

*Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment*

Men's Study Guide

by J. Brent Bill

**A STUDY GUIDE FOR  
MEN AND MEN'S GROUPS**

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For

*Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment*

A compass makes a good metaphor for our spiritual lives and the work of discerning God's will for them. God doesn't speak as clearly and as obviously as Mapquest or GoogleMaps or GPS. Maybe that's because we don't navigate the life of faith via anything remotely resembling GPS. Instead, the divine compass points us to the mind and love of God. Keeping our soul's eyes on the sacred compass leads us to the holy discovery that we can move through life with purpose and promise, even in those times when we may not sense with certainty what that purpose and promise are. In a grace-filled way, our compass invites us into a life of continuous experiences of God and of spiritual transformation. As we move toward Divine guidance, we joyfully behold the face of a loving God gazing back at us.

Below is a little study guide I put together especially for men's groups. Do as much as is helpful and don't do anything that isn't. Have fun with it - spirituality with a playful spirit. You can use these as a group study guide or adapt them for individual use.

I've used the Psalms as the scripture readings for the meditations because they seem to me to be the ultimate traveling music for the pilgrimage of faith that lies at the heart of following the sacred compass.

-- Brent

**Session One**

**Your Sacred Compass**

Psalm 25:4-9

How do a pre-school teacher, go-kart track operator, local church pastor, photocopier salesman, not-for-profit director, seminary instructor, and lumber salesman come to see their lives as God-directed? That question is one I've struggled with for many years - mostly because each of those people is me.

So, through this mishmash, is my life God-directed? I believe it is. I believe everyone's life can be. The reason is contained in the idea of the sacred compass - that God leads us to the places we need to go.

Questions for Discussion:

- What are some of the places (jobs, schooling, relationships) your sacred compass has led you to?

- Pick one of those places and think about why you feel God led you to that place? What did you learn or come understand there that you couldn't have learned or understood any other way?
- How does the Psalm speak to the idea of the paths we walk through our lives?

Prayer Thought: "Loving God, help me see the ways, hidden and clear, that you are leading me. Amen."

## Session Two

## Along the Pilgrim Way

### Psalm 73

Have you ever thought of yourself as a pilgrim? Being a pilgrim is a concept that often gets lost in today's tourist-y world. Being a pilgrim is a good thing. To be pilgrims means that we are people who are spending our lives going someplace – in our case, going to God. To be a pilgrim is to answer Jesus' call to be his disciples – to pick up our own crosses and follow him. Not down the broad way, but "by the narrow ... the way is narrow that leads to life." We are a traveling people. It is up to us whether we will be tourists or pilgrims.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- What images come to your mind when you hear the word pilgrim?
- In what ways is Psalm 73 about pilgrimage, with its talk of stumbling, and obedience, and God's presence?
- If you were to see your life as a pilgrimage, what would you "pack" for your journey?
- Who have been some of your fellow pilgrims and how have they helped you on your spiritual journey?

Prayer Thought: "Loving God, help me see the ways, hidden and clear, that you are leading me. Amen."

## Session Three

## Being Ourselves

### Psalm 16

We are called to be the distinct individuals God made us to be and to serve God the best we can as ourselves, not imitations of somebody else, save for Jesus. This is not easy to accept – especially when we see our flaws and shortcomings. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking, "If I was more like so and so, then I'd be more pleasing to God." That's not what God wants. God wants us to be us. Martin Buber says that learning to be ourselves, as God meant us to be, might be what makes up our true life's work.. He illustrates his point with a story about a Rabbi named Zusya. The rabbi, a short time before his death, said "In the world to come I shall not be asked: 'Why were you not Moses?' I shall be asked: 'Why were you not Zusya?'"

#### Questions for Discussion:

- What will it take for you to answer God's question with "I was me?"  
What traits, qualities, talents, abilities, and interests has God give you for God's work?

- What kinds of spiritual exercises are true to who you are and most feed your soul?
- What's the most important lesson God ever taught you about being yourself?
- If you were to write a spiritual memoir about yourself, what would the title be?

Prayer Thought: "Eternal Light, help me to see the person you created me to be – and give me your strength in living up to that vision. Amen."

## **Session Four**

## **Reading the Signs**

Psalm 143:1-10

People have a hard time finding our home. For one, it sits 1,500 feet off the road and is nestled back in a woods. For another our road goes by two names since we live on a road that divides two counties. One county calls the road one thing; the other another. And the house numbering system is different, too. So I designed a sign to place out by our driveway that says "Welcome to Ploughshares Farm." Now visitors just have to know to look for the sign.

God uses signs, too, which often come in the form of promptings of truth and love are subtle. They are inward, often beginning with a motion of caring. They are subtle signs that we can easily miss – unless we pay attention.

### Questions for Discussion:

- Share some signs God has shown you along your way. How did you know they were signs from God?
- Have you ever read a sign that led you to do something concrete?
- Have there been any signs you missed? Why do you think you missed them at the time – and what would you do to make sure you noticed them now?

Prayer Thought: "Oh God, teach me to see the signs so that I may serve you well throughout all the circumstances of my life."

## **Session Five**

## **A Gift from God**

Psalm 86: 1-11

The good things in my life are gifts from God. They have not come through dint of personal achievement. They didn't come as the result of my schooling, techniques, talents, or my amazing intellect. Following God has also brought me responsibilities. God has opened the way for me to be a father, grandfather, husband, boss, writer, and tree and prairie grass farmer for a reason. I have a responsibility to live up to the way God has laid before (and behind) me. I need to be faithful, loving, respectful, careful, and at work with God in this world.

### Questions for Discussion:

- What are some of the gifts God has given you? Where do you God's love in them?
- What responsibilities have come with those gifts and what have those responsibilities taught you?

- What about following God has brought you joy in your life?

Prayer Thought: "Spirit of God, let me hear your word whispering in my soul's ear. Teach me your way that I might walk in it. Amen."