

An aerial photograph of a river winding through a dark, textured landscape. The river is a bright, silty white, contrasting sharply with the dark brown, almost black, earth. The river flows from the top left, curves into a large U-shape in the center, and then continues towards the bottom right. The surrounding land has a rough, granular texture, possibly composed of sand or small stones. The overall mood is serene and natural.

# *streams*

The Spiritual Traditions of the Church



This summer, our sermon series is going to walk us through the book *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster. I (Caleb) first read this book as I was just beginning my work here at Varsity and found it deeply moving & compelling. The title for the book comes from Jesus' own reference to the Holy Spirit in John chapter 7. In this book Foster identifies six great traditions (or streams) of the Christian faith; Contemplative (The Prayer-Filled Life), Holiness (The Virtuous Life), Charismatic (The Spirit-Empowered Life), Social Justice (The Compassionate Life), Evangelical (The Word-Centred Life), and Incarnational (The Sacramental Life). Foster argues that while these traditions have often been broken apart and separated through denominational lines and boundaries- they are all important parts of our inheritance as part of Jesus' church. Our sermon series will focus on one of these traditions each week, and as usual we will be blessed to hear from different voices in our community over the summer months. This little booklet is meant to serve as a companion guide to our summer series. In it you will find a brief description of each tradition, a few ways this tradition could help us in our spiritual life, some notable figures from each tradition, and some suggested spiritual practices that flow out of the tradition. We encourage you to consider choosing a spiritual practice you haven't tried before! If you would like some more resources or guidance on a particular practice, please reach out to me (Caleb) or Rinus and also check out the sermons+ page on our website. Our prayer is that this summer we will be able to experience and encounter God in new ways together, as we learn more about the rich history of faith and practice in the Body of Christ- His church.



# Contemplative Tradition

## The Prayer-Filled Life

Rooted in the lives of early Christian hermits, monks, and mystics like the Desert Fathers, St. Teresa of Ávila, and Thomas Merton, this tradition emphasizes drawing close to God through silence, solitude, and deep & slow contemplation of Scripture, art, or nature. It reminds us that long before formal church services, Christians were sitting in stillness, listening for God's voice, and learning to rest in His love. This stream helps us create space in our noisy lives to slow down & be present with God.

## Quick Facts

- Focus: Deep communion with God through prayer and solitude
- Example: St. John of the Cross, Thomas Merton
- Modern Need: Stillness & slowness in a fast-paced, noisy, distracted world

## Suggested Practices

- Silent prayer / Centering prayer
- Meditative Scripture reading (Lectio Divina or Visio Divina)
- Silence & solitude

# Holiness Tradition

## The Virtuous Life

Emerging from movements like the Desert Fathers, John Wesley's Methodist revival, and the Keswick movement, the Holiness tradition has always aimed at personal transformation. It calls Christians to not just believe right things, but to live holy lives—where God shapes our thoughts, words, and habits to reflect the character of Jesus. This stream reminds us that God does not just forgive our sins and stop there; His desire is to transform us from the inside out so that we can walk in freedom and integrity.

## Quick Facts

- Focus: Inner transformation and moral purity
- Example: John Wesley, Phoebe Palmer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Modern Need: Character and integrity

## Suggested Practices

- Confession (private or communal)
- Accountability relationships
- Awareness Examen

# Charismatic Tradition

## The Spirit-Empowered Life

Seen from the book of Acts, revived through the Pentecostal movement of the early 20th century, and again in the Charismatic renewals across denominations, this tradition emphasizes the active presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It celebrates the spiritual gifts (like healing, tongues, prophecy) and expects God to move in miraculous, personal ways. The Charismatic stream reminds us that the same Spirit who empowered Jesus and the early Church is alive and active today.

## Quick Facts

- Focus: Life empowered by the Holy Spirit—gifts, miracles, guidance
- Example: St. Francis of Assisi, William J. Seymour
- Modern Need: Power and vitality in faith

## Suggested Practices

- Worship in song and spontaneity
- Prophetic listening / discerning God's voice
- Intercessory prayer / Anointing prayer



# Social Justice Tradition

## The Compassionate Life

This stream has deep roots in the prophetic tradition of Scripture, the radical compassion of Jesus, and the works of Christians like St. Francis of Assisi, William Wilberforce, and Dorothy Day. It reminds us that faith must not only be private, but public—expressed in justice, mercy, and advocacy for the vulnerable. From abolitionists to peacemakers, this tradition has always asked, “How do we love our neighbor in practical and sacrificial ways?”

## Quick Facts

- Focus: Working for justice, peace, and care for the marginalized
- Example: William Wilberforce, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr.
- Modern Need: Addressing injustice with Jesus-centred compassion

## Suggested Practices

- Advocacy and activism
- Serving the poor and marginalized
- Hospitality to strangers

# Evangelical Tradition

## The Word-Centered Life

Grounded in the preaching of the apostles, the theological clarity of Augustine and Luther, and the revival preaching of figures like George Whitefield and Billy Graham, this tradition centers on the power of the Bible and the need for personal faith in Jesus. It's passionate about truth and the authority of Scripture. This stream keeps the gospel front and center and helps us anchor our lives in the transforming truth of God's Word.

## Quick Facts

- Focus: Proclaiming the gospel, Scripture, and personal conversion
- Example: Billy Graham, St. Augustine
- Modern Need: Clear truth and rootedness in Scripture

## Suggested Practices

- Daily Bible reading and study
- Scripture memorization
- Testimony sharing

# *Incarnational Tradition*

## **The Sacramental Life**

Rooted in the Church's earliest theology of the Incarnation—God becoming flesh in Jesus—and lived out through the sacramental traditions of Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches, this stream teaches us that all of life is sacred. Whether baking bread, raising children, or painting a canvas, God meets us in the physical and the ordinary. This tradition reminds us that God is not far off, but present in the daily rhythms of our lives.

## **Quick Facts**

- Focus: Seeing God in everyday life, celebrating the sacred in the ordinary
- Example: Brother Lawrence, St. Francis of Assisi
- Modern Need: Wholeness and integration of faith with life

## **Suggested Practices**

- Marriage & parenting as spiritual callings
- Work as worship
- Appreciation of nature / creation care