

## **God Calls, We Respond**

By David L. Fleming, SJ

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/what-is-ignatian-spirituality/god-calls-we-respond>

From [What Is Ignatian Spirituality?](#)

Ignatian spirituality asks the question: *What more does God want of me?* Ignatius had a profound insight into God and his creation, and he developed many prayer methods, rules for discernment, spiritual disciplines, and approaches to apostolic service. But all these elements of [Ignatian spirituality](#) are ways to help us answer a single burning question, “*What more does God want now?*”

God calls. We respond. It is the fundamental dynamic of the spiritual life. The concluding prayer exercise at the end of the [Spiritual Exercises](#) shows God pouring his limitless love and his gifts down on the world, “like the light rays from the sun.” This is not just a global vision. God is active in each of us personally. The purpose of the Spiritual Exercises, writes Ignatius, is to facilitate the movement of God’s grace within us “so that the light and love of God inflame all possible decisions and resolutions about life situations.”

God is an active God. He is ever at work in people’s lives, inviting, directing, guiding, proposing, suggesting. This understanding of God animates Ignatian spirituality and gives it its internal cohesion. The techniques and practices associated with Ignatian spirituality are all designed to help us be more attentive to this active God. Ignatian spirituality can be described as an active attentiveness to God joined with a prompt responsiveness to his leading.

Our response to God occurs now. We are not to be inhibited by our own weakness and failure. We are not to ponder our unworthiness. God is working in our lives now and we are to respond now. This is certainly Jesus’ attitude when he called the first disciples. One day on the Sea of Galilee Jesus directed Peter to cast his nets into a place on the lake where Peter had had no luck fishing. Peter objects, but makes an enormous catch, a clear sign of his call as one of Jesus’ followers. He immediately raises the “unworthy” objection. “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,” he says. This is certainly true, but Jesus ignores him. “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men,” he says. (Luke 5:8,10)

Jesus surrounded himself with sinners. Ignatius draws our attention to the call of Matthew. He was a tax collector, an agent of the hated Romans, who made his living by extracting money from destitute peasants. Jesus encountered Matthew sitting at his customs post and said simply “Follow me.” The sinner’s response: “He got up and followed him.” Matthew threw a party to celebrate his new life; he invited his old friends to come and meet his new ones: “many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples.” When the Pharisees objected to this spectacle Jesus replied, “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Mark 2:14,15,17)

The Gospels show us Jesus entering into people’s lives and inviting them to follow him—right from where they are, from boats and fishnets and from tax booths. He does not demand first that they run to the synagogue. Neither should we delay our response to God until we deal with our neuroses and character defects and our own sinful behaviors.

Our response to God grows and matures and deepens over time. It is a process, not an event. Paul writes to the Corinthians that “I fed you milk, not solid food, because you were unable to take it.” (1 Corinthians 3:2) God will give us what we need. If we are beginners, or if we are troubled and weak, God will give us milk. Later on we will have solid food. All along the path we will be answering God’s call to “follow me.”

Our response to God has a particular quality to it. Our response is a response. God initiates; we answer. We do not strike out on our own. We are to “follow.” To follow means that we adopt a kind of

active passivity toward the action of God. "Active passivity" captures the characteristic tone of Ignatian spirituality. It is a spirituality of attentiveness, of watching and waiting, of noticing the ebb and flow of our feelings and inner dispositions. We are like the servant and maid in Psalm 123:

Yes, like the eyes of a servant  
on the hand of his master,  
Like the eyes of a maid  
on the hand of her mistress,  
So our eyes are on the LORD our God. (Psalm 123:2)

The question we seek an answer for is "What more does God want of me?" More is the *magis* of Ignatian spirituality—the aspiration to always grow in service for the greater glory of God. *Magis* has been described as the Jesuit "itch"—a restlessness in service, an ambition to maintain high standards of performance, a desire to conquer new frontiers. But it simply means *more*. We are loved by a God who loves without limit. We love him in return. What more can we do to love him?

This is the question that the rich young man asked Jesus in the Gospels. "What must I do to inherit eternal life," he asked Jesus. Jesus reminded him of his duties as a good Jew: to love God, keep the commandments, and love his neighbor. "All of these I have observed from my youth," he replied. He wants to do *more*. At this, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him." He tells the young man to get rid of his possessions, and to "follow me." (Mark 10:17-21)

Jesus challenges the young man—and us—to be free of what we claim as our own. This may be our material or worldly possessions. It may be our ideas and our desires. God calls us to be free of these things, claiming them as our own. Will we offer them to God and to God's shaping and forming and using them? He looks on us with love. What more can we do to respond to this love?

Excerpt from [\*\*What Is Ignatian Spirituality?\*\*](#) by David L. Fleming, SJ.

- See more at: <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/what-is-ignatian-spirituality/god-calls-we-respond#sthash.lwdfJlxw.dpuf>