

Daily Spiritual Practices Week of October 29

DAY 1: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Luke 8:11 - 15

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

Devotional

Awareness of the love of God - and responding to it - is at the heart of our lives. Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love. This is no new idea. Christ in the parable of the sower long ago told us that "The seed is the word of God." We often think this applies only to the word of the Gospel as formally preached in churches on Sundays.... But every expression of the will of God is in some sense a "word" of God and therefore a "seed" of new life. The ever-changing reality in the midst of which we live should awaken us to the possibility of an uninterrupted dialogue with God... We must learn to realize that the love of God seeks us in every situation, and seeks our good. -Thomas Merton

Question to Consider

Pause and consider your day. What seeds from God might be coming to you that you don't want to miss?

Prayer

Lord, I praise you because your love seeks my good in any and every situation. Forgive me for the seeds that I have squandered. Soften my heart to surrender to your will in and through me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with 2 minutes of silence

DAY 1: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:9-17

In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Devotional

At the heart of the Daily Office and Sabbath disciplines is stopping to surrender to God in trust. Lack of trust is the very essence of the sin in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve legitimately worked and enjoyed their achievements in the garden. However, they were called to embrace their limits and not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were not meant to see and know that which belongs to Almighty God. As theologian Robert Barron has argued, the heart of the original sin is the refusal to accept God's rhythm for us. The essence of being created in God's image is our ability, like God, to stop. We imitate God by stopping our work and resting. If we can stop for one day a week, or for a mini-Sabbath each day (a Daily Office), we touch something deep within us as image bearers of God. Our brains, bodies, spirits, and emotions are all wired by God for the rhythm of working and resting in him. Stopping for a Daily Office or the Sabbath is not meant to add another obligation to our already busy schedules. It is an entirely new way of being in the world, resetting all of our days toward a new destination - God.

Question to Consider

How do you hear the invitation to "stop and surrender to God in trust" today?

Prayer

Lord, help me to grab hold of you today. I need you. Set me free to begin reorienting my life around you, and you alone. Help me to pay attention to and honor how you have uniquely made me. Thank you for the gift of rest. In Jesus name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 2: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 19:11 - 12

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

Devotional

When God appeared to Elijah (after his flight from Jezebel and during his suicidal depression), he told him to stand and wait for the presence of the Lord to pass by. God did not appear in ways he had showed up in the past. God was not in the wind (as with Job), an earthquake (as when he gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai), or fire (like the burning bush Moses saw). God revealed himself to Elijah in "a gentle whisper," which can also be translated as "a sound of sheer silence." The common translation of this passage does not fully capture the original Hebrew, but what could the translators do? How do you hear silence? The silence after the chaos, for Elijah and for us, is full of the presence of God. God spoke to Elijah out of the silence. God invites you to stand and to wait like Elijah. Why? God also wants to speak to you out of the "sound of sheer silence."

Question to Consider

When can you set aside some time for extended, uninterrupted silence to hear God?

Prayer

Lord, you know how difficult it is for me to be in silence before you. At times it feels almost impossible, given the demands, dis-tractions, and noise all around me. I invite you to lead me to a quiet, silent place before you - to a place where I can hear you as Elijah did. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 2: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: John 15:4 - 6

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

Devotional

When we are busier than God requires us to be, we do violence to ourselves. Thomas Merton understood this and wrote: There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence ... activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands. To commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in every-thing, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy ... kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful. And when we do this violence to ourselves, we are unable to love others in and through the love of Christ.

Question to Consider

In what ways are you busier than God requires?

Prayer

Father, I know how often I am carried away by too many concerns and demands and projects. I have felt the violence to my soul. Deliver me from this whirlwind around me and in me. Heal my tired and weary spirit, allowing the wisdom that comes from rest in you to flow deep within me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 3: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46:1 - 3, 10

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Devotional

Many are avidly seeking but they alone find who remain in continual silence... Every man who delights in a multitude of words, even though he says admirable things, is empty within. If you love truth, be a lover of silence. Silence like the sunlight will illuminate you in God and will deliver you from the phantoms of ignorance. Silence will unite you to God himself...

More than all things love silence: it brings you a fruit that tongue cannot describe. In the beginning we have to force ourselves to be silent. But then there is born something that draws us to silence. May God give you an experience of this "some-thing" that is born of silence. If only you practice this, untold light will dawn on you in consequence...after a while a certain sweetness is born in the heart of this exercise and the body is drawn almost by force to remain in silence. - Isaac of Ninevch

Question to Consider

What keeps you from silence?

Prayer

Lord, help me to be still and to wait patiently for you in silence.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 3: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:31 - 33

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Devotional

In these two parables describing the kingdom of God, we hear Jesus calling us to slow down and take a longer view of our lives. We can work without stopping, faster and faster, electric lights making artificial day so the whole machine can labor without ceasing. But remember: No living thing lives like this. There are greater rhythms that govern how life grows: seasons and sunsets and great movements of seas and stars.... We are part of the creation story, subject to all its laws and rhythms. To surrender to the rhythms of seasons and flowerings and dormancies is to savor the secret of life itself. Many scientists believe we are "hard-wired" like this, to live in rhythmic awareness, to be in and then step out, to be engrossed and then detached, to work and then to rest. It follows then that the commandment to remember the Sabbath is not a burdensome requirement from some law-giving deity. "You ought, you'd better, you must" - but rather a remembrance of a law that is firmly embedded in the fabric of nature. It is a reminder of how things really are, the rhythmic dance to which we unavoidably belong. - Wayne Muller

Question to Consider

How do the rhythms you see in nature (e.g., spring, summer, fall, winter, day, night) speak to you and point to the kind of rhythms you desire for your own life?

Prayer

Lord, I thank you that you are working even when I am sleeping.
Teach me to respect the built-in rhythms of life, and to live from a place of deep rest in you. In Jesus name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 4: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Mark 2:23 - 28

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat.

And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Devotional

Sabbath is not dependent upon our readiness to stop. We do not stop when we are finished. We do not stop when we complete our phone calls, finish our project, get through this stack of messages, or get out this report that is due tomorrow. We stop because it is time to stop. Sabbath requires surrender. If we only stop when we are finished with all our work, we will never stop - because our work is never completely done. With every accomplishment there arises a new responsibility.... If we refuse rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to be finished..We stop because there are forces larger than we that take care of the universe, and while our efforts are important, necessary, and useful, they are not (nor are we) indispensable. The galaxy will somehow manage without us for this hour, this day, and so we are invited - nay, commanded - to relax, and enjoy our relative unimportance, our humble place at the table in a very large world.. Do not be anxious about tomorrow, Jesus said again and again. Let the work of this day be sufficient.. Sabbath says, Be still. Stop. There is no rush to get to the end, because we are never finished. - Wayne Muller

Question to Consider

What is your greatest fear in stopping for a twenty-four-hour period each week?

Prayer

Keeping the Sabbath, Lord, will require a lot of changes in the way I am living life. Teach me, Lord, how to take the next step with this in a way that fits my unique personality and situation. Help me to trust you with all that will remain unfinished and to enjoy my humble place in your very large world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 4: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 92:1 - 6

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord; I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, Lord, how profound your thoughts! Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand.

Devotional

Psalm 92 is a song that was intended for the Sabbath. It stands as an indictment against today's culture of exhaustion and destruction. It also presents us with a positive vision of observing the

Sabbath that takes us far beyond a mere reprieve from six days of frantic exertion. Sabbath is the focus and culmination of a life that is daily and practically devoted to honoring God. Abraham Joshua Heschel once observed, "Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come." We are simply naive if we think that having wasted or squandered the many good gifts of this creation, we will not do the same with the gifts of heaven. Sabbath practice, on this view, is a sort of training ground for the life of eternity, a preparation for the full reception and welcome of the presence of God. -Norman Witzba

Question to Consider

How might Sabbath keeping (for an entire twenty-four-hour period) or practicing the Daily Office (a mini-Sabbath for a few minutes) provide you with a taste of eternity?

Prayer

Lord, show me how to welcome your presence, not only one day a week, but every day. Train me for eternity. Grant me a taste of heaven through the experience of true Sabbath rest. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 5: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23:1 - 3

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Devotional

The Sabbath teaches us grace because it connects us experientially to the basic truth that nothing we do will earn God's love. As long as we are working hard, using our gifts to serve others, experiencing joy in our work along with the toil, we are always in danger of believing that our actions trigger God's love for us. Only in stopping, really stopping, do we teach our hearts and souls that we are loved apart from what we do. During a day of rest, we have the chance to take a deep breath and look at our lives. God is at work every minute of our days, yet we seldom notice. Noticing requires intentional stopping, and the Sabbath provides that opportunity. On the Sabbath we can take a moment to see the beauty of a maple leaf, created with great care by our loving Creator. Without time to stop, we cannot notice God's hand in our lives, practice thankfulness, step outside our culture's values or explore our deepest longings. Without time to rest, we will seriously undermine our ability to experience God's unconditional love and acceptance. The Sabbath is a gift whose blessings cannot be found anywhere else.

- Lynne Baab

Question to Consider

How will you allow God to lead you to the "quiet waters of rest" this week so that you experience his unconditional love and acceptance?

Prayer

Lord, I now take a deep breath and stop. So often I miss your hand and gifts in my life because I am preoccupied and anxious.

Grant me the power to pause each day and each week to simply rest in your arms of love. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 5: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 5:12 - 15

"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male or female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

Devotional

Sabbath was intended to shape our lives as a liberated people. The fourth commandment calls for a day of rest - even for people who had been enslaved. The Deuteronomy reason for Sabbath-keeping is that our ancestors in Egypt went for four hundred years without a vacation (Deuteronomy 5:15). Never a day off. The consequence: they were no longer considered persons but slaves. Hands. Work units. Not persons created in the image of God but equipment for making brick and building pyramids. Humanity was defaced. - Eugene Peterson

Keeping the Sabbaths is meant to be an experience of the truth that you are not a "doing machine" but a deeply loved son or daughter of God. He is not interested in simply using you to get work done; God delights in you. He provides free time once a week so that you might relish your release from all forms of oppression and slavery.

Question to Consider

How might the truth that God doesn't want to use you, but to enjoy you, give you a vision for celebrating the Sabbath?

Prayer

Lord, Sabbath rest is truly an unbelievable gift! Thank you that there is nothing I can do to earn your love; it comes without any strings attached. As I close my eyes for these few minutes before you, all I can say is, thank you! In Jesus name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)