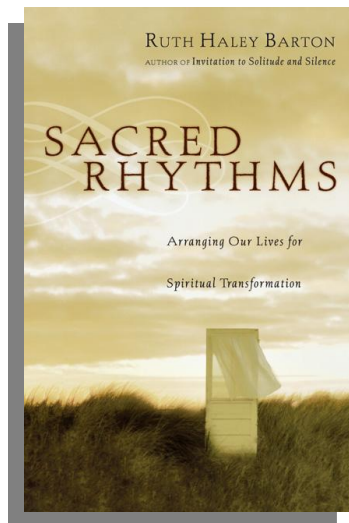




AN INTERVIEW  
WITH  
RUTH HALEY  
BARTON



*“Many of us have more clearly developed plans for finances, further education, home improvements and physical fitness than we do for our spiritual lives.”*

—Ruth Haley Barton

**What is the significance of the phrase “sacred rhythms”?**

**Ruth Haley Barton:** The phrase “spiritual rhythms” is a way of talking about the traditional Christian practice of establishing a rule of life—an intentional arrangement of spiritual practices, attitudes and relationships by which I regularly and routinely make myself available for God’s work of transformation in my life. I have come to enjoy the language of rhythms because it provides relief from some of the more heavy-handed and rigid approaches to the spiritual life and instead draws upon the beauty and delight of the natural rhythms in the created order. The rhythms of the tide, the seasons, night and day, the beat in a good piece of music all connote beauty, variety, spontaneity, and yet there is also some basic understanding and mastery required (in the case of playing music or dancing in particular) to give oneself fully to it.

**You talk about longing, the longing for God and to live life as it is meant to be lived. How are we to recognize those longings?**

**Ruth:** The ability to recognize desire and longing is the beginning of the spiritual journey because it opens up the possibility of choosing to order our lives more intentionally around what it is that our heart most wants. In this case we are talking about the spiritual longings of the heart—the longing for a way of life that works, a deeper experience of love and intimacy with God, deep and fundamental levels of change and transformation. Oftentimes we get in touch with these desires as we withdraw from the constant stimulation of life in our culture and allow more time for quiet reflection in our lives. As we become quieter on the inside, we will become more aware of our deepest longings, and if we allow ourselves to become more aware, we can eventually make choices that are more congruent with our heart’s deepest longings. This will include ordering our lives around the disciplines, values and relationships that we know will invite God’s transforming work in our lives. Experiences of desperation—when our life feels empty or out of control, when a relationship is broken, when we recognize sin or negative patterns in our lives and don’t know what to do about it—can also move us to order our lives in ways that will move us toward wholeness.

**What does the subtitle mean—*Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*?**

**Ruth:** The subtitle *Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* points to the fact that we really can arrange our lives for spiritual transformation rather than relying on random and haphazard approaches to this most important area of

(continued answer on page 2)



**Ruth Haley Barton** is a spiritual director, retreat leader and teacher trained through the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation and the Pathways Center for Spiritual Leadership. She is cofounder of The Transforming Center ([www.thetransformingcenter.org](http://www.thetransformingcenter.org)) and author of spiritual formation books and resources, including *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* (InterVarsity Press), *An Ordinary Day with Jesus* (Willow Creek Resources) and *The Truths That Free Us* (Waterbrook/Shaw).

Educated at Wheaton College and Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Barton has served on the pastoral staff at several different churches, including Willow Creek Community Church. Ruth, her husband, Chris, and their family live in the Chicago area.

our lives. Many of us have more clearly developed plans for finances, further education, home improvements and physical fitness than we do for our spiritual lives. Rather than shoving spiritual transformation into the nooks and crannies of unmanageable lives, we can move toward arranging our lives for what our hearts want most.

### **How does each of the following help us “arrange our lives for spiritual transformation”?**

- Self-examination
- Honoring the body
- Sabbath

**Ruth: Self-examination**, when we engage this discipline regularly, is the practice whereby we invite God to show us evidence of his presence with us in the ordinary and not-so-ordinary moments of our lives. We also invite God to show us those places where we are being transformed into the image of Christ and those places where we fall short. In this way, we open ourselves to having God show us those things we would probably not be able to see for ourselves. We celebrate God’s transforming presence and work in our lives and ask him to guide us into transformation in the areas where we need it. This is one of the most powerful practices for true change.

**Honoring the body** involves learning to experience our bodies as a place of prayer—a temple, as the New Testament refers to it. As we learn to care for and honor our bodies as a spiritual practice, we do begin to sense God’s goodness and presence in and through our life in the body; we are energized for the spiritual journey and for service to others; we are guided in different prayer experiences (kneeling, resting in God’s presence, engaging in creative movement, walking meditation, etc.). As we become more respectful of our bodies, we discover that God communicates with us through visceral, bodily sensations and experiences of tension, tears, energy drain, fear, etc., and we can gain wisdom as we learn to listen to the wisdom of the body.

**Sabbath keeping** is the discipline that helps us to live humbly within the limits of our humanity and to honor God in our use of time. When we order our lives around a pattern of working six days and resting on the seventh, we are living within sane rhythms of work and rest that keep us well for the long haul and give us regular time for worship and delighting in God and God’s good gifts. In my experience, sabbath is the kingpin of a life pattern that is ordered to honor God and open ourselves to his goodness and love.