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Preface

1. What experience or insight triggered your desire to read *Ordering Your Private World*?

2. What enemy (or enemies) of order to your private world do you need to identify?

3. Who is your most persistent advocate of ordering your private world? Compare Ephesians 1:13 with John 14:26.

4. List the five sectors of your private world that need ordering. See p. 39. Now rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 for each category, with ten representing perfection.

a.		b.	
c.		d.	
e			

- * 5. What biographies have motivated you to move toward a more ordered inner life? What made these persons so influential?

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.

- 5. What are some fears that may have prevented your seeking the inner peace that steals over a well-ordered inner world?

- * 6. Looking ahead, can you think of an event or pressure that could become powerful enough to become a sinkhole in your life?

- * 7. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. What connection do you see between verse 20 and verse 16?

Chapter Two: A View from the Bridge

1. Read the story of the submarine captain on pages 31 and 32. Now compare this with the “bridge” appearance described in Acts 27:21-25. What can we learn from the apostle Paul’s expression of confidence?
2. If you were a Christian counsellor and a Jerald H. Maxwell (see page 33) came to you, what would you tell him, based on Jesus’ response to the disciples in the storm on the Sea of Galilee?
- * 3. Where do we need to build up resources to be able to withstand the steadily mounting pressures of the world around us? See Romans 12:2.

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.

6. What do you sense is your primary purpose as a Christian servant?

7. Write out your “desert” experience. If you cannot identify one, plan for a specific time when you can be alone with God and settle your purpose and priorities. Then write them out.

- * 8. Describe two or more life situations in which the lessons John learned in the desert would help you in today’s environment.

9. The author asks, “What makes you tick Why are you doing all of that? What do you hope to gain as a result? And what would be your reaction if it was all taken away?” (p. 87). Write out your answers after you have had time to reflect on the questions.

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)

- * 3. In beginning to budget time effectively, you must establish priorities within the framework of your life calling. How does Jesus illustrate this in Luke 18 as He sets out for Jerusalem?

4. What do you consider your number one mission in life? In what way does it (should it) inform your time schedule?

5. Jesus understood His limits, says the author. In what ways could you be exceeding the natural limits God has given you for your life?

* 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?

7. Is there anything in your life about which you feel as strongly as Jesus did about going to Jerusalem, as recorded in Matthew 16:21?

8. Analyze your life rhythms. When are you most effective? What can you do to match your most effective moments with your most significant tasks?

- * 9. List the criteria you can use to distinguish the good from the best for you in light of your responsibilities.

10. What portions of your day/week should you be budgeting far in advance so you can fend off intruders?

- * 11. What were Jesus' time priorities according to these passages: Luke 4:16; 4:42-43; 5:27; 6:12; 9:21-22; 18:16; 19:5?

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)

- a. Specific reading to enlarge your base of information.
 - b. Professional seminars that enrich and challenge your thinking.
 - c. A mentor or close friend who consistently challenges your thinking.
 - d. Other.
6. What percentage of your reading or your interaction with others challenges your status quo? Name two books you have read with which you disagreed.
- * 7. List some of the indicators of mental toughness in Paul's address to the Athenians in Acts 17:16-32.

8. The author writes, “The best kind of thinking is accomplished when it is done in the context of reverence for God’s kingly reign over all creation.” What kind of preparation will you need to do to develop that context?

9. A Presbyterian pastor annually speaks and fields questions at a local “skeptics corner” attended only by unbelievers. This heavy interaction with the non-Christian mind sharpens his awareness of the enemy’s tactics. What can you do to achieve a similar result?

- * 10. What are some of the non-Christian ideas we can fall prey to when our minds become dull?

11. What are some areas of your thought life that need expanding and toughening? Beside each area, list a resource that you can tap to help you.

Chapter Nine: The Sadness of a Book Never Read

- * 1. The author suggests we need to learn to think Christianly. What does that mean? See page 140.
2. If you do not have the advantage of growing up in a strongly Christian environment, what can you do to “catch up”?
3. In what parts of your world can you learn to “appreciate the messages God has written in creation”?
- * 4. What can you do to enhance your storehouse of information, ideas, and insights?

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.

- * 9. What are your obstacles to beginning a program of offensive study if you do not already have one?
- * 10. What areas should we as Christians study intensively if we are to make a significant difference in our world?
11. What area of offensive study do you need to begin if you are to achieve excellence as a servant in your position? List the top resource that you need to acquire to do so.

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.

5. Stop to meditate on your favourite psalm. If you do not have one, take time with Psalm 139.

6. The author writes, “We often enter the chamber to meet with God while we are still emotionally out of breath.” If this has happened to you, what can you do to prevent it in the future?

- * 7. List the two great Christian classics that you want to read during the next six months.

- * 8. How can you use your imagination to enrich your meditation? Return to the psalm you earlier read meditatively and reread it with an active imagination. Write down some of your thoughts.

Chapter Thirteen: Seeing Through Heaven's Eyes

- * 1. How did the attitude of the saints of the past differ from their contemporaries, according to Bridget Herman?(see page 195). If you know someone with the same attitude, describe your experience with that person.
2. Write down reasons why we have trouble praying. Personalize the one that troubles you the most by writing out a prayer of confession expressing your feelings.
3. What does the author suggest as a reason for the greater ease with which women pray in public?(see page 198). If you are a married man, make this a journal entry about your attitudes and feelings about praying with your wife.
- * 4. What is a sign of significant spiritual growth, according to the author? See page 199.

10. What are the twelve “apostles of ill health,” according to E. Stanley Jones? (see pages 206 - 207).

- * 11. If you were to visualize yourself as an intercessory prayer warrior, how would you describe your prayer life?

12. What was the secret of the extraordinary leadership power of Eric Liddell, the missionary-prisoner? (see page 210).

13. Write out the deepest desire of your heart in respect to prayer.

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?

6. Are you experiencing the “rest that reaffirms truth”? If you are not, what steps do you need to take to make it happen?

7. What do you need to do to experience the kind of rest that redefines your mission in life?

- * 8. What is the content of the Sabbath rest according to the author? See page 228.

9. What personal “Sabbath rest” plan could be possible for you and your spouse?

10. Make a journal entry of the key ideas/concepts you have absorbed from reading and studying this book. Then add some of the exciting developments as you have implemented recommended action.