



STILL, SMALL VOICE

A self-guided spiritual retreat

“Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

1 Kings 19:11-13, NKJV

Welcome to the 2023 Blakemore UMC Family Retreat!

This year you are invited to participate in a self-guided exploration into a variety of contemplative practices. What, when and where you decide to explore is up to you, and included in this packet are suggestions and instructions for diving in. Although this is designed as an individual experience, feel free to gather in pairs or groups to share any of these spiritual practices together.

Here's a *sample* schedule:

Friday, Sept. 22

4:00 PM	Registration
6:00 PM	Dinner (experiment with a silent meal or mindful eating)
8:00- 10 PM	Family game night
11: PM	Quiet time (try a contemplative practice from your packet)

Saturday, Sept. 23

7:00 AM	Self-directed devotional at Vesper Point (try a contemplative practice from your packet)
8:00 AM	Breakfast (experiment with a silent meal or mindful eating)
9:00-10:30 AM	Two 30-minute periods of Centering Prayer or other practice separated by Walking Meditation
10:30-10:45 AM	Break
10:45-Noon	Two 30-minute periods of Centering Prayer or other practice separated by Walking Meditation
Noon	Lunch (experiment with a silent meal or mindful eating)
1:00 PM-5:30	Free time (trying journaling, silent walks, yoga or other exercise, drawing, napping or just sitting and staring into space!)
6:00 PM	Dinner (experiment with a silent meal or mindful eating)
8:00 PM	Campfire
11:00 PM	Quiet Time (try a contemplative practice from your packet)

Sunday, Sept. 24

7:00 AM	Self-directed devotional at Vesper Point (try a contemplative practice from your packet)
8:00 AM	Breakfast (experiment with a silent meal or mindful eating)
9:45 AM	Worship (location TBA)
10:45-11:30 AM	Clean up, pack up
11:30 AM	Closing Circle in the Quad
Noon	Lunch (experiment with a silent meal or mindful eating) and head home from the mountain!

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES INCLUDED IN YOUR PACKET

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Being in Silence

Unstructured time can make some people feel uneasy, and you may need to resist the urge to be doing more. Remain as silent as you can but be ready to make exceptions when you have a practical need to ask or answer a question. Don't use your cellphones and other digital devices if at all possible and avoid using online spiritual resources if you feel there is a danger you will be sucked in. Unless the retreat is taking place in an environment where you can walk outside in nature, it's best if you can minimize leaving the premises, which can be challenging on a pretty day, but particularly in urban environments or crowded places can cause people to be drawn into talking and ordinary life.

Silent Meals

Since your meals will not be provided for you, as they are on an in-person retreat, plan and prepare as much as possible in advance simple meals that you can eat in silence in your home. You might invite any companions in your home to eat in silence with you.

You might choose to eat in a mindful manner so that the eating itself becomes a meditative practice. However, it should be noted that there is some tension between the dreamy state mentioned above and the more bright and alert state of mindfulness. Do you want to rest and dream, allowing thoughts to float freely across your mind, or challenge yourself to pay attention?

Instructions for Mindful Eating

Bring yourself fully into your body, noticing your breath going in and out, gently letting go of thoughts that do not have to do with eating and being present to your food. If you are planning to give yourself fully to mindful eating, it is best to eat without reading, talking, or engaging in any other task as you eat.

Notice the colors, shapes, and textures of the food before you.

Slowly begin to eat, pausing to notice the sensations of the food and the feelings in your body as you eat and interact with your food.

Notice any thoughts that are coming up and gently let go of them if they do not have to do with the experience of eating.

Listen to your body. How do you feel as you eat? Does your body tell you when it has had enough?

Finally, offer a prayer for all those humans and creatures who helped bring your food to the table.

Prayer partners - It might also be helpful to coordinate with a friend or group of spiritual friends to keep to a similar schedule and pray for each other at certain times of the day. You could meet for centering prayer together by Zoom, using one of the programs if you choose, or check in with each other once a day for spiritual sharing.

Below are some simple guidelines you could use for some spiritual sharing:

Guidelines for Spiritual Sharing

- We listen attentively and without interruption when someone else is speaking.
- We share experiences from our own lives, not abstract ideas. We use "I" statements.
- We try to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, but no one is required to. We do not lecture or dominate the group time with our own speaking.
- We do not give advice, criticize, or comment on what others share.
- We keep our sharing in the group absolutely confidential.

You might reflect together on a question like, "Where do I feel the presence of God in this retreat day?" or "How am I being called to become more fully myself?" Leave a few minutes of silence for reflection, then invite participants to share one at a time for a set period of time with brief silences in between. You can calculate how much time is available, then divide by the number of people to determine how long each participant may share, including time for silence in between. This format ensures that each participant will have a chance to speak without being interrupted and without running out of time. The silences in between periods of sharing allow for further reflection and help make it clear that each participant is expected to speak out of their own experience rather than responding to what was previously said. The group may choose a pre-arranged order for sharing or allow the participants to choose when they will take their turns. A timekeeper might issue a gentle warning a minute before each speaker's time is up to allow them to bring their sharing to a close.

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GUIDE TO CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer is a method of contemplative prayer in which we rest silently in the presence of God. It is a very simple method that is easy to learn. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words, but this is not the only form of prayer.

In the 1970s a group of Trappist monks noticed that young people were increasingly turning to eastern forms of meditation. The monks - Thomas Keating, William Meninger, and Basil Pennington - knew that there were contemplative prayer practices from the Christian tradition that had at one time been used in monasteries but were unknown to the broader public. They set out to recover these practices and make them more widely available, developing the simple method of centering prayer based on their knowledge of Christian spiritual classics like *The Cloud of Unknowing*, writings by the Desert Fathers and Mothers, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, and Christian scripture, in particular Jesus' saying in Matthew, "Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Thomas Keating describes centering prayer as "a way of saying 'Here I am.' The next step is up to God. It is a way of putting yourself at God's disposal; it is God who determines the consequences."

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Sit with your back straight. You can sit on a cushion or on a chair. Set a timer, if you have one. Two sessions of 20 minutes each day are recommended, but if that is too much for you, begin with five or ten minutes. Allow your body to relax. Begin to notice your breath flowing in and out at its natural speed.

- Choose a sacred word of one or two syllables as the symbol of your intention to be open to God's presence. Choose any word with which you are comfortable to remind you to be present to God. Examples of a sacred word: Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Holy, Glory, God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen, Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, silently begin to repeat the sacred word, which points you gently towards God's presence. When you are ready, you can let go of the sacred word and simply rest in God.

It is also possible to practice centering prayer with a sacred breath as the sacred symbol instead of a sacred word. When using the sacred breath, you do not follow the breath, as in Zen meditation, but simply notice it, touching it gently with your attention.

- When you notice that you have become engaged with your thoughts, gently disengage yourself and turn towards God's presence, returning to the sacred symbol if necessary.

- At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. This is an important transition time for bringing the prayer into daily life. If you would like, you can simply rest in silence, dedicate the period of prayer to a person or concern, silently say a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer, or visualize yourself in your daily life as a way of transitioning from the prayer into life.

As long as your intention is to be with God and let God act upon you, you can't do the prayer wrong. Let go of expectations for the time of prayer and don't worry about whether the period of prayer is "good" or "bad."

GUIDE TO LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio divina is an ancient spiritual practice for listening to a scripture passage with the ear of the heart. It is not the same as bible study. In lectio divina we let go of more intellectual, studious, or effortful ways of reading the scripture and enter a state in which we are quiet and receptive to God's word. We let go of our own words, and let God speak to us. In this practice, the words of scripture become very alive and touch the heart in spontaneous ways that lead us more deeply into relationship with God.

Lectio divina has traditionally been practiced in a number of different formal ways which involve the use of different steps. The steps can be helpful in learning how to be drawn more deeply into the practice, but it is not necessary to practice in such a formal way, particularly if you have just been practicing centering prayer or another meditative practice that has put you into a quiet and receptive state, ready to allow God to speak out of the silence. As Carl Arico says, "Out of the silence, the word of God is heard on a much deeper level and with greater openness."

Here are instructions for several possible approaches to lectio divina, plus some links to some ways of doing lectio divina online.

BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

Slowly read through a brief scripture passage, either silently or aloud. Listen to the passage with the ear of the heart. Don't get distracted during the lectio divina by intellectual types of questions about the passage. Just listen to what the passage is saying to you, right now. You may find that it is helpful to meditate or sit in silence for a few minutes before and after looking at the passage and that it will speak to you in a different way out of the silence. It is best to read the passage at least twice, and often four times or more, with periods of silence in between. You may find that each time you read the passage you enter into it more deeply, not necessarily having thoughts about it, but allowing it to touch you or act upon you in a more mysterious way.

To find a scripture passage, you could work your way slowly through the Gospels, flip through and find a passage with which you would like to spend more time, or go to the Lectionary to find passages that are being read this week in churches.

TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

Here is a slightly more formal method for practicing lectio divina. Read the passage four times, leaving a few minutes of silence in between each reading.

- Listen with the ear of the heart. Notice if any phrase, sentence or word stands out and gently begin to repeat it to yourself, allowing it to touch you deeply.
- Reflect while you read the passage a second time with deep receptivity. Notice what thoughts, feelings, and reflections arise within you. Let the words resound in your heart. What might God be asking of you through the scripture?
- Respond spontaneously as you listen. Notice any prayerful response that arises within you, for example a small prayer of gratitude or praise.
- Rest in God's presence beyond thoughts and reflections. Just be.

These four movements do not need to take place in any particular order, and you do not need to do each step. Notice what is arising and be open to its movement within you.

VISIO DIVINA

Visio divina is a form of divine seeing in which we prayerfully invite God to speak to our hearts as we look at an image. While lectio divina is a traditional way of reading a text with the ear of the heart, in visio divina, lectio's visual cousin, we look at an image with the eye of the heart. As we gaze, present to an image without any particular agenda, we allow it to speak to us in words or wordlessly with a divine voice.

As Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler puts it:

Visio Divina facilitates a relationship with an image or subject, patiently being with it, receptive in mind and heart, perhaps even in dialogue with it. In stillness, we allow the image to reach beyond the intellect and into the unconscious level of our being, a place that can't be accessed directly. In wonder, we are invited to look at every aspect of an image and ponder it as an encounter with God. It is a way of seeing an aspect of ourselves in God at the non-verbal, heart level. The canvas then becomes alive with personal meaning meant just for us. This is the same movement of the Spirit we can experience with Lectio Divina and Scripture.

Choose a favorite piece of art, an icon, or a photograph. It doesn't need to be religious. Don't worry if you're not sure why you're selecting it. Does it vibrate with energy for you? Does it have a sense of mystery? Does there seem to be a story hidden within it? Does it evoke memories, emotions, a mood, or a feeling in your body?

When practicing visio divina in a group, it's helpful for the facilitator to leave a long pause between each question, using an intuitive sense of the appropriate length for the pause. Since this is a new experience for many, some people have told me that it's helpful when the silences aren't *too* long because they may start to feel lost. It's natural with this new way of praying to experience resistance or a sense of confusion: "I don't know how to do this!" Just trust the process as you would any other contemplative practice, knowing that by entering wholeheartedly into the experience you are saying *yes* to God's transformational presence

INSTRUCTIONS FOR VISIO DIVINA

Visio divina is a form of divine seeing in which we prayerfully invite God to speak to our hearts as we look at an image. As you gaze at an image, you will be offered some questions for silent reflection, some of which may speak to you, while others you may choose to ignore. At the end of the visio divina, you will be invited to share a word or phrase to express your experience of the image.

As you gaze at the image, notice your breath and your body.

Simply be present to the image and allow it to speak to your heart, without any particular agenda. It might speak to you in words or wordlessly.

How do you feel looking at the image?

If you had to describe the image in a sentence or two silently to yourself, what would you say?

If you were in the image, where would you place yourself?

Do you get a glimpse of the sacred from this image? Is God speaking to you in this image?

Does a name for God arise for you from this image? In silence, sit with what you have received.

If you choose, share aloud a word or phrase to express your experience of the image.













MUSICA DIVINA INSTRUCTIONS

While lectio divina is a traditional way of listening to a spiritual reading with the ear of the heart, in musica divina we listen to a short piece of music with the ear of the heart. We may hear God speaking to us through the music or simply rest in God's presence as we listen to it.

Choose one of the pieces of music below or another short piece of music. Below are three questions that you may reflect on if you choose as you listen to the music three times.

Listen with the ear of the heart.

As you listen to the music, notice your breath and your body. Simply be present to the music and allow it to speak to your heart, without any particular agenda.

- Play music first time.

How do you feel listening to the music?

- Play music second time.

Do you get a glimpse of the sacred from this music? Is God speaking to you in this music?

- Play music third time.

If you choose, share aloud a word or phrase to express your experience of the music.



IGNATIAN MEDITATION

Ignatius Loyola, the creator of Ignatian meditation, believed that God can speak to us through our imaginations. In the Ignatian tradition of the **Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola**, the word “contemplation” has a very particular meaning and is a very active way of praying that uses visualization to invite us into a gospel story. We allow ourselves to be very present to the events of Jesus’ life. We pay attention to all the details, the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations of the scene taking place around us. We engage with the story in creative, often surprising ways, allowing the story to unfold anew. The scene does not have to play out the way it did in the gospel reading, and we don’t have to worry about historical accuracy or physical plausibility.

When you engage in an Ignatian meditation, you can allow yourself the freedom of imagination to let the meditation play out in whatever way you wish. Offer your prayer time to the Holy Spirit and trust that your imagination and the Spirit will collaborate to create something that is meaningful and illuminating for you. If your imagination seems to be going “too wild,” ask yourself whether it is leading you closer to or farther away from God.

The term apophatic prayer comes from the Greek *apophatikos*, which means “*without* images or concepts.” Centering prayer is a form of apophatic prayer that takes us beyond words, images or concepts. In contrast, kataphatic prayer comes from the Greek *kataphatikos*, which in essence means “*with* images or concepts.” This kind of prayer utilizes our faculties for reason, imagination, feelings, and will. Ignatian guided meditation takes us deep into the realm of kataphatic prayer. Some people may enter very easily into Ignatian meditation while others may find this kind of imaginative prayer difficult. You may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet you may have some intuition or gut reaction to the story, or you may be drawn to pray with the story in a different way than the instructions describe. Allow God to speak to you in the way that is right for you.

IGNATIAN MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS

These instructions for an Ignatian guided meditation may be used by an individual or a group. Depending on the size of the group, the facilitator might choose at the end of the meditation to invite everyone to share a word or phrase that expresses their experience of the meditation, or the facilitator might invite lengthier reflections on the experience if there is time.

Choose a scripture passage that tells a story that the listener will be able to visualize and place themselves within. Choose a passage long enough to tell a story, but not so long that the reader gets tired of reading aloud and the listener cannot remember it all.

Examples of scripture passages can be found here.

Begin by reading the scripture passage twice, with silence in between.

Then slowly read the following prompts, with long pauses so that the listener has time to visualize and enter into the story. It can be helpful for the reader to enter into the story as well, which will help the reader to know how long the pauses should be.

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Begin by reading the scripture passage twice, with silence in between.

Now, imagine that you are right in the story, as it is happening. The scene does not have to unfold the way it did in the reading, and you don't have to worry about historical or physical accuracy. This is your meditation, and it can play out in whatever way you wish.

Take all the time you need to place yourself in the setting, in vivid detail, with all five of your senses. You may be one of the people in the story, or you may be someone who isn't mentioned in the story. Or you may be something in the story that isn't a person. Who, or what, are you?

Where are you? Look around. What does the scene look like?

Pause for a minute or so.

Notice the weather. How does the air around you feel? What smells are in the air? What sounds do you hear? What draws your attention in this setting?

Pause for a minute or so.

Are there people near you? What do they look like? How are they dressed? How do you feel about them?

Pause for a minute or so.

What are you doing, or what would you like to do? What emotions do you feel in this scene? Notice and experience what happens as the situation continues

Pause for 2 - 3 minutes.

Speaking with Jesus

And now, the others have all gone away, and only Jesus is left. He sees you, welcomes you, and invites you to sit down and talk with him.

If you could ask him or tell him something about your own life or about your experience in this scene, what would it be? Could you ask or tell him—now? And hear what he says to you?

Pause for a few minutes.

Now make whatever preparations you need to leave the scene. Say goodbye, knowing you can come back later if you choose.

In a group setting you may choose to invite participants to share:

I invite you to share a word or phrase that describes your experience of the meditation.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES FOR USE IN IGNATIAN MEDITATION

Scripture passages for use in Ignatian meditation are similar to the passages that might be used in lectio divina except that they always tell a story, are taken from the gospels, and include Jesus.

LUKE 10:38-42, MARY AND MARTHA

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

MARK 10:46 - 52, THE HEALING OF BLIND BARTIMAEUS

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

MATTHEW 8:28 - 34, THE GADARENE SWINE

When Jesus came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs coming out of the tombs met him. They were so fierce that no one could pass that way. Suddenly they shouted, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. The demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go!" So they came out and entered the swine; and suddenly, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the water. The swineherds ran off, and on going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the demoniacs. Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood.

JOHN 8:2 - 11, THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN

At dawn Jesus appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered round him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

JOHN 20:11-18, DO NOT HOLD ON TO ME

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

MATTHEW 14:13-21 LOAVES AND FISHES

Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the

loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

LUKE 2:41-52, TWELVE YEAR OLD JESUS

Now the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem every year for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

MATTHEW 3:13-17, THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

MARK 6:7-13, JESUS CALLS THE TWELVE

Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

JOHN 13: 1-11, JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES' FEET

During supper Jesus, knowing that God had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

JOHN 20:19-29, DOUBTING THOMAS

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

All translations from the NRSV version of the Bible.

A CONCISE GUIDE TO WALKING MEDITATION

from Centering Prayer for Everyone

Walking meditation is often used as a way of stretching and refreshing the body, providing a break between periods of sitting in centering prayer, but it is an important practice in and of itself. As a dynamic practice it can help us to learn to bring our prayer into action and create a transition from our sitting practice to our everyday life.

Instructions for Walking Meditation

Place your hands in a comfortable position, perhaps hanging at your sides or lightly clasped at your waist. Begin to walk at a slower pace than usual, paying attention to your body and particularly your feet. Notice the sensation of lifting each foot and placing it back on the floor. Feel each step fully. If your mind begins to wander, bring it gently back to the sensations in your body, the feeling of moving through space, the feeling of the soles of your feet touching and leaving the floor.

In order to maintain awareness of your body, it can be helpful to maintain a stately posture, like a king or queen, not stiff but alert and graceful.

The great master of walking meditation, the Vietnamese monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, tells us that "we can arrive in the present moment with every step" and expresses the power of walking meditation in this passage from his book *How to Walk*:

When I go to the airport, I like to arrive early so that I can do walking meditation before the flight. About thirty years ago I was walking in the Honolulu airport. Someone came up to me and asked, "Who are you; what is your spiritual tradition?" I said, "Why do you ask?" And he said, "Because I see that the way that you walk is so different than the way others walk. It's so peaceful and relaxed." He had approached me simply because of the way I walked. I hadn't given a speech or a conference. With every step you make, you can create peace within yourself and give joy to other people.

Walking meditation is often carried out in a circle around the outside of the chairs or cushions where the meditators have been sitting and can also be carried out outdoors. If you do not have room for walking meditation, you can invite the group to stand up and do a short, mindful stretch in between sitting sessions. You can also make clear in your instructions that no one is required to do walking meditation, especially since people with physical limitations are sometimes not able to do so.

At our church group in between two twenty-minute periods of centering prayer we process down a side aisle and up the center aisle towards the cross. I always enjoy the stately feeling of processing silently in the beautiful church space.

When doing walking meditation in your home, the main thing is the mindful quality of the walking rather than the length of the walk. You might walk back and forth in a hallway or in a very small circle. Be sure to choose a flat surface where there is no danger of tripping and banging into furniture.

PRAYING WITH THE PSALMS

The Book of Psalms is a collection of one hundred and fifty ancient prayers considered scripture in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. They are written from the human perspective, yet as Jewish and Christian scripture they can also be regarded as the word of God, language given by God for the purpose of prayer. Jesus, as a faithful Jewish man, prayed using the psalms, and some of his most famous words, for example “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and “Into your hands I commend my spirit,” are quotations from the psalms.

The psalms express the full range of human emotion, including joy, despair, rage, vengefulness, fear, loneliness, gratitude, alienation, peacefulness, intimacy, weariness. They challenge us to pray honestly, exposing all of our thoughts and emotions to the gaze of God. In our more comfortable moments the desperate feelings that some of the psalms describe may seem remote, but when injustice, misfortune, mental illness, addiction or even just the everyday pain of being a human being arouse these emotions, then the psalms are ready to help us acknowledge them.

Many people dislike the psalms and are uncomfortable with the way God is depicted within them. Yet at the same time they may be drawn to their poetry. The psalms provide a path by which you might reapproach the religion of your youth. If you have rejected Christianity as too judgmental and intolerant, some of the images of God you see in the psalms may reinforce this impression. Yet there may be something about Christianity that continues to draw you, embodied in the beauty, awe, and mercy expressed by the psalms. The psalms are a rich terrain where these attractions and discomforts can be explored. By eliciting conflicting and paradoxical feelings that can continue to exist in tension as part of the complex landscape of your life of prayer and belief, the psalms provide a kind of laboratory of the soul. You don't always have to solve the problem of the conflicting things that the psalms evoke in you as you hold them in your prayer.

There are many different translations of the psalms available which address potential discomforts with the language of the psalms in a variety of ways. The free adaptations by Stephen Mitchell, a well known translator and poet, capture their beauty and power while omitting the most problematic of the psalms. Nan Merrill's version substitutes language that emphasizes the loving nature of God. The sisters of the Order of St. Helena use fully inclusive language while remaining close to the traditional language of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Here are a few points to remember as you work with the psalms in your prayer:

- The psalms depict violence, anger, and our feelings about our enemies not because God encourages these things but because these are part of our experience that we need to bring to God in prayer to be transformed.
- The painful and desperate feelings that the psalms describe are things we sometimes feel. When we allow ourselves to acknowledge these feelings, then it is easier to move on, and we may be transformed.
- We may not actually believe in a God who is exactly like the God depicted in the psalms, but there might be a way in which these images of God touch us emotionally and are important to our prayer life. We can bring things into the emotional world of our prayer life which don't necessarily make sense in terms of our intellectual beliefs.
- The psalms elicit conflicting and paradoxical feelings, which can continue to exist in tension as part of the complex landscape of our lives of prayer and belief. We don't always have to solve the “problem” of the conflicting emotions that the psalms evoke.
- The psalms don't always reflect what we actually believe, but struggling with the psalms can help us to articulate what we *do* believe.
- We may not think of ourselves as having enemies, but as we read the psalms, the parts about enemies often remind us of *something* we are struggling with in our lives, whether it's something inner or outer. They help us to remember struggles that we might prefer to forget and remind us to bring them into our prayer.

Using the Finger Labyrinth

Steps:

1. Start by taking deep breaths, to help bring focus and to relax. Find a poem, meditation, or scripture verse that you would like to focus on for your 'walk'.
2. Choose either your dominant pointer finger (or non dominant if you want to use even more focus). You can also use a pen, pencil, or other implement to 'walk' the labyrinth.
3. Slowly and intentionally trace the path. Just as you might walk a labyrinth, you can take the tracing at your own speed.
4. Once you reach the center, take time to relax. Focus on your breathing.
5. Retrace your way out of the labyrinth. Again, at your own pace.
6. Breath, relax and consider how you are feeling when you have retraced your way out of the labyrinth.





READING SUGGESTIONS

CHRISTIANITY

Richard Rohr, *Falling Upwards: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. Jossey-Bass, 2011.

The Franciscan priest Richard Rohr explores how our failings can help us to enter a more mature spirituality in the second half of life.

Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind--A New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. Shambhala, 2008.

The Episcopal priest and gifted teacher Cynthia Bourgeault traces contemplative teaching back to Jesus's words and explores with depth and insight how Jesus invites us into a transformation of consciousness.

Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. Crossroads, 2009.

This exploration of the teachings of Jesus and the Christian mystics by the Franciscan priest and great teacher Richard Rohr makes clear why Christian contemplative practice is essential: "We must move from a belief-based religion to a practice-based religion, or little will change."

Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*.

Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994.

This book lays out the theology of orthodox Christianity and is useful for anyone with Christian beliefs who is struggling to decide what he or she believes. Particularly valuable is the section on tests of doctrinal faithfulness, which provides ten criteria for examining statements of belief.

Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*. New York: New Directions, 1960.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers were fourth century Christian hermits who lived in the deserts of the Near East. In this book, the great spiritual writer and Trappist monk has collected his favorites from their stories and sayings.

Simone Weil, *Waiting for God (Perennial Classics)*. New York: Harper & Row, 1951.

These brilliant essays are by an intriguing twentieth century figure who was born into a comfortable family of Jewish descent and converted to Christianity yet remained outside the church.

Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*.

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

A beautiful book on how to find one's true calling. Palmer discusses how we must listen to our call or we will hurt ourselves and others.

Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*.

Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1992.

This helpful handbook has essays on many different theological subjects, arranged alphabetically and written by major theologians.

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*.

New York: Crossroad Herder, 1999.

This excellent book helps us to find language to speak about God without leaving the feminine out of the picture, yet remains rooted in classical Christian theology.

William Johnston, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. New York: Image Books, 1996.

By an anonymous author from the fourteenth century, this book is one of the great classics of Christian contemplative wordless prayer.

Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, from Whom God Hid Nothing*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1996.

An introduction to the work of the great fourteenth century writer, preacher, and mystic.

PRAYER

Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1970.

This short, beautifully written book is a very good introductory text on how to pray.

Ann & Barry Ulanov, *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982.

A very helpful book on the psychology of prayer, including chapters on difficult subjects such as prayer and sexuality and prayer and aggression. This book rewards careful reading.

A New Zealand Prayer Book - He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989.

The prayer book of the Anglican church in New Zealand contains prayers in both English and Maori, including some lovely alternative versions of familiar prayers and prayers for many occasions.

CENTERING PRAYER

Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*. New York: Continuum, 2006.

A good introduction to centering prayer, a method of silent contemplative prayer that is somewhat similar to Zen meditation but derived from the Christian tradition. This classic book has recently been revised in honor of its 20th anniversary.

Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*. Bloomsbury, 2012.

This book by one of the founders and great exponents of centering prayer explores the spiritual growth that takes place when centering prayer is seriously undertaken.

Lindsay Boyer, *Centering Prayer for Everyone: With Readings, Instructions, and Programs for Home and Group Practice*. Eugene OR: Cascade, 2020.

A welcoming and accessible guide to five contemplative practices - lectio divina, visio divina, walking meditation, chanting the psalms, and especially the silent practice of centering prayer - this inclusive handbook explicitly welcomes everyone to these practices, whatever their beliefs or doubts.

David Frenette, *The Path of Centering Prayer: Deepening Your Experience of God*.

Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2012.

David Frenette has taught Centering Prayer under Fr. Thomas Keating's guidance since 1984 and is my own beloved teacher.

This wonderful book provides a good introduction for beginners but also goes more deeply into the practice for the more experienced practitioner. Includes chapters on the sacred breath, the sacred glance, and the sacred nothingness as well as the sacred word. The second part of the book looks at eight contemplative attitudes: receiving, consent, simplicity, gentleness, letting go, resting, embracing, and integrating. These attitudes represent subtly different ways of being in the prayer that allow one to relate to the sacred symbol more and more deeply. Thomas Keating calls David's book "the best, more comprehensive, and most practical book on centering prayer." Read my extended review of this book on the Amazon website.

David Frenette, *Centering Prayer Meditations: Effortless Contemplation to Deepen Your Experience of God*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014.

David's guided meditations are one of my favorite parts of being on retreat with him and these recorded meditations, available

on CD or audio download from Sounds True, Amazon or Audible, focus on the eight contemplative attitudes described in his wonderful book *The Path of Centering Prayer*. The meditations can be used to introduce a period of Centering Prayer, then paused for a period of silent prayer, then turned on again to end the session. It's a lovely way to frame a session if you have a little extra time, like being on a mini retreat with David.

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 2004.

Cynthia Bourgeault has worked closely with Thomas Keating and this book is an excellent guide for those who would like to go deeper into centering prayer. Includes a good chapter on the welcoming prayer.

Contemplative Outreach website

Contemplative Outreach is a great resource for more information on centering prayer, centering prayer weekly groups, and centering prayer retreats.

LECTIO DIVINA

Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*. Paulist Press, 1988.

This classic book contains not only instructions for traditional lectio divina and its theological background but many reference numbers for scripture passages that may be used in lectio divina.

Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina—The Sacred Art: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-Centered Prayer*. Skylight Paths, 2012.

This book approaches lectio divina with openness and creativity, exploring traditional and non-traditional approaches. Includes passages and questions for reflection.

Watch a short video of my colleague Steve Standiford describing Lectio Divina.

THE PSALMS

The Saint Helena Psalter. New York: Church Publishing, 2004.

The Book of Psalms is a collection of one hundred and fifty ancient prayers considered scripture in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. They provide a biblical model of how to pray and express the full range of human emotions. This lovely translation of the psalms features inclusive language.

Stephen Mitchell, *A Book of Psalms: Selected and Adapted from the Hebrew*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1993.

A selection of the psalms, translated quite loosely and very beautifully by the well-known translator and poet.

Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*. Boston: Cowley, 2001.

A collection of excellent essays on the Old Testament, including six essays on the psalms which are helpful in understanding how to use the psalms in prayer.

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Chanting the Psalms: A Practical Guide with Instructional CD*. Boston: Shambhala, 2006.

An introduction to chanting the psalms, from the simplest monotone to more complex systems, including a CD that provides examples of all the different styles. Chanting is a wonderful practice for those who are looking for a more embodied form of prayer.

PRAYER ANTHOLOGIES

Desmond Tutu, *An African Prayer Book*. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

An anthology of Christian and non-Christian prayers from Africa selected and with introductions by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology, ed. Timothy Ware. London: Faber & Faber, 1966.

An anthology of texts on prayer by different authors from the Christian Orthodox tradition. The Eastern Orthodox tradition has focused more on the practice of prayer, the "how to," than the Western church, and so their writings can be very helpful and practical. I particularly recommend the writings of Theophan the Recluse and St. Dimitri of Rostov in this anthology.

The Oxford Book of Prayer, ed. George Appleton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

An anthology of primarily Christian prayers, with short sections of prayers from other traditions.

ONLINE PRAYER RESOURCES

Richard Rohr's Daily Email Meditations.

I begin my day with Richard Rohr's short, free, daily email reflections on contemplative spirituality. A Franciscan monk, Rohr has a deep appreciation of the spirituality of other religions and is very good at discussing with sensitivity and balance the ways in which Christians have gone off course and suggesting how Christian scripture and theology can be interpreted with intelligence, tolerance, simplicity, and love.

Contemplative Outreach website

Contemplative Outreach is a great resource for more information on centering prayer, centering prayer weekly groups, and centering prayer retreats.

Pray-as-you-go.org

These short daily podcasts include spiritual music, scripture passages, and suggestions for how to reflect upon the passages.

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*. Cowley, 2001.

An excellent book of essays about how to read the Old Testament in a spiritually engaged way.

Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*. Harper Perennial 2001.

The great Heschel explores the way that the passionate prophets teach us to enter into a very personal relationship with a God who cares about us and is affected by us.

ZEN MEDITATION

Shunryu Suzuki. *Zen Mind. Beginner's Mind (Shambhala Library)*. New York: Weatherhill, 1970.

A classic introduction to Zen by a Japanese master who was a leader in bringing Zen to the West.

Thich Nhat Hahn. *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976.

An introduction to the practice of mindfulness, a way of bringing our meditation into our daily lives, by the Vietnamese Zen master who was nominated by Martin Luther King for the Nobel Prize for his work in the peace movement during the Vietnam war.

Jack Kornfield. *A Path with Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*.

New York: Bantam, 1993. This book covers the subject of meditation in a very multi-faceted way, addressing a wide range of issues and is especially helpful in its discussion of how to experience emotions more fully.

Stephen Mitchell, ed. *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha: The Teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn*. New York, Grove, 1976.

Seung Sahn was a Korean Zen master who taught using koans, or kong-ans in the Korean tradition, the mysterious Zen sayings that lead us beyond regular thought into "don't know mind."

REFLECTIONS:

