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FLAME

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BY ALBERT HAASE, OFM

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ALBERT HAASE, OFM

CATCHING  
FIRE  
BECOMING  
FLAME

A GUIDE FOR SPIRITUAL  
TRANSFORMATION



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*Catching Fire, Becoming Flame: A Guide for Spiritual Transformation*

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Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, “Abba, as far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?”

Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands toward heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, “If you will, you can become all flame.”

—*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*



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## INTRODUCTION

# GOD'S PASSION, OUR ENTHUSIASM

**M**y friend Helen is the mother of two daughters. She's a retired executive assistant for a senior partner in a global financial services firm. She's a good wife, an honest woman, and a faithful friend. She's also dedicated to her faith and committed to working on her relationship with God. I nodded in agreement when I heard someone say, "You can feel her fire in everything Helen says and does."

Helen is an ordinary person who enjoys babysitting her grandchildren, raising African violets, and meandering down the grocery aisle looking for bargains. But in her enthusiasm, I think she's extraordinary. Her love for God moves her to pause and pray at the site of a beautiful sunset over the ocean—and drives her presence when volunteers are needed for the annual church cleaning. Her passion for the homeless fuels the care and concern she exudes as she pours an extra ladle of meat sauce on spaghetti at the local soup kitchen. Her gratitude glows in the many thank-you notes she deliberately handwrites every month to friends and neighbors.

Eight hundred years before Helen, Francis of Assisi was also consumed with a godly enthusiasm. His love for God burned so ardently that he became a living image of the crucified Christ, branded with the five wounds of the stigmata—something rarely experienced among us today. But, much like my friend Helen, he showed what happens when a person responds to God's longing for us.

Throughout history hundreds of thousands of people have known the fiery passion God has for being in a relationship with us. The

sparks from God's longing catch fire in their lives, and by engaging and responding to it, ordinary people like Helen and Francis become beacons of light who blaze by day and shine brightly by night.

*Catching Fire, Becoming Flame: A Guide for Spiritual Transformation* gives you the practical tools and time-honored techniques to do the same. It shows you how to respond to God's fiery passion, how to engage it, and, most important, how to be changed by it. Each of its chapters is purposely short and concise, allowing you ample time in one convenient sitting not only to read it, but also to reflect on its questions or practice the presented technique.

Each chapter concludes with a "Go Deeper" section. That's where you'll find additional resources about the chapter's topic that I recommend based on my thirty years of experience as a spiritual director and student of Christian spirituality. These resources will deepen your appreciation and understanding of the specific topic.

This book is designed to be a handy resource for expanding your knowledge and practice of ancient and contemporary spiritual practices. It will fuel your creativity and appreciation for myriad ways to fall in love with God—which, in the end, is what being on fire is all about.

As you practice the spiritual methods of *Catching Fire, Becoming Flame* and make them your own in a distinct way, you will find the flames of godly enthusiasm leaping up in your own life as they do in the lives of all holy people. You will also find yourself gradually transformed into your truest identity: a little Christ—which is what the word *Christian* literally means—sent to respond lovingly to the unmet need or required duty of the present moment.

*Albert Haase, OFM*  
*Feast of Pentecost*

THE  
SPARK  
FROM  
GOD

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE



*God initiates the process of spiritual transformation by throwing a divine spark into our lives. God then waits for our response.*



## CHAPTER 1

# A PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION



Sr. Elena is eighty-seven years old, blind, and spends her days in a wheelchair. I didn't notice her when I began preaching the week-long retreat at the retirement home where she resides. But on the afternoon of the second day, she asked someone to push her to me.

"Father, I have a secret to tell you," she said.

I leaned over and she whispered in my ear, "God l-o-n-g-s to turn you into a saint!" Her face lit up as she added, "If you respond to God's yearning, you'll be amazed at what happens."

### A Lifelong Process

Though it's been more than a decade since I heard Sr. Elena's secret, I can still feel the ardor and passion that accompanied her revelation. In one short moment, Sr. Elena taught me that God's longing to be in a relationship with us spreads like wildfire in the hearts of people who respond to it. They can't contain what becomes like a fire in the belly, a burning in their bones (see Jeremiah 20:9). No wonder their devotion is memorable and contagious.

Let's take a broad, quick overview at the process God uses in preparing and then setting people on fire with divine love.

Catching and crackling with the fire of godly enthusiasm is a lifelong *process*. It starts with God throwing a divine spark on the tinder of the heart. I'll describe that spark in greater detail in the

next chapter. For now, it's helpful to know that it often comes out of nowhere and can take many different shapes and sizes. It might be an attraction or religious sentiment that grips the heart. It might be an event or situation that stirs your devotion. It could even be a word spoken by a friend, colleague, or relative that gets underneath the skin and stings your conscience.

If we fan the spark to flame and then stoke its fire with spiritual practices, it will ever so gradually transform us into beacons of light for the world. Sometimes it might flare up, shooting its sparks elsewhere as it did with Sr. Elena.

Because this is a gradual, ongoing process, we have to resist the temptation to look for a single book, program, practice, or guru that will cause spontaneous combustion; there are none. How many times have I been tricked into thinking that by reading the most recent book by a favorite author or practicing the latest spiritual craze, I'll become a saint? Catching fire takes patience and perseverance; it's hard, fatiguing work. It also requires a daily commitment to nurturing and tending the fire once it's started.

As God tries to spark our hearts into flame and we actively respond with spiritual practices, we *are transformed*. Note the passive voice. The sixteenth-century Carmelite mystic John of the Cross compares this process of transformation to a log catching fire. The heat of the fire initially expels the log's moisture and other inconsistencies, blackens the wood as the fire burns on the log's exterior, and then gradually transforms the log into flame as it burns from within.<sup>1</sup> That's why we can look back some ten or fifteen years, reflect on our lives then and now, and ask with embarrassment, surprise, or disgust, "Who *was* the person who did *that*? How could *that* have been *me*?" This transformation occurs not only on the exterior and cosmetic

level of our actions, but also, and more important, on the interior and cardiac level of our thoughts, feelings, and desires.

Living with a blazing fire does not happen on our own by sheer willpower. We have to rely upon *the Spirit of God* and divine grace working on us and in us. The Spirit, and the Spirit alone, is the flint for all holiness. The Spirit then also becomes the fuel for our enthusiasm. Without the Spirit, our spiritual lives as Christians flicker out and become cold; with the Spirit, we are sent forth as zealous torches of devotion.

### A Little Christ

Catching fire is not supposed to be a flash in the pan. And it becomes just that if we do not spend time tending and stoking the fire set by God's spark. It will easily flame out if we do not commit daily, monthly, and yearly to myriad and varied spiritual practices that the Christian tradition offers and which are discussed in this book. Fire needs tending just as grace needs a response. There is no other way.

As someone responds to the Spirit's action, he or she is ever so gradually transformed into *a little Christ*, the very meaning of the word *Christian*. That's the essence of the spiritual life: we are called to become who we profess to be by virtue of our baptism.

The waters of Baptism along with their gift of the Holy Spirit fuel a spiritual transformation that requires a lifetime of surrender. This gradual transformation of our identity is not a mime act, a caricature, or playacting. Rather, as in John of the Cross's log metaphor, the fire of God's love purifies our egos; it ignites our minds, words, wills, and actions so that we can say with Jesus, "Not my will but yours be done" (see Luke 22:42). It is then over time that we reach spiritual maturity, "the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Like Christ,

who came “to bring fire to the earth” (Luke 12:49), we challenge institutional religion’s insensitivity to the outcast and marginalized by becoming arsonists of divine love and compassion.



For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Matthew 25:35–36

As we respond and slowly grow in our baptismal identity as little Christs, our hearts expand and the Spirit enlarges the circle of our relationships. Our fire cannot be restrained or suppressed in the hermetically sealed container of a single life for the sole purpose of our own personal sanctification. “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket” (Matthew 5:15). That would indeed quench the flame. Rather, through the daily discipline of prayer, the weekly practice of sharing our time, treasures, and talents with others along with attending church services, and the monthly commitment to spiritual practices such as Scripture reading and journaling combined with a yearly retreat, our godly enthusiasm becomes like a wildfire, moving us beyond ourselves, focusing our Christlike lives on others, for others, and with others. It leads us right into the heart of a suffering, needy world where we are *sent to respond lovingly to the unmet need or required*

*duty of the present moment.* As we cook meals, change diapers, and commute back and forth to the office, discovering who we are and how it's possible to stay on fire for God, we become torchbearers of God's mercy to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the naked, and the imprisoned. Without a sense of mission, godly enthusiasm fizzles into bogus piety.

I remember myself in my late teens and early twenties as a needy, selfish, egotistical young adult. I often used humor to control people and situations. I still recall attending a party in my sophomore year of college and spending the entire evening desperately trying to get people to laugh so I would be considered the life of the party. Some thirty-five years later, through the generosity of God's grace and a commitment to daily prayer and other spiritual practices, I am no longer obsessed with other people's affection and attention. I no longer use humor as a subtle form of manipulation. Something has changed inside of me, and my selfishness and need to control gave way to a decade of missionary service to Catholics in mainland China. I know from my own experience that from her darkness in the wheelchair, Sr. Elena illumined a great truth: you will be amazed at what gradually happens over a lifetime if you respond to God's longing.

God yearns to set us ablaze. As we open ourselves up to this divine love, we discover a fire being ignited and then glowing and sometimes raging in our lives. We experience *the process of being transformed by the Spirit of God into a little Christ sent to respond lovingly to the unmet need or required duty of the present moment.*<sup>2</sup> God's longing and call for this process to begin sometimes come in and through our deepest desires and attractions.

## ■ REFLECT

1. Fire is one image that captures the intensity of God's yearning to be in a relationship with us. What other images speak even more deeply to you?
2. As you reflect upon your past, how has God's abiding passion to be in a relationship with you expressed itself? What has been your response?
3. How are you responding to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the naked, and the imprisoned in your neighborhood or the wider world community? How do they influence your spiritual life and transformation?

## ■ GO DEEPER

Albert Haase, OFM, *Instruments of Christ: Reflections on the Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004).

M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

Francis Kelly Nemeck and Marie Therese Coombs, *The Spiritual Journey: Critical Thresholds and Stages of Adult Spiritual Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986).

## CHAPTER 2

# DESIRE AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING



About four times a year, I am the guest on *On Call with Wendy Wiese*, heard every afternoon on the Relevant Radio Network. Once, Stacey, from Austin, Texas, called into the show.

“Father, I’m a happy stay-at-home mom with two small children. Lately, though, I’ve been restless and feeling a strange attraction to prayer. But I must be honest: my husband and I are not regular churchgoers. So I’m wondering if I’m just imagining this. And my jobs as a mom and wife don’t allow me the freedom to walk away and hide beyond the walls of a monastery. I’m calling to ask your advice. What am I supposed to do?”

I tried my best to show Stacey the special invitation she was being offered.

### God’s Passionate Invitation to Us

God is always trying to awaken a dormant soul and set it on fire with godly enthusiasm. Our deepest impulses and yearnings for the things of God can be God’s way of throwing sparks at us. Religious interests, pious aspirations, and spiritual longings that seemingly come out of nowhere do, in fact, show we have captured divine attention and that God is now trying to capture ours. We desire God because God first desires us.

The mere awareness of being attracted to prayer or wanting to make God some part of daily life is the beginning of the process of

being transformed. Before that awareness, we are like sleepwalkers. Life is a task-oriented game characterized by flatness, sluggishness, and, sometimes, lackluster monotony. Many are quite content to live this way. Stacey certainly was. She had spent her days with virtually the same routine: bathing the children, entertaining them with trips to the park and zoo, planning the evening meal, and, on weekends, occasionally going to church when it was convenient for her and her family. But now a spiritual spark is touching and scorching her heart. She is becoming restless. And without her even knowing it right now, her phone call for advice is the beginning of her response to God. Sooner or later we all discover that restlessness comes into our lives for a profound purpose: so that we may begin a relationship with God. This is the awakening.

The divine spark of the Holy Spirit—the flint and flame of godly enthusiasm—triggers the awakening. Without it, we would be rubbing two sticks together in the pouring rain.



Wake up from your  
sleep, Climb out of your  
coffins; Christ will show  
you the light!

(Ephesians 5:14,  
THE MESSAGE)

God's spark can find us in any situation, circumstance, or event. Some experiences are powerfully positive: a weekend retreat, the birth of a child, an uplifting worship service, a heart-to-heart conversation with a trusted friend, someone's profession of love for us, or the sight of a beautiful sunset. Sometimes the catalyst is painful: a loved one's death, the diagnosis of a disease, the loss of a home in a natural disaster, or being

laid off from work. In either case, this experience of grace is unique to each person and tailored to his or her season and situation. The circumstances are limitless, since nothing is impossible with God (see Luke 1:37).

Two of the most formative years of my life were spent when I was a boarder in a Franciscan high school seminary in Cincinnati. At the age of sixteen, while wanting to improve my handball game and hone my public speaking skills for a state speech contest, I began feeling an attraction and magnetic pull to the chapel for personal prayer. I tried my best to squelch those feelings because I didn't understand what they meant, and I certainly didn't want my classmates to think I was abandoning handball for a higher power. I remember going to see Fr. Murray and sheepishly asking about them. With a wisdom born from his own experience, he matter-of-factly replied, "That's God tugging at your heart and looking for some company. Why don't you oblige him sometimes?"

The awakening is God's invitation to a relationship. But it still requires our response. God will never force or put pressure upon us; with utmost respect for human free will, God can only invite us, encourage us, nudge us, and entice us. God tugs at the heart. And God does so through spiritual desires and longings that are placed deep within us. Stacey learned that in her own life. It's ultimately up to us to do something about them, to respond to God's generous bidding to be in a relationship with us.

### Human Hesitations

If we choose not to respond or throw cold water on the kindling, God is forced to wait again and use another situation or event to spark us into flame.

Two misconceptions might keep us from responding to God's invitation. One resembles Stacey's initial insinuation that, not being a regular churchgoer, she was somehow unworthy, as if it was too late for her to connect with God.

It is never too late to begin fanning the flames. God's patience and generosity are magnanimous. That's why spiritual thoughts or feelings suddenly like flying sparks arise out of nowhere and keep recurring. They are indications of God's insistent determination to have a relationship with us. Jesus's parable of the workers in the vineyard (see Matthew 20:1–16) speaks to this. A landowner goes out at various hours and hires day laborers to work in his vineyard. At the end of the day, when the landowner pays them, the laborers who worked only an hour received the same per diem as those hired at the beginning of the day. Jesus does not say the late hires received a full day's pay because they worked hard and gave it their all but because the landowner is "generous" (see verse 15).

A significant lesson of that parable is that our time and God's patience never run out. The important thing is not *when* we begin to get serious about responding to God's invitation, but *that* we begin. It makes no difference whether you are sixteen years old as I was or in your forties as was the Carmelite mystic Teresa of Avila. And the moment we respond, we lose any apparent disadvantage that our tardiness, laziness, or lack of previous motivation might have imposed. A simple yes to God—no matter when it is spoken—fans the spark of godly enthusiasm and begins the process of our being transformed into a little Christ.

Stacey's phone call also suggested another misconception that might keep us from responding to God's invitation: the supposition

that a relationship with God requires the abandonment of all spousal responsibilities, parental duties, and employment obligations. As Stacey put it, “And my jobs as a mom and wife don’t allow me the freedom to walk away and hide beyond the walls of a monastery.” Nothing could be further from the truth. The wonderful thing about God’s invitation is that we can accept it right where we are. Throughout history people have done so as they went to school, raised a family, or went to the office to earn a paycheck. That’s part of the contagion of godly enthusiasm and the paradox of catching fire and becoming flame: the extraordinary occurs right in the midst of the ordinary; the marvelous is found amid the mundane.

## ■ REFLECT

1. Reflect and pray over the famous words of St. Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” What does this say about the attractions and desires of your life? Which ones speak of God’s invitation to you?
2. In what ways are you beginning to become awake? What are the circumstances? What is your immediate reaction to it?
3. How do tardiness, laziness, or a lack of interest make it difficult for you to notice the sparks God is sending your way?

## ■ GO DEEPER

John Eldredge, *Desire: The Journey We Must Take to Find the Life God Offers* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

Philip Sheldrake, *Befriending Our Desires* (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001).

Connie Zweig, *The Holy Longing: The Hidden Power of Spiritual Yearning* (New York: Tarcher, 2003).

CHAPTER 3

## THE THREE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY



As I crisscross the country giving workshops on the spiritual life, I am often asked to give more details about the process of being transformed by the Spirit of God. How do I begin to respond to God's desire to have a relationship with me? What does the process of spiritual transformation look like? How do I know if it is happening to me? These are important questions, and our rich spiritual tradition not only answers them, but also offers some sage advice to people who want to burn with godly enthusiasm.

If you are willing to respond to God's invitation that comes through an awakening, you will suddenly find yourself walking along what's been called the threefold path or the threefold way. Rather than being distinct, discrete stages, these three transformative stages to the spiritual life are more like processes, movements, or actions that occur at various times and at various levels of our lives.

### The Stage of Purgation

Once awakened and ready to respond, we are like a spark that needs help to become something greater. During this initial stage of transformation, called purgation, we arrange the kindling and wood by deliberately fostering attitudes and actions that reflect a person who is serious about catching fire. The tasks of this first

stage are characterized by the acronym CPR: community, prayer, and repentance.



Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

(Acts 4:32–35)

**Community:** We begin by building bonds of support with a regular church community so that we are around other people who are similarly on fire—or at least smoldering! Jesus himself modeled the importance of community with the call of the twelve disciples; the early church lived out its ramifications in a practical way.

Spiritual transformation is not meant to be a solitary, individual affair; nor is it done in isolation from the world. It stretches the heart beyond the ego—“from me to thee,” as a wise spiritual director once told me. Becoming a little Christ involves selfless love and service. This is learned within a community of flesh-and-blood believers who “wash each other’s feet,” learn to forgive each other, celebrate life events as sacramental moments, and welcome to their table the poor, the sinner, and the marginalized. Christianity without community is a caricature.

**Prayer:** CPR includes the commitment to daily prayer. What is critical is

not *how* we pray, but *that* we pray for an amount of time appropriate for our commitments and schedules. For some, the most helpful form of prayer will be a conversation at the same time every day, when we convey to God our thoughts and feelings and then wait in silence for God to respond. That's what I did at age sixteen when I intentionally started praying for twenty minutes every day. This form of prayer can conveniently take place on the bus or a commuter train. Others might find more conducive to their temperament a simple and structured pattern, like repeating traditional prayers while using a rosary or repeating the Jesus Prayer ("Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, a sinner"). Still others might turn to Scripture. One of the first challenges in the process of spiritual transformation is discovering the prayer techniques that fan the flame and make us receptive to God's continual presence throughout the day. I encourage people initially to try different and varied prayer techniques, until they happen upon the ones that are comfortable and helpful for them.

Repentance: The final task of purgation's CPR is repentance, which involves purging ourselves of the deliberate sins that we nonchalantly commit; it is about removing the moisture that hinders us from catching fire. We choose to start moving out of the shadows and darkness where we have been content to live. We make an examination of conscience, take an inventory of our lives, and take conscious steps toward moral integration. The Christian values that we profess with our lips become the Christian values that we intentionally put into practice: forgiveness involves letting go of grudges; compassion includes deepening our sensitivity to the marginalized; kindness means dying to selfish desires. Repentance and conversion—from the Greek word *metanoia*, meaning "to turn around"—demand changing the orientation of our daily lives.

### The Stage of Illumination

Over time, if we are faithful to CPR, we will perceive the Spirit of God working in our lives. That awareness—of the Spirit’s interior work—is a typical indication of the second stage of the spiritual journey, illumination.

Unlike the stage of purgation, which can be seen exteriorly, this stage is internal and, as the name suggests, is characterized by light and enlightenment. As the Spirit’s spark becomes a flame and then matures into a fire, we begin to see how Christian beliefs and values make sense. We take on an intuitive understanding and wisdom of the things of God. The commitments to community and prayer, once requiring the effort needed for any discipline, become more natural and are the ways by which we express our deepening enthusiasm and love for God.

Trustful surrender characterizes the illuminative stage, as Christians give themselves over to the action of the Holy Spirit. While the stage of purgation is active, the stage of illumination is more receptive; we allow something to be done to us. This receptive stance is strengthened by the emotional sense of being led by Someone bigger than our own egos. The purgative stage’s guilt for past sin is now replaced by the illuminative stage’s sorrow for having wasted so much time. Selfless acts become second nature as we are shaped, molded, and prodded along by the Spirit of God. In this second stage, God’s grace is doing the majority of the work and action.

### The Stage of Union

Fidelity to the CPR purgative practices and the trustful surrender characteristic of the illuminative stage gradually come to fruition in the third stage, called union. As awakening can be likened to a

spark landing on ripe kindling, purgation to fanning the flame, and illumination to catching fire, union is likened to the experience of becoming a torch with a fire blazing from within. At this stage, we not only know but also experience union with God and God's will: so united are we to God that God's desires are our desires.

At this stage, in a vivid and obvious way, we do not simply *live* the Christian life but are in fact *being* and *acting* as little Christs. Here the fire is stoked with the wisdom of the Beatitudes, and we crackle with missional energy and passion for the loving service of others. Like Christ and with Christ, we feel alive and sent by God as a coworker for the kingdom (see Colossians 4:11).

This is certainly not to give the false impression that the threefold path is neatly and clearly delineated; it is not. The three stages or processes are fluid as divine grace works upon human nature. We could be experiencing all three stages at the same time: the memory could be experiencing an awakening, while the intellect and what it is thinking are in the illuminative stage and the will with its desires is working on purgative practices. This means we don't complete the homework of one stage and automatically graduate to the next stage. That's why I remind people that it is a misguided use of time to try and track where they are. The Spirit of God is ultimately in charge of the entire process, and divine grace is often more complicated and messy—and sometimes simpler—than delineating these three stages might suggest.

## ■ REFLECT

1. How are you living out the purgative practices of community, prayer, and repentance in your daily life right now? Which of the three needs greatest attention?

2. Where is the Holy Spirit currently working in your life? How might your actions and attitudes hinder the Spirit's guidance?
3. What is God's will and desire for you?

■ GO DEEPER

Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem, WI: Sheffield, 1995).

## IMPERFECTIONS VERSUS SINS



James was stuck in discouragement and regret.

“Once again, my short fuse was just too short. I came home the other day tired from work. The kids wanted some attention and asked me to play with them. Instead of giving them five minutes of my time, which would have more than satisfied them, I just snapped. I raised my voice and told them I had been working all day and just needed some time to relax. This happens at least once or twice a month, and every time it does, I feel terrible afterward. I’ve been working so hard on my relationship with God and then something like this happens, and I realize I am a total failure. Where have I gone wrong?”

Listening to James, I leaned back in my chair and momentarily thought how we struggle with imperfections—and sin!

### *Imperfections and Weaknesses*

All of us, like James, struggle with imperfections and weaknesses such as impatience and anger. Before we accept God’s invitation to enter into a relationship, we instinctively give in to them in a variety of situations without much thought or reflection. But after we respond to the initial invitation and then become intentional about an ongoing relationship with God, something slowly changes in us.

We are now in a position to do something that, before, we never could have done as well: take an honest look at our imperfections and weaknesses. In what areas of life do we need God’s grace and the light