

*Kneeling with Giants:  
Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers  
By Gary Neal Hansen*  
**Material for Chapter 7 (Puritans — Meditation in Writing)**  
Andy Smothers

We have three weeks in which to experiment with chapter 7 or, maybe, to go back to previous chapters and explore one or more of them further. Maybe there's a practice you didn't get much of a chance to do because of the demands of the week.

In chapter 7, I'd invite you to choose one of the practices or more and practice at least one of them daily for at least a week. For one or more of those days, I request that you explore the first practice Gary Hansen notes from John Beadle "Let every man keep a strict account of his effectual calling." Very likely, you'll want to spend at least an hour on this and maybe several hours in total. I'll provide several questions here on which you can journal to guide that process, which will be an expansion of what Gary shares in the book from my own reflection. We'll discuss this particular journaling work as we meet on April 14 among other activities.

Spend some time on this. I firmly believe one of the inhibitions to us sharing our faith today is that we haven't reflected on our own journeys. We need to reflect upon and learn about our own journeys before we can share them with others and invite them to faith. The more you form this (and do other activities), the better prepared I expect you will be for sharing the faith with others.

The purpose here is to write out your spiritual autobiography. Don't worry much about grammar, spelling, word choice, exact dates, full names, etc. It's important for you to understand later what you wrote, but this isn't being written for publication. Just write stream of thought — even if it's out of order, contains some conflict, isn't fully formed, leaves questions, corrects itself, etc.... I'll provide questions below but invite you to write or type them on a separate sheet of paper. Do these in order and, preferably, don't read ahead as they build on one another. Feel free to repeat yourself or refer back to other answers where it's helpful.

There are a lot of questions here, and, potentially a lot of work. I invite you into this work as I believe the benefits could be substantial. You are your own guide, though, and the benefits (and lack thereof) are your own. You may choose to skip questions or keep answers brief should you desire or circumstances require.

**Please bring this (for your own use) the next time we meet.**

1. Write down significant events in your own spiritual journey.
2. What are some significant stages in your journey? Describe each stage and how you developed belief, trust, and growth in the faith. How would others have viewed your

outward expressions of faith in that stage? How might God have been trying to mold you into the disciple he intends you to be? What progress or deterioration of faith did you experience?

3. Who were you before you believed or took ownership of your faith? For some, this may be a specific moment where they committed themselves to Christ (or multiple times); for others, this might be what you were like when your faith was more the faith of your parents than the faith over which you took ownership. For yet others, you may not know whether you believe yet; you might consider writing about who you are now and where you were before you started exploring.
4. How have you learned about Jesus (both academically and in practice/experience)?
5. Who is Jesus to you today? (Write both about head knowledge (facts) but also about who he was in practice and what that practice suggests of who you should be. How are you living into who you should be?)
6. What helped prepare you for faith? Where do you still need to be prepared?
7. What obstacles did God overcome to win you to faith? What obstacles remain?
8. What wrong turns did you experience? What fresh starts did you experience?
9. When you really look, how was God at work in your life and your faith journey?
10. Have you experienced God's rescue at times? When? Describe the circumstances and what God did. What significant answers to prayer (positive and negative) have you experienced?
11. Name the people who have been spiritual guides and teachers for you. What did they offer you? How did they go about it?
12. What congregations or fellowships have nurtured you? What nurturing was particularly helpful? Describe any that were particularly harmful.
13. What books, periodicals, other written, audio streams, podcasts, movies, or other resources have drawn you toward God or pushed you away from God?
14. Are there special events or experiences that built, challenged, or endangered your faith? Name and describe them. These could be particular classes, retreats, discussions, difficult or joyous experiences, conferences, etc.

15. Who might you have been without God? This is not meant to be the basics such as that you wouldn't be here if God hadn't created you or similar. Where would you have been if God hadn't intervened in your particular life in that particular instance?
16. Where else has God been active in your life?
17. Where have other powers and principalities (earthly or spiritual) been active in challenging your faith in God?
18. What is lacking in your journey. Are there experiences, teachings, activities, or other things that you need for your further spiritual development? What questions bother you from time-to-time or even frequently? What doubts keep cropping up? List them here. Describe how you might fill these holes, answer these questions, or address these doubts. In some cases, you might note having a discussion with your pastor; in the majority, though, I invite you to take ownership and seek out resources. Your pastor could be a source for finding those resources. Be as specific as you can —preferably not “listen better in church” or “go to more adult education programs”, etc.... What specifically will address this challenge?
19. Now take time to order all the events and experiences above chronologically in the various stages you noted above. It doesn't have to be exact — some may be a few lines out of order, and dates can be your closest guess of year. Some may not fit the stage very well. You will very likely have more experiences under each stage, but your number of stages may be more or less. It might look something like the following:

#### **Stage 1**

Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)  
 Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)  
 Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)

#### **Stage 2**

Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)  
 Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)  
 Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)

#### **Stage 3**

Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)  
 Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)  
 Year    Event, experience, person, etc... — brief note of significance (few words)

20. Now, reflecting on all you have assembled, where might you be without God and these experiences? What might you have been if God hadn't intervened in your life? (Don't answer with very basics such as there wouldn't be a creation without God but in respect for how your life specifically would be changed without intervention.)

21. After completing this exercise and if someone came up to you and asked you why you follow this person named Jesus from 2000 years ago, how would you answer? Are there experiences, people, evidence, hopes, etc. in your life that that you would share with hopes that might uncover the faith given them by God?
- Consider writing out how you might answer this in a discussion you might have in the length of an elevator ride (30 seconds to 2 minutes) and a longer description of 5-10 minutes.

**Again, please remember to bring this sheet and your answers to our next meeting.**

This study aid is written by Pastor Andy Smothers to guide study and discussions of *Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History's Best Teachers* by Gary Neal Hansen. The full set of study guides is available at <https://livingintograce.com/study-group-aids-for-kneeling-with-giants-learning-to-pray-with-historys-best-teachers-by-gary-neal-hansen>. While based on the book, this guide was not prepared in cooperation with the author, Gary Neal Hansen, nor the publishers (InterVarsity Press).



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