

Book Review of John Mark Comer's 2024 Book, *Practicing the Way*

By Bruce C.

It is difficult to write a summary for this review because the book is so full of error, but since few people will be willing to wade through the pages of details, here goes:

9 MAJOR POINTS THIS REVIEW WILL DISCUSS AND DOCUMENT

1. Comer denies that belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is adequate for salvation such as presented in the "Romans' Road." He ignores 200 places in the New Testament where belief is cited as the common denominator for salvation. (Page 19)

2. In *Practicing the Way* (PtW) to be saved you must be an apprentice of Jesus. That puts you "on the road to salvation." Comer says that two more times in similar words. (Pages 19-26, 205)

3. He twists what Jesus said in John 14:6 that He is the Way to make it that what Jesus was saying was it is the Way that Jesus lived, and he backs up his premise by a quote from a New Age advocate. (Pages 19-26)

4. He abuses John 15 to say that obviously vines need support structures, a trellis, which in the case of this book is establishing rules to constitute the "Rule of Life" by which you must live as an apprentice. So he is saying that Jesus, God, as the vine, needed a support structure of rules to live by. This is his *a priori* argument upon which the entire book is built. (Page 160)

5. The term "Rule of Life" comes from a 16th century monk, St Benedict, who is quoted as saying: "Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from *the road that leads to salvation.*" (Page 205; emphasis added)

6. Throughout the book, Comer cites over a dozen New Age/contemplative prayer/mystic gurus multiple times to back up his thesis. *If it runs with wolves, it is probably a wolf.*

7. He neglects *inconvenient* parts of Scripture, such as the criminal on the cross' request of Jesus for salvation which Jesus grants, that Jesus clarifies He is the "Way" in John 10:7 by calling Himself the gate for the sheep, that to live like Jesus did require homelessness. (Matthew 8:20, etc.)

8. This is minor, but he makes a specious argument for not using "disciple" as anything but a noun because the Bible only uses it as a noun. Instead, Comer introduces "apprentice."

Then, later in the book, he proceeds to switch back to disciple as a verb, discipling, discipleship. Perhaps it was meant as a distraction from all the garbage in the book.

9. He clearly advocates for contemplative prayer. (Pages 48-52, and basically the whole book)'

Keep in mind Harry Ironside's quote: "Error is like leaven of which we read, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (Galatians 5:9). Truth mixed with error is equivalent to all error, except that it is more innocent looking and, therefore, more dangerous. God hates such a mixture! Any error, or truth-and-error mixture, calls for definite exposure and repudiation. To condone such is to be unfaithful to God and His Word and treacherous to imperiled souls for whom Christ died."²

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

The purpose of this review is to see how much it endorses and/or teaches the New Age/mystic form of Spiritual Formation and Contemplative Prayer.



On the endorsement page of *Practicing the Way* is an ecstatic review by the pastor of a "progressive" Baptist church.

In the list of Bibles used in PtW, it lists Eugene Peterson's New Age *The Message*.

CHAPTERS

(I find the order notable in that it builds to a "How" chapter that uses New Age spiritual formation and references New Age/mystic gurus a lot.

Chapters:

Apprentice to Jesus 3-27

Goal#1 Be with Jesus 32-60

Goal#2 Become Like Him 64-114

Goal#3 Do as He Did 118-150

How? A Rule of Life 156-202

(Find your inner monk 202)

Take Up Your Cross 206-217

Extras 222-229

Gratitude 231

Notes 233-255—Yes, 22 pages

I first reviewed the Notes pages at the end of the book to see whom Comer referenced:

- Dallas Willard—a New Age heavy.
- Frank Laubach—a self-proclaimed “modern mystic.”
- Rob Bell—Who once said, “We’re rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion, as a way of life.”
- Henri Nouwen (heavily used)—Who said in his book *Sabbatical Journey*, “Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God.” And in his book *Way of the Heart*: “The quiet repetition of a single word can help us to descend with the mind into the heart.” <https://www.lighthouse-trail-research.com/nouwenbuddhism.htm>.
- Robert Mulholland—Spiritual formation.
- Eugene Peterson—New Age advocate.
- Kahlil Gibran—universalist.

THE “HOW? A RULE OF LIFE” SECTION

- Peter Scazzero—New spirituality. Introduces readers to countless proponents of contemplative spirituality and mindfulness meditation as in Zen and Buddhism—*be true to yourself*.
- John Ortberg—Key player in contemplative spirituality and mystical prayer.
- Rich Villodas—Spiritual formation, contemplative prayer proponent.
- Saint Seraphim of Sarov—Mystic.
- Margaret Guenther—Episcopal priest and spiritual director—wrote a primer on contemplative mysticism.
- Ruth Haley Barton—New Age rhythms; trained contemplative prayer advocate.
- Eugene Peterson—New Age Richard Foster advocate.
- Richard Foster—The guru of modern New Age and “school of contemplative prayer.”
- M. Robert Mulholland—Guru of spiritual formation/transformation.
- Henri Nouwen—Prolific Catholic contemplative mystic.
- Saint Isaac the Syrian—Mystic.
- James Conner—Jesuit priest.
- Gary Thomas—Mantra advocate.
- Ken Shigematsu—New Age “ancient rhythms.”
- Greg Peters—Monk, monastic.

THE “TAKE UP YOUR CROSS” SECTION

- Thomas Keating—“...many serious seekers of truth study the eastern religions,” guru of mystical prayer.
- Tito Colliander—“Way of the Ascetics.”

- Gregory of Nyssa—Renovare, associated with Richard Foster.
- Gary Moon—Mentored by Dallas Willard.
- Thomas R. Kelly—associated with Richard Foster, a universalist.

The percentage of references to major New Age/mystic authors is much higher in the “How” and “Take Up Your Cross” sections than in the rest of the book.

COMER’S PROLOGUE CALLED “DUST”

This provides the setting for his book, both personal and the environment for it. Most of the Prologue is OK, but on page xv, he introduces us to Dallas Willard, a major influencer to Richard Foster, the guru of modern New Age, Spiritual Formation and contemplative prayer. In Willard’s quote, Willard introduces us to “apprenticing Jesus.”

On page xvi, Comer talks about getting stuck or hitting a plateau in your relationship with Jesus. He then introduces the “Way of Jesus laid down by Jesus himself.” “He invited people to apprentice under him into a whole new way of living. To be transformed.” This is the first, but not the last where Comer conveniently leaves out the rest of Romans 12:2 “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” That does not fit into his game plan.

He expands this transformation: “My thesis is simple: Transformation is possible if we are willing to arrange our lives around the practices, rhythms and truths that Jesus himself did which will open our lives to God’s power to change.” A couple of comments: “Rhythms” is a favorite New Age term. He is setting the stage to present a non-biblical format for your life, but which he claims is Jesus’ Way.

APPRENTICE TO JESUS

Comer has a problem with the word “disciple” because the Bible only uses it as a noun, Therefore, we cannot use it as a verb in any form. He says that he likes “apprentice,” apprenticeship, “apprenticing” much more. Interestingly, the further you get into this book, the more he uses discipling, disciplined, etc. I think he is using apprentice and its forms as a distraction to his non-biblical tenants. He goes to ridiculous lengths on page 12 to justify his choice.

He starts referring to John Ortberg on page 14. Ortberg is a major player in New Age/emergent spirituality and contemplative prayer. I am surprised he introduces us to Ortberg so early in the book. However, he may feel that few know Ortberg’s theology.

BUT WHAT ARE WE SAVED TO?

On page 19, Comer cites a somewhat abbreviated Gospel—“You are a sinner going to hell. God loves you. Jesus died on the cross for your sins. If you believe in him, you can go to heaven when you die.” Then he says that this doesn’t sound anything at

all like the gospel Jesus himself preached.” What he has written on pages 19-24 are so misguided and bad that I have attached scans of my mark-up rather than summarize.

On page 25, Comer says that, “The Greek word for way is *hodos*. The word literally means ‘a road or a path,’ but Jesus used it as a metaphor for apprenticeship to him.” Oh really?

On page 26, he introduces the New Spirituality writer Eugene Peterson. Peterson wrote the New Age book *The Message*, which purports to be a paraphrase of the Bible. It has the form, but not the substance of the Bible, which is easily seen through comparison with any translation. Peterson’s quote confirms Comer’s twist of “the way” above by again twisting Jesus’ quote of “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.” John 14:6 to be Jesus “as” the way. This then leads to Jesus’ Way, as a specific way to live. That is a force-fit of Scripture. Then Comer takes Matthew 7:13-14 “the narrow road that leads to life” as meaning life “both in this age and the age to come.” So he has set his shaky foundation for selling “The Way of Jesus.” He concludes this chapter on page 27, “But you can be one of the lucky few—an apprentice of Jesus.”

WHOEVER MEANS WHOEVER P27

This section is generally OK until the end. He lists only part of the Fruit of the Spirit for a person who is “like the Father.” Then he goes on to say, “You can fulfill your purpose.” “You can even learn to do many of the incredible things Jesus did.” Interesting, unsubstantiated statements to attract readers.

GOAL #1 PAGE 34

He calls Mary (of Martha and Lazarus in Luke 10:39) an “apprentice “who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to him.” Since he is equating apprentice and disciple, that is wrong. He goes on to say that the first and most important goal of apprenticeship to Jesus is to be with him, to spend every waking moment aware of his presence and attentive to his voice.

On page 35, he totally ignores the fact of how obstinate and factious the disciples were, arguing amongst themselves about who would be greatest, until they received the Holy Spirit. Comer sees it as growth/change over a long time with Jesus.

ABIDE IN ME

On the last page and a half, he says, “Apprenticeship to Jesus is about turning your body into a temple....” This ignores much Scripture that our body *is* a temple of the Holy Spirit, but it fits conveniently with his two statements later that we “are being saved” as we live the Way. On page 40, he cites five New Spirituality figures: Saint John of the Cross, a Spanish Carmelite mystic, Madam Guyon a French mystic, a “Jesuit spiritual director” Jean-Pierre de Caussade, Dallas Willard, and Brother Lawrence, a contemplative prayer advocate.

TURNING GOD INTO A HABIT

He may be quoting a psychologist when he says: “The un-directed mind ends toward chaos.” Taking that a priori, he says that “ancient Christian spirituality and bleeding-edge neuroscience agree: the mind can be retrained.” What a convoluted way to get to that conclusion. He then expounds on Brother Lawrence’s (<https://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/the-desert-fathers-borrowing-from-the-east-3/>) beliefs and actions of keeping God at the center of his thoughts.

On page 43, we see Dallas Willard expanding this to be “practicing the presence of God.”

Then Comer starts writing about “Willard and all these spiritual masters of the Way.”

On page 45, he introduces us to Frank Laubach, a self-proclaimed “modern mystic.” To put Laubach in perspective, in his *Letters by a Modern Mystic* on 9 March 1930, in point #2, he writes, “God needs my help to do His will for others, and that my prayer releases His power. I must be His channel for the world needs me.” Comer claims that “Over time, the wiring of your brain will begin to change, to heal from its rupture from your maker.” How poetic, how nonsensical.

I LOOK AT HIM, HE LOOKS AT ME, AND WE ARE HAPPY

Pages 46 and 47: “This is the apex of Christian spirituality.” Here Comer introduces sitting in the quiet and letting God love him to be the single most joyful experience this side of eternity; indeed it is a kind of foretaste of eternity.” “Masters of the Way of Jesus have long called this ‘contemplation.’” Contemplation “at its most basic, it just means looking at God, looking at you, in love.” He cites 2 Corinthians 3:18 using NIV 2011. Even that translation says that the word “contemplate” could be “reflect.” No other translation comes close to “contemplate.” Look them up. NIV 2011 has gone a bit New Age.

On page 48, he really goes into Never-never Land. “As the psalmist David put it, it’s ‘to gaze on the beauty of the Lord.’ To the degree we do so, we are ‘transformed into His image.’ Meaning, we become like what we gaze at—Jesus.” So if I gaze at a hot dog long enough, I become like a hot dog? Or if I gaze at President Biden long enough, I will become like President Biden? He says, “How do we become like Jesus? Through contemplation. We let God love us into people of love.”

I don’t know how he can do it with any intellectual integrity, but he takes Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:16-17 and twists it to: “And in Paul’s paradigm, this transformation happens as we ‘contemplate,’ as we gaze, as we look at God, looking at us in love.” Compare Paul’s prayer to what Comer wrote. Then he quotes the experiences of David Benner, a psychologist and a contemplative “spiritual director” to back up his statement.

Pages 50 and 51 are filled with explanations of contemplative prayer about “just looking at God,” and he concludes that “The

Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all” (a quote by mystic Karl Rahner).

Page 52 is a piece of work. He starts out saying the Christian of the past was a mystic. That might have been true of the 4th to 6th century “desert fathers” who were influenced by eastern religions, but it was not true of the disciples or the early Christians of Acts. The rest of the page is devoted to writing about mystics.

THE REWARD FOR FOLLOWING JESUS IS JESUS

Page 54: “Prayer (that is, being with Jesus) is our primary portal to joy.” So where in this fits the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit, a part of which is joy? He then differentiates between prayer and “true prayer.”

“You can sit before Jesus daily, letting him speak to you, teach you, direct you, above all love you. This is ‘the life that is truly life.’” Why not spend that time in His Word?

Page 55: “You can take hold of the life that is truly life,” (1 Timothy 6:19 totally out of context) the life Jesus died to make possible. What a miserable twist of why Jesus went to the cross.

FIND YOUR SECRET PLACE

He believes this is necessary “to reach the depth of life with God that Jesus modeled.” I agree that having a place with no distractions is helpful, but I take issue with that place enabling me to get to any greater depth than in any other place.

Page 57: “Jesus’ life template was based on a rhythm of retreat and return, like breathing and then out.” That does not marry up with the Gospels’ account of his life. Luke 5:16 says that he “often” withdrew. That is not a rhythm. However “rhythm” is used by New Agers.

Comer amplifies that by calling the places Jesus went to “secret place,” “little hiding places.”

Page 58: Henry Nouwen’s quote: “Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.”

Page 59: Comer does it “sitting cross-legged in the quiet of my room.”

He also says: “Without quiet prayer, your life with God will wither.” Note that he does not enjoin us to read Scripture to keep a vital Christian life.

YOU MUST RUTHLESSLY ELIMINATE HURRY FROM YOUR LIFE.

He quotes Dallas Willard: hurry “the great enemy of spiritual life in your day.” “The number one challenge you will face should you decide to take following Jesus seriously.” This is much too broad and yet too limiting. He neglects an equal if not greater challenge, and that is people growing numb and lazy, wasting how they spend their idle time. Hurry can also be a source of deep prayer, although quick, in the life of a first responder, pilot, etc.

Page 63: He writes about slowing down and gazing at the beauty of God, but as in almost all the book, he does not talk about searching, studying, reading Scripture. Probably, like some

popular pastors, people would realize how off base their guru’s teaching is.

GOAL #2 BECOME LIKE HIM

Page 66: Comer introduces a 6th century monk, Benedict, who coined the “Rule of St. Benedict.”

Page 69: He equates to monks practice of “the imitation of Christ” with Spiritual Formation.

FORMATION DEFINED

Pages 70-72: He discusses/defines Spiritual Formation with quotes from New Age advocates Willard and Mulholland

Page 73: “A true original is one practicing the Way. Because no one is more original than a saint. With that in mind, let me attempt a working definition of spiritual formation in the Way of Jesus: the process of being formed in people of love in Christ.” Notice how he keeps “Way” capitalized. This is probably an attempt to keep it aligned with “I am the Way...” Note, too, that Spiritual Formation forms us into people of love in Christ as though Christ was only love. He avoids Matthew 3:7; 12:34, 39; 23:33-36.

THE PROCESS

Page 74: Uses the terms “channeling,” “actualize our destinies.” Quotes the spiritual contemplative teacher Pete Scazzero.

Page 76: “Formation isn’t a Christianized version of project self; it’s a process of salvation. Of being saved by Jesus.”

INTO PEOPLE OF LOVE

“Love is the acid test of spiritual formation.”

Page 77: Separates love from the Fruit of the Spirit. He misses the fact that Love is not God. “[L]ove is who God is inside his deepest self.” NO. God, Himself, tells us who He is in Exodus 34:6-7. He says God is love, but he leaves out the context of 1 John 4:7-21 from which that is taken.

Page 79: “Jesus’ invitation to apprentice under him isn’t just a chance to become people of love who are like God; it’s a chance to enter the inner life of God himself. The ancients call this ‘union’ with God, and it is the very meaning of our human existence. . . .”

NO ACCIDENTAL SAINTS

Page 81: Cites a study at Fuller Seminary. Fuller strongly embraces Spiritual Formation.

Page 83: Lauds Richard Foster, the guru of Spiritual Formation, as “a true sage.”

PROBLEM #1 SIN PAGE 89

Page 92: Quote by Kallistos Ware—formerly Anglican converted to Eastern Orthodox—a bishop.

“The doctrine of original sin means—that we are born into an environment where it is easy to do evil and hard to do good;” I don’t think that his definition is widely accepted.

Page 93: Comer differentiates “Western” biblical views from “other paradigms.”

He then discusses sin as “a kind of disease.” Not repentance pleading for mercy before a judge, but opening your wounding to a physician.

Page 96: He makes a really off the wall statement: “Over a millennia and a half ago Evagrius Ponticus said, ‘The beginning of salvation is to condemn oneself.’ He was just saying that until we name our sin and open our wound to God, we can’t be saved from it.” That could not be more works oriented. How do you know that you have condemned all your sins? No, crying out for help can also be the beginning

PROBLEM #2: YOU’VE ALREADY BEEN FORMED PAGE 96

#1 The stories we believe.

#2 Our habits.

#3 Our relationships.

Page 100: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed.” Amazing how he completely leaves off the last half of that sentence “by the renewing of your mind.” Again he sidesteps time in the Word as a foundation for your life.

Page 101: “The alternative is to practice the Way . . . to make choices that aim our love and longing at union with God and our formation into his likeness.” Note that based on the rest of the book, this is all before our salvation can take place!

A WORKING THEORY OF CHANGE

Page 103 #1 Teaching.

“Another word to use here is truth. Jesus came as a rabbi, a teacher, a truth teller. Why? Because the role of truth is central to our spiritual formation.” NO NO NO. He IS the Truth. Note that Comer does not say that He came as the Christ, the Messiah. He did not sin (tell lies). He told us that Satan is the father of all lies. John 8:44.

Page 109: He says that, “All the NT writers attest to this sacred mystery [why call it a sacred mystery?]” The writers of the Gospels did not attest to that, and he only lists James, Paul and Peter.

Page 117; “Our bodies can become temples;” Wrong. Once saved (by the Gospel and not by the process Comer describes) our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:19

GOAL #3 DO AS HE DID PAGE 120

Starts mixing the use of apprentices and disciples.

Page 122: Quotes Dallas Willard.

Page 124: Jesus the prototype.

Instead of using “first fruits” of 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 which is used in the NASB, NIV, NET, ESV, NKJV, translations and has a very specific meaning behind it, Comer would prefer to translate first fruits as “prototype.” “Who Jesus was in his time on earth is an advanced version of who we have the potential to become in

him. Jesus is the template for you and me to pour our lives into.” Do I really have to comment on this?

Page 127: A quote from Henri Nouwen which is meaningless: “Jesus’ life moved along a continuum from solitude to community to ministry.”

RHYTHM #1: MAKING SPACE FOR THE GOSPEL (I.E. HOSPITALITY)

He claims that meals stratify as “boundary markers.”

Pages 130-131: He has a reasonable section on inviting people who are different, and even hostile to you, to a meal.

Page 132 has a quote from contemplative author Ronald Rolheiser’s book *Sacred Fire*: “When we act like God, we get to feel like God” (page 234). That is meant in the context of hospitality.

Discusses discomfort when telling the good news of Jesus.

Page 136: “And through apprenticeship to Jesus, we can enter into this kingdom and into the inner life of God himself.”

RHYTHM #3 DEMONSTRATING THE GOSPEL

#1 Healing; #2 Deliverance; #3 Prophecy.

Page 147: Comer makes an unfounded (I believe) statement: “. . . you see Jesus disciples do this all through the New Testament, and *not* just the apostles.” I am not aware of references in the NT about that.

Page 148: Justice: Jesus stands in a long line of Hebrew prophets who stand for justice in the world. Perhaps the OT prophets got involved in politics to the degree that kings crossed politics into their religious life, but Jesus did not get involved. The best example is him sidestepping a trap regarding taxes.

HOW? A RULE OF LIFE 156-202

General: As in reading Richard Foster’s, *The Celebration of Discipline*, there is a lack of mention of the Holy Spirit. I find that notable in a chapter on developing our spiritual lives.

As listed above, Comer cites 14 New Age/Mystic authors and/or gurus. Although he doesn’t go into the mechanics of contemplative prayer, he certainly flirts and dances with it.

When he cites the New Age/Mystic authors, he is assigning credibility to their tenets and writings. This is akin to a pastor using *The Message* from the pulpit. Even if the specific verse that the pastor is quoting is not bad, he is ascribing truth to Peterson that *The Message* and Peterson do not deserve.

He does not mention the brevity of the form of prayer that Jesus taught the disciples. It would seem that the contemplative prayer movement to an hour or so per day is an adulteration of what Jesus taught. I cannot recall Jesus or the disciples making up a timetable for prayer life during their day.

He conveniently jumps to and uses authors who refer to the desert fathers for their habits. Why not just stick to the teaching of the New Testament? Too few people have a familiarity with the New Testament, and that is where time should be spent, not with desert fathers centuries later.

Page 160: He says that the earliest apprentices (Why doesn't he refer to them as disciples, or is he referring obliquely to the "desert fathers?") were asking the same question we are (note that he does *not* say they were asking Jesus): How do we go about following Jesus in such a way that we are transformed? He again conveniently bypasses Romans 12:2—by the renewing of your mind. Then he extrapolates John 15 into Jesus, as a vine, needing a trellis. Surely he jests—but he does not. He makes up the entire need for a structure for our lives—a "Rule of Life" based on this flight of his worldly imagination, not Scripture. Then on page 161, he backs up his position by quoting a pastor who is into spiritual formation. If you read Villodas' quote carefully, it is not certain that he and Comer are talking about the same thing. Comer cites "the first few centuries." Why not go to and stop with the disciples? Why go down generations of adulteration of practices and rule making?

Page 170 starts with a quote by Saint Seraphim of Sarov "Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find their salvation." Unbiblical, untrue. At the bottom is that the Rule of Life will force you to clarify what your deepest desires are to listen to your heart. He ignores Jeremiah 17:9.

Page 172: He writes: "But a Rule is very different: It's self-generated from your internal desires, it has a ton of flexibility, it's relationship based (not morality based) and it's designed to index you toward your vision of the good life." That doesn't seem to me to be a necessarily good thing if there is any meaning to it at all.

Page 173: He cites Margaret Guenther, an Anglican priest who is a guru of contemplative mysticism. "A good rule . . . should support us, but never constrict us." Never constrict us!

Then he writes: "Jesus came to set us free by living according to His Way, not to enslave us to routine, ritual and religion." There is so much flat wrong and ambiguous in that sentence, that I will let you sort it out.

Page 174: He cites two major contemplative figures, Ruth Haley Barton and Eugene Peterson, calling the disciplines "rhythms."

Page 177: "The practices are disciplines based on the lifestyle of Jesus that create time and space for us to access the presence and power of the Spirit and, in doing so, be transformed from the inside out." I do not see Comer's teaching on the Rule as reflecting the lifestyle of Jesus in any way. Matthew 14:14, 15:30, 19:2; Mark 1:34, etc.

Page 178: In the last paragraph, the last sentence is not scriptural regarding offering yourself (Romans 12:1) or drawing on God's grace—we don't draw on it! He gives it according to His will. He then equates drawing on God's grace with the "empowering presence of the Holy Spirit." I think that he just loves to make things up that will be senseless and non-biblical, but which people love to hear.

Page 179: He quotes Dallas Willard who makes a statement that is New Age at best, if not nonsensical when you read it carefully.

The last paragraph is a far cry from biblical, and it borders on the nonsensical: "But it must be said: Anything can become a spiritual discipline if we offer it to God as a channel of grace." A channel of grace!? What?! Anything?!

Page 180: He cites Robert Mulholland, who provides a strange, poetic and limiting definition. It does not include daily time in the Word for edification. 2 Timothy 3:17

Page 183: This page is filled with nonsense. First is Henri Nouwen saying that "without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life" (*Spiritual Life*, p. iv). If that were true, people employed in most hands-on work would not be able to live a spiritual life. I think that, as an example, Christian soldiers and sailors would take great exception to Nouwen's categorical statement. To bolster his statement, Comer cites Conner that "silence is the 'one door into communion with God.'" Again, he is neglecting the role played by the Holy Spirit in a believer. He says that what the Gospel writers call the quiet place is utterly key. Note no biblical references at all.

He next says that "quiet is where we go to find God . . . and the chaos . . . fades away, and what shimmers in its place is the peace and presence of God." How poetic and non-biblical. Take a look at Jesus' life. I've heard sermons that He was never hurried and that seems reasonable, if not necessarily biblical, but the chaos in his life from others is replete in the Gospels.

Then there is the quote from Saint Isaac the Syrian ". . . In silence, we enter into the mystery of the world to come—and into God himself." That is as New Age, contemplative prayer as you can get.

Then Comer says: "Find the quiet to find God." Good luck telling that to a Christian policeman, fireman, or soldier.

Page 184: He gives four levels of prayer: 1) Talking to God; 2) Talking with God; 3) Listening to God; 4) Being with God. Numbers 3 and 4 are New Age. Note that he implies that they are better than 1 and 2, and that 4 is better than 3 and "even fewer discover the joy and possibility of the fourth." 3. His *Lectio Divina* is definitely the New Age style, and may even be channeling, which is prohibited by God. 4. Is also clearly New Age and opening up to spirits. (Note that even Richard Foster in *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* - pages 156-157) warns of an evil side that is potentially reached in 4.)

Page 185: Fasting: I don't see that it is biblical that "you are amplifying your prayers—increasing your capacity to both hear and be heard by God." Jesus said that in the case of the dumb demon it is more effective, but I don't recall anything else specific as a result.

Page 186: He equates reading Scripture all alone with *Lectio Divina*. I think that it is obvious that you don't need to use *Lectio Divina*, in any of its forms, for independent reading of Scripture. [LT Note: *Lectio Divina* is a gateway into contemplative prayer and should be avoided.]

Page 187: Second to the last paragraph: “When you act like God, you get to feel like God.” This is a quote from Rolheiser, a Roman Catholic priest who does not appear to be New Age.

Page 191: He says that an hour a day in prayer is ideal. Pray a psalm, go on a short walk, breathe. This advice is reminiscent of Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.

On page 194, he cites Gary Thomas from his book *Sacred Pathways* (Thomas is a strong advocate of mantras and “nine spiritual temperaments, each with its own pathway to God.”): “I note that none of the nine is immersing oneself in Scripture with heart, soul, and mind. He ignores the Psalmist’s approach to Scripture, as examples in Psalm 19 and Psalm 119. In fact, he ignores the OT as a whole. Jesus didn’t.

On page 195, Comer says: “Tragically we humans tend to moralize our preferences, which can cause great harm to others who are different from us.” Is he justifying tree hugging? He certainly is not emphasizing time in the Word, which should be our only foundation for growing closer to God. Instead he says: “To grow, you may need to expand your horizon of possibility and explore new pathways to God.” Jesus is the only Way, and the ONLY means of knowing Jesus is through His Word. Experience is a fickle teacher.

Page 197: In the second full paragraph, the last sentence is nonsensical. He talks about taking the easy path, not the hard for spiritual growth. This is indicative to me of his New Age proclivities—the practices that you naturally/carnally love and find joy in.”

Page 199: Up till now he has clearly been writing to the individual. In the first paragraph under “#8 Do this in community,” he decries “individual people writing their Rule of Life.” Then

he uses monastic life as a model “to hold a community together around shared rhythms of spiritual formation.” He is bringing this up a priori. He is presuming this without evidence or proof. It is intuitive, he says.

This whole section is internally conflicted.

“FIND YOUR INNER MONK”

Page 203: He quotes a Canadian contemplative pastor Ken Shigematsu, “Everyone of us had a monk or nun ‘embryo’ inside of us.” A monastic impulse that craves quiet prayer, solitude and contemplation—our inner monk.

Page 204: “I believe the invitation of Jesus in our day is to live as desert fathers and mothers in the middle of the city.” What an unsubstantiated claim!

Pages 204- 205: “In closing, I offer you this from the prologue to The Rule of St. Benedict, The Rule that started it all, dating to the sixth century.

“In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.” This is a very works-oriented, Roman Catholic, salvation. That Comer would cite it is indicative of how Spiritual Formation is supposed to lead to salvation.