

Men's Spirituality
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We live in a busy, busy world. However, the fact is, we've always lived in such a world! How do we find time for God when there's work and chores at home and 'honey-do's' and Facebook and television and the kids, let alone the yard and the car, truck, motorcycle, boat, etc.? And even if we could 'find God', how do you fit God into all of that? Of course, therein lies our biggest snow job! You've all heard before but it bears repeating - God isn't lost - we don't need to 'find God'!

We need to find ourselves in the presence of God.

Right there, in amongst all the activities, all the chores, all the - stuff - that's where we'll find God already waiting for us. And yes, there are some things we can do to help facilitate our contact with the God who is in everything, the God of all creation. First and foremost is the simple recognition that we are God's, just like everything else that exists. It's in the simple notice that the grass is greener today than it was yesterday, maybe because it rained right when the grass needed it or maybe because you watered it yourself but, for whatever reason, you recognize it - and it captures you. It is a reverent moment. Reverence is the first step.

With recognition and reverence, the next step is to find some good spiritual practices. This is the easiest part because these are well known and documented; there are many books, audio tapes, etc., etc.! And there are very simple practices that anyone can learn.

Finally, the one thing we tend to overlook as we develop our spiritual life is obedience. It's not enough to recognize that we are in the presence of the living God, it's not enough to try out a variety of spiritual practices, using them where and when we get the chance. It's crucial to be obedient to the discipline of practicing for it is in the simple obedience that we are formed. Nike actually may have it right - 'just do it!'

Below, these basic themes are fleshed out with a few suggestions or 'how-to's' along with specific resources. I pray that you will awake like Jacob and exclaim, "Surely, the LORD is in this place - and I did not know it!" (Gen 28:16)

1. Reverence

Have you ever noticed how first thing in the morning, when the sun is low and bright, the dew on the grass sparkles? Have you ever gotten lost on purpose? Just turned down an unknown road to see what was down there? And have you ever caught someone's eye at Walmart and just known you were thinking the same thing and they smiled the same smile you had plastered to your face?

That's reverence. Reverence is the noticing; it's the awe and the wonder the psalmists sing about.

Barbara Brown Taylor's recent book, *An Altar in the World*, is a wonderfully readable book all about reverence while Kathleen Norris' *The Quotidian Mysteries* focuses on the tasks we'd least likely think of as holy and finds reverence in them. Murray Bodo's *Landscape of Prayer* could have gone in the 'spiritual practices' category but I think the simple stories he uses as illustrations are wonderfully reverent and aware and helpful. Finally, Father Vincent Donovan finds true reverence in the Masai people he was sent to evangelize in his book, *Christianity Rediscovered*.

These all provide good examples of the art of noticing, of walking in the other person's shoes. Reverence is the beginning of it all.

2. Spiritual Practices

A. *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is an ancient method of reading and abiding in scripture. It is less about the content of the text and more about the 'flavor' of the text. If you wolf down your big mac you won't even know if they put a pickle on it! Same thing for scripture - if we simply read through like we're reading a Sears catalog, we're not likely to get much out of it. But if we savor it, tasting each word slowly, we'll find nuances of exotic spices and hints of far away traditions.

There are many, many sources for information about *lectio divina* - Margaret Guenther has a nice simple explanation in *The Practice of Prayer*.

The final step in *lectio divina* is *contemplatio*, resting in the loving presence of God and Thomas Keating's fine resource, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, focuses on centering prayer as another means to contemplation.

B. Mindfulness

Mindfulness has much in common with reverence and so these two go hand in hand. This would make perfect sense to the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, who provides a good beginner's variety of mindfulness techniques in *Peace is every Step*.

A helpful mindfulness practice is embodied in simple breath prayers. A breath prayer is a short, two phrase prayer like "Lord, let your light/come into my heart." The first half of the phrase is repeated as you breathe in; the second half, as you breathe out. "Lord, let your light/come into me heart." As you repeat this simple prayer, your breathing becomes steady and one can't help but be mindful.

Thich Nhat Hanh reduces this to its most simple form - "In/out." Here's a hint - when you're stressed out and entirely wrapped up in tomorrow, which isn't even here yet - try being mindful of your breathing, "In/out; In/out." Repeat as needed.

C. Prayer

Once again, there are many, many resources on prayer! Several good books have already been noted. But one of the more important ways to learn prayer is to read prayers - good prayers that engage our hearts as well as our minds. I particularly enjoy John Shea's prayers in *The God who fell from Heaven* and Murray Bodo's *Song of the Sparrow*. Both of these are as much poetry as they are prayer and maybe I like them primarily for that reason. On the other hand, Kay Bessler Northcutt's collection, *Praying by Heart*, is a great example of moving pastoral prayers. Walter Brueggemann's prayers in *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth* are also quite poetic while retaining a peculiarly Old Testament flavor.

While all of these resources are great for meeting prayers, etc., there's a whole prayer tradition in the monastic world that revolves around regular, daily prayer, or, the liturgy of the hours. Any Catholic resource can easily provide daily prayer books and Phyllis Tickle's 3-volume set provides a complete set of formal prayers. Kathleen Geignan has put together a wonderful prayer book based on the writings of Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton - A Book of Hours*, that has prayers for dawn, morning, day and night.

3. Obedience

While there are many resources for prayer and other spiritual disciplines, none of them are very much good - if we don't use them! Probably one of the best resources to learn about obedience is Benedict's Rule - it's short and to the point - and has been effective and useful for about 1500 years now! Of course, Margaret Silf's book on Ignatian spirituality, *Inner Compass - An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, will also put you on the path to obedience.

Let us go forth, then with the words of St. Benedict to guide us:

“Listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into

practice. The labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.” (RB Prologue 1-3)

References

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Note: The texts referenced above are, quite simply, favorites of mine. They can be easily located - and often purchased - as used books from a variety of sources including internet stores like Amazon.com. But there are many, many more equally good resources so take these as simple, beginning suggestions. Rev. Scott Taylor



