

TREK

Spiritual Development Programme
For Staff in Anglican Schools

Part Four

Habits

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Welcome to Trek

TREK has been created to help those working in Anglican Schools explore their spirituality.

Spirituality is an important part of human wellbeing. It is a key part of the human search for meaning that all people participate in. This search helps us to live happy and fuller lives. Spirituality is recognised in the Bible as a fundamental aspect of human life that connects us with God, with each other and with the world. It is also an important part of education. Young people are at a formative stage of life. Schools have an important role to play in the development of their spirituality. Spiritual development is increasingly seen as an important part of education including here in Australia. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* states:

“Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion.”

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008)

TREK is open to all people. It is firmly embedded in the Christian faith and is shaped by it. It focuses on the development of personal spirituality within a community and encourages participants to practice spiritually constructive action in the school.

The program is sensitive to the various spiritual starting places of school staff including the deeply spiritual, the curious but cautious seeker, the agnostic, the committed Anglican and those of other denominations and traditions.

There are four parts to the program each with a different theme: journey, growth, community and habit. Each part has five sessions. TREK is designed with a group journey in mind and can be completed over the course of a year meeting together every two weeks during term time or by meeting more regularly.

We hope you enjoy the journey.

Welcome to Part 4 of Trek

- The theme for Part 4 is habits.
- For each of the group meetings, you prepare a “challenge” that requires you to think about the theme in a particular way. During the challenge, you choose an artefact to bring to the next meeting.

Before Week 1

Challenge

Create for yourself a quiet place to practice silence and solitude.

This may look like:

- A prayer desk in the corner of your home study.
- A comfy couch in a sunny corner of your bedroom.
- A chair in a crowded coffee shop (with your headphones in!)
- A place in your garden or a local park where you can stand still for a moment.
- Aim to visit this place during your holidays regularly. Note that “regularly” may mean once a week.

Journal

- What experience have you had with prayer?
- Who do you know who sets aside time for silence and solitude?
- What does it do for them?
- When have you felt the benefits of solitude and silence?

Collect an Artefact for next session

- You may choose to take a photo of your quiet place to share with the group, or prepare a description of your aims and purpose for this space.

Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.



Habits Week 1

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

You will need

5 - 10 minute guided reflection/visualisation – see below for an example, or use another similar script.

- Yoga mat for each participant
- a space for everyone to lie down comfortably.

The facilitator reads through the guided meditation, taking the words slowly and in a relaxed manner. Allow space between the sentences for people to imagine their response to the words.

Script for guided reflection/visualisation



Find a space to lie or sit comfortably. Close your eyes and be still and silent. If this is all you do to participate in the next few minutes of guided reflection, that's fine. By agreeing to be still and quiet, you offer the gift of silence to your neighbours.

Focus on your breathing. Breathe naturally, just notice your in and out breaths. Allow each breath to fill your body, each out breath to empty. Notice the breath as it keeps your life going. Acknowledge it and turn your gaze inward.

Imagine that you are standing in front of a gate. You know this gate leads in to a secret garden, one that is yours alone. No one goes in except you. The gate shows that this place is yours. Take a moment to imagine the symbols and signs that you would place on the gate to your garden. Decide on the style of gate. Some like to imagine the gate is in a white picket fence, with flowers all over it. Perhaps it would suit you better to have an ancient wooden door in a stone fence, overgrown with vines. A gate that hides from all others. Perhaps it looks like something from the Lord of the Rings, or Harry Potter, with intricate locks. Reach your hand out and open the gate, step into the garden and close the gate behind you.

You are now in your garden. Take a moment to look around you, notice the kind of garden it is. What is underfoot? Grass, pebble tracks, rocky ground, sand? What time of day is it in your garden?

Imagine those into being in your mind. Concentrate on what you can see in your garden. What animals join you there? What type of trees or shrubs are present? Look around and notice what types of birds are in the trees? Imagine that you can step towards the centre of the garden. What do you notice around you?

Smell the flowers and the fresh scent of nature as you step through the garden. Listen to the birds and the breeze in the trees. Listen to the rustle of leaves, and the swish of fronds as you pass by. You realise there is a splash of water coming from further in the garden. Seek the source of that sound. You come across a clear stream flowing across the garden. The bank is clean sand, the water inviting. Imagine yourself taking your shoes off and stepping into the stream. The first shock of cold water gives way to cool, refreshing water. You feel revived and relieved. Paddle in the water and venture in up to your knees.

You realise this is a safe and secure place. You could become truly yourself here. Imagine your shoulders relaxing as your worries and troubles move from your head, down your back and legs, to be caught by the flowing stream and washed away in the water. Sense the relief of letting go. Feel the refreshment available to you from the water as you paddle....the cool tingle of water on your calves and ankles.

Acknowledge that your time here is nearly done. Step back to the bank and make your way back through the garden. As you walk towards the gate, take another look around the path, through the trees – what do you notice this time as you gaze upon your garden? Have any special things joined you there? Pets, or animals, significant plants.

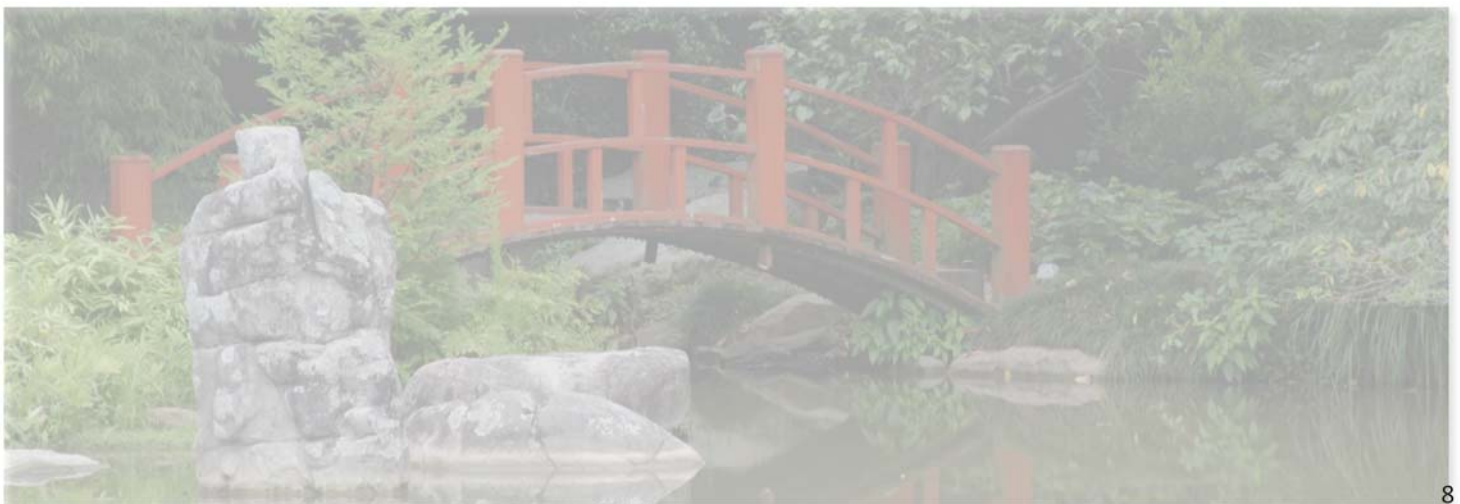
Find yourself once again at the gate. Reach to open it, walk through and find yourself on the outside of the garden once again. Shut the gate behind you and lock it.

Know that this place is yours and yours alone, and that now it is created, it is available to you for when you need a quiet place of solitude and refreshment.

Gently bring your awareness to the room, notice your breathing. Move your fingers and toes gently to bring movement back to your body. Gently roll onto your right side. Take a few breaths here. When you are ready, move to a sitting position and become ready to join the group.

Discussion

- Spiritual Development is a discipline that requires us to practice openness and availability.
- The challenge is to keep the being and doing in balance. We are not required to rush to earn spiritual brownie points.
- We gain more through learning to BE.
- We intentionally form habits that allow us to practice openness and availability, to carve time and space for receptivity to God's still, small voice.



Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting -

Challenge

Create for yourself a quiet place to practice silence and solitude.

This may look like:

- A prayer desk in the corner of your home study.
- A comfortable couch in a sunny corner of your bedroom.
- A chair in a crowded coffee shop (with your headphones in!)
- A place in your garden or a local park where you can stand still for a moment.

Aim to visit this place during your holidays regularly. Note that “regularly” may mean once a week.

Artefact:

You may choose to take a photo of your quiet place to share with the group, or prepare a description of your aims and purpose for this space.

The group shares stories from the challenge -

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the “talking stick”...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end.
- Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.



Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2006.

Page 4: There are two contemplative practices of fundamental importance in the Christian tradition: the practice of stillness (also called meditation, still prayer, contemplative prayer, etc.) and the practice of watchfulness or awareness. These contemplative skills are not imports from other religious traditions, and the Christian tradition has a lot to say about them.

Page 10: People who have travelled far along the contemplative path are often aware that the sense of separation from God is itself pasted up out of a mass of thoughts and feelings. When the mind comes into its own stillness and enters the silent land, the sense of separation goes. Union is seen to be the fundamental reality, and separateness a highly filtered mental perception. It has nothing whatever to do with the loss of one's ontological status as a creature of God, nothing to do with becoming an amorphous blob. Quite the opposite, it is the realization this side of death of the fundamental mystery of our existence as the creation of a loving God. "Of you my heart has spoken, 'seek His face'" (Psalm 27:8). "For God alone my soul in silence waits" (Psalm 62: 1,6).

1. In what way/s have you experienced the "silent land", when the mind comes into its own stillness?

2. To what extent do you agree that in this state, "union is seen to be the fundamental reality, and separateness a highly filtered mental perception"?

3. In what ways can you accept the "fundamental mystery of our existence as the creation of a loving God"?

Reading 2

Pastor William R. Grimbol, The Complete Idiot's Guide to Spirituality for Teens, Alpha Books, Indiana, USA, 2000. p 22-23.

Practice...Practice...Practice

When I was at St. Olaf College, I had an art teacher named Dorothy Divers. She taught the introductory course in drawing and painting. For the first eight weeks of the class, we drew bricks - big bricks and little bricks, and clusters of bricks.

We drew bricks in light; bricks in shadows; red, white, and gray bricks. By the end of eight weeks, I wanted to throw bricks.

Guess at who?

After eight weeks of learning perspective, shape, and form, Dorothy Divers unleashed us on the village of Northfield, to find and paint any building we wished. It was exhilarating to be freed from the brickyard. It was even more exciting to realize that my drawing and subsequent painting of a section of downtown was by far the best I had ever done. I remember being so proud showing it to the class, I hung it in my dorm room.

The daily discipline of drawing bricks had paid off, big time. I had indeed learned perspective. I was aware of dimensions, shadows, and the impact of light. I knew how to show depth and distance. I knew how to reveal texture and color.

Spirituality is a lot like drawing bricks. It is a basic discipline that requires you to take time each day...The discipline of spirituality is in making time for yourself, your soul, and your God. You can actually learn how to be a "time-creator." You do so by the choices you make and by choosing to stop and think, and feel and question. You do so by being disciplined in your daily devotion to developing a stronger spiritual side.

- 1. Identify an area of your life where daily effort has contributed to an overall development of consciousness and competence.**

- 2. What habit/s would you consider adopting as daily practice, in order to strengthen your spiritual muscles over time?**

3. Identify questions that you have about this area of spiritual development.

Reading 3

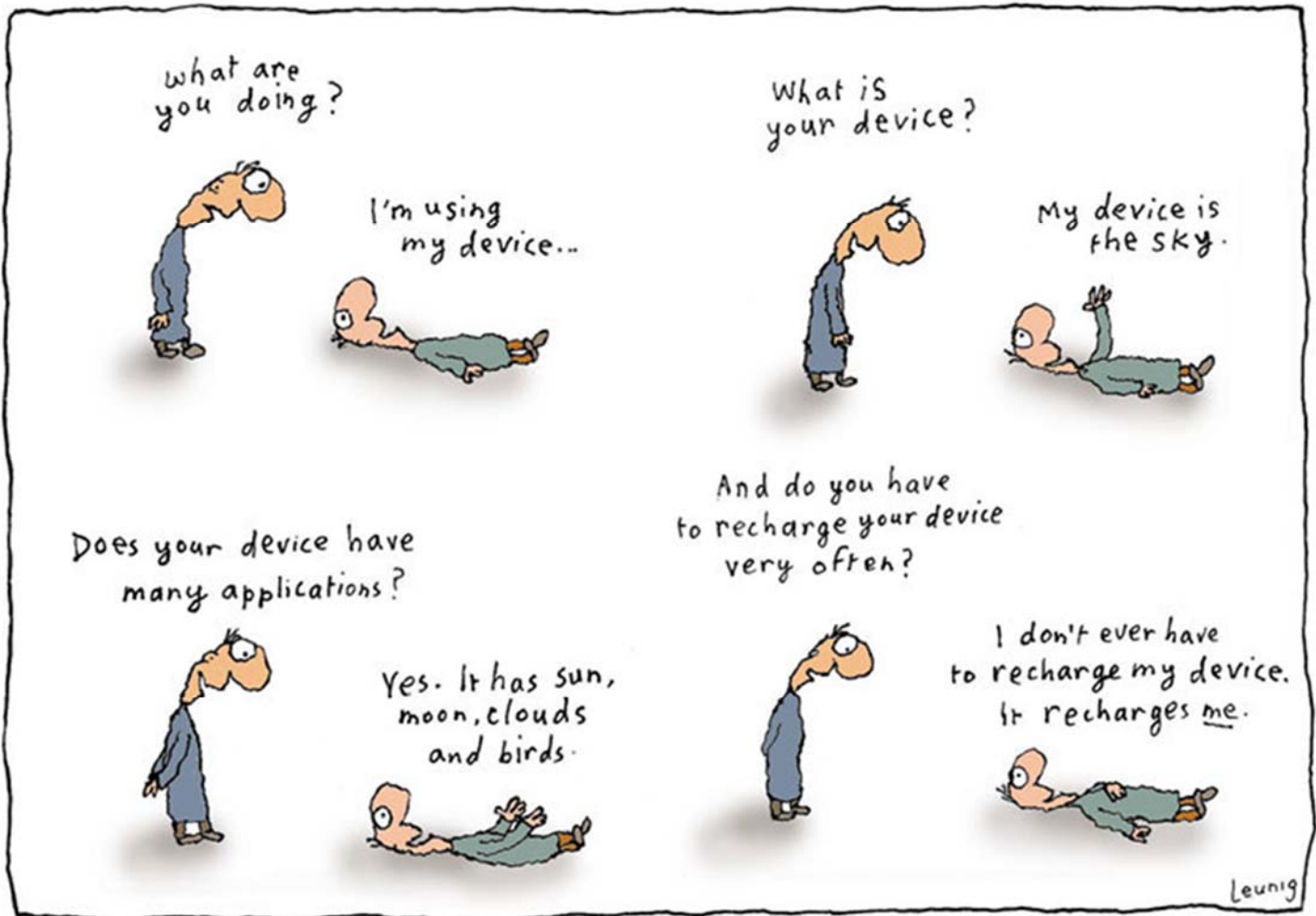


Image courtesy of Michael Leunig - <http://www.leunig.com.au/works/cartoons>

1. What "devices" recharge you?

2. Staying with Leunig's metaphor, what applications does your recharging "device" have?

3. In your opinion, is it all really, this simple?



Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that Spiritual Development benefits from consistent practice

Spiritual
Development is
like a muscle

becomes more flexible and stronger with consistent use.

benefits from discipline and routine

regular attention to the spiritual "muscles" means that in times of crisis, they are ready and provide strength.

a discipline which requires us to practice openness and availability prepares us for situations where spiritual strength is required.

Before the next meeting:

Challenge

- Write out your busiest day, timetabled lessons, appointments, meetings and unpaid work, home responsibilities, social commitments
- Highlight the times and places during which you experience silence and solitude.
- Highlight the available spaces for reflection.

Journal

There are many ways to pray. Consider these two approaches to making time for God:

- creating an entirely separate time and space for reflection and prayer
- Weaving reflection and prayer throughout your existing routine

Which days/times give you the opportunity to carve out a place for silence and solitude?

In what ways could you weave reflection and prayer into your existing routine?

Collect an Artefact for next session

- Write a list of your top five tips for prioritising silence and reflection.
- What are you prepared to try in the next few weeks to carve out some quiet space?

Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.



Habits Week 2

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

You will need:

- A place to meet where you can all be very comfortable.
 - Tea
 - Food to share
- Hopefully you find these sessions to be a welcome break from your normal routine.
 - Today, really make the most of this break in routine by resting up.
- Plan to meet somewhere comfortable, where you can really kick back and get settled. This means comfortable couches or at least two chairs each (one for your feet!)
- Take the first 20 minutes of this session resting from the day. Bring anything that will help speed up this process. If you are meeting early in the day, sit in the sun, make tea and breathe deeply.
 - If you meet in the afternoon, bring a bottle of wine to share, or again, make tea and share something to eat.
- Debrief a little and consciously switch off. Chat about topics that you find engaging and restful.

Discussion

- Taking time is a discipline heralded as central to the development of the spirit.
 - Time to rest, time to reflect, time to watch and wait.
- While this is anathema to the process of our modern life, it proves again and again to be a crucial part of learning about ourselves with God, and allowing growth to occur in our spirit.
 - You may manage to carve out a special time in your day for solitude and silence.
- Celtic spirituality offers all activities to God. Prayers accompany routine activities, and so spirituality becomes part of each ordinary day. Time is a gift, resting with God is a good way to use it.

Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting-

- Write out your busiest day, timetabled lessons, appointments, meetings and unpaid work, home responsibilities, social commitments
- Highlight the times and places during which you experience silence and solitude.
- Highlight the available spaces for reflection.

Artefact

- Write a list of your top five tips for prioritising silence and reflection.
- What are you prepared to try in the next few weeks to carve out some quiet space?

The group shares stories from the challenge -

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the “talking stick”...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end.
- Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.

Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today’s session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

Paula Gooder, *The Meaning is in the Waiting: The Spirit of Advent*, Canterbury Press Norwich, London, 2008, p2-3.

Imagine entering a room and finding a beautifully wrapped present on a table; attached to the present is a label that reads: “This present is for you but don’t open it now...wait.”

An instruction like this might evoke a wide range of emotions but probably the two most common would be a sense of indignation or frustration and/or a tingle of anticipation. Depending on who we are, we might feel just one emotion – entirely irritated or completely intrigued – but I, at least, would have a complex combination of the two: irritation tinged with anticipation or eagerness laced with frustration.

In reality, I wonder how many of us would obey the command to wait. Waiting is not something most of us do easily. Our frustrations at waiting begin at an early age and are hard to outgrow. When I tell my own children to wait, and see on their faces that familiar expression that borders on emotional agony, I recognize it, not so much because I remember feeling that way when I was their age – although I do – but because I still feel that way now and am less able to express it quite so openly.

Antipathy to waiting is exacerbated, if not encouraged, by the world in which we live. All around us we encounter, day after day, the encouragement not to wait but to have what we want now. Our credit-driven society urges us to abandon all thought of waiting and to buy now; so many adverts have as their underlying message 'why wait?' Improvements in communication erode the notion of waiting further: we are told that people feel aggrieved if they have to wait for more than 24 hours to receive a reply from an email and mobile phones help us to be available even when we are out. Waiting is, increasingly, a strange notion. We have become accustomed to immediacy and swift action.

1. Identify three benefits of waiting for something special.

2. To what extent do you agree that human spirituality is designed for waiting and watching?

3. What have you learned about waiting? What have you had to wait for? Was it worth the wait?



Kneeling

R. S. Thomas

Moments of great calm,
Kneeling before an altar
Of wood in a stone church
In summer, waiting for the God
To speak; the air a staircase
For silence; the sun's light
Ringing me, as though I acted
A great role. And the audiences
Still; all that close throng
Of spirits waiting, as I,
For the message.
Prompt me, God;
But not yet. When I speak,
Though it be you who speak
Through me, something is lost.



1. What does Thomas mean when he writes that “the meaning is in the waiting”?

2. Describe a time when you have appreciated waiting.

3. What questions do you have about the nature of waiting on God? What are you waiting for now?

Reading 3

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 2005, p 65-66 (paraphrased)

Our culture accepts that sleep deprivation and running on empty are normal. Living full throttle is expected. The ticking of the second hand defines our pace. And God's rhythms of rest and work give way to a nearly permanent state of exhaustion and impending burnout. You don't need to look far to see how workaholicism is compromising our health as well as our relationships. Lack of adequate rest can ruin our families, damage our souls, even kill us.

When we burn the candle at both ends we

- Lose sight of what we enjoy in our work
- Find even the things we enjoy doing become a chore
- Fail to give people the gift of our attention and presence
- Impair our ability to hear God's voice and discern his movement in our lives
- Become obsessive about the to-do list
- Lose touch with the human limits that are meant to keep us in touch with God.

Clearly, we are not made to work 24/7. We have limits. There is a finiteness to our time and energy. And to live as though there isn't is destructive as well as delusional. It can be hard to tell the truth about our human capacity and limits because few of us want to accept the losses that come with this truth. We can't say yes to everything. We can't go everywhere and see everyone. We can't have it all. We aren't dispensable. We are finite beings who need rest. And that is not a bad thing. It is a Godlike thing.

We are created in God's image. God works then rests. When we rest we honor the way God made us. Rest can be a spiritual act – a truly human act of submission to and dependence on God who watches over all things as we rest.

What is your alternative to work? Is it rest, or is it a different kind of work: work around the house or in the yard? Is doing finances, cleaning a closet or working out? Can you ever stop producing and let down? Honestly, where does rest fit in? Rest is a radical thing in our day and age. It reminds us that we are human beings, not human doings. We are meant to live sane lives that partake of a deep and playful holy leisure. There is enough time in each day for all that God requires of us. And part of what God requires is rest. So settle in and breathe deeply of the gift of rest.

1. How do you respond to this radical call to deliberately partake of rest? Is this something that you can envisage taking shape in your day, or does it fall in the realms of fantasy?



2. Envisage a rested version of yourself. What would you like about that person?

3. Ahlberg Calhoun encourages the reader to “rest and be”. She states that we are designed for deep rest. What questions do you have about this idea?

Spiritual development requires us to watch and wait. Resting is a key skill.

Without rest, our attempts at quietness and reflection can turn into sleep

We are designed as beings that need regular restoration - sleep, quiet, and time apart

Our focus is often on doing.

Satisfaction in merely “being” is a core skill for those who wish to develop spiritually.



Before the next meeting:

Challenge

You have a place to go for rest and reflection.

Aim to use that place several times between this meeting and the next.

Ensure that you have time to yourself to enjoy solitude and rest.

- Listen if you have the energy.
- Watch if you are up to it.
- Wait if you can.
- But rest, and be nurtured in the silence and solitude.

If you wish to pray, consider keeping it short and repetitive. If your mind wanders, merely bring it back to rest with God and repeat your prayer over again.

Journal

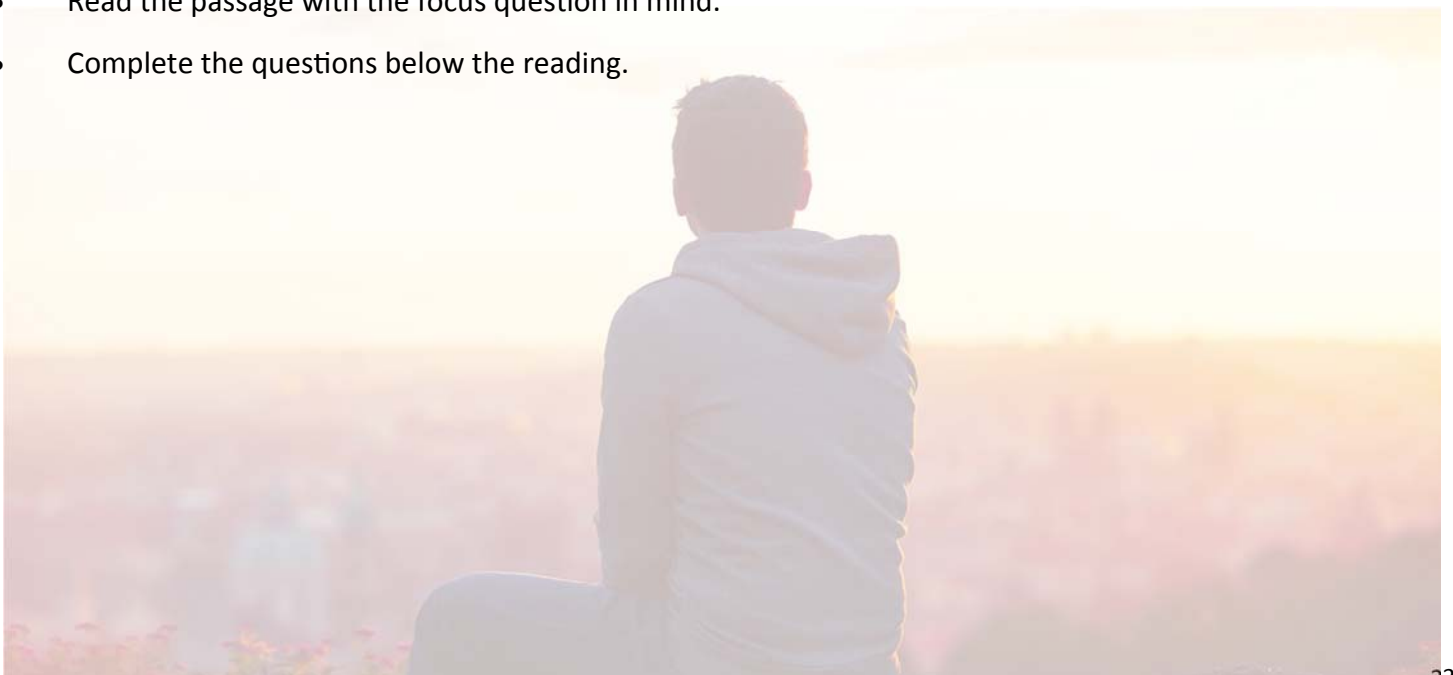
- Describe those times in your life when you have been really alone.
- Did you seek that solitude? Was it forced upon you?
- How did you react?
- How does solitude appeal to you at present?

Collect an Artefact for next session

- Find an item that symbolises “solitude” as you have experienced it.
- E.g., This may be photograph of a place where you experienced solitude, or an image of a lonely place, a stone from a walk you took by yourself.

Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.



Habits Week 3

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity

You will need

- Sketch paper
- Pencils or fine black pens.



- If you needed to go away for a time of solitude, and budget, responsibilities and work were no impediment, where would you go?
- Sketch or write your ideal place of solitude. Spend 5 minutes filling out the details.
 - Share your ideal place with the other group members.
 - Discuss the similarities and differences between your images.

Discussion

- Many spiritual traditions use aloneness and separation as a tool to refine our sensitivity to spiritual matters.
- Our modern lifestyles surround us with stimulus 24/7, and so it is easy to avoid confronting deep, troubling issues.
 - It is also easy to miss moments of quiet joy and contentment.
- It is possible to practice time without stimulus as a means of making space for the quiet prompting of the Spirit.



Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting -

You have a place to go for rest and reflection.

Aim to use that place several times between this meeting and the next.

Ensure that you have time to yourself to enjoy solitude and rest.

- Listen if you have the energy.
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- Wait if you can.
- But rest, and be nurtured in the silence and solitude.

If you wish to pray, consider keeping it short and repetitive. If your mind wanders, merely bring it back to rest with God and repeat your prayer over again.

Artefact:

- Find an item that symbolises “solitude” as you have experienced it.
- E.g., This may be photograph of a place where you experienced solitude, or an image of a lonely place, a stone from a walk you took by yourself.

The group shares stories from the challenge -

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Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

Mark 1: 32-39

32. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.
33. And the whole city was gathered around the door.
34. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.
35. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.
36. And Simon and his companions hunted for him.
37. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."
38. He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."
39. And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Henri Nouwen, Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1974, p 13-15

In the middle of sentences loaded with action – healing suffering people, casting out devils, responding to impatient disciples, travelling from town to town and preaching from synagogue to synagogue – we find these quiet words: "In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there." In the centre of breathless activities we hear a restful breathing. Surrounded by hours of moving we find a moment of quiet stillness. In the heart of much involvement there are words of withdrawal. In the midst of action there is contemplation. And after much togetherness there is solitude. The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have the sense that the secret of Jesus' ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn.

In the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God's will and not his own; to speak God's words and not his own; to do God's work and not his own...Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our lives are in danger. Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure. Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our actions quickly become empty gestures. The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention.

1. This passage from St Mark's gospel is almost a "day-in-the-life" of Jesus. Describe the role of solitude in that day.

2. Describe two insights you gained from this passage.

3. Describe the way you would use solitude as a means of spiritual development.



Reading 2 - Mark 1: 32-39

32. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.
33. And the whole city was gathered around the door.
34. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.
35. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.
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39. And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Our Life in Solitude

To live a Christian Life means to live in the world without being of it. It is in solitude that this inner freedom can grow. Jesus went to a lonely place to pray, that is, to grow in the awareness that all the power he had was given to him; that all the words he spoke came from his Father; and that all the works he did were not really his but the works of the One who had sent him. In the lonely place Jesus was made free to fail.

A life without a lonely place, that is a life without a quiet center, easily becomes destructive. When we cling to the results of our actions as our only way of self-identification, then we become possessive and defensive and tend to look at our fellow human beings more as enemies to be kept at a distance than as friends with whom we share the gifts of life.

In solitude we can slowly unmask the illusion of our possessiveness and discover in the centre of our own self that we are not what we can conquer, but what is given to us. In solitude we can listen to the voice of him who spoke to us before we could speak a word, who healed us before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could free others, and who loved us long before we could give love to anyone. It is in this solitude that we discover that being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the result of our efforts. In solitude we discover that our life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared.

1. Identify three ideas that resonate with you and your own spiritual journey.

2. What insights about the nature of spirituality have you gained?

3. Frame a question from something that puzzles you about the idea of solitude as an essential part of our human life.

2. What insights about the nature of spirituality have you gained?

3. Frame a question from something that puzzles you about the idea of solitude as an essential part of our human life.

Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that Spiritual Development thrives on solitude.

Solitude and
silence are the
friends of
spiritual
development

People who have experienced the discipline of silent retreats say this: the first day is for sleeping, the second and third are spent reading and then the real work begins.

When there's nothing left to engage us, no one left to distract us, we must confront ourselves – the reality of what it is to be us.

In the context of spiritual discipline, solitude becomes a way to confront ourselves in relationship with a passionate Creator.

It is only through consistently seeking solitude that we will become comfortable with the things from which we constantly seek distraction.

Before the next meeting:

Challenge

- Schedule a walk in solitude this week. As you walk, become aware of your inner monologue. Many of us are conscious that we have a voice occasionally chatting – some have done the work and consciously made the voice a friendly and constructive one. The practical result of this characteristic of our mind is that most of us are busily always listening. Even in silence and solitude, we tune in to our inner monologue.
- Do you recognise this phenomenon?
- What are the words of your inner monologue when you tune in? What words does it use when you are not paying attention?

Journal

- Describe silence.
- Remember a time when you were conscious of silence.
- Describe its impact on you.
- How would you go about creating silence in your life?

Collect an Artefact for next session

- Compose a photograph on the theme:
“My relationship with solitude”



Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.



Habits Week 4

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. Actions for Next Meeting

Gathering activity



<http://endofthegame.net/2011/09/23/mandalas/>

Consider the work these Tibetan Monks have put into creating this mandala. Having consecrated the site, they work for days placing coloured sand in intricate patterns while chanting. The mandala is swept up and the sand tipped into flowing water to symbolise and celebrate the impermanence of life.

Be inspired by the beauty, intricacy and impermanence of a sand mandala. Spend the first 10 minutes of today's meeting in silence and colour the image below.

You will need:

good coloured pencils



Discussion

It is possible to create silence even in the busiest day. We need to look for the opportunity to experience silence and practice the art of switching off our inner monologues. Kids know how to do this instinctively – one way is to focus on a task that will occupy your hands while your mind is free from difficult decisions.

Consider how the process of creating mandalas, or colouring in an image can be considered useful. How is it useful? How does it contribute to our wellbeing or that of the artists? Can all things be useful just by being that which they are created to be?

As Henri Nouwen says: “In prayer and meditation, we can live and be; we can bear or not bear fruit, and we can grow old freely, without being preoccupied with our usefulness. Faithfulness in prayer is its own reward, with or without tangible results.”

Henri Nouwen, Spiritual Formation, SPCK, London, 2011. P 33

Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting -

- Schedule a walk in solitude this week. As you walk, become aware of your inner monologue. Many of us are conscious that we have a voice occasionally chatting – some have done the work and consciously made the voice a friendly and constructive one. The practical result of this characteristic of our mind is that most of us are busily always listening. Even in silence and solitude, we tune in to our inner monologue.
- Do you recognise this phenomenon?
- What are the words of your inner monologue when you tune in? What words does it use when you are not paying attention?

Artefact:

- Compose a photograph on the theme: “My relationship with solitude.”

The group shares stories from the challenge -

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the “talking stick”...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end.
- Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.

Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

Reading 1

Martin Laird, *Into The Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London, 2006, pp 21-22

THE INTERIOR VIDEO

The woman could blow like silk across the stage or drive like a storm through the corps de ballet.

To watch this world-class ballerina was to behold light and grace in human form.

But if you would ask her about her own experience as source of beauty and inspiration you would see only a vacant stare of shocked disbelief.

She would speak instead of an obsessive and torturously perfectionist mind that left her grinding her teeth.

She described her inner state as a series of internal videos that constantly played and that she constantly watched.

Her attention was routinely stolen by them.

What were these videos that played in her head?

Usually something about how she wasn't quite up to standard - not just regarding ballet but any aspect of her life.

This accompanied another series of videos concerning her intense anger.

The anger registered in her body as a clenched jaw and a physique completely free of any suggestion of fat.

Deeper than the anger, though, was the fear: fear of what the critics might say of her dancing, fear that her husband might wake up one day and decide to leave her, fear of being alone.

There were a lot of videos about pain. The most debilitating concerned some very old pain from childhood.

One day her mother walked into her bedroom as she sat looking at herself in the mirror. The mother said to her, "I hope you don't think you're beautiful."

She was indeed beautiful. In every season of life-as a young girl, an adolescent, a young adult, a mature woman-she was beautiful.

But this beauty became a gag knotted behind her: for she believed she was ugly.

When as a teenager she won a highly prized scholarship to study ballet, her mother said, "Why would they give you that? Everybody knows you've got two left feet."

And so, although she has danced to great acclaim all over the world, she believes she's a klutz with two left feet.

All of this plays in her head. Even if she isn't watching the video and pressing rewind to watch it again, and then again, and yet again, the video still plays in the background, like that dirge music in malls and lifts.

This video was the cage that kept her running in tight circles.

She did find solace. She took long walks out on the Yorkshire moors.

If she walked long enough, her roiling mind would begin to settle.

The expanse of heather was scented balm that soothed the throbbing anger, fear, and pain.

She described how on one occasion her anxiety began to drop like layers of scarves.

Suddenly she was aware of being immersed in a sacred presence that upheld her and everything.

While this experience out on the moors happened only once, it proved a real turning point in her life and drew her into the way of prayer.

She knew from her own experience that there was something in her that was deeper than her pain and anxiety and that when the chaos of the mind was quieted, the sense of anguish gave way to a sense of divine presence.

1. What will you remember about this story?

2. Describe two aspects of this dancer's story that inspire you.

3. Why do you think realisations like this happen in moments of silence and solitude?

Reading 2



R. S. Thomas

"The Moor."

It was like church to me.

I entered it on soft foot,

Breath held like a cap in the hand.

It was quiet.

What God was there made himself felt,

Not listened to, in clean colours

That brought a moistening of the eye,

In movement of the wind over grass.

There were no prayers said. But stillness

Of the heart's passions - that was praise

Enough; and the mind's cession

Of its kingdom. I walked on,

Simple and poor, while the air crumbled

And broke on me generously as bread.

1. In what ways was the moor like a church to Thomas?

2. What are two insights you note about the nature of spirituality as R.S. Thomas experiences it?

3. Describe a place where you might feel like this.

Prayer by Michael Leunig

Dear God,

We pray for another way of being:
another way of knowing.

Across the difficult terrain of our existence
we have attempted to build a highway
and in so doing have lost our footpath.

God lead us to our footpath:

Lead us there where in simplicity
we may move at the speed of natural creatures
and feel the earth's love beneath our feet.

Lead us there where step-by-step we may feel
the movement of creation in our hearts.

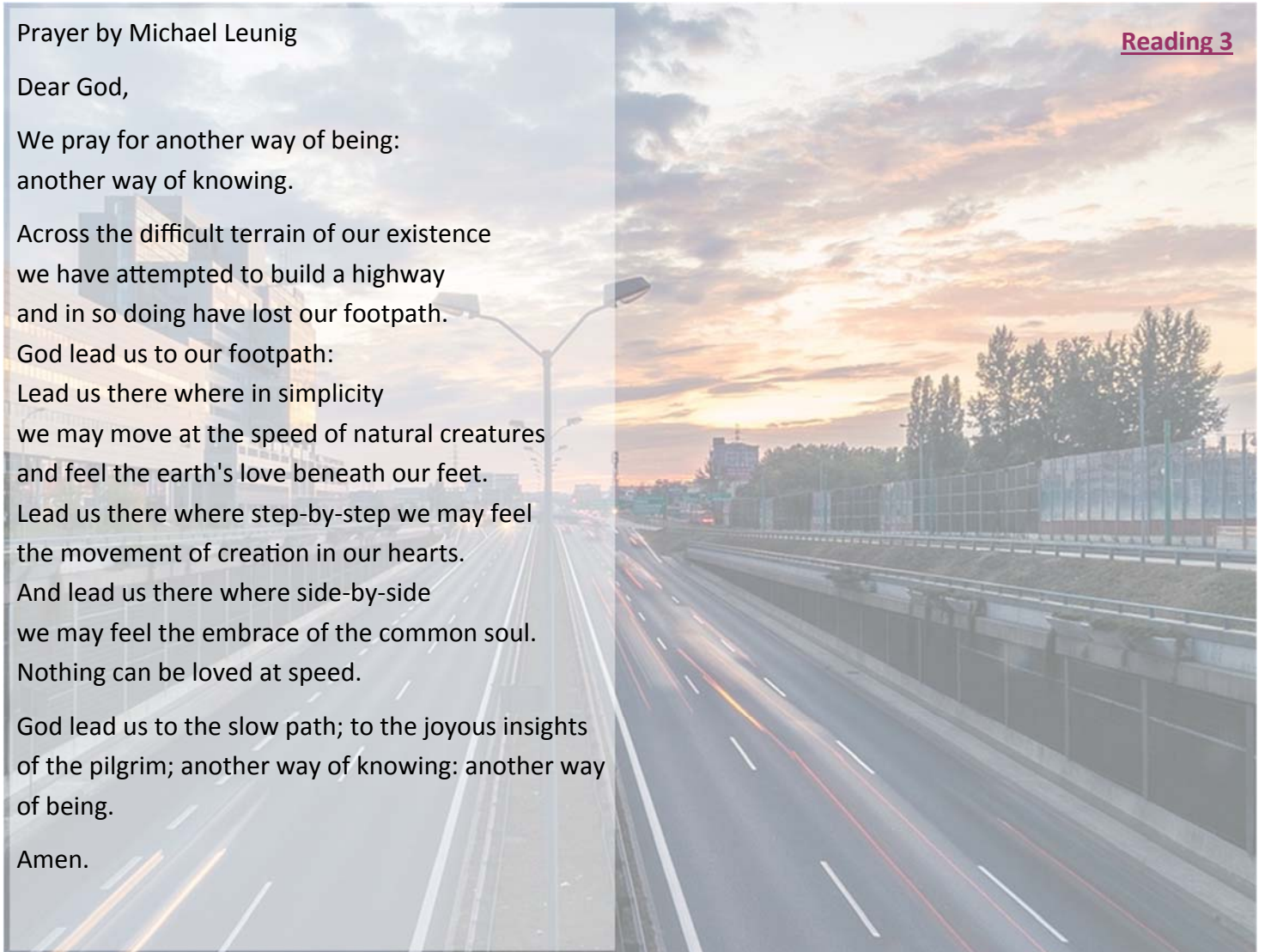
And lead us there where side-by-side
we may feel the embrace of the common soul.

Nothing can be loved at speed.

God lead us to the slow path; to the joyous insights
of the pilgrim; another way of knowing: another way
of being.

Amen.

Reading 3



1. In what ways have you “attempted to build a highway” across your life?

2. What insights about the nature of human existence are contained in this prayer?

3. In what ways do you agree that we need to live our life at a slower speed?

Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that Spiritual Development involves switching off from connectedness and engaging in silence with the possibility of the divine

God help us to live slowly

To move simply:

To look softly

To allow emptiness

To let the heart create for us

Amen

By Michael Leunig

Write a few more lines to the prayer:

God help us to live slowly:

To speak _____

To love _____

To engage _____

To create _____

To be _____

Before the next meeting:

Challenge

- Be open to the experience of God in the everyday experience. In *About Time*, (Richard Curtis, 2013, Working Title Films) the hero had the ability to travel in time within his own life, to live whole days again. Eventually, he rarely chose to do this, as he had learned to look for the sweetness of life the first time around.
- Imagine you are searching for the sweetness in life, for the “thin place” where you meet God in people, landscape, moments. Tune your vision and your heart to the possibility that God is making these things available to you, and that all you have to do is be aware, to watch and listen, to be happy to see.
- Record some of these insights on film, or in your journal.

Journal

- Define transcendence.
- Recall a time when you experienced transcendence, or were aware of the “thin place” between heaven and earth.
- Identify what made you feel close to the divine in that situation, what elements worked together to bring you a special experience.

Collect an Artefact for next session

- Find an image that signifies for you, the idea of God’s space and humanity’s space overlapping or intersecting.

Choose a reading from the material from next week and gather your ideas

- Read the passage with the focus question in mind.
- Complete the questions below the reading.



Habits Week 5

Order of activities for the meeting

1. Gathering activity
2. Discuss your artefacts
3. Discuss what you learn from the Readings
4. Conclusion
5. What next?

Gathering activity

You will need:

Bowls – one each

Towels - one each

Soap

Music to wash by: Michael Card's "The Basin and Towel", can be found at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsSLiatlTQ>

Read together John 13: 1-17

1. Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
2. ...
3. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,
4. got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.
5. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with a towel that was tied around him.
6. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
7. Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."
8. Peter said to him "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."
9. Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"
10. Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean..."
11. ...
12. After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"
13. You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right for that is what I am.
14. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

15. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.
16. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.
17. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

In the Anglican community we remember the humility of Jesus, and his message of community and communion, when we wash each other's feet on Maundy Thursday as part of the Easter story. The disciples were puzzled (and embarrassed!) when they saw Jesus take the role of the lowest among them in order to wash the dust from their feet. Through taking the role of a servant, Jesus transformed the simple ritual into a blessing for his companions on the journey.

Acknowledge that you have been both teacher and student for each other and offer to wash each other's feet as a symbol of your companionship on the journey along the dusty road of spiritual discernment.

Discussion

You have travelled quite a road this past year, and together explored ways towards growing spiritual development. Recognise that you have been together in this process, and acknowledge what you have given and received from each other on the way....be thankful.

Discuss the artefacts

Remember the challenge you completed prior to meeting-

Challenge

- Be open to the experience of God in the everyday experience. In *About Time*, (Richard Curtis, 2013, Working Title Films) the hero had the ability to travel in time within his own life, to live whole days again. Eventually, he rarely chose to do this, as he had learned to look for the sweetness of life the first time around.
- Imagine you are searching for the sweetness in life, for the “thin place” where you meet God in people, landscape, moments. Tune your vision and your heart to the possibility that God is making these things available to you, and that all you have to do is be aware, to watch and listen, to be happy to see.
- Record some of these insights on film, or in your journal.

Artefact:

Find an image that signifies for you, the idea of God's space and humanity's space overlapping or intersecting.

The group shares stories from the challenge-

- Each participant has the opportunity to show their artefact and tell their story.
- While someone is speaking, their artefact is the “talking stick”...this allows the speaker uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- Agree beforehand how much time each person has and allow time for comments and questions at the end. Ensure that each participant has a chance to share.

Readings and discussion

As part of your preparation for today's session, you will have read and considered one or more of the following stimulus materials.

Contribute to a group discussion on the ideas.

Identify the reading you chose and discuss the insights you gained.

The Bright Field

By R. S. Thomas

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

Reading 1

1. Describe the impressions left by this poem.

2. To what extent is this concept important to you?

3. Describe a moment of “turning aside” in your life.

Reading 2

Paula Gooder, Everyday God: the Spirit of the Ordinary, Canterbury Press Norwich, London, 2012, pp 124-127

Glimpsing Glory

It would feel wrong to leave our exploration of ordinary living without looking at what glimpses of glory in our everyday life might be like. What was it that Moses encountered when he turned aside? ... What is the beam of sunlight, the brightness, which is the eternity that awaits you? What is it that transforms us in the very midst of our ordinary living into people able to live out God’s extraordinary calling? How do we know when we have had a glimpse of glory? The short answer to all of these questions is that when you have seen it, really seen it, you will know and you will know without a shadow of a doubt.

Of course, so often we don’t really see. We catch a glimmer, the tiniest hint, and by the time we have turned our heads, or managed to slow down enough to register what we have seen, it is gone, leaving in its wake the merest suggestion that there might have lain the treasure in the field...

My natural reaction whenever I get a glimpse of God is to say “Why can’t it be like this all the time?”, and then to strive to return to that fleeting moment for more of the same. ... This is to miss the point of such an experience. It is entirely natural once we have caught a glimpse of God to stay there yearning for its return but the point of all these experiences is that they are, to a greater or lesser extent, glimpses. They need no structures permanent or otherwise built around them, because after them we are sent onwards, down the mountain and back to our everyday lives. Or if we use R.S. Thomas’s image of the sun illuminating a field, the very last thing we are meant to do is to hang around that field waiting for the sun to come back out again, or to build an elaborate structure that will allow the sun’s rays to be particularly magnified the next time they appear. Instead we are to be ready to recognize the glimpse for what it is when we see it, to drink it in with all that we have, to savour it and then to go on living our normal lives; lives that now will be both the same as ever and transformed utterly by what we have seen and experienced.

1. In your opinion and experience, what is the purpose of moments of transcendence?

2. Describe two ideas from Paula Gooder's passage that resonate with you.

3. Why do we strive to recreate the moments of brightness?

Reading 3

Paula Gooder, Everyday God: the Spirit of the Ordinary, Canterbury Press Norwich, London, 2012, p 134-135.

Ordinariness lies right at the heart of our Christian faith. The God, whom we worship, is truly an everyday God who time and time again breaks out of the gilded palaces we create for him and meets us instead in our everyday lives. This God cares more about people than about grandeur. He is more concerned with justice than fine worship. This God is more likely to be found with mud and dust, than with gold and jewels. This God yearns to give us everything we need to thrive. This God reveals his glory both with dramatic fire, thunder and lightning and in the sound of sheer silence...

We are most likely to encounter this God in ordinariness, in our everyday lives and in the people that we meet day by day. So often we miss glimpses of God's glory not because they are not there but simply because we fail to notice them. We know that God is not to be found in this kind of situation or with that kind of person, and so we fail to look, and go on our way unchanged....We need to be alert to the possibility that this event or that encounter might just provide us with a glimpse of glory. We need to become people who, like R.S. Thomas can recognize that moment which is for us the pearl of great price or treasure in the field, and to turn aside, and in doing so to encounter the eternity that awaits us.

Conclusion

You may have touched on these points through your discussion. Conclude your time together by revising the idea that Spiritual Development involves appreciating the ordinary, looking for the chance to turn aside and rest with wonder.

Our ordinary God is present and available. Our ordinary lives can develop awareness and watchfulness for moments of transcendence.

Many of us have experienced the “thin place” – the embrace of temporal and eternal - when enjoying music, or experiencing the overwhelming beauty of nature, or in a moment of quietness.

Often these moments happen when we least expect them and are completely unprepared for the wonder and beauty of being brought close to the divine.

As a result, we fail to capture them, to make records of their impact on us. Perhaps it is better to leave well enough alone, to remember the sweetness of being in that place at that time without straining to recreate the events.

We learn to appreciate fleeting moments of wonder and glimpses of eternity, to be changed by them and inspired to be the best version of ourselves.



Before the next meeting:

Challenge

- Continue to weave the disciplines of spiritual development through your life.
- Identify the routines that allow you to be watchful and expectant – anticipating the sweetness that God promises.
- Practice those disciplines that suit you.
- Commit to a retreat with your fellow travellers in the New Year.

Journal

- Reflect on the year past. In what ways have you changed in your understanding of yourself and of God?
- How would you characterise your journey through the Spiritual Development Programme?
- What things/people/activities will you take with you on the forward journey, from this place into the future?



