

PRAYING LIKE MONKS, LIVING LIKE FOOLS

do your best to live without getting the order mixed up. That'll be enough. That's where you start changing, and as a result, the world around you starts changing too.

Picture yourself on a beach. It's a brisk November day. The cold wind cuts through your clothes; waves crash melodically as water pulls in and out with the tide; the sun hangs low in the late afternoon; and the water stretches hundreds of miles beyond what looks like the edge.

See anything more powerful than you?

Great. Start there.

PRACTICE

Be Still

Many confuse stillness with waiting for revelation. Sometimes revelation does come, and it's marvelous. But that's not the purpose of stillness. The purpose is consent. It is the daily practice of consenting to the work of God's Spirit, which is deeper than understanding or words. It is how "deep calls to deep"³¹ from our souls to his.

Pick a consistent time. For you, this may be the final moments before rushing off on your morning commute, the sudden silence right after dropping the kids at school, or the daily office lunch break. It could be the very first thing you do in the morning or the last thing you do before your head hits the pillow. "When" doesn't matter, so long as the "when" is consistent, because there's no such thing as a habit or priority that doesn't happen consistently.

Create a ritual. Choose an ordinary place to become sacred—ordinary holy ground. This could be your favorite chair, the back porch steps, the upstairs balcony, or the window seat in the city bus. Sit up straight with your two feet planted firmly on the ground.

BE STILL AND KNOW

Lay your hands in your lap, palms open, facing up. Close your eyes. Breathe in deeply and exhale slowly three times. Pray something simple and invitational. Traditionally, this is called a breath prayer and sounds like, "Here I am, Lord," or "Come, Holy Spirit," or "Lord, have mercy."

Then be quiet. Be still. Wait. I suggest setting a timer—a chime on your device or an old-fashioned stopwatch will do. When you set a timer, it keeps you from needing to open your eyes to check the time. Start with two minutes. Do this every day. Just two minutes of silence. After a month, bump it up to four, and then a month later to six. Keep this going until you get to ten minutes.

Resist the urge to decide if this practice of silent prayer is "working." Don't evaluate if you're "getting anything out of it." Simply trust that the practice of a couple centuries' worth of saints, and the practice of Jesus himself, might have a place in your life too. Practice silence as a sacrificial offering to God. It's that simple. It's about giving something of yourself to God, not getting something from God. One day you'll look up, discovering that somewhere along the way—at a point you can't name precisely but know for sure you've crossed—silent prayer became a lifeline, an essential.

Give God the first word, and let spoken prayer follow as a response.