

V III. BOOKLET RESOURCES

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RESOURCE MATERIALS FOR SELF AND FOR USE BY RETREATANTS

On the following pages is a collection of articles, presentations, monographs, etc., which we have found to be helpful. We have maintained the same wide margin for your convenience in making notes.

In most instances it is helpful to the retreatants to provide them with selected readings for them to access on the spot and/or take with them when they return home.

Suggestions are welcome regarding material you feel should be in future editions of this handbook.

BURNOUT

A hazard of community life
by Robert Sabath

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Burn-out. The word has been around for a long time. It has become such a jargon phrase that we easily forget the vivid imagery that called it forth. The word suggests a waning vitality, a fire going out. At worst, it denotes what is left over at the end: a cold vestige of something that once was aflame. Burned-out buildings are not an uncommon sight in our neighborhood. A charred, gutted, empty shell of what was once a building thriving with life is an ever-present reminder of burn-out's destructive reality.

Many recent articles and books have studied the phenomenon. All of them conclude that burn-out comes with the task of helping people. One writer humorously thinks that a mandatory caution should be written into every recruitment program for the helping professions: "Warning: Helping people can be extremely hazardous to your physical and mental health." Jesuit writer Alfred Kramer laments that "brevity" seems to be the one common characteristic of most forms of social ministry in direct contact with the poor and their problems. "Why is it," he asks, "that activities in Jesuit social ministry seem to have the longevity of a bomb squad?"

Burn-out cannot develop without dedication to high ideals. It has its roots in the unrealistic enthusiasm

of determined idealists who have unlimited commitment to whatever they undertake. Burn-out-prone people are the caring ones among us who have a sense of mission and are especially vulnerable to the excessive demands that are made on them. They cannot compromise or admit defeat, but bring their habitual dedication to whatever thankless situation they encounter.

Burn-out does not necessarily come from overwork, as may commonly be supposed. In fact, workaholics are not generally the burnout types. Rather, burn-out begins with the disconfirmation of great expectations. Perhaps the most helpful, popularly written book on the subject is by psychoanalyst Herbert Freudenberger. Burn-Out: The High Cost of High Achievement describes burn-out as "a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward."

Other recent studies confirm that the discrepancy between expectation and reality is the central cause of burn-out. It is a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose that comes from excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation. Another recent book by psychologist Jerry Edewich understands burn-out as "stages of disillusionment that come from a revolution of unfulfilled expectations."

Such conclusions about the context and causes of burn-out make it easy to understand why renewal communities often can be breeding grounds for burn-

out. Communities call for high expectations and grow out of the "unrealistic" vision of God's kingdom. They attract determined and dedicated people who are willing to pay the price to see that vision become a reality. Communities also qualify for classification under the hazard-prone occupation of "helping professions." Many find themselves juggling intensive pastoral ministry with demanding involvements with the poor or with various social causes. The stage is set for burn-out.

Our expectations are almost never met — at least not in the way and timing that we desire. Conflict develops between people. The healing and reconciliation that we thought would happen is slow in coming. People we thought were here to stay decide to leave, breaking long patterns of friendship. We are hurt when our ideals for certain aspects of community life seem so imperfectly embodied. We struggle together for five years, or for 10, and wonder, "Is this all we have to show for it?" The vision that called the community together seems lost in all the energy that just goes into the maintenance of our lives. Even in the midst of growing and successful ministries, we can lose heart. We work for racial reconciliation in poor neighborhoods, but still we misunderstand. The vision we hold of a world at peace seems so distant, and even God's people often seem hardened to this word.

Leaders of renewal communities find themselves in a particularly stressful role. Experimentation with new

roles of leadership necessarily involves much trial and error. Our early growing pains to exercise pastoral leadership are often met with resistance and sometimes with open hostility. Many of us now for the first time, experience the projected anger of others as we seek to enter deeply into their lives. Raymond Fritz and Lawrence Cada describe the failures and tentative conclusions that are an inevitable part of renewal communities: "The revitalization processes imply that only a small number of the many community experiments that are tried will eventually be selected out to be incorporated into the transformed community structure. Errors will be much more prevalent than successes. The ability actively to commit oneself with great hope to social experiments aimed at improving the community must be tempered with an awareness of each experiment's low likelihood of success."

If renewal communities are to have any staying power, it is important that they learn to understand the dynamics that lead to burn-out and to recognize some of its symptoms. Only in this way can individuals learn to redirect it before it reaches the chronic phase where serious work and life crises fully erupt.

Recently I was working at my desk at the Sojourners office, feeling exhausted and unable to concentrate. I turned to a collected volume of Thomas Merton's poetry that had just arrived. As I leafed through the book, my eyes unexpectedly fell upon a poem entitled, "Whether There is Enjoyment in

Bitterness.¹ It was a poem about burn-out! There was something in me that took great delight and comfort in knowing that Merton too knew burn-out, and that it could strike even the most faithful of God's people. I have not seen the inner spiritual dynamic of burn-out anywhere better expressed than in his words:

"This afternoon, let me
Be a sad person. Am I not
Permitted (like other men)
To be sick of myself?

"Am I not allowed to be hollow,
Or fall in the hole
Or break my bones (within me)
In the trap set by my own
Lie to myself? O my friend,
I too must sin and sin

"I too must hurt other people and
(Since I am no exception)
I must be hated by them

"Do not forbid me, therefore,
To taste the same bitter poison,
And drink the gall that love
(Love most of all) so easily becomes.

"Do not forbid me (once again) to be
Angry, bitter, disillusioned,
Wishing I could die.

"While life and death
Are killing one another in my flesh,
Leave me in peace, I can enjoy,
Even as other men, this agony.

¹ From The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton © 1957 by the Abbey of Gethemani, Inc. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

"Only (whoever you may be)
Pray for my soul. Speak my name
To Him, for in my bitterness
I hardly speak to Him: and He
While He is busy killing me
Refuses to listen."

Here in Merton's poem were all the classic symptoms and causes of an advanced case of burn-out. His burn-out was caused by disillusionment in the results of his ministry; in his attempts to love others, he hurt them and was hated by them. He became alienated from his true self, angry, bitter, disillusioned, withdrawn from his friends, angry at God, and unable to pray.

Burn-out is not always so readily apparent. It is a process that happens slowly and often goes unnoticed in its early stages. Almost everyone experiences the early stages of burn-out: physical and emotional exhaustion; greater impatience and irritability; disorientation at work, including limited concentration, forgetfulness, and impaired judgment; withdrawal from friendships; psychosomatic complaints of headaches, backaches, or lingering colds. The severity and duration of these indicators are minimal in the early stages of burn-out. But as burn-out progresses, these symptoms become more stable and tougher to get rid of.

In its most advanced stage, burn-out takes the form of apathy and pronounced emotional detachment. In addition to chronic physical fatigue, spiritual and emotional exhaustion set in. The cynicism

and withdrawal that develop are less a poised distancing than a kind of numbness and deadness. The desire to help gradually erodes; people bore you; causes seem trivial. Where once meetings engaged your full attention, you now sit silently, wishing you could get away. This discouragement is a self-protective device to ward off the pain of feeling let down by people and situations.

Of all the stages of burn-out, this last is the hardest from which to bounce back. It is the most deep-seated, takes the longest to reach, and lasts the longest. It stems from a decision reached over a period of time and reinforced by one's peers to stop caring.

So what can be done about burn-out? Just as overwork does not necessarily cause burn-out, so rest does not necessarily cure it. Recent studies show that for some people, burn-out cannot be prevented, but it can be turned into a source of creative energy.

Ignatius, the 16th-century founder of the Jesuits, in his Spiritual Exercises, describes many of the inner dynamics of burn-out as "spiritual desolation." Ignatius' insights about this can help us to learn to cope with burn-out.

Ignatius says first that "we should not try to change a previous decision or come to a new decision. At a time of desolation, we hold fast to the decision which guided us during the time before the desolation came on us." Burn-out is a time when we may be tempted to leave community or change a basic life

decision. While it may be helpful to change jobs or roles, this is not the time to consider whether to leave the community. When the intensity of burn-out passes we will have the emotional clarity to evaluate that kind of decision.

Second, Ignatius pleads with us to let "patience mark even the efforts we undertake to work against the desolation which affects us." The burn-out personality thrives on intensity and brings to the chosen remedy the same personality traits and behavior patterns that led to burn-out in the first place. The cure that is undertaken for pleasure or relief — whether a retreat, a new job, a playful hobby — soon becomes governed by the same burn-out-producing work ethic. It is important to learn how to relax, to keep a time perspective, and to be free from expectations of immediate results.

Third, Ignatius advocates intensifying our prayer and making a closer examination of ourselves and our life of faith. People who burn out seldom take time out to be alone. It is imperative to seek out extended time to pray and sort through all the compacted experiences that led to burn-out. Self-knowledge is essential if we are to recover. In every case of burn-out, there is an element of blindness. We become separated from our true inner self, and suppress our spontaneous feelings, especially our negative ones. The secret to recapturing energy is listening to our real feelings, needs, and desires.

While a foundational principle of all community is

Jesus' teaching that we must lose our life to find it, "losing" our life does not mean being out of touch with our feelings and needs. Jesus knew his true wants and in Gethsemane could say, "Father, remove this cup from me." This self-knowledge was crucial before he could with integrity say, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." We are not to let our own needs determine our actions, but neither are we to act without knowing our deepest feelings and wants. Burn-out can come through refusing to admit who we are and to meet our own legitimate needs. We cannot forget that we are human beings with limitations. There is a fine line between dedication and over dedication; if it is crossed, burn-out, and not the renewed life that comes from "losing our life," will result.

Fourth, Ignatius recommends that a confessional closeness be developed with a trusted person so that our "secret temptations," and actions can be brought into the light of day. Just as distancing can intensify burn-out, closeness can help overcome it. In one way or another, nearly all burn-outs are loners who find it difficult to reveal themselves, even within community. Precisely those who call others to community may themselves be among those denied its consolations. Over commitment to any job, including building community, can become such an absorption that our myriad activities keep us from experiencing closeness in what, to all appearances, are legitimate ways. Communities can become so stretched that not

enough time is made for camaraderie. The burn-out may find it very difficult to initiate relationships at this time, but it is crucial to find at least one person to whom all the repressed needs and disappointed hopes can be fully spoken.

In all these suggestions, perhaps the most important is to develop a faith perspective about the burn-out that is happening to us. In order to live effectively in community, we must undergo a deep conversion. The burn-out process can be part of our continuing crucible of conversion.

Burn-out consumes our illusions and false expectations. God alone is our hope and expectation, our vision and joy. Community itself can become a great idol, and God's work can become more important to us than God. Burn-out is a refining fire that can detach us from an excessive identity with the results of our work and the impact we make in the world. It can teach us deeper trust in God by forcing us to withdraw all hope, ideals, visions, and expectations from every other object, situation, thing, or person — except God. So burn-out becomes not just stages of disillusionment, but if persisted in faithfully, it can become a maturing process of faith. Burn-out establishes our illusions and establishes true faith.

By all the normal laws of psychological process, the people of faith in Hebrews 11 should have all ended up burned-out. They all "died in faith, not having received what was promised." (verse 13). Talk about disappointed expectations! Yet faith conquered their

burn-out and became for them "The assurance of things hoped for." They understood "that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear."

A close friend in the community recently said to me that the only difference between a cynic and saint is faith. Both the cynic and the saint know the same discouraging reality of this world's pain and the difficulty by which any true healing and redemption come. The cynic withdraws and despairs of hope for any real change. The saint responds with faith, maintaining hope and zeal in the face of the many discouraging failures and partial embodiments of God's promise.

Burn-out holds the potential for making us either cynics or saints. In the midst of burn-out, we have a choice: We can swing from the heights of all our unmet expectations to the detached withdrawal of no expectations at all. Or we can learn to grow in faith and transfer our misplaced expectations to their proper focus on God alone.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."
(Hebrews 12:1-2)

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Your place, time and method of prayer will work best for you if you see them as ways to develop your companionship with God. The following guidelines can be helpful;

1. Base your prayer style on your personality.
Pray at designated time(s) and in a designated place, if you are a person who likes routine and structure. Create a free-flowing prayer style, if you are a spontaneous person. If you are both spontaneous and orderly, let your praying be rooted in order and allow for spontaneity.
2. You can discern whether or not your prayer style is working on the basis of its effect on your life. Are you beginning to slow down your frantic pace? Is your praying helping you begin to be more aware of God, and the needs of others, as well as your own needs? At first, you will find it helpful to count even the smallest gains in developing your own spirituality.
3. See your prayer style as a continuing walk with God, who is with us in ways that are dependable and unpredictable.

4. Realize that the way you life must be compatible with the way you pray, if praying is to open you to the strengthening and transforming fit which God wants to give to you.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP PRAYER

1. Connect solitude prayer with group prayer. If possible, participate in a group in which each of the members is willing to commit to solitude prayer. Whenever the group gathers the members can share out of their solitude prayer experience.
2. Connect a period of 3-5 minutes of spoken and/or silent prayer with a Bible study class or group. If the prayer is silent, the leader can introduce a few prayer themes, allowing for no less than thirty seconds after the theme is mentioned so that people can pray silently, e.g.,

- “Let us give thanks for God’s gifts to each of us and to our group.”
- “Let us pray for our needs...”
- “Let us pray for the needs of others...”

If the prayer is spoken, you might find it helpful to use the “Prayer for Everyday Life” in its “we” form, or another printed prayer. (Sec. VIII-45.)

The leader may prefer to lead in a spontaneous prayer form.

3. Family Prayer. (Suggestion also usable for singles.)
 - a. Make a Prayer Jar using an old mayo jar or something similar. Each time a family member has a prayer request for self or others, a thanksgiving, et., he/she can write it on a slip of paper, and place it in the Prayer Jar. While family members are eating, they can take the prayer slips of of the jar and pray to the need

expressed. Some families eat together. Some have schedules that preclude family meals. If some, or all, of the family members eat together, they can explain their prayer requests more fully if needed. If there is no common meal, individual family members can pray with whatever information is available on the prayer slips. The Spirit of the Risen Christ, the Strengthener, is praying with and for us and, we may be confident, will clarify with God whatever is not clear to us.

- b. Gather for a family “Peace and Quiet Time” once a week. Let all who are willing mention any prayer requests. Then all the family members scatter to their rooms or other selected places for 10 to 15 minutes of Peace and Quiet Time. Small children can use this time to listen to music, or play alone, quietly. If you have an infant, this weekly time together should be structured when the infant is asleep.

IMPORTANT: Let the form and structure that you use in prayer relate to your needs and the needs of others in your group/family.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTINUING SOLITUDE PRAYER IN A FREE-FLOWING STYLE

(Use one or more, whatever is workable for you. Begin with a suggestion that is appealing to you.)

1. Choose a phrase or sentence from the Lord's Prayer. Write it on a 3x5 card. Place the card where you will see it at various times throughout your day. Each time that you glance at your Prayer Card, take a moment or so to pray your prayer. Change the content of your Prayer Card as necessary. In time you may choose to continue the Prayer Card process with other Scripture, such as Psalm 23; Psalm 131; Psalm 145; John 15:1-17; Ephesians 3:14-19.
2. Use the Prayer Card approach with "A Prayer for Everyday Living." See page VIII-45 this section.)
3. Ask God to lead you to a word or phrase related to Scripture, such as"

"Our Abba God," "Jesus," "Come, Lord Jesus," "Praise You and thank You," or create your own.

Pray your sacred word throughout the day by simply repeating it to yourself whenever you think of it. A Prayer Card , as in the suggestions above, may be helpful.

4. Picture Jesus holding you in His arms. To whatever extent that you can, sense His strength and love filling, comforting and empowering you

Do this at various times during your day. Picture others in the same way—any persons for whom you need to pray.

5. Pray for the persons and issues reported in news briefs as you glance at the newspaper, or while watching TV.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTINUING SOLITUDE PRAYER IN A DESIGNATED TIME FRAME

(Use one or more, whatever is workable for you. Begin with a Suggestion that is appealing to you.)

1. Begin by slowing down your pace.
 - a. Take slow deep breaths. Tighten and loosen your muscles,
 - b. Sing a hymn, or listen to music on a cassette of CD.
 - c. Use the Loose Ends Prayer approach. Let your random or pressing thoughts become your initial step in prayer as a process of settling in to more focused praying
2. Pray the Lord' Prayer as a bidding prayer, pausing for silent prayer after each phrase.
3. Pray the Prayer for Everyday Life (Page VIII-45 this section) adding the content suggested, as is feasible for you.
4. Continue praying with the Bible. using one of the following materials:
 - a. The Psalm, along with a Psalm guide, such as Like Trees That Grow Beside A Stream (Praying Through the Psalms), Donald E. Collins, Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN

- b. The Daily Study Bible Series, Introductions and interpretations by several writers (Old Testament) and William Barclay (New Testament), Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA.
 - c. A daily devotional booklet
5. Develop a consistent way to Hallow the Creation.

LOOSE ENDS PRAYER

by Bill Vamos

When I begin my prayer, in solitude or in community, I need some silence in order to slow down my busy, overworked brain. So I pray what I call my loose ends prayers, in which I fling confessions and petitions and intercessions and thanksgivings at God all at one time. It goes something like this:

“Lord, be with my daughter who is going through so many changes. Help my wife and George Bush and Bill Clinton and me to finish my retreat and Yitzak Rabin and the Arab leaders forgive me thank you for that story my son told me about finding silence by listening for a ticking watch that tree outside my window just caresses the air with its branches help me center down the rain is coming our Father who are in heaven hallowed by thy budget is still unbalanced this day our daily income tax for give us our debts as we try to forget Psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd I’m starting to slow down Lord, lead me...”

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IN THE PSALMS

1. Meeting God in ministries in behalf of the afflicted, the needy, the oppressed, and the poor (outwardly and inwardly).

See Psalms 9; 10; 12; 37; 82; 101; 146

2. Praying out of our own poverty and neediness (outward and inward).

See Psalms 6; 22; 35; 42; 55; 56; 57; 63; 69; 109

3. Praying from our need into our hope in the power of God's steadfast love.

See Psalms 13; 23; 31; 42; 43; 46; 71; 119; 147

4. Preparation in God's community, the church (viz., the people of Israel/the Body of Christ.)

Some of the Psalms were created by individuals, in solitude, yet those individuals, along with worship leaders and the congregation went to the Temple to declare their need of God, their hope in God, and their thanksgiving to God, together. The Psalms come from a fellowship with God and each other, and lead us into that same fellowship, which Christians call "Koinonia."

5. Singing.

There are at least 33 references to singing in the Psalms.

6. Silence

See Psalms 4:4; 46:10; 62:1,5

7. Sleep

See Psalms 3:5; 4:4; 4:8; 127:2

8. Fasting

See Psalms 35:13; 69:10; 109:24

9. Praise and Thanksgiving

See Psalms 32; 34; 65; 66; 75; 111; 117; 118;
124; 146-150

PERSONAL PSALM RESPONSE EXERCISE

1. Create your own Psalm, your own emotional response to God, out of your life situation now.

–or–

2. Choose a Psalm from the list that follows, and let it guide you as you respond to God with your feelings:

Psalms 9 & 10

109

13

143

or any Psalm of your choice

Suggested Methods

(Choose one during our Workshop. Save the others for use on your own.)

Auditory:

What words do you hear?

Visual:

What do you see? What pictures/images come to mind? You may want to sketch or doodle your response to God.

Kinesthetic (Body feelings):

As you respond to God, express the physical feelings that come, i.e., choreograph a dance; compose a song or a hymn. (At home you could

work with clay or with paints, etc.)

Memory:

Choose a short passage. Make it a prayer that you can pray throughout the day. Then commit it to memory.

Psalm 9:8

9:10

143:6

143:8

143:10

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYING WITH THE PSALMS

1. Read through the Psalm consecutively, letting each Psalm become your prayer as best you can. Use a commentary to help understand the Psalmist's perspective, e.g., The Layman's Bible Commentary, and the Daily Study Bible.
2. Use Donald Collin's book, Like Trees that Grow Beside A Stream, Upper Room, Nashville, TN. This is a book that gives brief but very helpful guidance for praying through the Psalms on a regular basis. For solitude or group use.
3. Other good daily prayer guides for individual or group use:
 - Prayer for All God's People, Norman Sawchuck & Forest Job, Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN.
 - Prayers for Ministers and Other Servants, Norman Sawchuck & Forest Job, Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN.
 - Use Daily Prayer , SLR #5, Westminster Press, Louisville, KY.
4. Prioritize a special time for praying with the Psalms. Start with an amount of time that you know is achievable, such as 10 or 15 minutes. Add to it as needed. Move with the Psalms at your pace, and according to the process that works

best for you, i.e., one Psalm each day, or every other day, or one each week.

5. Consider recruiting a Spiritual Partner. See the pages in this handbook entitled Comments on Spiritual Partners, (Sec. VIII-33).
6. Use a brief memorized Psalm verse as a short prayer saying to guide you through the day, as suggested in the Personal Psalm Response in this handbook, (Sec. VIII-27).
7. Pray the Psalms at meetings, in groups, and with family (“family” includes the nuclear family, intergenerational family members, singles, friends, church family, etc.). Psalms especially helpful for family prayer are: 84; 95; 100; 121; 122.
8. Look at the New Testament in light of the Psalms: From the Cross”

Lament:

“I thirst.”

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Lament & Celebration

“Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.”

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Celebration

“Today you will be with me in paradise.”

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

“It is finished.”

9. Additional reading suggestions:

Answering God, Eugene Peterson, Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1989. (Inspirational and informative.)

Praying with the Bible, Hughes Oliphant Old, the Geneva Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1980.

(Informative for Christian Education, Worship, and Christian Discipleship. May be out of print.)

U, Walter Brueggemann, St. Mary’s Press, Winona, MN, 1986. (Very incisive and clear.)

Psalms of David, David Redding, Fleming H. Revell Company, Westwood, NJ. (Devotional messages on selected Psalms.)

The Psalms, Elmer A. Leslie, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press. (Basic and thorough information.)

COMMENTS ON SPIRITUAL PARTNERSHIPS

by Bill Vamos

1. Many people find it helpful to develop their life of prayer and quiet solitude with the support and teamwork of a spiritual partner. If this seems the best way for you, the following suggestions may help:
 - a. In your prayers, over a period of time, ask God to guide you to a person whom you respect, someone who has been growing spiritually or wants to share with you in such growth. Be open to God's guidance. Let yourself be patient with God and persistent in your own need for initiative in this process. As Henri Nouwen has written, "A spiritual partner is not a great guru who has it all together; it's just someone who shares his or her...struggles, and by doing so, reveals that there is a presence that is forgiving."
 - b. Decide on regular times to meet, i.e., weekly, biweekly, monthly, or annually.
 - c. Decide on your own initial commitment of regular time for quiet solitude and prayer. How much time do you want to start with? How often? What do you want to do during the time? Commit yourself to your partner for that which you have decided and set up a means of being accountable to him or to her. Your partner may want to do the same with you, but that is not a necessity.

- d. The following accountability specifics are often used by members of the Church of the Savior in Washington, DC. I include them here as one example only. (This process may seem to be overly structured, but it can be adapted.)
 - i. A pretty specific report on how much time is spent in the devotional time each day and which elements were covered.
 - ii. What the Scriptures have been saying to me.
 - iii. High and low points of the week.
 - iv. Something about my ministry to others.
 - v. Generally, where I am with God and the primary people in my life.
- 2. Of course, I am the only one who can choose to make myself accountable to a spiritual partner. The process is voluntary and is designed to help us grow by staying with disciplines which may find it difficult to continue without a partner. I find spiritual partnership to be a gift of freedom, not a legalistic slavery. My partner helps me to be free by challenging me, on the one hand, and releasing me from perfectionism, on the other.
- 3. An excellent book on spiritual direction, which can be readily adapted by spiritual partners, is Inviting the Mystic-Supporting the Prophet, by Katherine Marie Dyckman, S.N.J.M., and L. Patrick Carroll, S.J., Paulist Press, Ramsey, New York (1981).

THE SILENCE OF RETREAT

“There must be a time of day when the person who makes plans forgets his plan, and acts as if he had no plans at all.

“There must be a time of day when the person who has had to speak falls very silent. And her mind forms no more propositions and she asks herself, ‘Did they have a meaning?’

There must be a time when the person of resolution puts his resolutions aside as if they had all been broken, and he learns a different wisdom: Distinguishing the sun from the moon, the stars from the darkness, the seas from the dry land ...” Thomas Merton, in No Man Is An Island, from Thomas Merton Reader, pp487-488.

“In an age of noise, activity and tensions like our own, it is not easy or necessary to forget our cares and commitments, the noise and excitement of our environment. Never feel constrained to blot out all distractions. Anxiety in this regard could hinder our prayer.

“Rather, realize that the Word did become flesh – that God speaks to us in the noise and confusion of our day. Sometimes in preparing for prayer, relax and listen to the sounds around you. God’s presence is as real as they are.

Be conscious of your sensations and living experiences of feeling, thinking, hoping, loving, of wondering, desiring, etc. Be conscious of God’s

unselfish, loving presence in you, address God simply and admit: ‘Yes, You do love life and feeling into me. You do love a share of Your personal life into me. You are present to me. You live in me. Yes, You do.’”

Father Armand Nigro, S.J., and John Christensen.

In silence. we sometimes feel distant from God, or we resist God. Sometimes God’s absence is more vivid than God’s presence. In such times we need to continue to be present and available to God, looking forward to knowing God’s presence again. As Saint Theresa of Avila says, “Even though we are not with God we must allow God to be with us.” God is able to use all of our experiences to draw us into a deeper relationship with our Lord.

THE SILENCE OF RETREAT

[This paper offers a brief explanation of the silence along with a few techniques for entering it. This material was originated by the Dayspring Retreat group of The Church of the Savior, Washington, D.C.]

God is Spirit. Thus, God goes beyond the experience of seeing and hearing with the senses. He goes beyond our thoughts about him, fashioned as they are in terms of images and feelings. We cannot create an encounter with God; He does that. But we can work to eliminate the barriers between us and Him, and the most effective method of doing this on retreat is to enter into and preserve the deep silence. In silence, we reach beyond the experience of our bodies and minds to touch the very being of God.

The purpose of retreat is to come away from our daily lives and enter as deeply as we can into the silence, not as an escape from noise and confusion, but as a means of meeting God face to face. The silence is sacred. God is with us. As we enter silence with our whole selves, we find that we can listen to God speaking to us.

This is both an individual and a group experience. Rather than isolating us from each other, group silence draws us together. With no speaking among us, it is possible, even if we are strangers, to feel as if we had always known each other. And when we work together to preserve silence, an awareness grows that we are not alone. It gives rise to a sense of reverence for each other. Group silence can be an

experience of love quite unlike that found in any other situation.

On the simplest level, silence means not speaking or whispering, whether with others or alone. It means not making harsh noises such as the scrape of a chair on the floor or the slam of a door. In other words, we preserve silence both for ourselves and for one another. No matter how true any one person is to the silence, it cannot be meaningful if it is repeatedly broken by others.

Outward quiet is essential to retreat, but sometimes our thoughts keep us from becoming quiet within. On retreat, we seek to become quiet within as well as outwardly.

One helpful way is to relax the body. It is best to avoid sharp, sudden movements - these are "noisy". Instead, let your movements be peaceful and unhurried, as if you were listening with your whole body to something deep within you. This is restful and helps the mind to grow quiet.

We come to rest and pray, to listen and be filled with the Spirit. We come to be refreshed and renewed.

SUGGESTIONS FOR QUIET SOLITUDE AND PRAYER AT HOME OR AT WORK

By

Bill Vamos

I believe the most important factors in developing a regular discipline of solitude and prayer are as follows:

1. Continue to remember that you are supported by the spiritual life of Christians all over the world and throughout history. This is a corporate as well as an individual experience.
2. Always remember to be gentle with yourself. The center of prayer, as well as service to others, is God's amazing grace, not our amazing discipline. The most helpful words to me in this process are: "It takes time to grow, and it even takes time to know that it takes time to grow."
3. The above is especially important when it comes to dealing with distractions. Henri Nouwen has written some clarifying thoughts in his book, Making All Things New

"Once we have committed ourselves to spending time in solitude, we develop an attentiveness to God's voice in us. In the beginning during the first days, weeks, or even months, we may have the feeling that we are simply wasting our time. Time in solitude may at first seem little more than a time in which we are bombarded by thousands

of feelings that emerge from hidden areas of our mind. One of the early Christian writers describes the first stage of solitary prayer as the experience of a man who, after years of living with open doors, suddenly decides to shut them. The visitors who used to come and enter his home start pounding on his doors, wondering why they are not allowed to enter. Only when they realize that they are not welcome do they gradually stop coming. This is the experience of anyone who decides to enter into solitude after a life without much spiritual discipline. At first, the many distractions keep presenting themselves. Later, as they receive less and less attention, they slowly withdraw. It is clear that what matters is faithfulness to the discipline."

4. Many people find it helpful to develop their life of solitude and prayer with the support and teamwork of a spiritual partner. If this seems to be the best way for you, the following suggestions may help:
 - a. In your prayers, over a period of time, ask God to guide you to a person whom you respect, someone who has been growing spiritually or wants to share with you in such growth. Be open to God's guidance. Let yourself be patient with God and persistent in your own need for initiative, in this process. As Henri Nouwen has

written, "A spiritual partner is not a great guru who has it all together; it's just someone who struggles, and by doing so, reveals that there is a presence that is forgiving.

- b. Decide on regular times to meet, i.e., weekly, biweekly, monthly, or annually.
- c. Decide on your initial commitment of regular time for solitude and prayer. How much time do you want to start with? How often? What do you want to do during that time? Commit yourself to your partner for that which you have decided and set up a means of being accountable to him or her. Your partner may want to do the same with you.

People sometimes ask: "How do I start? With a schedule so full of tasks and life so often cluttered with wall to wall people, where do I find time to begin?" I have found that people can effectively initiate their solitude and prayer by exploring one's own hunger and sense of readiness. Ask yourself: Do I really want and need to commune with God in a regular way? And ask God to guide you to that point at which you are ready to begin. (He knows what we are ready for much more clearly than we do.)

For some of us the answer is: I need mutual support or group prayer most urgently right now, or I need to begin by reading more about prayer or by studying the Bible. If that is where God guides you, start there and accompany your studying with prayer. Just keep asking Him to move you forward with Him,

for others and for yourself.

Some will want to begin with 5 to 15 minutes each day, or one hour once a week, or a two to three hour retreat every two months. (This is a good suggestion for parents with small children; it can be coupled with a request to one of the people in your church or neighborhood, someone who loves children, asking them to enjoy the privilege of being with your children, in order that you can have time for solitude and praying. You might even trade residences for this bimonthly mini-retreat.) Many people find it helpful to support their devotional growth by participating in a retreat in which time for solitude and prayer is combined with sharing and physical renewal and study.

If I were beginning a solitude and prayer discipline at this point in my life, I would probably try to start with 20 minutes each day, which for me, would be scheduled first thing in the morning (although it could be at any time of day and still be effective.) It's mostly a matter of the anticipated flow of one's day-by-day schedule. I would include the following:

1. Centering myself in God's presence with either taped music, or physical relaxation², or giving 5 minutes to each. Time = 10 minutes.
2. Reading of a brief portion of scripture. Several of the Psalms are helpful here, especially **Psalms**

VIII-42

² (*Whenever my own tension is difficult to release and the demands of the day begin to swirl in my mind, I spend a bit more time praying with my body. In fact, much of the time, this is an effective aid in focusing myself on God. Beginning with my chin and moving up over my head and down my shoulders, and then throughout the rest of my body, I tighten my muscles and then loosen them as slowly as I can. I include relaxed, deep breathing

16-19, 32,46-48, 65-68, 83, 95-100, 104,
135-137:1-6;139:1-18; 145-148.

Or, move slowly through a New Testament book,
such as the Gospel of John, or the Letter to the
Ephesians.

Time = 5 minutes.

3. Prayer in response to God's presence, in Christ,
through Scripture, etc.

Time = 5 minutes.

A few other suggestions may help.

1. Start with the length of time which you really feel
is attainable for you. Add to it when it is not long
enough.
- . You may need to ask for cooperation from your
family or even your coworkers (I know one
executive who uses the first 15 minutes before
the office officially opens for his solitude and
prayer. He's let other early arrivers know that he
wants not to be interrupted at that time.)
3. One family I know of has designated a "quiet chair"
in one of the rooms in their house. When someone
sits in the chair, they are to be left alone.
4. Richard Foster, author of Celebration of Discipline,
prays reflectively over his day while shooting
baskets at night. He also prays the first five
minutes before getting out of bed in the morning
and the last five minutes before going to sleep at
night.
5. Having a regular time and a regular place (or more
than one of if needed), for your own devotional

growth, is very helpful.

Sometimes I also pray, "O God, let my body be my prayer." At first I had to get over thinking that what I was doing was too close to Eastern Mysticism.

Remembering that the scriptures consider us to be body-persons helped me lay aside that concern with little difficulty.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER
AT HOME AND AT CHURCH**
by Autumn Hall

1. How do we manage personal prayer in a busy life?
 - spend five minutes a day praying over a passage of Scripture, a favorite Psalm, or work your way through a Gospel or an Epistle
 - Pray with accountability to a spiritual partner.
 - Pray during occasional moments, while doing the dishes or mowing the lawn.
 - Pray for people in a news story that strikes you while you are watching or listening to TV.
 - Pray for people as you pass them on the street or in a store.
 - Sit or stand with your palms down and let go of your worries and problems one at a time, then turn your palms up and ask God to fill you with refreshment or whatever you need.
 - When you wake in the morning ask for the strength to do what is on God's agenda for you that day.
2. How do we include prayer in quietness in church life?
 - Spend five minutes in quiet before the opening and closing prayer of each meeting.
 - Spend 15 to 30 minutes in silent and intercessory prayer at the start of session-board-cabinet meetings.

- In the middle of a meeting pause, ask for prayer concerns, then ask for one person willing to pray for each person or concern.
- Meet with the pastor before worship for prayer.
- Include quiet prayer after the confession in worship and at points during the pastoral prayer.

A PRAYER FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

by William J. Vamos © 1992

(“I” can be changed to “we” for public and group prayer.)

Our Abba God, You live in Heaven and on earth.

Please slow me down.

Praising You for being our Creators, Lord, Savior,
and Friend

Thank You for our gifts to me: (Name some of
these...).

especially for Your gift of the Strengtheners,
the Spirit of the Risen Christ Jesus, who is
praying for me according to Your will.

You are still the Head of this tragic and troubled
world. I don't understand why there is so much
suffering these days.

I want to keep trusting You and Your compassion
for all of us.

I am willing to receive You into my life.

Our Abba God, sometimes my life is a mess.

Where are you when that happens?

I need you to strengthen and transform me.

Open my eyes and ears to Your presence in other
people and their needs.

Some of them support me. (Name them...)

Thank You.

Some of them challenge me, although sometimes

I could do with a little less challenge.

Some people aggravate me. (Name them...)

I really want to aggravate them in return.

I need Your power and love to enable me to forgive.

(Name at least one person whom you need to forgive.)

Forgive me. (For what do you need to be forgiven?)

I affirm that, in Christ Jesus, You do forgive me, now.

I pray for the people of every nation in the world, and for their leaders. (Especially...)

You are still in charge Lord

Keep holding on to me.

In the Name of Christ Jesus,

Who is with me right now.

Amen