

Daily Spiritual Practices October 1st

**Monday morning/midday**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:33 - 38

*The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.*

Devotional

The challenge to shed our "Old false" self in order to live authentically in our "new true" self strikes at the very core of true spirituality. We see this authenticity in the life of Jesus. In the midst of a mini-revival in the town of Capernaum, Jesus was able to withstand the pressure of everyone looking for him, and to move on to another place. He also knew his Father, who loved him and had a work for him to complete. In living faithfully to his true self, however, Jesus disappointed a lot of people. For example: He disappointed his family to the point where his mother and siblings wondered if he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21). He disappointed the people he grew up with in Nazareth. When Jesus declared who he really was - the Messiah they tried to push him off a cliff (Luke 4:28 - 29). He disappointed his closest friends, the twelve disciples. They projected onto Jesus their own picture of the kind of Messiah they expected him to be. When he failed to meet their expectations, they quit on him. He disappointed the crowds. They wanted an earthly Messiah who would feed them, fix all their problems, overthrow the Roman oppressors, work miracles, and give inspiring sermons. They walked away from him. He disappointed the religious leaders. They did not appreciate the disruption his presence brought to their day-to-day lives or to their theology. They finally attributed his power to demons and had him crucified.

Question to Consider

What might be one specific way that you give in to the expectations of others rather than being faithful to what Jesus has for you?

**Prayer**

Jesus, I am so grateful that you understand what it is like to feel pressure from the expectations of others. It can feel crushing at times. Lord, help me to love others well while at the same time remaining faithful to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## **Monday midday/evening**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: I Samuel 17:38 - 40, 45

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened

on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.

Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LoRD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

### **Devotional**

Even as a young man, David knew both himself and God. Having taken off Saul's armor, he went up against the nine-foot Goliath with only his slingshot and a few smooth stones, confident in the living God. Unlike David, however, the vast majority of us go to our graves without ever really knowing who we are. We unconsciously live someone else's life, or at least someone else's expectations for us. We are so unaccustomed to being our true self that it can seem impossible to know where to begin. Thomas Merton describes what we so often do:

I use up my life in the desire for pleasures ... power, honor, knowledge and love, to clothe this false self.... And I wind experiences around myself and cover myself with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world, as if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface. But there is no substance under the things with which I am clothed. I am hollow, and my structure of pleasures and ambitions has no foundation... And when they are gone there will be nothing left of me but my own nakedness and emptiness and hollowness.

The path we must walk to remove the layers of our false self is initially very hard. Powerful forces around and inside us can smother the process. At the same time, the God of the universe has made his home in us (John 14:23), and the very glory God gave Jesus has also been given to us (John 17:21-23).

Question to Consider

What might be one false layer or bandage God is inviting you to remove today?

Prayer

*Lord, grant me the courage of David to resist the temptation to live a life that is not the one you have given to me. Deliver me from the "Goliaths" in front of me, and from the negative voices I hear so often. Help me to listen and obey your voice today. In Jesus name, amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## **Tuesday morning/midday**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139:13 - 16

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

### **Devotional**

David seems to have maintained the tension of two complementary truths taught in Scripture.

We are sinners who desperately need forgiveness and a Savior. At the same time, God created us in his image, knit each of us together in our mother's womb with enormous care, and chose us for a special purpose on earth. Parker Palmer captured well the wonder of Psalm 139:

Vocation does not come from a voice "out there" calling me to become something I am not. It

comes from a voice "in here" calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God. It is a strange gift, this birthright of self. Accepting it turns out

to be even more demanding than attempting to become someone else! I have sometimes responded to that demand by ignoring the gift, or hiding it, or fleeing from it, or squandering

it-and I think I am not alone. There is a Hasidic tale that Teveals, with amazing brevity, both the

universal tendency to want to be someone else and the ultimate importance of becoming one's self. Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me:

Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: Why were you not Zusya?

Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: Why were you not Zusya?

Question to Consider

What do you think might be one of your "birthright" gifts from God that you have ignored in your life?

### **Prayer**

*Lord, I come this day inviting you to cut those deeply entrenched chains that keep me from being faithful to my true self in Christ. In doing so, may my life be a blessing to many. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## **Tuesday midday/evening**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3: 14 - 19

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

### **Devotional**

Bernard of Clairvaux (AD 1090 - 1153), the abbot of a Cistercian monastery in France, was perhaps the greatest Christian leader and writer of his day. In his great work entitled *Loving God*, Bernard describes four degrees of love:

1. Loving ourselves for our own sake
2. Loving God for his gifts and blessings
3. Loving God for himself alone
4. Loving ourselves for the sake of God

The highest degree of love, for Bernard, was simply that we love ourselves as God loves us - in the same degree, in the same manner, and with the very same love. We love the self that God loves, the essential image and likeness of God in us that has been damaged by sin.

Question to Consider

Where do you see yourself on Bernard's list of the four degrees of love?

### **Prayer**

*Lord, strengthen me with your power that I might grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ that surpasses human knowledge. May I love you for you alone, and not your gifts or blessings. And may I live in the deep experience of your tender love this day. In Jesus name, amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

### **Wednesday morning/midday**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:26 - 31

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other,

"Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said,

"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.?" Then Peter spoke up, "We have left every. thing to follow you!"

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields - along with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

## **Devotional**

Anthony (AD 251-356) grew up in a wealthy family in Egypt, receiving an excellent education and upbringing from his Christian parents. One Sunday, Anthony heard the words: "Go sell all you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven" and he felt God speaking directly to his heart. Unlike the rich young ruler, he responded to Jesus in faith. Selling his possessions, Anthony went off into the solitude of the Egyptian desert, not just for a few days or weeks, but for twenty years! He renounced all possessions to learn detachment; he renounced speech in order to learn compassion; and he renounced activity in order to learn prayer. In the desert, Anthony both discovered God and did intense battle with the devil. When Anthony emerged from his solitude after twenty years, people recognized in him the qualities of an authentic "healthy" man - whole in body, mind, and soul. God soon catapulted him into one of the most remarkable ministries of that day. He preached the gospel among the rich and the poor, performed many heal-ings, expelled demons, and more. Emperor Constantine Augustus sought out Anthony's counsel. He served tirelessly in prisons and among the poor. In his old age, Anthony retired to an even deeper solitude to be totally absorbed in direct communion with God. He died in the year 356 at the age of 106 years old.

Question to Consider

What impresses you most about the story of Anthony's life?

## **Prayer**

*Lord, it is clear that layers of Anthony's false, superficial self were shed during his time with you. Crack the hard shell over my heart that obscures and buries my true self in Christ. Transform me into the person you desire me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Conclude with silence (2 minutes)*

## **Wednesday midday/evening**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1 - 3,8 - 11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you, he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

## **Devotional**

Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace.

There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant ("turn stones into loaves"), to be spectacular ("throw yourself down"), and to be powerful ("I will give you all these kingdoms"). There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity ("You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone"). Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter - the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self....

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make.... The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone.

- Henri Nouwen?

Question to Consider

What temptations or trials do you find yourself in today that God might be using as a furnace to help develop your interior life?

### **Prayer**

*Lord, help me to turn down the volume of the voices that tell me I have little worth unless I am wealthy, influential, and popular.*

*Grant me the grace today to experience your voice, which tells me:*

*You are "my (child), whom I love; with (you) I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16). In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

### **Thursday morning/midday**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 19:1 - 5

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LoRD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

### **Devotional**

After Elijah's great victory over 850 false prophets at Mount Car-mel, he had to run for his life. During that process, he became both exhausted and depressed - to the point of wanting to die. For reasons not given in this text, we find Elijah alone under a broom bush and asking for death. He is, as we call it today, "burned out."

When I give something I do not possess, I give a false and dangerous gift, a gift that looks like love but is, in reality, loveless - a gift given more from my need to prove myself than from the other's need to be cared for....

One sign that I am violating my own nature in the name of nobility is a condition called burnout. Though usually regarded as the result of trying to give too much, burnout in my experience results from trying to give what I do not possess - the ultimate in giving too little! Burnout is a state of emptiness, to be sure, but it does not result from giving all I have; it merely reveals the nothingness from which I was trying to give in the first place.

Question to Consider

What would it look like for you to respect yourself in light of your God-given human limits?

### **Prayer**

*Jesus, you know my tendency to say yes to more commitments than I can possibly keep. Help me to embrace the gift of my limits physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And may you, Lord Jesus, be glorified in and through me today. In your name, amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

### **Thursday midday/evening**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Exodus 3:1 - 5

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight - why the bush does not burn up."

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

### **Devotional**

God's presence in us is like the fire in the Burning Bush. It gradually takes us over, so that although we remain fully ourselves, we are being made over into our true selves, the way God originally intended us to be. He is Light, and we are filled with His light - maybe even literally, as some saints were said to visibly glow. The term for this transformation is fairly scandalizing: theosis, which means being transformed into God, divinized or deified. Of course we do not become little mini-gods with our own universes. We never lose our identity, but we are filled with God like a sponge is filled with water.

- Frederica Mathewes-Green

## Question to Consider

What is one area of your inner person that the fire of God's presence might want to burn away (e.g., selfishness, greed, bitterness, impatience)?

## Prayer

*Jesus, I believe that you came to save me from the penalty of my sins - death - and for eternal life. At the same time, you came to save me from the poison that flows in my veins, from that which keeps me from your Light. Come invade me with your burning fire that I might become the person you have created me to be in you. In your name, amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## Friday morning/midday

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:35 - 39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## Devotional

Most of us place a higher premium on what other people think than we realize. As can be seen in Galatians, the apostle Paul understood this struggle intimately.

M. Scott Peck illustrates the point through a story of meeting a high school classmate at the age of fifteen. Here are his reflections after a conversation with his friend:

I suddenly realized that for the entire ten-minute period from when I had first seen my acquaintance until that very moment, I had been totally self-preoccupied. For the two or three minutes before we met, all I was thinking about was the clever things I might say that would impress him. During our five minutes together, I was listening to what he had to say only so that I might turn it into a clever rejoinder. I watched him only so that I might see what effect my remarks were having upon him. And for the two or three minutes after we separated, my sole thought was of those things I could have said that might have impressed him even more.

I had not cared a whit for my classmate.

What is most startling in reading this detailed explanation of what was going on beneath the surface of this fifteen-year-old boy, is the recognition that the same dynamics continue for most of us into our twenties, thirties, fifties, seventies, and nineties! We remain trapped in living a pretend life - always seeking the approval of others. True freedom comes when we no longer



need to be special in other people's eyes because we know we are loveable and good enough in Christ.

#### Question to Consider

How might it change your day today if you were to cease looking for human approval and begin seeking only the approval of God?

#### **Prayer**

*Grant me courage, Lord, to do today what you have given me to do, to say what you have given me to say, and to become who you have called me to become. In Jesus name, amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

#### **Friday midday/ evening**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:28 - 31

Do you not know?

Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

#### **Devotional**

In his book *The Song of the Bird*, Tony de Mello tells the following story:

A man found an eagle's egg and put it in a nest of a barnyard hen. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them.

All his life the eagle did what the barnyard chicks did, thinking he was a barnyard chick. He scratched the earth for worms and insects, he clucked and cackled. And he would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air.

Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird above him in the cloudless sky. It glided in graceful majesty among the powerful wind currents, with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings. The eagle looked up in awe. "Who's that?" he asked.

"That's the eagle, the king of the birds, said his neighbor. "He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth - we are chickens."

Question to Consider

In what area of your life might you be living as a chicken when God, in reality, has made you an eagle?

**Prayer**

*Father, you have made me a golden eagle - able to fly. In so many ways, however, I still live as a chicken, unaware of the heights and the richness to which you have called me. Fill me, Holy Spirit. Set me free to be the unique person the Lord Jesus has created me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*