



The Basics of Life in Christ



Spiritual Disciplines
for Everyday Life

Week Three

Openness to a God you
Can't Control



Introduction: In Pursuit of Leisure

Patricia Hampl, in her short book *Blue Arabesque: In Search of the Sublime*, wrote of an encounter she had with a nun:

“Can you say,’ I once inquired of a sixty-year old cloistered nun who had lived (vibrantly, it seemed) from the age of nineteen in her monastery cell, ‘what the core of contemplative life is?’

‘Leisure,’ she said, without hesitation, her china blue eyes cheerfully steady on me. I suppose I expected her to say, ‘Prayer.’ Or maybe ‘The search for God.’ Or ‘Inner peace.’ Inner peace would have been good. One of the big-ticket items of spirituality.

She saw I didn't see.

‘It takes time to do this,’ she said finally.

Her ‘this’ being the kind of work that requires abdication from time's industrial purpose (doing things, getting things). By choosing leisure she had bid farewell to the fevered enterprise of getting-and-spending whereby, as the poet said, we lay waste our powers.”

What this nameless nun expressed is at the center of what Adele Calhoun calls a pursuit of openness, that is, a desire to “make space in a crowded life to notice the movements of the Spirit of God” (SDH, 53). The

disciplines of Openness are those which lead us, with careful attention, to come to terms with God, ourselves, and the nature of existence itself. And for that, we need *time*.

The Tyranny of the Urgent

Q: What things fill up our days? How has this changed in the last ten, fifty, or one-hundred years?

“Your greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important.”—Charles E. Hummel.

Openness: A disposition of intentional, unhurried recognition of God’s presence in our down-to-earth lives.

“[God did this so] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;
as even some of your own poets have said,
‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” (Acts 17:27-28)

“What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23)

Q: How do people tend to think of their lives, their value, and God's place in those lives?

When people become solely workers, never existing outside of their activity, accumulation, or achievements, they really lose a large part of what it means to live as the Image of God, a *created* being made to fellowship and enjoy its Creator.

“The Chief end of Man is to glorify God and Enjoy Him Forever”—*Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

Question for Reflection: *How has this conception of human life only in terms of work hindered your spiritual walk? If you were to strip away all your achievements, accumulation, and busy activity, who ARE you?*

Desires that Lead us to Openness

As we've said before, the beginning of pursuing the spiritual life is simply taking the time to recognize what we desire, and following that desire to God's throne.

I want...

...to wake up to the presence of God in all things

...to reflect on where I was most and least present to God's love in my day

...to be alert to my life through writing and reflecting on God's presence and activity in, around and through me

...to go on an outer journey that will lead me closer to God

...to develop a continual openness and awareness of Christ's presence living in me

...to honor God and my human limitations through restful rhythms

...to value myself as my heavenly Father values me

...to uncomplicate and untangle my life so I can focus on what really matters

...to curb my addiction to busyness, hurry and workaholism; to learn to savor the moment

Q: Do you resonate with these desires? Do they spark any memories, thoughts, or reminders for you?

Spiritual Disciplines For Opening Ourselves to God

Contemplation	“Contemplation is about waking up. To be contemplative is to experience an event fully, in all its aspects.”—Ronald Rolheiser
Examen	A practice for discerning the voice and activity of God within the flow of the day. A vehicle that creates deeper awareness of God-given desires in one’s life.
Iconography	A way of pondering God through visual images of saints, biblical character and events
Journaling	A tool for reflecting on God’s presence, guidance and nurture in daily comings and goings. Journals can be kept regularly or during time of transitions.
Pilgrimage	A practice of walking to a holy site with prayerful <i>intention</i> to be more than a tourist, as well as prayerful <i>attention</i> to the Holy Spirit’s movements within.

Practicing the Presence	Practicing the presence is an invitation to see and experience every moment as a gift of God. It is to live alive to union with the Trinity.
Rest	Entering into rest depends on honoring our God-given limits. By paying attention to the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the body, we learn when and how to rest.
Retreat	Specific and regular times apart for quietly listening to God and delighting in his company. Retreats remove us from the daily battle into times of refreshing, retooling, renewing and unwinding.
Self-Care	Honors God by nurturing and protecting the limits and desires of the body, mind and spirit.
Simplicity	Cultivates the great art of letting go. Simplicity aims at loosening inordinate attachment to owning and having. Simplicity brings freedom and with it generosity.
Slowing	One way to overcome inner hurriedness and addiction to busyness. Through slowing, the sacrament of the present moment is tasted to the full.

Teachability	A propensity and openness to learn from God no matter who the teacher or what the experience may be.
Unplugging	Calls us to leave the virtual world of technology (computers, email, cell phones, iPads, iPods, etc.) in order to become present to God and others.

Question for reflection: *Which of these practices inspires you as you think of the desire above? Which could you try this week?*

An Example: Contemplation

Desire: to wake up to the presence of God in all things.

Definition: “Contemplation is about waking up. To be contemplative is to experience an event fully, in all its aspects.”—Ronald Rolheiser

The practice of contemplation aims at removing us from the hasty pursuit of consumption, FOMO, and production. It is the process of “fixing our eyes” beyond the urgent to the unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Contemplate: to view or consider with continued attention: meditate on (Merriam-Webster).

Q: What sorts of things do you find yourself contemplating? When are you led into contemplation?

An Exercise in Contemplation:

Take five minutes:

“Contemplate Jesus. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Become quiet—Express to God your intent to rest in his love. Use your imagination: you may want to picture yourself leaning on Jesus’ breast as John did or sitting at Jesus feet as Mary did or kneeling before Jesus as other desperate people before you have. Be with Jesus. (When thoughts and distractions interrupt, gently return to Jesus. Begin again and again.)—what is it like to receive God’s gift of new beginnings?” (SDH, 56).

Questions for Reflection: *Take a while to contemplate your life, your soul, and your relationship with Jesus. Turn off your phone, close the door, and “fix your eyes” on God. What thoughts, emotions, and realizations come to your mind? Write them here.*

Write down things, people, and experiences you really enjoy. Now ask yourself, where is the divine in your delights? Where is God acting, moving, enabling, gifting, blessing, revealing, and displaying his power? Write your reflections.

Schedule (From Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*):

Week Four (1/31): “**R**elinquishment”: Letting Go in a World Dedicated to Accumulation—practices that lead to authenticity and surrender.

Week Five (2/14): “**S**haring” Your Life in a Culture Designed for Privacy—practices that lead us to inter dependence and community.

Week Six (2/21): “**H**earing” from God—practices that form the mind of Christ in us.

Week Seven (2/28): “**I**ncarnating” Jesus—practices that let us be Jesus to the world.

Week Eight (3/14): “**P**raying” my life—practices that lead me to pray without ceasing.