

FLOOD CHURCH

*Reflective Retreat*



**BARREN TO BEARING**

FALL 2022



# *Beginnings*

# WELCOME HOME

**The difference between nowhere and now hear is a space** (Larry Warner). Christ followers who have gone before us continually pass down the wisdom of experiencing God through the gift of presence. And we know this relationally. There is a big difference in being physically in the same space with someone and being present with them. And so it is with God. As Richard Rohr writes: ***"We cannot attain the presence of God because we're already totally in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness."*** Thankfully, we can learn to be aware anywhere. And retreating with God, yourself, others, and creation, is a wonderful training ground.

This retreat's emphasis is **BARREN & BEARING**.

**When you think of being barren what comes to mind?**

**Conversely, when you think of bearing fruit what comes to mind?**

In **John 15**, Jesus juxtaposes these two realities that we all experience in life: barrenness and bearing fruit. Often, our gut instinct is to strive for fruitfulness out of duty, shame, or drivenness.

We can even bring this filter to Jesus' words, as if he is saying, "You aren't trying hard enough! What's wrong with you!? Get to it!" However, nothing could be further from the truth. The truth that Jesus does reveal, the truth that will actually set us free (John 8:32), is by way of metaphor—

which is language of both the head and the heart. Jesus teaches that if we are to experience fruitfulness, we are simply to **remain** in him. In the gospels, the word "remain" is usually in the context of being *at home with* (*abide, dwell*). It's the same idea that John (1:14) used to describe the incarnation: ***"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."*** It's why Eugene

Peterson translates John 15:4 as: ***"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you."***

To be sure, out of love, there is also a warning in the passage: ***"In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me."*** (John 15:4, MSG). However, this is not a punishment. It's a statement of reality. We who have experienced barrenness—of being, ***"tired, worn out, and burned out on religion"***—know full well this truth. And true to form, instead of judgment, Jesus continually beckons us with an invitation: ***"Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly"*** (Matthew 11:28-30, MSG).

Here's the good news. You are here, today, with us. Clear evidence that God is growing something deep within you. You are accepting Jesus' invitation to abide.

**Welcome Home!**



## SACRED TIME

*For most of us, time is perceived as a major obstacle in prayer. We have FOMO if we give too much away, without any tangible and immediate benefit—like a transaction. But, God does not yield to us, and is not transactional. In fact, we have what German Scholar Hartmut Rosa calls *Zeitkrankheit*... “Time Sickness”. In the pre-modern world, there were no clocks but the earth orbiting the sun, and seasons. That’s all that was needed. There was no race against time. But today, time is a resource to be controlled. What other cliches can you think of regarding time?*

*Save time.  
Spend time.  
Time is money.  
Lose track of time.  
Lose time.  
Time is on my side.  
Time is against me.  
Not enough time.  
Too much time.  
Time flies.  
Time out!*

*Hartmut Rosa believes that what it means to be living in a modern age is to have our lives continually and constantly accelerated. This acceleration has the effect of stripping the sacred out of time. Human society has always had a Time Keeper, and the Time Keeper defined what is “the good life” that we are all pursuing. Though the Church has never been perfect, when she kept time, our life was at least organized around God’s presence. Today, Silicon Valley is the new Time Keeper, defining the “good life” as constantly speeding up to produce and attain more. Time is money after all, and wasting time is the root of all “sin” from a technological standpoint.*

*But there is a cost to treating time this way. Dallas Willard once shared a story about a herd of cows on a farm near where he lived. One summer, they started dying, one by one. It turns out that the soil had lost its iron content, so the cows started eating rusted nails lying around, which in turn, tore up their stomachs, leading to their death. In the same way, we believe that acceleration to save time will save us, but it’s leading us to death.*

*In contrast, author Wayne Mueller tells the story of Sister Gilchrist, a Cistercian nun at the Abbye of the Mississippi. One day the sisters became interested in permaculture, and sought consultation to discover the most efficient and sustainable use for both land and animals. They were advised to change the grazing habits of their cattle. Where previously the cattle roamed freely over the entire field, they were told to pen the cattle in smaller areas, to thoroughly graze—and fertilize—a small patch of land. The rest of the field could lie fallow. Later, they moved the pen to another spot, and in this way each section of land was fully used, and then allowed to rest. After two years of this new grazing method, Sister Gilchrist went out in early spring to check on the growth of her precious herbs. To her astonishment, she found not only the few herbs she was familiar with, but over a dozen new ones that had miraculously appeared, apparently out of nowhere. Several new grasses had germinated as well, grasses that, when the cows began to graze on them, proved so nourishing that the sisters were able to stop supplementing the cows’ diet with corn. The nutrition in the new grasses was more than enough to sustain them.*

*This is what sacred time means. Sacred time means being present with eternity, the living God, in the present. Sacred Time and Sacred Space protects our commitment and safeguards our love, as St. Benedict taught.*

## AN INVITATION TO RETREAT

*“Imagine the disciples’ surprise in Mark 6:30-31 when, in the midst of their excitement about “all they had done and taught” in Jesus’ name, he invited them to retreat. Literally! His words, “Come away to a deserted place . . . and rest a while,” shut down the conversation the disciples wanted to have and redirected it to the conversation Jesus wanted to have—about retreat! What a wonder it is, as Jesus’ disciples, to be invited by him to conversation and communion, self-care and replenishment.*

*Retreat in the context of the spiritual life is **an extended time apart for the purpose of being with God and giving God our full and undivided attention**; it is, as Emilie Griffin puts it, ‘a generous commitment to our friendship with God.’ The emphasis is on the words extended and generous...*

*And beyond our daily rhythms of solitude, many of us are longing for more—and we have a sense that there is more if we could create more space for quiet to give attention to God at the center of our beings. We sense that a kind of fullness and satisfaction is discovered more in the silence than in the words, more in solitude than in socializing, more in spaciousness than in busyness. ‘Times come,’ Emilie Griffin goes on to say, ‘when we yearn for more of God than our schedules will allow. We are tired, we are crushed, we are crowded by friends and acquaintances, commitments and obligations. The life of grace is abounding, but we are too busy for it. Even good obligations begin to hem us in.’*

*The yearning for retreat: Can you feel it? That yearning is your invitation. It is the Spirit of God stirring up your deepest longings and questions in order to draw you deeper into the intimacy with the God you were created for. Will you trust it? Are you brave enough to let it carry you into the more?”*

**RUTH HALEY BARTON**  
An Invitation to Retreat





## *Session One*

**“Live in me.  
Make your home in me  
just as I do in you.”**



# SESSION ONE

## PRELUDE

In groups of three: share your name and why you are here this morning.

## PASS THE PEACE

Walk around, look one another in the eyes, and give a blessing, or simply say,  
*"Peace be with you..."*

## PREPARATION

*The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalm 119:1).*

## PRESENCE

Choose a piece of fruit. Pay attention with intention to it by engaging all five of your senses.

- *Observe it closely with your eyes... look at all of the details.*
- *Feel it: What textures does it have?*
- *What sound does it make when you peel and/or bite into it?*
- *How does it smell? What are the fragrances of the fruit?*
- *Savor the taste. How many sensations does it have (sweet, sour, etc.)?*

## PRAISE

Mother Teresa would start her day by exclaiming, *"Hello Jesus!"* Say hello...

Spend a few moments praising God, noticing God's good creation.

Together: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen" (Isa. 60:1, Eph. 3:21).

## PRAYER

**Breath Prayer:** *"Christ's home is in me [inhale],  
My home is in Christ [exhale]."*

## PASSAGE: JOHN 15 (MSG)

<sup>1-3</sup> "I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

<sup>4</sup> "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

<sup>5-8</sup> "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples."





# SOLITUDE ONE

## LECTIO DIVINA (30 MIN)

"The spiritual life receives its very heart and soul in prayer, a practice that for Christians is embedded in meditation on scripture. What makes our reading spiritual has as much to do with the intention, attitude, and manner we bring to the words as it does with the nature and content of those words. Spiritual reading is reflective and prayerful. It requires unhurried time and an open heart. It is concerned not with speed or volume but with depth and receptivity. That is because the purpose of spiritual reading is to open ourselves to how God may be speaking to us in and through any particular text. In a certain sense, when we are engaged in spiritual reading it is not so much we who read the Word as the Word who "reads" us! If the purpose of our reading is to be addressed by God, we will need to practice attentive listening and a willingness to respond to what we hear." ~Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast*

- **PRAYER:** *"God, give me the grace to be completely open to you in this time" (Ignatius).*
- **PREPARE:** *Be still in silence for a few minutes with God, the lover of your soul. Choose a word like "love" or "grace" as an anchor when distraction comes.*
- **READ** *the prayer to take in it's meaning. Read 1-2 more times, but slower, like one would a love letter (vs. a newspaper). What word or phrase stands out to you? Don't judge. Stay open.*
- **REFLECT:** *How does this word/phrase intersect with my life right now?*
- **RESPOND:** *What do you sense God inviting you towards through this word/phrase? What is your truest response to God's invitation? The key here is honesty. Where do you have resistance (fear, doubt, sadness), and resonance (hope, joy, peace)?*
- **REST** *in God's love through this word/phrase for the remainder of the time.*

## VISIO DIVINA

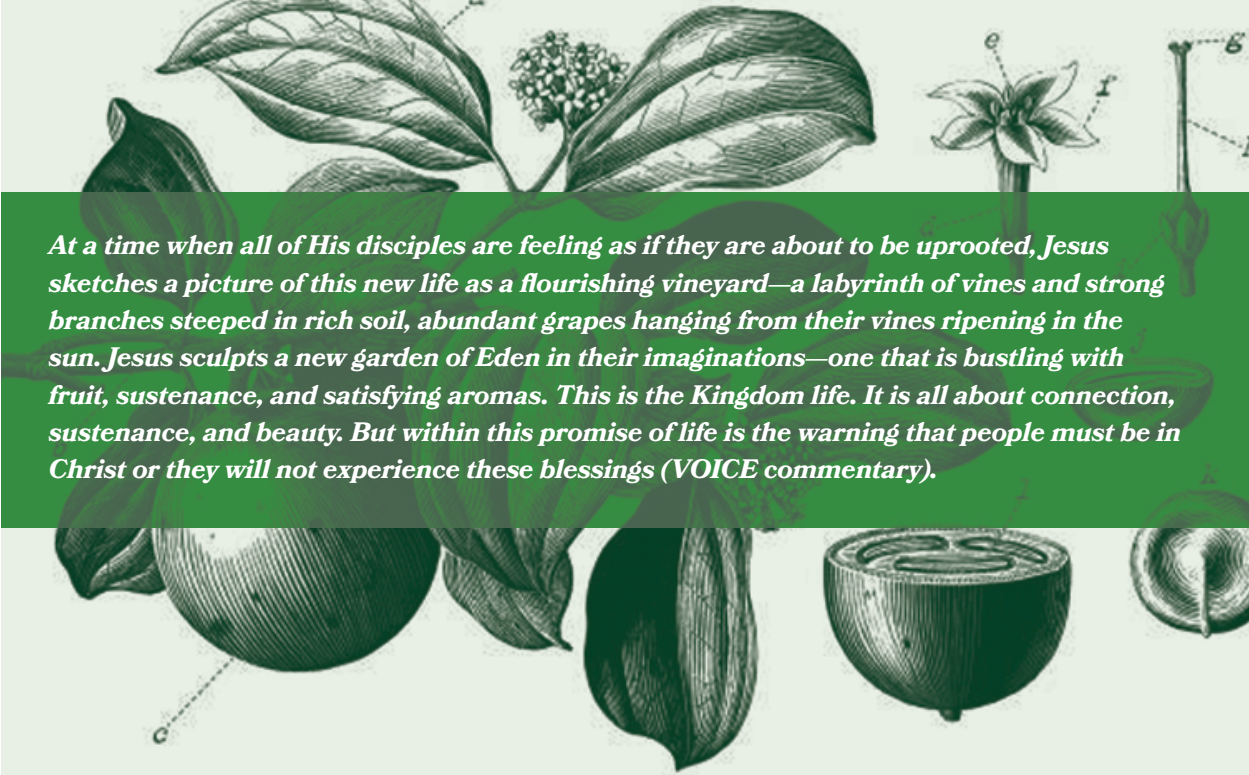
"Visio divina, Latin for 'divine seeing,' is a long-practiced spiritual discipline in the Christian tradition. It invites us into an active awareness of God's presence through images, reflection, and prayer, opening us up to His invitations for our lives. Remember: Lean into this spiritual practice with no expectations. Relax, and allow the 'right side' of your brain to inform your journey with Christ." ~David Smith, *Theodyssey.org*

"In the New Testament, the Greek word for *icon* is translated "image," "likeness," "portrait." [This word] is used to describe all of us being in the image of the God who made us (Gen. 1:26; Matt. 22:20; Col. 1:15). In that sense an icon has written this book and an icon is now reading it. There is a Jewish saying that thousands of angels go before every human being, crying, 'Make way, make way for the image of God.'

In church history, Christians have used images to point us to something beyond itself. For example, St. John Chrysostom speaks of having a portrait of St. Paul on his desk to inspire him when writing homilies on the Epistles.

According to the ancient teaching of the early church...an icon is a door. If you cannot believe that it is a door, never mind. For you, I hope that icons come to be seen as beautiful and rich pictures, showing God and his work in a visual language that can be understood. So to look into images is to find a window to God. To look at God means simply 'to look': I cannot explain it any other way. Give your attention to him and let your soul smile. I know that may sound fanciful and what some people would derisively call 'a bit mystical,' but it is something that must be done if prayer is ever to be more than either recitation or chatter. So do not analyze what it means to look at God: just do it." ~ Linette Martin, *Praying with Icons (Ancient Spiritual Disciplines)*





*At a time when all of His disciples are feeling as if they are about to be uprooted, Jesus sketches a picture of this new life as a flourishing vineyard—a labyrinth of vines and strong branches steeped in rich soil, abundant grapes hanging from their vines ripening in the sun. Jesus sculpts a new garden of Eden in their imaginations—one that is bustling with fruit, sustenance, and satisfying aromas. This is the Kingdom life. It is all about connection, sustenance, and beauty. But within this promise of life is the warning that people must be in Christ or they will not experience these blessings (VOICE commentary).*

## LECTIO DIVINA

### JOHN 15:1-17, *The Message*

<sup>1-3</sup> “I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn’t bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

<sup>4</sup> “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

<sup>5-8</sup> “I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.

<sup>9-10</sup> “I’ve loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you’ll remain intimately at home in my love. That’s what I’ve done—kept my Father’s commands and made myself at home in his love.

<sup>11-15</sup> “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I’m no longer calling you servants because servants don’t understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I’ve named you friends because I’ve let you in on everything I’ve heard from the Father.

<sup>16</sup> “You didn’t choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won’t spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you.

<sup>17</sup> “But remember the root command: Love one another.



## LECTIO DIVINA

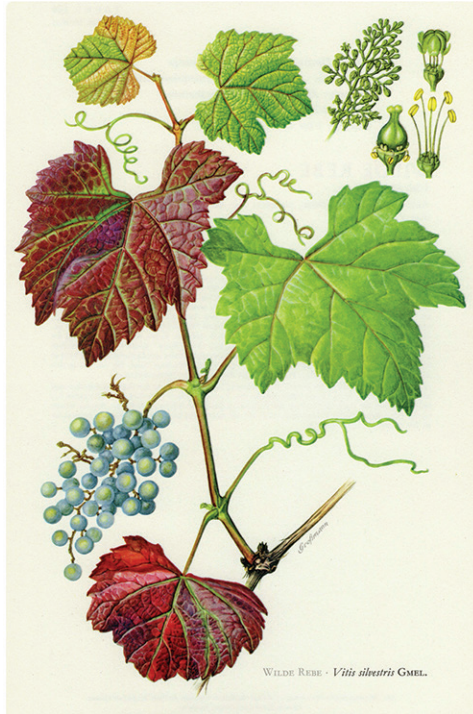


Jean-François Millet: *In the Vineyard*, 1852

### JOHN 15:1-17, *The Message*

<sup>1-3</sup> "I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

<sup>4</sup> "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me.



## Session Two

“When you’re joined with me and I with you,  
the relation intimate and organic,  
the harvest is sure to be abundant.”



## SESSION TWO

### FACTORY WORKER VS. FARMER

From David Smith, *Theodyssey.org*

**How do we grow? How do our lives bear fruit?**

We live in a society that is driven by the idea that we can know everything with enough investigation and time, and do anything if we put our minds and willpower to it. Thanks to the scientific Enlightenment and the subsequent industrial revolution, our imaginations lead us to believe that our output is proportional to input. And with precision engineering the outcomes are quite predictable. Consider an assembly line. Car companies know precisely how many cars they can produce in a day, and the quality control of each car is virtually identical. And, we unconsciously believe that this is how spiritual growth happens. We clock in, we clock out. Our spiritual life is one aspect of our lives.  $A + B + C = \text{Growth}$ . If we put enough effort into the 'right' things (prayer, bible, church, etc.) we expect growth, if not deserve it.

**Spiritual Growth, however, doesn't work like that. Spiritual growth is more like farming.**

Spend some time comparing and contrasting the two postures below:

#### FACTORY WORKER

**The Goal:** Be productive, successful.

**The Process:** Assemble pieces being manufactured in the correct way.

**Degree of Control:** Very high (complete control of the environment).

**Keys to Success:** Planning, Efficiency, Hard Work. I.e., human effort.

**Measuring Results:** Short term, quarterly, driven by the bottom line.

**Involvement:** 8 hours a day/ 40 hours a week (It's a job—one part of my life separated from the other parts).

Spiritual Disciplines + Frequency + Willpower = Spiritual Growth.

It's predictable, and we are owed something for our work.



#### FARMER

**The Goal:** Fruitful, faithful.

**The Process:** Cultivate soil.

**Degree of control:** Low. Farmers have little control over their yield. They are dependent to nature.

**Keys to Success:** Giving over to the process of cultivation, but are ultimately powerless over whether a harvest is "successful" or not. Farmers are faithful, but not necessarily successful.

**Measuring Results:** On the farm, things grow on their own time to varying degrees. Natural laws govern the work and determine the harvest.

**Involvement:** Farmers are never not farmers. Farming is not a task, it's a way of being. Try as we might, we cannot produce our own spiritual growth. It is a gift from God. However, this does not mean we do nothing. Like a farmer, our job is to cultivate an environment where we can be attentive and responsive to God, so God can bear fruit.



### SHARING

In groups of three: share what stands out to you from the Factory Worker vs. Farmer analogy.

*How have you experienced the spiritual life like a factory worker?*

*How has this effected your relationship with God? With others?*

*How is your heart responding to the farmer way of life with God?*

*What questions do you still have about how we grow and bear fruit?*

# SOLITUDE TWO

## DRIVEN (*productive*) vs. DRAWN (*fruitful*)

Exercise from Sheryl Fleisher

Perfect love drives out fear' (1 John 4:18).

“Here we have to make an important distinction between fruits and products. A call to live a fruitful life does not necessarily imply a call to be productive. A product is something we make.

In our world, everything can become a product. When fear dominates our lives, we worry about our value as persons and become easily preoccupied with products.

I even wonder if our deep-seated fear of being [unproductive] does not often motivate us to a frantic productivity. However, Productivity can never give the deep sense of belonging we crave. The more we produce, the more we realize that successes and results cannot give us the experience of "at homeness"... In fact, our productivity often reveals to us that we are driven by fear... But fruitfulness belongs to the order of love, not fear. The great mystery of fecundity is that it becomes visible where we have given up our attempts to control life and take the risk to let life reveal its own inner movements. Whenever we trust and surrender ourselves to the God of love, fruits will grow. Fruits can only come forth from the ground of intimate love.”

—Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Lifesigns*

The words or phrase below are not meant to produce guilt, shame, or a sense of failure. Rather, they are intended to help you learn more about what it means to live God's rhythm of grace and feel drawn towards God's invitation of extravagant and abiding love.

Spend some time comparing and contrasting the two columns below. Invite God to reveal a 'driven' way that needs pruning in order for you to thrive. What are you being 'drawn' towards—a fruit God is emerging? What do you want growth in? Ask God for help in the pruning and growing the new.

### DRIVEN

- Hurry mode
- Over adrenalized and collapse
- Ongoing heaviness, overly intense
- Trapped
- Consistently tired
- Consistently overstimulated
- Clinging, grasping, clutching
- Over thinking, planning, analyzing
- Overly protective
- Driven by fear/edgy
- Numbing or monkey mind
- Destination disease

### DRAWN

- Unforced grace
- Internal rest/peace
- Lightness of being
- Freedom
- Embrace limits
- Comfortable with stillness/quiet
- Surrendered posture
- Wait on God to unfold
- Open and attentive
- Living in flow
- Fully present
- Embrace what is

## SHARING

In groups of three: share your experience with reflecting on being drawn vs. driven.



**“Make yourselves at home in my love.”**



## SOLITUDE THREE

### PRACTICE (30 MIN)

Choose *one* spiritual practice from the exercises provided on the next few pages.

AND/OR rest in a receiving posture. Allow your senses to feel both soil and sun. Invite God to grow the fruits of His Spirit within your soul. Give God consent to purge anything that is inhibiting your growth.

**“I’ve loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you’ll remain intimately at home in my love. That’s what I’ve done—kept my Father’s commands and made myself at home in his love.”**

JOHN 15:9-10, MSG

*“Most of us distrust God. Most of us think of God as a fearful, punitive authority or as an empty, powerless nothing. Jesus’ core message was that God is neither a powerless weakling nor a powerful boss, but a lover, whose only desire is to give us what our hearts most desire.*

*To pray is to listen to that voice of love. That is what obedience is all about. The word obedience comes from the Latin word ob-audire, which means “to listen with great attentiveness.” Without listening, we become “deaf” to the voice of love. The Latin word for deaf is surdus. To be completely deaf is to be absurdus, yes, absurd. When we no longer pray, no longer listen to the voice of love that speaks to us in the moment, our lives become absurd lives in which we are thrown back and forth between the past and the future.*

*If we could just be, for a few minutes each day, fully where we are, we would indeed discover that we are not alone and that the One who is with us wants only one thing: to give us love.” — Henri J. M. Nouwen*





## Spiritual Practices

### **PRUNING: LIFE FROM DEATH (20 MIN)**

*From Larry Warner, b-ing.org*

***"I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken" (John 15:1-3, MSG).***

Explicit sin (ways in which we rebel from God) can be a hindrance to growth. And, we can easily overlook things that are not sin per se that keep us from the ability to bear fruit. Take time and consider the things in your life that are not evil in and of themselves, but are less than helpful in producing fruit and keeping you connected to Jesus.

**Can you be honest with yourself and God about the things that need pruning?**

**What needs to be pruned from your life? Read Hebrews 12:1.**

**As you list these, what is your first response (guilt, shame, fear, sadness, etc.)?**

Reflect upon a time in your life when you experienced the pruning of God and its vulnerability:

**What was your process of giving God consent to prune? How long did the season last?**

**What was pruned? How did it feel? When did you see experience benefits of pruning?**

**How did it effect your relationships with God, yourself, and other people?**

Spend time praying through each thing listed, asking:

***"God, how are WE going to prune \_\_\_\_\_ that is keeping me from abundant life?"***

In the natural world, branches cannot choose to separate from the vines, or from one another. However, we can choose to disconnect. Spend time asking God to show you what areas, practices, persons, causes and/or desires that you may have attached yourself to in a way that hinders your ability to live, remain, abide, or make your home in Jesus. If God reveals something to you, spend additional time seeking guidance and wisdom regarding how to allow these things to be pruned by God. Give these to God through a prayer of surrender: ***"God, I surrender \_\_\_\_\_."***



## Spiritual Practices

### BEARING FRUIT (15 MIN)

From Larry Warner, [b-ing.org](http://b-ing.org)

*"I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing" (John 15:5-8, MSG).*

Take some time to reflect on the fruits for the Spirit (Galatians 5):

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Ask yourself: Which of these fruit is most prevalent in my life?

Which fruit is God wanting to grow?

Which is dormant?

Which is budding?

### FRUITFULNESS (15 MIN)

Take a piece of fruit from the table. Spend time observing it, like a scientist. Be present through the five senses—including tasting it. Then, reflect on how this fruit came to be:

What was the process for this fruit to seed, sprout, grow, and be consumed?

How else is this fruit contribute to the ecosystem?

Reflect on the parallels with your relationship with God, yourself, and others:

What is the process in which fruit is planted, sprouted, grown, and contributed to life?

### THANKING GOD FOR THE HARVEST (15 MIN)

Spend time reflecting upon the year so far. Ask God to show you the fruit that God grew in and through you. Write down specific relationships, situations, and occurrences of fruit in your life.

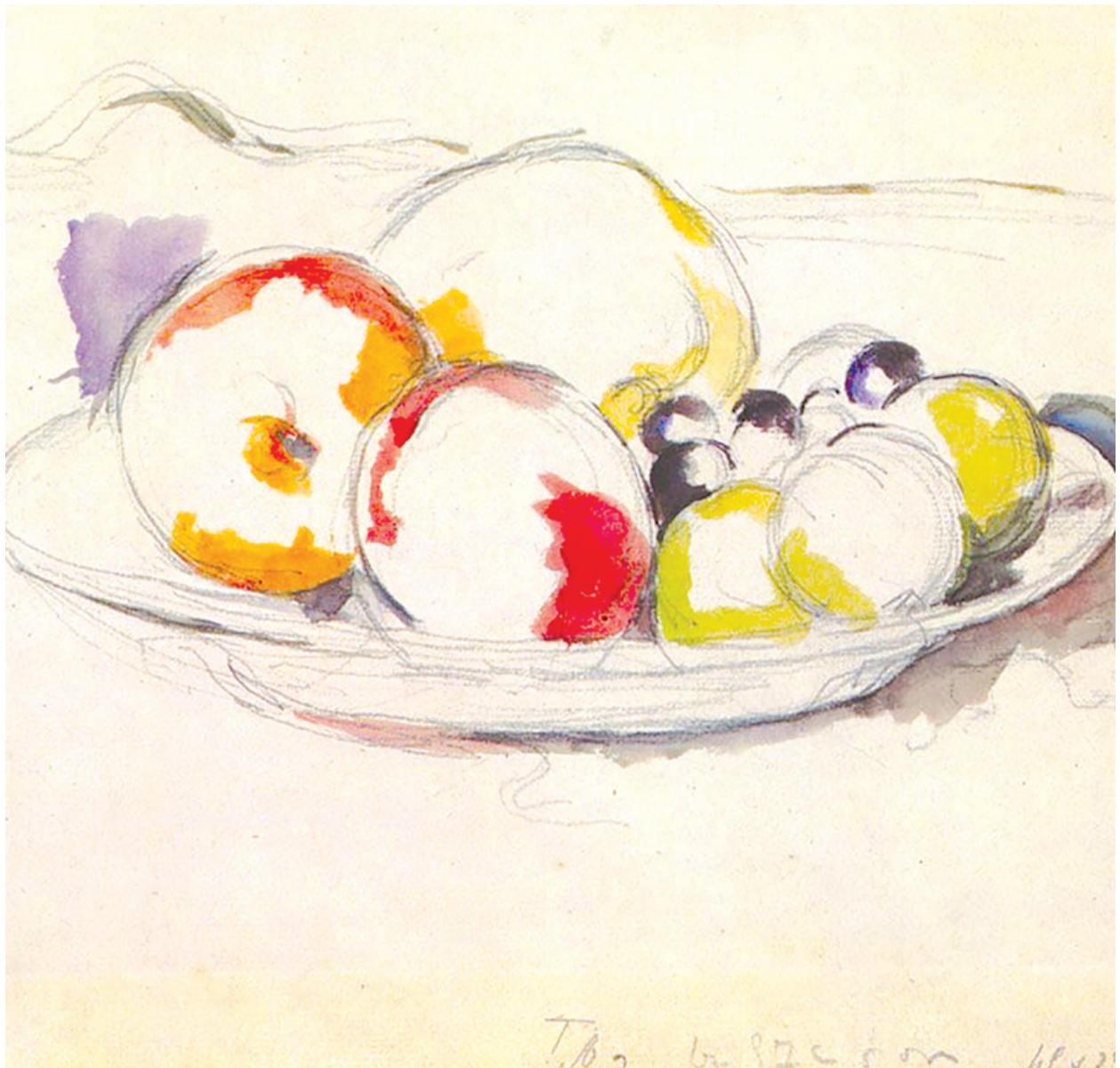
Write a letter thanking God for his commitment to your ongoing growth and development in Christ-likeness and fruit bearing.

## *Spiritual Practices*

### **SEEING FRUIT THROUGH ART AND PRAYER (30 MIN)**

A famous artist once said that one hasn't seen anything until they have drawn it. Spend some time with God through art and prayer.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Grab some art supplies (water colors, colored pencils). Use the Paul Cezanne sketched below as a guide, or use a piece of art paper. Take some fruit and begin drawing/painting it. Don't worry about the style, or how "good" your art is—that's not the point. Pray while painting by talking God about the fruit being grown in you, and what has been pruned in order for this fruit to grow. Thank God for being a faithful gardener and a friend in your life.







## Spiritual Practices

### YOUR SOUL'S PRAYER (30 MIN)

*From Ruth Haley Barton, and The Breath of Life: A Simple Way to Pray, by Ron Delbene*

Henri Nouwen writes, “The literal translation of the words ‘pray always’ (1 Thess. 5:17) is ‘come to rest’... The Greek word for rest is *hesychia*. We tend to see prayer primarily as an activity of the mind, however, *hesychasts* is prayer of the heart.” This is the essence of what [soul prayer] means—prayer of the heart—the first step in yielding to God. Breath prayer is a practice to engage the soul and God.

Breath Prayer is a primary way we grow in praying continuously as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Sit quietly in your sacred time and space, reminding yourself that you are in God’s loving presence. If there is a particular word or phrase from Scripture that helps you to enter into a prayerful, listening stance allow yourself to just sit with that phrase for a few moments. E.g., “Here I am LORD...”

Then, imagine God calling you by name and asking (John 5) “\_\_\_\_\_, what do you want?” Allow your truest answer to this question come from your heart and express this to God. You may find it helpful to reflect on your most recent experiences of desire and the words that you have used to express your desire in your journal or in conversation with others.

This phrase might help you to begin: **“God, what I most want from you right now is...”**

Then choose your favorite name or image for God as you are relating to God right now (such as: Abba, Jesus, Creator, Spirit, Breath of Life, Good Shepherd, Holy One, etc.). This is an intimate name for God, or an attribute of God that is particularly meaningful to you. Whichever name best captures your sense of who God is for you at this point in your relationship or who you need God to be. Reminder: God’s attributes are also God’s actions. E.g., not only is God good, but God is always doing good.

This phrase might help you: **“A name for God that is most meaningful for me right now is...”**

Now combine your name for God with the expression of your heart’s desire (There is no right or wrong way to put these together, but you may find a way that is more dynamic for your needs).

OR, you might also be drawn to a phrase from Scripture or a prayer from Christian tradition that seems to capture your desire at this time:

***“Root me in your love; Healer set me free”; “Come Holy Spirit”;  
“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”; “My Teacher, let me see again.”***

Breath prayers are about 6-8 syllables that flow smoothly when spoken aloud, that is rhythmic enough to be prayed with the inhalation and exhalation of your breathing and that captures your deep yearning for intimacy, wholeness or well-being in Christ.

It’s OK that this is a process. It takes time to narrow down options and receive a sense of what God is already praying within you (Romans 8). Once you have discovered your breath prayer, pray it into the spaces of your day—over time learn to pray it “underneath” all the other thoughts and words that swirl around you throughout your daily interactions.

During times of contemplation, you can pray this prayer as a way of entering into silence and solitude, as a way of bring your mind back to you desire when it begins to wander. Over time and with use, this prayer will start to “pray itself in you” in such a way that you don’t even have to think consciously about doing so (praying without ceasing). Use this prayer as a way of capturing your heart’s deepest desire until God gives you another one that he is praying within you (Romans 8).



## Spiritual Practices

### CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

**Contemplation** means revealing reality and resting in God's love. In contemplative prayer, our masks are revealed—the painful reality of all the ways in which we chase after love, security, and purpose. As Parker Palmer writes, *“Contemplation is any way that we can unveil the illusions that masquerade as reality and reveal the reality behind the mask.”* In this place of undefended vulnerability, we experience the unconditional love of Abba, allowing us to rest in God's presence—the source of our love for God, self, neighbor, and even enemy (1 John 4:19). Like the sheep in Psalm 23, we yield in complete trust to The Good Shepherd.

*“Contemplation also Restores our vision, not only about ourselves, but also God's Kingdom and the Imago Dei in all we encounter. Contemplation frees us to consciously act, not unconsciously react.” ~Parker J. Palmer*

#### *Revealing Masks*

“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace (Matthew 6:6, MSG).”

Spend some time being honest with yourself and God by reflecting on your own false self heart beliefs:

I have to \_\_\_\_\_ to be wanted, respected, loved, etc.

I'm not lovable unless I \_\_\_\_\_.

Ask God to show you any obstacles to prayer that you need to confront in order to have an authentic friendship with Him. Listen for what He awakens within you over the coming days. Be ready for what He shows you (from the Theodyssey: 33 Days Soul-Care Challenge).

#### *Choose a Sacred Time and Sacred Space*

One obstacle we all share in today's world is what German Scholar Hartmut Rosa calls, *Zeitkrankheit*, meaning, “Time Sickness”. This is because “time” is no longer sacred to us as the Church is no longer the Time Keeper in society. The Time Keeper determines how we imagine the “good life”—what our heart believes will fulfill us. Today, Silicon Valley is the Time Keeper, which means we have been unconsciously formed into imagining that acceleration, the new, and productivity, will fulfill our deepest desires.

Sacred time and space means being present with eternity, the living God, in the present. Therefore, contemplation is an intentional counter-formation that protects our commitment and safeguards our love.

What time and space in your life can be redeemed to sacred? Spend a few moments asking God to reveal times during the day/week that you can choose to meet. Next, reflect on what spaces/ places in your life are or can be sacred—a place that reminds you of God's goodness, beauty, and truth, that will support your commitment and help protect against distraction.





## Spiritual Practices

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Praying Scripture involves reading and memorizing a biblical prayer, like Ephesians 3:14-21, and allowing God to minister to you through these sacred words. The wisdom and experience of Christian's past for centuries have practices this as *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading). The emphasis is sitting with God through this prescribed prayer until it becomes a part of you—a means to communion with God. The goal is not to accomplish or finish this practice, but rather to be transformed over time. This is sacred time, meaning it's not "on the clock." When God has loved you through these prayers, God will let you know when you are ready for the next one, whether it's a week, month, or even a year later.

### PRESENCE PRAYER

*From Ruth Haley Barton, Transforming Center*

Presence Prayer "is a way of praying without words that opens us to the presence of God and fosters a way of being attentive and receptive to the work of God in our lives and in the world, as Jesus describes in Matthew 6:6..." (Ruth Haley Barton). It's an integral reminder that we cannot attain God because God is already totally with us. We don't need to go anywhere or do anything per se.

Choose a sacred word that expresses your intention of opening, consenting, and surrendering (yielding to God), such as: "Jesus," "Open," "Here I am LORD," "Present," "Available." Whenever a thought or emotion captures your attention, simply return to your sacred word which expresses your desire of trusting openness to God. As long as our will keeps returning to God via the sacred word, that is enough activity to keep us awake to God's presence.

Practicing presence involves time. It's OK to start when short increments each day, then add time:

5 min., then 10 min., then 15 min., etc. The key is choosing an amount of time and committing to it, because the temptation to be productive and not "waste time" will ALWAYS be there. This will also protect your commitment and safeguard your loving intent.

When time is up, thank God for all—seen and unseen—and for the gift of God's presence alone (whether or not we think, feel, or see anything).

### BEING STILL

*"Be still, and know that I am God..." (Psalm 46:10a)*

- Begin with a minute of silence, quietly inviting God to fill your mind, heart, and soul.
- Recite Psalm 46:10a eight times, subtracting the last word each time
- Pause between each reading for at least a minute. Try and expand the pause each time.

Example: "Be still, and know that I am God..." (1 min. pause)

"Be still, and know that I am..." (1 min., 30 sec. pause)

"Be still, and know that I..." (2 min. pause)

What was it like to be still and silent before God? What surfaced?

Did you hear any invitations? What did you notice about God? Yourself?



## *Spiritual Practices*

### **WALK with GOD**

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:4-6).

“Take off your shoes. Stand still and quiet for a moment. Let your feet touch earth, soil, floor, and rock. Feel the visceral holiness rise up... Walk slowly. Let each step be a prayer, each footfall a sacred kiss of flesh and earth. Let each sensation rise up the body. Feel how the body receives the blessing of holy ground.

For thirty minutes walk slowly and silently—preferably outside in nature, without trying to get anywhere. It is more of an amble, a stroll. Let your senses guide your walk. If you are drawn to a leaf, a stone, a color, a chink in the concrete, the fragrance of the grass, simply stop, and linger, and allow the moment to be, to smell or touch or thoroughly observe whatever is available for you. Listen to the God who speaks. At the end of thirty minutes, notice what has happened to your body, your mind, your sense of time. Sabbath challenges the theology of progress by reminding us that we are already and always on sacred ground. The gifts of grace and delight are present and abundant; the time to live and love and give thanks and rest and delight is now, this moment, this day. Feel what heaven is like; have a taste of eternity. Rest in the arms of the divine” (Wayne Muller, Sabbath).

### **SEEP in GOD’S LOVE**

Loretta Ross, a woman of deep prayer, was describing what she had heard in response to the question she put before Jesus each morning: “What do you want me to tell the people?” For many years the response she received was, “Tell the people that I love them.” Then one day the reply came: “Tell the people that I miss them.” ~Pastor Loretta Ross

Ephesians 3 says that we are rooted and established in love, and to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. But what does God’s love look like? I Corinthians 13 is a chapter that can give us a picture.

Consider the ways God loves you by saying each phrase below slowly:\*

- You love me with patience
- You love me with kindness
- You love me with acceptance
- You love me with humility
- You love me with gentleness
- You love me with freedom
- You love me with unhurried serenity
- You love me with infinite forgiveness
- You love me in the blossoming of truth
- You always cocoon me in your love
- You always trust me
- You always look for the best in me
- You always persevere with me
- Your love with me will never end.

Which quality above stands out to you the most? Spend some time to picture what it looks like for God to love you in that way—to feel it, experience it, and soak it in.

*\*Exercise created by Sheryl Fleisher*



## *Spiritual Practices*

### **GRATITUDE**

“Meister Eckhart, the Christian mystic, asserted that if the only prayer we ever prayed our whole life was ‘Thank you,’ that would be enough. Gratefulness cultivates a visceral experience of having enough. When we are mindful of what we have, and give thanks for the many gifts we have overlooked or forgotten, our sense of wealth cannot help but expand, and we soon achieve a sense of sufficiency we so desire. Practice thanksgiving before meals, upon rising, when going to sleep. Friends, family, food, color, fragrance, the earth, life itself—these are all gifts, perfectly gratuitous. How can we not give thanks? During Sabbath time we are less concerned with what is missing, focusing instead on sharing our gratefulness for what has already been given” (Wayne Muller, Sabbath).

- *Thank you for...*
- *Thank you for...*
- *Thank you for...*

### **HOLY SLEEP (NAP)**

“It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:17).

In November 1576, sister Teresa of Avila wrote a letter to Father Gracian of Seville, entitled: “Father Gracian’s enemies. His need of sleep”

She writes him “...On reading Paul’s letter again, I find that he says that he sacrifices his sleep to ‘think things over,’ and I believe he means on account of transports of prayer. He ought not to accustom himself to neglect so great a treasure except for the sleep that his body requires, for God bestows most precious gifts at such times and I am not astonished at the devil’s trying to deprive Paul of them. As this favor cannot be enjoyed at will, we must prize it when God bestows it. His Majesty then gives us more light as to how to serve Him than our intellect could obtain if it forsook the favor it is enjoying, to search on its own account. But believe me, I have spoken the truth: follow my advice about sleep unless you have business of such importance on hand that it would keep you awake; but if sleep comes, there will be time enough afterwards to think about your work.”

*Enjoy the gift of sleep and take a holy nap.*

### **DAILY PRACTICE RESOURCES**

DailyLectio.net

24-7Prayer.com/DailyDevotional (App: Lectio 365)

LectioDivinaJournal.com

Pray-as-you-go.org

CommonPrayer.net (App: Book of Common Prayer)

BookofCommonPrayer.net

Prayerminder (App)

SoulShepherding.org

TransformingCenter.org



## Appendix

**“I’ve loved you the way my Father has loved me.  
Make yourselves at home in my love.”**

# JOHN BACKGROUND

*The Essential Bible Companion: Key Insights for Reading God's Word, by John H. Walton, et al.*

## **Summary Overview:**

John gives a portrait of Jesus as the divine Son who came to earth to reveal the Father and to bring eternal life to all who believe in him. The message of this gospel can be summed up in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

## **Key Themes:**

- Jesus as the Son. Emphasis on Jesus' identity as the divine Son who reveals the Father.
- Strong dualistic perspective. People are either "of God" or "of the world."
- Miracles. Identified as "signs" revealing Jesus' identity.
- Spiritual Symbols and Metaphors. New birth, living water, light, bread, shepherd, gate, and so on.
- Jesus' Self-revelation. "I am" statements.
- The Holy Spirit as counselor/advocate (paraclete) who will mediate Jesus' presence.

## **Author:**

John, the brother of James and son of Zebedee, identified only as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20).

## **Recipients:**

The gospel was likely written to believers and unbelievers in the region of Ephesus, where John is thought to have been ministering. He writes to assure believers of the truth of the gospel and to call unbelievers to faith in Jesus (20:30–31).

## **Purpose:**

Jesus describes himself with common symbols from everyday life: light, water, bread, a vine, a shepherd, a gate. Yet these everyday items are used to explain the most profound and unfathomable mystery of all: how God became a human being to bring eternal life to all who believe. John writes to call his readers to faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. John 20:30–31 provides a clear statement of purpose: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The phrase "that you may believe" also could be translated "that you may continue to believe." John likely writes both to confirm the faith of believers and to provoke faith in unbelievers.

## **Structure:**

The main body of the gospel has two parts, the Book of Signs containing seven key miracles, which reveal Jesus' identity, and the Book of Glory, where Jesus' passion is repeatedly described as his "glorification." The seven "signs" are: water into wine (2:1–11); official's son healed (4:43–54); healing of the disabled man at Bethesda pool (5:1–15); feeding of the 5,000 (6:1–14); walking on water (6:16–21); healing the man born blind (9:1–12); and Lazarus raised (11:1–43). An eighth sign, the miraculous catch of fish (21:1–14), is in the epilogue.

## **Notable:**

The prologue of John (1:1–18) contains the highest Christology (description of Jesus' identity) in the New Testament. It sets the stage for the rest of the gospel by presenting Jesus as the self-revelation of God.

No other book in the New Testament so clearly and explicitly confirms the deity of Jesus Christ (1:1–3, 18; 8:58; 20:28, etc.).

While emphasizing Jesus' deity, John also has a strong "submission" theme. In his humanity, Jesus wholly submits to the Father's will to accomplish his purpose.

John's gospel provides the most systematic teaching in the New Testament on the role of the Holy Spirit as comforter, guide, and convicter of sin (chs. 14, 16).

Most of the events and teaching in John are unique to this gospel. The feeding of the 5,000 (6:1–15) is the only miracle to appear in all four gospels.

The gospel has seven "I am" statements, which help to explain Jesus' identity: the bread of life (6:35); the light of the world (8:12; 9:5); the gate (10:7); the good shepherd (10:11, 14); the resurrection and the life (11:25); the way, the truth, and the life (14:6); and the true vine (15:1).





*Jean-François Millet: Vineyard Worker, 1853*

## The PURPOSE of PRACTICE

“By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done...They are the means by which we place ourselves where God can bless us.”

~Richard Foster

“...Any practiced that allows us to receive God's love and give it away.” ~Sheryl Fleisher

“The focus of Spiritual Formation is not on solving problems but on the Problem Solver—namely, the person of the Holy Spirit. These practices do not rely on behavior modification. Instead, they seek to address the core of the inner life of the heart where transformation takes place. This gives us power to fight the deceptions of the enemy, who would tell us to work harder, do more, and also resist the longings of the flesh to be in control. This means we must develop a more intimate relationship with God. By engaging these timeless spiritual practices to shine the light of love on these tender, sensitive places at our core, we learn to trust the eternal God to heal the blemishes of the past. We are energized, and our hearts are stirred for the kingdom work ahead.” ~Brenda Darby

## PRAYER as SILENCE & SOLITUDE

“Over and over Scripture invites us to abide in God. To rest in God. To dwell in God. As Paul says frequently, to be ‘in Christ.’ Prayer is not just about activity and speaking but also about listening and resting in God.

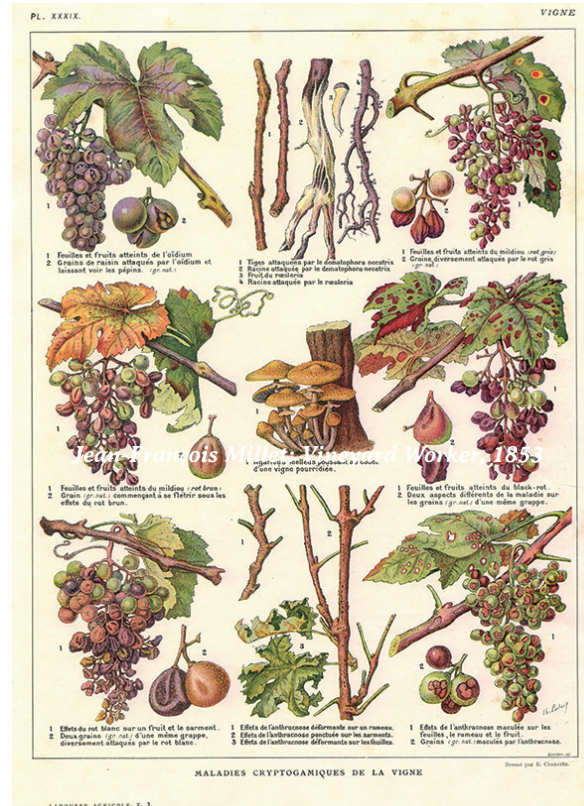
A primary purpose of prayer is to impress on us the personality and character of Christ. We want to become like Jesus, so the life that we live is no longer ours but Christ living in us and through us.

Prayer is less about trying to get God to do something we want God to do and more about getting ourselves to do what God wants us to do and to become who God wants us to become. There are times when we speak, weep, groan, and shout at God. But there are also times when we simply sit in silence and are held by our Beloved. We remember the character of God, the fruit of the Spirit, and the incarnation of Jesus as he reveals to us what God is like with flesh on. And we pray that God's character will become our character. The monks have been known to say, ‘If your speaking doesn't add something beautiful to the silence, don't speak.’ For many of us in the high-paced, cluttered world of materialism and noise, silence is a way we can free up the space to listen to God.

In most of our lives, silence gets interrupted pretty quickly. Teresa of Avila, who was distracted by her own thoughts in prayer, said she learned not to fight them but to let them come and go like waves in the sea, trusting that God was an anchor who could hold her through any storm.

Prayer, through solitude and silence, is about tending to the lines that anchor us in Christ, to be ‘rooted and established in his love (Ephesians 3:17).’ ~From *Common Prayer*, by Shane Claiborne





## THE SOUL

*“Like a wild animal, the soul is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, and self-sufficient: it knows how to survive in hard places. I learned about these qualities during my bouts with depression. In that deadly darkness, the faculties I had always depended on collapsed.*

*My intellect was useless; my emotions were dead; my will was impotent; my ego was shattered. But from time to time, deep in the thickets of my inner wilderness, I could sense the presence of something that knew how to stay alive even when the rest of me wanted to die. That something was my tough and tenacious soul.*

*Yet despite its toughness, the soul is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush, especially when other people are around. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. But if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of an eye-but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself.”*

PARKER J. PALMER

*A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*

# THE SOCIAL LIFE OF FORESTS

*Trees appear to communicate and cooperate through subterranean networks of fungi. What are they sharing with one another? By Ferris Jabr, NYTimes*

Suzanne Simard grew up in Canada immersed in the forest as her family was in the logging industry. She began studying trees at university, where she noticed that up to 10 percent of newly planted Douglas fir were likely to get sick and die whenever nearby aspen, paper birch and cottonwood were removed. Why were these newly planted trees so frail, she wondered. Simard suspected that the answer was buried in the soil.

Underground, trees and fungi form partnerships known as mycorrhizas: Threadlike fungi envelop and fuse with tree roots, helping them extract water and nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen in exchange for some of the carbon-rich sugars the trees make through photosynthesis. Research had demonstrated that mycorrhizas also connected plants to one another and that these associations might be ecologically important, but most scientists had studied them in greenhouses and laboratories, not in the wild. For her doctoral thesis, Simard decided to investigate fungal links between Douglas fir and paper birch in the forests of British Columbia. Apart from her supervisor, she didn't receive much encouragement from her mostly male peers. "The old foresters were like, Why don't you just study growth and yield?" Simard told me. "I was more interested in how these plants interact."

Now a professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia, Simard, who is 60, has studied webs of root and fungi in the Arctic, temperate and coastal forests of North America for nearly three decades. Her initial inklings about the importance of mycorrhizal networks were prescient, inspiring whole new lines of research that ultimately overturned longstanding misconceptions about forest ecosystems. By analyzing the DNA in root tips and tracing the movement of molecules through underground conduits, Simard has discovered that fungal threads link nearly every tree in a forest — even trees of different species. Carbon, water, nutrients, alarm signals and hormones can pass from tree to tree through these subterranean circuits. Resources tend to flow from the oldest and biggest trees to the youngest

and smallest. Chemical alarm signals generated by one tree prepare nearby trees for danger. Seedlings severed from the forest's underground lifelines are much more likely to die than their networked counterparts. And if a tree is on the brink of death, it sometimes bequeaths a substantial share of its carbon to its neighbors.

Before Simard and other ecologists revealed the extent and significance of mycorrhizal networks, foresters typically regarded trees as solitary individuals that competed for space and resources and were otherwise indifferent to one another. Simard and her peers have demonstrated that this framework is far too simplistic. An old-growth forest is neither an assemblage of stoic organisms tolerating one another's presence nor a merciless battle

royale: It's a vast, ancient and intricate society. There is conflict in a forest, but there is also negotiation, reciprocity and perhaps even selflessness. The trees, understory plants, fungi and microbes in a forest are so thoroughly connected, communicative and codependent that some scientists have described

them as superorganisms. Recent research suggests that mycorrhizal networks also perfuse prairies, grasslands, chaparral and Arctic tundra — essentially everywhere there is life on land. Together, these symbiotic partners knit Earth's soils into nearly contiguous living networks of unfathomable scale and complexity. "I was taught that you have a tree, and it's out there to find its own way," Simard told me. "It's not how a forest works, though."

**REFLECT on the figurative trees in your community (friends, family, group, church, etc.). Spend some time mapping out connections. Use words, images, or any combination of the two that serves you.**

- How have the root systems of the people in your life shared soul sustenance with you?
- How have they delivered vital nutrients?
- How have they brought life and Spirit in ways you might not have known you needed?



# Soul Assessment

## SOUL ASSESSMENT CONT'D

*From: Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership, by Ruth Haley Barton (pgs. 241-246)*

8. I have become emotionally numb—unable to experience a full range of human emotion.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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9. I find myself increasingly giving in to escapist behaviors (eating, mindless television viewing, substance abuse, shopping/spending, pornography, etc.) or escapist fantasies—dreaming about being somewhere else or having a different life.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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10. I do not have time for attending to my human needs—exercise, eating right, getting enough sleep, doctor's appointments and medical procedures, picking up dry cleaning, getting the car washed, making home repairs, etc.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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11. My most significant human relationships are getting shortchanged.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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12. I don't have time to regularly engage in hobbies and other activities that bring me joy.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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13. I find myself hoarding energy—avoiding people in the grocery store, holing up at home or in my office—for fear that routine social interactions will rob me of that last bit of energy.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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14. My spiritual practices have slipped. Even though I know that practices such as solitude, prayer and personal reflection on Scripture are life giving, I find I don't have time or energy for them.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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15. I feel isolated with no one to fully confide in and no one who fully understands my situation.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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16. It has been a long time since I have felt connected with the presence of God in my own life beyond what I am accomplishing for God and for others.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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# Soul Assessment

## SOUL ASSESSMENT (15 MIN)

*From: Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership, by Ruth Haley Barton (pgs. 241-246)*

*“These questions and categories are not meant to produce guilt, shame, or a sense of failure. Rather, they are intended to help you be honest with yourself and with God about the state of your soul. This kind of truth seeing and truth telling is a first step toward ensuring that you find your soul rather than lose your soul in the context of kingdom ministry. If you become aware of indications that you might be losing your soul on some level (in other words, losing your connection with what is most real), do not try to fix things or problem solve just yet. Instead, simply ask God, ‘What are we going to do about that?’”*

*“On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.” —PSALM 138:3*

1. More and more often I notice that I am going through the motions of the Christian life—championing things I am not currently experiencing in my own life, manufacturing emotion that I am not feeling, engaging in kingdom action but aware that sometimes I don’t really care.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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2. I am aware of a nagging sense that something is not quite right, but I don’t seem to be able to take the time or make the effort to look into it. The truth is, I’m not even sure I know how.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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3. I find myself rushing from one thing to the next without time to really pay attention to what’s going on in and around me.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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4. I am keeping up with what my work requires, but deep down I feel that I have lost touch with who I am in God and what he has called me to do.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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5. I am tired—not just physically but spiritually and emotionally. I don’t really know how to get rested.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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6. I am aware of an underlying irritability and restlessness just beneath the surface of my life.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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7. I can’t stop working even when I know I need to.

<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
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