

Daily Spiritual Practices Monday:

## **DAY 1: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:24 - 27

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

Devotional

Even the worst and most painful family experiences become part of our total identity. God had a plan in placing us in our particular families and cultures. And the more we know about our families, the more we know about ourselves - and the more freedom we have to make decisions about how we want to live. If we ignore the truth out of fear, we will end up like Miss Havisham from Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*. The daughter of a wealthy man, she received a letter at 8:40 a.m. on her wedding day, saying that her husband-to-be was not coming. She stopped all clocks in the house at the precise time the letter arrived and spent the rest of her life in her bridal dress (which eventually turned yellow), and wearing only one shoe (since she had not yet put on the other one at the time of the disaster). Even as an old lady she remained crippled by the weight of that crushing blow. It was as if "everything in the room and house had stopped." She decided to live in her past, not her present or future. Moses' life had more than its share of pain and failure. After being raised in a wealthy, privileged home, he murdered a man, lost everything, and spent the next forty years of his life in obscurity in the desert. Yet, by faith he "sees him who is invisible" and hears God's invitation to do something that will be a blessing to many.

Question to Consider

What invitation might God be offering to you out of the failures and pain of your past?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, set me free to be the person you have destined me to be. Help me to pause to hear your voice today, and to leave behind the "baggage" I am carrying as I seek to follow you. Help me to discern your hand at work in and through my life, both in the past and the future. In Jesus name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## **DAY 1: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Luke 9:59 - 62

[Jesus] said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God?"

#### Devotional

There's an old story about a boy who, having grown up at the edge of a wide, turbulent river, spent his childhood learning to build rafts. When the boy reached manhood, he felled some trees, lashed them together, and riding his raft, he crossed to the far side of the river. Because he had spent so long working on the raft, he couldn't see leaving it behind when he reached dry land, so he lashed it to his shoulders and carried it with him, though all he came upon in his journeys were a few easily foldable streams and puddles. He rarely thought about the things he was missing out on because he was carrying the bulky raft - the trees he couldn't climb, vistas he couldn't see, people he couldn't get close to and races he couldn't run. He didn't even realize how heavy the raft was, because he had never known what it was like to be free of it. Lori Gordon

While all of us are affected by powerful external events and circumstances throughout our earthly lives, our families of origin are the most influential group to which we will ever belong. Even those who leave home as young adults, determined to "break" from their family history, soon find their family's way of "doing life" follows them wherever they go.

Family patterns from the past are played out in our present relationships - often without us necessarily being aware of it. The price we pay for this is high. Our family history lives inside of all of us, even in those who attempt to bury it.

Only the truth sets us free. What was learned can be unlearned.

And by God's grace and power, we can learn new ways of "doing life," making change and freedom possible.

#### Question to Consider

What heavy "raft" might you be carrying as you seek to climb the mountains God has placed before you?

#### Prayer

Lord, I too prefer to not look at or remember the painful past.

Show me, O Father, the heavy weights and rafts I am carrying. due to my past. Help me to learn what it means to honestly face my past, lift it up to you, and allow you to use it as a means to my maturing and growing in Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## **DAY 2: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Mark 3:31 - 35

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does

God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Devotional

When we become Christians we are adopted into the family of Jesus. Jesus was clear and direct in calling people to have a first loyalty to him. Discipleship, he made clear, is putting off the sinful patterns of unbelief so that we might put on the choices of faith, being transformed to live as members of Jesus' family. As we go back to go forward, we find that it is a never-ending process. We go back, breaking some destructive power of the past. Then later, on a deeper level, God has us return to the same issue on a more profound level. Thomas Keating compares God's work in us to a Middle Eastern "tell, " or archeological site, where one civilization is built on another in the same place. Archeologists excavate, level by level, culture by culture, down through history. The Holy Spirit, he says, is like a Divine Archeologist digging through the layers of our lives.

The Spirit intends to investigate our whole life history, layer by layer, throwing out the junk and preserving the values that were appropriate to each stage of our human development....

Eventually, the Spirit begins to dig into the bedrock of our ear-lest emotional life.... Hence, as we progress toward the center where God actually is waiting for us, we are naturally going to feel that we are getting worse. This warns us that the spiritual journey is not a success, story or a career move. It is rather a series of humiliations of the false self.

Question to Consider

What false self are you struggling with that Christ wants you to die to so that you can truly live?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, I invite you to dig through the layers of my being that hinder my relationships and communion with others. Grant me perseverance to allow you to dig deeply, excavating out of me all that is not of Christ so that I may be filled with your presence. In Jesus name amen.

*Conclude with two minutes of silence.*

## **DAY 2: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:1 - 3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Devotional

Francis of Assisi, one of the most influential Christians in the past two thousand years, broke with his family in a very dramatic way. As Francis grew more passionate about his relationship with Christ and less interested in his fathers, lucrative business, their attention grew. This climax in the following scene: the father (dragged) the sun before the local bishop in the hopes that the town's religious authority could talk some sense into the young man. But the plan backfired. They're in front of God and everybody, Francis stripped off his clothing, and handed it to his father. Standing there, naked as the day he was born, Francis said, "until now, I called you, father, but from now on, I can say, without reserved, 'our father, who art in heaven.'" Francis, his father carried his son's clothes, back to a large house that was now strangely quiet. Francis, on the other hand, went on his way, rejoicing, suddenly freed from the encumbrances of wealth, family, and social esteem... But one final barrier was left to cross before he could serve God with his whole heart. One day as he was walking down the road and saw a leper approaching him he knew his opportunity was at hand... Francis reached out and kissed him. Francis of Assisi represents one of the "great cloud of witnesses" mentioned in Hebrews 12. He literally "threw off everything that hindered him" and was launched by God into an extraordinary life and destiny. His life continues to speak to us today.

Questions to Consider

What most impacts you in this story about Francis? How is God speaking to you through it?

Prayer

Lord, there is none like you. I want to know you as my ultimate Father, the one whose unfathomable, unconditional love sets me free to live for you - far above all other loyalties and expectations. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

### **DAY 3: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE**

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Genesis 50:15, 19 - 21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

#### Devotional

Joseph was born into a family characterized by great brokenness and sadness. Lying, jealousy, secrecy, and betrayal visited upon Joseph's young life, and he spent ten to thirteen years in prison, completely cut off from his family.

Nonetheless, Joseph was able to observe the large, loving hand of God through all his setbacks and disappointments. In doing so, he affirmed that God mysteriously leads us into his purposes through darkness and obscurity. God is the Lord God Almighty who has all history in his grip, working in ways that are mostly hidden to us on earth. Joseph understood that in all things God is at work - in spite of, through, and against all human effort - orchestrating his purposes. 30 God never discards any of our past for his future when we surrender ourselves to him. He is the Lord! Every mistake, sin, and detour we take in the journey of life is taken by God and becomes his gift for a future of blessing when we surrender ourselves to him.

Why did God allow Joseph to go through such pain and loss?

We see traces of the good that came out of it in Genesis 37 - 50, but much remains a mystery.

Most important for us to recognize today is that Joseph did not deny his past but trusted in God's goodness and love, even when circumstances went from bad to worse.

#### Question to Consider

What would it look like for you to surrender the pains of your past (mistakes, sins, setbacks, and disappointments) to God today?

#### Prayer

Father, I affirm with Joseph that you sovereignly placed me into my family, my culture, and my present circumstances. I cannot see all that you see, but I ask you to show me how, like Joseph, I can rest in your love and power - even when I can't see any good that you might be doing. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

### **DAY 3: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Genesis 45:4 - 7

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead

of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

#### Devotional

Most of us resist remembering and feeling the hurt and pain of our past. It can feel like an abyss that might swallow us up. We can wonder if we are only getting worse. Yet Joseph wept repeatedly when he reunited with his family. In fact, Scripture relates that he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him (Genesis 45:2).

Joseph did not minimize or rationalize the painful years of his life. He could have destroyed his brothers in anger. Instead, out of the honest grieving of his pain, he genuinely forgave the brothers who had betrayed him, and was able to bless them. Joseph was able to discern that God had sent him ahead to Egypt to save his brothers' lives by a great deliverance (Genesis 45:7).

The question is, "How did he do it?"

Joseph clearly developed a secret history over a long period of time in his relationship with God. His whole life was structured around following the Lord God of Israel. Then, when the moment came for him to make a critical decision, he was ready. He took leadership of his family - and continued to the end of his days - providing for them financially, emotionally, and spiritually.

#### Question to Consider

What pains in your life are waiting to be acknowledged and grieved?

#### Prayer

Lord, lead me through the process of grieving and healing that I might offer genuine kindness and forgiveness to those who have not been kind to me. Help me, like Joseph, to join with you to become a blessing to many other people. In Jesus name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

### **DAY 4: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:1 - 6, 15 - 16

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

#### Devotional

Saul's great conversion and life as an apostle can only be understood by looking at his entire life and training leading up to this famous passage in Acts 9.

Soren Kierkegaard once observed that life is lived forward, but only understood backward. This was certainly Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's experience. Solzhenitsyn is considered by many to be the greatest Russian writer of the twentieth century, but his sense of calling was not always clear. His purpose grew in his experiences of the Gulag, the Soviet concentration camps - a place where he experienced a deadly struggle to write, a miracle of a cure from cancer, a conversion through a Jewish follower of Jesus, and a deepening burden to put "the dying wish of millions on record. He wrote:

The one worrying thing was that I might not be given time to carry out the whole scheme. I felt as though I was about to fill a space in the world that was meant for me and had long awaited me, a mold, as it were, made for me alone, but discerned by me only this very moment. I was a molten substance, impatient, unendurably impatient, to pour into my mold, to fill it full, without air bubbles or cracks, before I cooled and stiffened...

Later, the true significance of what happened would inevitably become clear to me, and I would be numb with surprise.

#### Question to Consider

What space in the world (for which your past has prepared you) is waiting to be filled by you?

#### Prayer

Lord, you are good, and your love endures forever. Help me to trust you - with the good as well as the difficult, the successes and the failures, the joys and the sorrows of my past. I surrender to your voice that whispers to me, "All is well, and all will be well." In Jesus name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

### **DAY 4: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 16:6 - 7

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

## Devotional

Chaim Potok, in his novel *The Chosen*, tells the story of a friendship between two boys growing up in Brooklyn, New York. Danny is a strict Hasidic Jew, and Reuven is a conservative Jew. Danny's father is the leader of a Hasidic community and raises his son in silence.

He never speaks to him directly.

Danny is hurt and confused. He cannot understand why his father is so distant and afflicts him with so much pain. At the end of the novel, Danny's father explains that he did it for him as an act of love. Danny later reflects on the painful experience: "My father never talked to me, except when we studied together. He taught me with silence. He taught me to look into myself, to find my own strength, to walk inside myself in company with my soul." In the book, Danny discovers that the suffering he experienced had a good outcome. "One learns of the pain of others by suffering one's own pain, by turning inside oneself, by finding one's own soul. And it is important to know of pain. It destroys our self-pride, our arrogance, and our indifference toward others. It makes us aware of how frail and tiny we are and of how much we must depend upon the Master of the Universe." In reading 1 Samuel 16, one has to wonder what life was like for David as the youngest of seven sons. What did he learn from being considered invisible, not only by his brothers, but his father as well? How might this experience have helped to shape his character so that he is later called "a man after God's own heart"?

## Question to Consider

Can you name some of the ways in which you have learned the pain of others by suffering your own pain?

## Prayer

Father, may the pains I experience in life kill the things that need to die in me - arrogance, pride, and indifference to others. Help me, daily, to see my frailty and how dependent I am on you, the Master of the Universe. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## **DAY 5: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Exodus 14:10, 13 - 16

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD.

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.

The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground."

## Devotional

Moses demonstrated godly leadership as Egypt's army was overtaking the Israelites at the Red Sea. However, in their anxiety, the Israelites distorted the past and refused to move forward. They preferred their miserable past to an unknown future with God. Moses courageously stands alone and calls them to "be still and to move on? He picks up his staff and takes deliberate steps to move ahead. By remembering the Lord (being still), Moses courageously does what is best (moving on), despite the Israelites lack of support. He models the delicate balance of being still while at the same time moving on. In doing so, he transforms not only his own life, but the life of all those around him. same time moving on. In doing so, he transforms not only his own life, but the life of all those around him. Everyone who draws breath "takes the lead" many times a day. We lead with actions that range from a smile to a frown; with words that range from blessing to curse; with decisions that range from faithful to fearful.... When I resist thinking of myself as a leader, it is neither because of modesty nor a clear-eyed look at the reality of my life.... I am responsible for my impact on the world whether I acknowledge it or not. So, what does it take to qualify as a leader? Being human and being here. As long as I am here, doing whatever I am doing, I am leading, for better or for worse. And, if I may say so, so are you.

## Question to Consider

How might the words from Exodus 14:14 - 15 - "The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still" and "move on" apply to you today?

## Prayer

Lord, I can relate to the Israelites in the desert and their desire to return to what is predictable - even if it is miserable. Change is hard. Grant me the courage of Moses to walk the delicate balance of being still and moving on to the new life in Christ that you have for me. In Jesus name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

## **DAY 5: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE**

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty;

I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore.

## Devotional

We often forget our humanity, our limits, and our inability to change others. Considering that David was one of the more powerful people in his day, it is striking how he reminds himself in this psalm to not think too highly of himself. The following quotation is from an anonymous

Hasidic rabbi on his deathbed. These words have served me well over the years; they keep me focused on Christ changing me:

When I was young, I set out to change the world. When I grew a little older, I perceived that this was too ambitious, so I set out to change my state. This too, I realized as I grew older, was too ambitious, so I set out to change my town. When I realized I could not even do this, I tried to change my family. Now as an old man, I know that I should have started by changing myself. If I had started with myself, maybe then I would have succeeded in changing my family, the town, or even the state - and who knows, maybe even the world!

Question to Consider

In Psalm 131:1 David prays: "I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." How do you hear these words?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give my heart eyes to see and ears to hear the ways I need to change. May I be more deeply, radically, and powerfully transformed for your name's sake. Amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*