

Daily Spiritual Practices Week of October 15

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: Genesis 12:1 - 3**

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

### **Devotional**

Like few other metaphors, the image of the Christian life as a journey captures our experience of following Christ. Journeys involve movement, action, stops and starts, detours, delays, and trips into the unknown.

God called Abraham to leave his comfortable life in Ur at the age of seventy-five and to embark on a long, slow journey - a journey with God that would require much patient trust.

#### *Patient Trust*

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability - and that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually - let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste.*

*Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you. And accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

### **Question to Consider**

What does it mean for you to trust in the slow work of God today?

### **Prayer**

Grant me courage, Father, to embark on the unique journey you have crafted for me. By faith, I surrender my need and desire to be in control of every event, circumstance, and person I will meet today. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: Song of Songs 1:2, 3:1 - 3**

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth - for your love is more delightful than wine....  
All night long on my bed  
Looked for the one my heart loves;  
I looked for him but did not find him.  
I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares;  
I will search for the one my heart loves.  
So I looked for him but did not find him.  
The watchmen found me  
as they made their rounds in the city.  
"Have you seen the one my heart loves?"

### **Devotional**

Christians primarily read the Song of Songs on two levels: as the marital love of a man and woman, and as a description of our love relationship with the Lord Jesus - our Bridegroom. Song of Songs 3:1-3 describes, in particular, the experience of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Regarding her painful struggle with God's absence throughout her fifty-year service among the poor, she wrote:

When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven - there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul. Love - the word - it brings nothing. I am told God loves me - and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul..

In spite of all - this darkness and emptiness is not as painful as the longing for God....

Before I could spend hours before Our Lord - loving

Him - talking to Him - and now - not even meditation goes properly. ... Yet deep down somewhere in my heart that longing for God keeps breaking through the darkness....

My soul is just like (an] ice block - I have nothing to say. Mother Teresa came to realize that her darkness was the spiritual side of her work, a sharing in Christ's suffering, a treasure for her and her unique work. She eventually wrote: "I have come to love the darkness. For I believe that it is a part, a very small part, of Jesus' darkness and pain on earth."

### **Question to Consider**

What treasures might there be in the darkness or difficulties in your own life today?

### **Prayer**

Father, teach me to trust you even when I feel like I am alone and that you are asleep in the boat with storms raging all around me.

Awaken me to the treasures that can only be found in darkness.

Grant me the grace to follow you into the next place you have for me in this journey called life.

In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

### **Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:7 - 11**

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined - and everyone undergoes discipline - then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

### **Devotional**

The best way to understand the dynamics of suffering is to examine the classic work of St. John of the Cross entitled *Dark Night of the Soul*, written over five hundred years ago. St. John describes the spiritual journey in three phases: beginners, progressives, and perfect. To move out of the beginning stage, he argues, requires receiving God's gift of the dark night, or the wall. This is the ordinary way we grow in Christ. The wall is God's way of rewiring and "purging our affections and passions" so that we might delight in his love and enter into a richer, fuller communion with him. God works to free us from unhealthy worldly attachments and idolatries. He wants to communicate his true sweetness and love to us. He longs for us to know his true peace and rest. For this reason, John of the Cross wrote that God sends us "the dark night of loving fire" to free us from such deadly spiritual imperfections as pride (being judgmental and impatient with the faults of others), avarice (suffering discontentment), luxury (taking more pleasure in our spiritual blessings than in God himself), wrath (becoming easily irritated or impatient), spiritual gluttony (resisting the cross), spiritual envy (always comparing ourselves to others), and sloth (running from what is hard).

### **Question to Consider**

What are some unhealthy attachments or idols God wants to remove from your life in order to lead you to a deeper, richer communion with him?

### **Prayer**

Lord, I invite you this day to cut any unhealthy attachments or idols out of me. You promise in Psalm 32 to teach me the way to go. Help me not to be stubborn like a mule, but rather to be cooperative as you seek to lead me to freedom. Lead me to a place of communion with you, where true peace and rest is found. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: Genesis 22:9 - 12**

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am, he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy" he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

### **Devotional**

We encounter the wall when a crisis turns our world upside down.

These walls are not simply one-time events that we pass through and get beyond. They are issues we return to as a part of our ongoing relationship with God. We see this in Abraham, waiting at the wall of infertility for twenty-five years before the birth of his first child with his wife, Sarah. Ten to thirteen years later, God led him to another wall - the separation from Ishmael, his eldest son (conceived with Sarah's maidservant, Hagar). Abraham encountered a third wall a few years later, when God commanded him to sacrifice his long-awaited, beloved son Isaac on the altar. Abraham appears to have gone through the wall numerous times in his journey with God. Why? Thomas Merton explains, "Unintentionally and unknowingly we fall back into imperfections. Bad habits are like living roots that return. These roots must be dug away and cleared from the garden of our soul.... This requires the direct intervention of God."

### **Question to Consider**

What things or people are you rooting your identity in that God may want to dig up so that your identity might be replanted in him?

### **Prayer**

Abba Father, I open my clenched fists to surrender everything you have given to me.

Reestablish my identity in you - not in my family, my work, my accomplishments, or what others think of me. Cleanse the things in me that are not conformed to your will.

By faith I unite my will to yours so that the likeness of Jesus Christ may be formed in me. In his name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: Romans 11:33 - 36**

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?"

For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

### **Devotional**

Our experience at the wall can be fruitful in providing a greater appreciation for what I call "holy unknowing" or mystery. This expands our capacity to wait on God when everything inside us is saying, "Do something!" There is an old story about a wise man living on one of China's vast frontiers. One day, for no apparent reason, his son's horse ran away and was taken by nomads across the border. Everyone tried to offer consolation for the man's bad fortune, but his father, a wise man, said, "What makes you so sure this is not a blessing?"

Months later, the horse returned, bringing with her a magnificent stallion. This time everyone was full of congratulations for the son's good fortune. But now his father said, "What makes you so sure this isn't a disaster?" Their household was made richer by this fine horse the son loved to ride, but one day he fell off his horse and broke his hip. Once again, everyone offered their consolation for his bad luck, his father said, "What makes you so sure this is not a blessing?" A year later, nomads invaded, and every able-bodied man was required to take up his bow and go into battle. The Chinese families living on the border lost nine out of every ten men who went to fight. Only because the son was lame did the father and son survive to take care of each other. Often, what appears to be success or a blessing is actually a terrible thing; what appears to be a terrible event can turn out to be a rich blessing.

### **Question to Consider**

Have you ever experienced a terrible circumstance that (in time) actually turned out to be a rich blessing?

### **Prayer**

Forgive me, Father, for at times treating you as if you were my personal assistant or secretary. Your ways are unsearchable and beyond understanding. Help me to put my trust in you and not in my circumstances. In your presence, I am silenced. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

Scripture Reading: Job 42:1 - 6

Then Job replied to the Lord:

"I know that you can do all things;

no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?'

Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;

I will question you, and you shall answer me!

My ears had heard of you

but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I despise myself

and repent in dust and ashes." (NIV 1984)

### **Devotional**

Job was faithful and blameless, a man of integrity. Yet he experienced the cataclysmic loss of his family, wealth, and health, and found himself at a wall like few others in all of Scripture. From this place of deep wrestling with his faith and God, he experiences God's love and grace. He is transformed. Now, believe it or not, we are threatened by such a free God because it takes away all of our ability to control or engineer the process. It leaves us powerless, and changes the language from any language of performance or achievement to that of surrender, trust and vulnerability... That is the so-called "wildness" of God. We cannot control God by any means whatsoever, not even by our good behavior, which tends to be our first and natural instinct...

That utter and absolute freedom of God is fortunately used totally in our favor, even though we are still afraid of it. It is called providence, forgiveness, free election or mercy... But to us, it feels like wildness - precisely because we cannot control it, manipulate it, direct it, earn it or lose it.

Anyone into controlling God by his or her actions will feel very useless, impotent and ineffective.

-Richard Rohr

### **Prayer**

Father, when I read even part of the story of Job, I too am overwhelmed by your "wildness."

Your ways and timing are beyond me. Job moved from hearing about you to having seen you."

Lead me, Lord, on a pathway so that I too can pray as Job prayed: "My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5).

In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: Psalm 69: 1 - 3, 15 - 16**

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold.

I have come into the deep waters;

the floods engulf me.

I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.

### **Devotional**

The Bible presents David as a man after God's own heart, yet the preceding Scripture reading shows us that David's emotional world was very human and broken. He bares his soul in these heart-wrenching poems - as prayers back to God. While he often struggles with his circumstances, David affirms that God is good, and that his love endures forever. David knows that God's ways are higher and deeper than our ways (Isaiah 55:9 - 10).

In Paradise Lost, John Milton compares the evil of history to a compost pile - a mixture of decaying substances such as animal excrement, potato skins, egg shells, dead leaves, and banana peels. If you cover it with dirt, after some time it smells wonderful. The soil has become a rich, natural fertilizer and is tremendously well suited for growing fruits and vegetables - but you have to be willing to wait - years, in some cases. Milton's point is that the worst events of human history - those that we cannot understand - even hell itself - are compost in God's wonderful eternal plan. Out of the greatest evil, the death of Jesus, came the greatest good. The fact that God exists does not lessen the awfulness of the evil in the world; nevertheless, we can rest in him, placing our hope in a God who is so great and sovereign that he ultimately transforms all evil into good. We can trust God at the Wall.

### **Question to Consider**

How is God inviting you to wait on him today?

### **Prayer**

Lord, fill me with the simple trust that even out of the most awful evil around me, you are able to bring great good - for me, for others, and for your great glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: John 21:17 - 19**

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things: you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

### **Devotional**

Jesus had this different vision of maturity: It is the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go. Immediately after Jesus commissions Peter to be a leader of his sheep, Jesus confronts Peter with the hard truth that the servant-leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places. Henri Nou-wen expressed it well:

The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross.... Powerlessness and humility in the spiritual life do not refer to people who have no spine and who let everyone make decisions for them. They refer to people who are so deeply in love with Jesus that they are ready to follow him wherever he guides them, always trusting that, with him, they will find life and find it abundantly.

### **Question to Consider**

In your own words, speak to God about your willingness to go where he leads you. What joys and/or fears accompany your willingness?

### **Prayer**

Father, to you I acknowledge that I don't want to go the way of powerlessness and humility. Like Peter, I want to know what you are doing with those around me. I love you. Help me to trust you with this day, with tomorrow, and with my whole life. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: James 1:2 - 5**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

### **Devotional**

If there were never any storms or clouds in our lives, we would have no faith. "His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet" (Nahum 1:3b). Clouds are a sign that God is there. What a revelation to know that sorrow, bereavement, and suffering are actually the clouds that come along with God! It is not true to say that God wants to teach us something in our trials. Through every cloud He brings our way, He wants us to unlearn something. His purpose in using the cloud is to simplify our beliefs until our relationship with Him is exactly like that of a child - a relationship simply between God and our own souls, and where other people are but shadows. Until other people become shadows to us, clouds and darkness will be ours every once in a while. Is our relationship with God becoming more simple than it has ever been?.. Until we come face to face with the deepest, darkest fact of life without damaging our view of God's character, we do not yet know Him.- Oswald Chambers



## **Question to Consider**

What is one thing God might want you to unlearn today?

## **Prayer**

Father, I confess that when difficulties and trials come into my life, large or small, I mostly grumble and complain. I realize the trials James talks about are not necessarily "walls," but they are difficult to bear nonetheless. Fill me with such a vision of a transformed life, O God, that I might actually consider it "pure joy" when you bring trials my way. I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*

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

*Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)*

### **Scripture Reading: Matthew 26:50b - 53**

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

## **Devotional**

Walls are sometimes God's way of saying no. The Gospel of John tells us it was the apostle Peter who drew his sword to defend Jesus by force. Peter found it very difficult to accept Jesus' no to his plan for a life and future without a crucifixion. In contrast, we observe David accepting God's no to his desire to build the Temple (2 Samuel 7). Additionally, we read of Jesus submitting to his Father's no-that the cup of the cross be taken from him (Matthew 26:37 - 44). You may want to use the following prayer found on an unknown soldier in Gettysburg to help you embrace God's response when he says yes or no in your journey with him: I asked God for strength that I might achieve, I was made weak that I might learn to obey. asked for health that I might do great things.

I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

Tasked for riches that I might be happy;

I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power when I was young that I might have the praise of men;

I was given weakness that I might feel the need for God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;

I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

I am, among all people, most richly blessed.

**Questions to Consider**

Which words speak to you the most from the above prayer? Why?

**Prayer**

Lord, I relate to Peter's headstrong nature, and to his struggle to understand what you were telling him. It is difficult for me to understand how you are running the universe and my place in it. Transform my stubborn will, O Lord. Teach me to wait on you. Help me to trust you. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)*