

# Refresh

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# Practice



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## A Salty Reverie

Hilary Oxford Smith

*And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a little while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)<sup>1</sup>*

With elderly poise and grace, my four-legged friend gently made her way along the pathway to a favourite patch of grass near the water's edge. Minx and I had been together for fifteen years. Her days of climbing mountains, fording rivers, chasing rabbits and catching sticks now belonged to her memories and dreams. It was summertime and she cherished the sights, sounds and smells of her world. Every now and then, we would catch a glimpse of one another.

It was a warm day in Picton where we lived then. A day to let work lie fallow and do nothing, except watch the world go by. Brightly-coloured boats with generations of family on board, put-putted out of the harbour into Queen Charlotte Sound. Children in swimsuits played tag on the beach and then tucked into fruit salad and jelly. Seagulls hovered overhead, waiting for a pineapple chunk to come their way.

*The flourishing and blossoming of a contemplative spirituality in the context of the busyness and distractedness of our lived experience is a constant challenge.*

This salty reverie carried me back to childhood, when I was five years old, on the beach at Blackpool in Lancashire, with my younger brother, Mark. We were wearing our new inflatable swim rings. Mark's was shaped like a horse, mine, a swan. The Irish Sea is always cold. Yet small guardians of the future do not worry about such things. Dad gently coaxed me into the water, not letting me go until, screeching with fearful delight, I insisted on freedom. It felt so good. Afterwards, we headed to Notorianni's ice-cream parlour for banana splits all round. To children belongs the Kingdom of God.

This quiet daydreaming in Picton came to an abrupt end when two men in gumboots began to argue on the quay about how to divide up their catch of fish and I heard the distant gunshot of a pig hunter in the valley.

When I was Associate Minister at St. Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh, I recall the organists, Michael Harris and Peter Backhouse, regularly playing, on the magnificent Rieger organ, some of the works of French composer, Olivier Messaien. He was a devout Catholic. His music was an expression of his profound Christian faith and also his love for birds, especially their colour and song. Dissonant and melodic, tonal and atonal, with regular and irregular rhythmic patterns and changing meters, the Cathedral was often filled with bright-hued, discordant fortissimo chords one moment and graceful plainsong melodies

<sup>1</sup> St. Mark 6:31, New American Standard Bible

and transcribed birdsong the next. I became increasingly captivated by Messaien's remarkable musical language with its stark juxtaposition between the harmful and creative potentials of humanity, between deep calm and great complexity. Faith for this composer was not about comfort or blissful serenity. It was rather about the struggle of our spirits to live in the world as it is. Sometimes we are not fully aware of the place where we are standing or the time that is now. The flourishing and blossoming of a contemplative spirituality in the context of the busyness and distractedness of our lived experience is a constant challenge.

Drawing from biblical texts, poetry and personal journal entries, Nicola Slee in her beautiful, thoughtful and practical book, *Sabbath: The Hidden Heartbeat of our Lives*, engages with this juxtaposition and encourages the practice of Sabbath time. She quotes from *The Rule of Life of the Companions of Brother Lawrence*:

*'(It is)...making an intentional choice about 'things we will leave undone or postpone, so that instead of being oppressed by a clutter of unfinished jobs, we think out our priorities under God and then accept, without guilt or resentment, the fact that much we had thought we ought to do, we must leave.'*<sup>2</sup>

She continues,

*'Sabbath requires us to let go our habitual control and give over to...God's Kairos moment. It opens us up to encounter with the depths which are both awesome and fearful.'*<sup>3</sup>

*Sabbath time is the breathing space in our labours...the clearing in the woods through which the light comes, the empty dark hours of night in which our minds and bodies regenerate themselves and God gives gifts, treasures of darkness to God's beloved. Sabbath is, indeed, the hidden heartbeat of our lives...'*<sup>4</sup>

*The invitation to pause...is part of God's invitation to Sabbath, whether it is to rest, to eat, to gather with colleagues at work, to pray, to walk or take other forms of exercise, to weed or plant or prune the garden, to do other kinds of physical work...or to play with our children or pets...and create a rhythm, a gentle balance, a structure that can hold everything together before God.'*<sup>5</sup>

I have discovered this rhythm and gentle balance in the ancient monastic practice of being present and attentive to the sacred rhythms of the day. The Book of Hours,

popular in the medieval period, was originally written by monks who contemplated the nature of God in quietness, sometimes in isolation. It offered prayers for specific hours of the day, days of the week, months and seasons, with colourful illustrations to help the reader contemplate and meditate. It was read by all kinds of people from every strata of society, often carried in pocket or bag. The Liturgy of the Hours, The Daily Office, The Divine Services all originate from this early source of wisdom. It is a wisdom gifting us a way of knowing and living in a natural rhythm with the whole of creation, and connecting us to a deeper Unity.

May we value these gifts, the graceful moments, the here and now and be fully and prayerfully present.

*'God of the here and now  
and of eternity,  
constant Presence,  
help me to take time,  
to be present to you,  
  
to be mindful,  
delighting in each given moment,  
since each contains –  
like the sweet kernel of a hazelnut –  
everything that is.'*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Nicola Slee, *Sabbath: The Hidden Heartbeat Of Our Lives*, (Darton, Longman and Todd 2019) 88

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 89

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 94

<sup>6</sup> Jan Sutch Pickard and Kathy Galloway, *Living by the Rule: The Rule of The Iona Community*, (Wild Goose Publications 2010), 62





Kerry Johnstone ©

## Retreat Glynn Cardy

There is an old word called 'retreat' that is appropriated nowadays by providers of luxury holiday venues. It has a military meaning too which, though rhyming with 'defeat', is more about regrouping and rethinking before again engaging. In religious parlance its meaning differs again: it is about moving away from the demands of the usual to listen for the demands of God. It is said that Jesus once went on a less-than-luxury wilderness retreat for 40 days!

Talking of 40, each year the Jewish world celebrates Sukkot, the 40 years that tradition says was spent wandering in the wilderness. It is a festival of insecurity. That which was usual, expected, and trusted in was not permanent. Out of the uncertainty grew resilience, out of the vulnerability grew faith, out of the resilience and faith flowered thanksgiving.

For at least the last two decades my place of retreat has been Waikaremoana. I walk around the lake, which takes three days or more, and stay at the huts en route. There is no power, no internet, or cell phone coverage. There are fireplaces (though for a while some 'bright' bureaucrat tried to replace them with gas burners on timers!).

The track is a bit beaten up these days – actually it's always been a bit beaten up – and there is lots of mud, usually lots of rain, and the odd broken bridge. Those used to the 'Great Walk' standards elsewhere are inevitably disappointed. I know the place, the track, the huts and even the idle hut conversations so well.

*As the years have gone by,  
I've lightened my pack and my  
self-expectations, and just  
spent time listening*

A friend asked me whether I had done any writing while away. There was a time when I'd take a book to read, or a notebook and pen to record thoughts and feelings. But, more often than not, those implements were under-utilised, and as the years have gone by, I've lightened my pack and my self-expectations, and just spent time listening.

One of the great things about Waikaremoana, is the unsealed road in from Murupara. For 90 kms it twists and turns, and one dodges rock falls, horses, and even pigs emerging from the bush to feed. It is difficult to drive more than 40 kph. It is a time to slow down, and get acclimatised to this different world. Slowing and listening go together.

In recent years, I've stayed a night at the Holiday Park on the lakeside before heading in. This, like everything else here, is owned by Tuhoë. I value the conversations I have with locals – about tracks, trapping, hunting, and whatever. It is their turangawaewae, and their spirit is mingled with the bush and the mist.



'Listening to the demands of G/god' could be thought of as onerous if your version of G/god is a supreme boss who sends instructions. But I've left that God to 'his' own devices long ago. If, however, your version of G/god is a sacredness that infuses all life and speaks the language of healing and love, then 'demands' might be thought of in a more gentle frame. Maybe the key 'demand' is just to be at one. Listening prayer is about feeling a sense of oneness with the S/sacred, and then feeling gratitude rise up within.

I used to go - years ago now - on spiritual retreats at pleasant locations with catered meals and a retreat conductor to guide the participants through structured days of reflection. But inevitably I'd get distracted with the conductor's talks and find the God-language difficult, spend time thinking about work or doing it, read quite a lot, and inevitably find some like-minded souls to share a drink with into the wee hours. Enjoyable. But not really about listening to G/god. One of the most important things about listening/praying is knowing one's avoidance behaviours.

Being physically active, walking for hours, helps me take my mind off my usual, to get prayer out of my head, to listen, see, smell, touch, and engage with tawa, kahikatea, matai, and miro; with the robins, kereru, tomtits, and riflemen; with lake, river, rain, cold, and muddy earth. Maybe in these insecure days of climate crisis and Covid pandemic these are the angels of G/god we need to nurture us.



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## Redefining Spiritual Practice

Val Roberts

How easily I can feel that I am failing at following a spiritual practice! I think this is because my interpretation of the word 'practice' is quite rigid – a disciplined, structured method that must be followed daily or regularly, whether I feel like it or not.

I know this may work for some people, but it feels very much like my school days where learning by exploration wasn't part of the set curriculum of learning facts and producing results. The fundamental teachings and discipleship in my early Christian journey required daily Quiet Times of Bible study and praying for a list of people and situations. I followed this for some years but it felt very intellectual and didn't really connect with my heart.

In my late 20s I discovered that I have a sensitive, creative and contemplative personality. This opened up new ways for me to connect to my emotions and to evolving images of God. I found myself rebelling against structure and discipline big time! Exploring new, creative and contemplative ways to connect to God began to feed me deeply as the well of different practices sprung open. Over the ensuing years my spiritual practice became very haphazard. It still is as I'm often learning or implementing more than one new method at a time.

*...realisation that the things I feel intuitively to pursue are actually my spiritual practice*

The recent realisation that the things I feel intuitively to pursue are actually my spiritual practice, has been very freeing for me. The list is long and varies from season to season, or sometimes day to day, depending on what is happening in my life and body. Embodiment practices such as conscious dance, massage, immersing myself in nature help me to learn to be in my body, to listen to my body and to God. Deep breathing as part of swimming and Qi Gong is meditative and prayerful. These forms of body prayer result in deep shifts within over time.

As a tactile, visual and word person, artistic activities such as craft, art, photography, journaling, poetry writing and collaging all help me to find God in my everyday life. These, along with forms of movement allow me to express my discoveries, joys, struggles and questions. They allow me to converse with God or just be with God, who has a habit of showing up in very surprising ways! Rest has also become an important practice. This may just be moments of being still and quiet, or it may be intentional centring prayer times.

Since becoming a grandmother and spending a lot of time babysitting, I have found that the focused attention of being with and engaging with a toddler is also deeply spiritual.

God reveals much to me through my grandson! I choose to engage mindfully and so it becomes a practice of sorts.

My word for this year is ATTEND: to God, myself and to others.

I have a note on my fridge (since early last year) reminding me to:

Slow down

Focus on one thing at a time

Move with ease

Do things mindfully

Be kind to myself and others

In other words, to be present in the moment, living attentively. This for me, is spiritual practice. If I am consciously living this way, then my everyday life is a spiritual practice.



Noah: Janine Ross-Johnstone, <https://www.jphotographic.co.nz>

## Journeys of Practice

Heather Kelly

In my early Christian days (over 50 years past!) my practice was daily Bible study and journalising what I perceived the 'message' to be. I walked the Jesus way. And, of course, the Scriptures speak still. My mentor arrived on the scene 30 years past now and it was she who introduced me to the concept of Creation Orientated Spirituality. My eyes were opened in more ways than one. I sought a personal relationship that was different, without completely discarding the earlier practice, and found a personal Spirituality. Along the way I explored Pentecostal worship and I grew from the short but significant side journey. Today I find the Gospel in the written word and in the natural world.

More recently, at the beginning of the first C19 level 3 lockdown, I moved from my usual environment to 'bubble' with a good friend in her home. There, as the weeks passed, I felt wrapped in a security blanket. I knew that, come what may, my friend and her extended family had my back! I do not have that reassurance in the community where I normally live.

*Today I find the Gospel in  
the written word and in  
the natural world.*

At all the levels 3, 4 and 3 of the lockdowns, I had difficulty in finding silence and space to meet and talk with God. I went on solo walks and He met me in the trees and gardens of the neighbourhood.

On the reduction to C19 alert level 2, I returned to my village home. Within days I found myself frightened and within weeks I realised that I had lost hope. Being human it took a while for me to be able to name these feelings for myself. I reached out to God who, in His love, led me to the books of the Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. I found the words of God to Joshua when he was commissioned to lead God's people into the Promised land. Joshua 1:9 'Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord Thy God is with thee.....' In my vulnerability I seek frequent reassurance on my journey.

In the exercise of regaining hope, I am seeking and finding God in the natural world where I live. The trees are stark and bare but there are clumps of snowdrops and Winter Cheer is flowering well. The promise of Genesis 8:22 comes to mind.

My present daily practice is to ask God to walk with me through the chaos of these days, reassure me and speak to me of hope. I thank God. He does!

## Our Shared Home

Bruce Nicholls

I am increasingly recognising that our Planet Earth doesn't exist for human pleasure alone. We share it with all of nature, which I call creation. As humans and animals, we continue to exist on the earth because nature continues to exist. We depend on it for our oxygen, while nature in part depends on us for its carbon dioxide. We depend on nature for our water and for our food. Our balanced distance from the sun, the stability of the earth's revolution around the sun, and our relationship to the soil all point to our unique existence in our solar system.

Professor Polkinghorne, former professor at Cambridge University and now a parish priest, says nature is so 'finely tuned' as to make life possible. This uniqueness doesn't happen by chance. Space, time and gravity were uniquely created. The supposed Big Bang of 13 billion years ago points to the same uniqueness.

### A relationship of love

We understand the relationship between humans and the animal and bird kingdoms as one of love, though often it is marred by selfishness. I spend my mornings in research and writing. At about 10:30 a.m. I have my regular coffee at an outside table. A dozen or so sparrows are my friends. They come every day for their biscuit fragments. They all have different personalities. Some are timid and keep their distance, while others, especially the females, risk coming to my feet for their nibbles. These sparrows are my favourite birds. Every year at the breeding season a pair of them come to the same corner of the spouting of my neighbour's house, rebuild their nest, mate, lay their eggs, and take care of feeding their chicks until they are strong enough to fly away. Next year, they will return and repeat the cycle. What an act of love—a rebuke to our human waywardness.

### Living simply is a moral issue

My response to this relationship of love is 'to live more simply so that others may simply live.' This includes all of nature and human life. Many birds and insects are becoming extinct at an appalling rate. Is this our fault? I think so. Greed and consumerism mark our lifestyle. Nations are driven by a passion for economic progress, at nature's cost. Nature is now rebelling, with weather extremes.

Our western society is obsessed with attaining zero carbon increase by 2050, just 30 years from now. This will be at great cost to our economy and may not be the needed answer. Scientists and governments are fearing the consequences of reaching the 'tipping point' of no return by 2050. These 'alarmists' believe our overuse of fossil fuels is the chief cause of global warming. The 'sceptics' doubt that this is the main factor. They believe other factors are of greater importance, such as the fact that there will be two

billion more people on earth by 2050, bringing the total to possibly 9.9 billion, most of whom will live in Asia and Africa and in increasing poverty.

As cities grow, slums increase, as do the greenhouse gases that are released. New Delhi, with 20 million people, and Tokyo, with 30 million, are beyond climatic control. China is about to pour 600 billion dollars into Iran as part of their Belt and Road initiatives' globalising policy.

The level of greenhouse gases will inevitably rise. Then there are forces of nature beyond human control, including changes in the sun's ultraviolet radiation, volcanic eruptions, and rising sea levels which increase the level of water vapour. These are all contributing to our weather extremes. However, the relationship between rising carbon and rising global temperatures is still unproven. These are ultimately moral issues, which call for moral answers.

In Asia, Hindus turn to their traditional deities for help: Buddhists appeal to the elevated Self for answers, and Jews, Christians and Muslims put their trust in a personal Creator God and his divine laws to restore nature's equilibrium. It is Christians, above others, who are offering compassion for all who are suffering these radical changes in climate and who are looking to God to transform our suffering world to one of peace and justice.

On the gates of the Cavendish laboratory of Cambridge University, where our own Lord Rutherford pioneered atomic research, are the words:

"Great are the works of the Lord, they are pondered on by all who delight in them"  
(Ps 111:2).

This is where love begins and hope follows for our shared home.



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## What We Need

Ana Lisa de Jong

God is to us what we need,  
to each of us singularly unique,  
though in every respect  
God is the same,  
Grace is always understood personally.

So that God, for some,  
is the sky overarching, encompassing,  
and for others, God is the ground,  
a foundation to support our footing.

Yet for some God is the breath we exhale,  
or the veins spread through  
each intricate leaf,  
and the world is a blessing  
of light and shade  
through which God is  
intrinsically wound.

While for others God is the promise  
at the end of the dark perilous day,  
and living is a 'one foot in front of  
the other' thing, with God  
as our best only hope.

Whatever God is to each of us,  
a word, a prayer, or a plea  
God comes to us, as a smile,  
the gentlest touch to brush away tears,  
a crutch for support, a hands up,  
and sometimes even,  
as a miracle, of new life and restoration.

But in a trillion faces and circumstances,  
the God that always appears,  
is the perfectly shaped response  
to our countless endless needs.

And Grace is such,  
that it is ever present, unchanging -  
no need to express, define or clarify  
our need for it.

For we swim in God as a sea,  
upon which we are buoyed up  
or, we might think of it  
as the gravity  
keeping us tethered.

## Practice as Praxis

Steve Tollestrup

What do we mean by a spiritual practice? I'd suggest a simple understanding is that a practice is the disciplined and maintained activity we pursue on our path to know God. A practice intentionally sets aside time for reflection or moments of recollection throughout the day, to consider God's love and presence more deeply, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to grow in wisdom, character, discernment and insight. I suspect that we can agree broadly with that.

But I have started to ask myself another question that spins off our accepted notions of a spiritual practice, and might have important consequences for us. At what point does contemplative insight become consciousness raising, or devotion become defiance and practice become praxis? In other words, when does our practice move beyond private piety to justice?

I've come to see that the very act of just sitting in openness to grace or any practice committed to prayerful reflection of sacred mystery, is something deeply radical in its resistance to the 'world.' The character of practice considered this way is both defiant and subversive to everything that wants to misshape, disfigure and reduce our human life into product, data, consumer, or political pawn. As Dorothee Soelle writes: "To be content with the world as it is, is to be dead."<sup>1</sup> Practice yearns for something deeper.

*... when does our practice  
move beyond private piety  
to justice?*

I don't think that it is overstating the situation today that there is an assault on human consciousness and spirit. Consider that increasingly, hidden persuaders target our minds and emotions to ends not consistent with the character of Christ. The American Indian activist, John Trudell, insightfully put it like this; we have moved from an early capitalist period of extraction of the earth's natural resources like ore, timber, oil, fish, water etc, with its resulting pollution, to a new level and order of extraction. In the new economic order, the subject of extraction is deeply psychological and personally intrusive, mining the emotions and consciousness of human beings. It excavates anxiety, greed, insecurity, the desire for recognition and status, lust, and fear, all repackaged to create mostly artificial offerings of, highly inflated needs, distracting entertainment or political outcomes. Like the polluting detritus of natural resource extraction this new order creates a toxic social and psychological pollution with winners and losers, exploited and exploiter, successful and humiliated. It is what Trudell calls a 'Mined Mind.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry; Mysticism and Resistance*. Fortress Press, 2001

<sup>2</sup> John Trudell, *Lines from a Mined Mind*. Fulcrum Publishing; April 1, 2008

Things have moved even further today with what Harvard Professor Shoshana Zuboff calls Surveillance Capitalism.<sup>3</sup> "Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data," and that data is used against us to influence our behaviour when sold to business and political interests. Zuboff echoes Trudell when she says, "While industrial capitalism exploited and controlled nature with devastating consequences, surveillance capitalism exploits and controls human nature with a totalitarian order as the endpoint of the development." Just consider for a moment that most global human data and information are owned by Google and Facebook; independent, unelected, and unaccountable corporates.

Seen this way, Christian contemplation or practice, words I use interchangeably, is not passive but active in non-violent opposition. It has an almost Gandhian quality of Satyagraha or 'truth force' about it. Even in the shortest reflective disengagement, we are making an act or statement of protest and claim the fundamental right and priority of our interior spiritual life and its fruits. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect".<sup>4</sup>

If there is such a thing as a contemplative activist, I think the word that best describes this is mystic. I like the word mysticism and especially the designation mystic. There is something unsettling in the notion of a mystic that is wholesomely democratic and outside the control of bureaucracies and systems whether secular, technological, political, or religious. Mystics have a unique internal and subjective autonomy.

We might think of Deridda's term counter-path (contre-allee), a path that disturbs and haunts the established one. This counter-path is the beginning of the awakening from what Metz terms 'bourgeois religion', which he defines as a religious culture that endorses the haves, the propertied, those whose seemingly guaranteed future allows them to take life for granted.

Here the term 'false self' becomes an important one to consider. The false self is the manufactured, created for compliance and consumerism. Our deepest self on the other hand is with Christ and full of creativity, wonder, integrity, and life, holding the imago dei. Our practice is the journey in Christ to discover that truer self. In contemplation and meditation, we deny that false self in favour of the dignity of a fully alive human being.

Importantly this defiant spirituality isn't restricted to cushion, prayer stool or chair but finds itself at home wherever we are in the choices we make and, in our faith, claim to God's presence. "This is the victory we have over the world, our Faith". 1 Jn 5:4

All of this has implications for our work as Directors. When practice becomes praxis our ministry as spiritual directors or companions is nothing less than the path of freedom

and liberation in Christ. We support the directees in our care to claim a greater solidarity with Christ with a loosening of the world's claim on their lives and vestiges of the false self. This creates room and spaciousness for greater confidence in grace and less insecurity, more loving-kindness and mercy in the face of alienation, conflict, anxiety, and injustice. More transformative encounter with the sacred than with character stereotyping media.

The practice of authentic contemplative spirituality seen in this way is more radical than we might first imagine. If this understanding of a practice appears outside spiritual civility and piety, let's reflect deeply on the words of Jesus.

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled"  
Luke 12.49.

Now that's a new way of looking at the cushion!



Part of mural, KingsWay School, designed by Jayne Boesley: KJ

3 Shoshana Zuboff, *Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Public Affairs; 2019

4 Rom 12:2



## The Rhythm of Life

Rhythm gives me life.  
Rhythm resounds with my soul.  
I am a rhythmic being in a rhythmic natural world.  
Take any rhythm away and life is less.  
Take away the sun rising and going down and everything flounders.  
Take away the rhythm of the seasons and the food will not grow.  
Take away my rhythmic pumping heart and my breathing pattern, and I am no more.

Rhythm is at the heart of life.  
Rhythm is within me.  
Rhythm is without me.

Rhythm is at the same time within and without.  
Rhythm is the balance of movement and stillness.  
Rhythm is the balance of silence and sound.

Rhythm is movement with shape,  
but the shape so invades all that it loses its shape and becomes one.

The rhythm of the Universe has authority.  
I know about circadian rhythms,  
Circa diem: approximately a day.  
We share these with all life on earth:  
plants, animals and even bacteria.

The light from the sun sends a message to my brain  
causing a 24 hour cycle in my body.  
I need humility in the face of this enormity.  
I mostly take my circadian rhythms for granted.  
Thinking that I know best and ignoring the rhythms of the Universe  
means my world and I don't function properly.  
Too little sleep means that I get tired and stressed.  
Long flights disrupt my body and my sleeping.  
Artificial light disturbs the pattern of all living beings.  
Rushing, without stopping, exhausts me.

Keeping in step physically with the rhythm of my environment is how I must live:  
sleeping and waking, working and resting,  
speaking and listening, eating and fasting,  
all in tune with the cycle of the day and of the seasons.  
Keeping in step spiritually with the rhythms of my environment  
by consenting to my relationship with the Source of all Creation is how I must live.

Each morning bowing in humility  
and emptying myself,  
(for me, with sacred reading, reflection and Centring Prayer)  
allowing Love and Light to enter,  
readying myself for life and what the day may bring.  
Each evening stopping with thanks to look back on the day.  
Attending to these rhythms is my sure foundation.  
Physical and spiritual are one.

When peace fills my day  
I can look back and say  
I let go of myself  
when the sun bade me wake  
I joined in the rhythm  
Love calls me to take.

Anon.

---

*I don't write much these days. I have to keep a certain amount of time free for reading, meditation and prayer. This life wouldn't amount to much without that. After all, what is the use of doing a lot of work, if you don't keep your heart for God? That is what I try to do. That is the only way I can be of use to others.*

Thomas Merton  
*The Road to Joy*

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## On the Trail – physical exertion and spiritual practice

Clare Lind



There is Only the Dance: Ceramic Panel  
420x420 with T.S. Eliot quote: Peter Atkinson © www.peteratkinson.co.nz

I never learned ballet,  
Never even mastered walking on my hands,  
But in the quiet candlelight at evening prayer  
My spirit is doing pirouettes  
And leaps and steps,  
Calling, 'Glory!' as it goes.

Liquid, exuberant, misbehaving... beautifully.  
I caught you laughing  
When you caught me thinking  
Of trying to rein her in.  
Nabbed in the act,  
Guilty of restraining worship during worship,  
I am laughing too.

My spirit turns with a grace and agility  
That my body will never match,  
But my body set it turning.

It was my body that took me down the trail today,  
Its knees that kept bending,  
Its feet on pedals spinning,  
Its eyes on the track in front,  
Its hands on the bar, its seat on the seat  
All the way to Hyde and back.

Unknown to me,  
It was my body that found the pilgrim's rhythm  
And slipped me into prayer,  
Which, home now at the end of the day,  
Powers this wild dance of worship.

I wrote this poem on a retreat in Central Otago earlier this year. I had cycled from Waipiata to Hyde and back along the Rail Trail. I had been looking forward to those times on the trail when there is no one to be seen in front and no one to be seen behind - 'Just me and Jesus'. I had been anticipating deep and wise conversation.

But most of my day was absorbed with the physicality of cycling. The internal chatter



and plans gave way to the more immediate sensory activities of watching the trail, recognising landmarks I remembered from other times, pushing into the wind, keeping the pedals turning, easing aches – managing the practicalities of getting there and getting back again in the time available. There was the odd word of prayer, but not a lot.

I felt a little flat when I got back to Waipiata. 'Well,' I told myself, 'it is what it is. God will do what God will do.' I was unprepared for the explosion of joy I experienced later that evening during worship. Yet even as I was caught up in it, I knew it was intimately connected to the rest of the day.

That day's long discipline of being present in what I was doing on the bike was the patterning for being present in evening worship. It was the work before the rest, the emptying before the filling. It was much more than getting the fidget out of me. It was a form of prayer, an act of worship in itself.

American lecturer, Belden Lane, writes that his young son taught him that the point of hide and seek is to be found. It is not to stay hidden so that no one finds you; it is to be discovered after a search. He says that God hides to be discovered.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the bike ride was the search ('I know you are out there somewhere') and evening worship, the discovery. That pattern of absence and yearning followed by the flash of presence is found in the Psalms, in the love poetry of the Song of Songs, in John's account of the response of Mary Magdalene to the risen Jesus.

The time on the bike has had me thinking about physicality and spiritual practice. Our senses are God's creation along with our minds and imaginations. Creation was built to lean towards God, its maker. There is a logic, then, to being drawn towards God through our senses. On top of that, our senses are foundational in our interactions with the world; they precede even our language-making ability. That would indicate that physical expressions of prayer and worship are among the most fundamental and straightforward routes to engage with God. That God sends Jesus, the Word in flesh and blood, suggests that this is the conclusion that God has come to too, about the most effective way to relate to humanity. This is probably a no-brainer to a sensate, but to an intuitive, it is a discovery.

Finally, although the joy of evening prayer flowed from a day of exertion, it did not have to. Certainly by the time it happened there was no expectation that it would. It was not an entitlement. It was a gift from a gracious God, that could be received because in the day leading up to it, God made room for it in me.

<sup>1</sup> p.179, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, Belden Lane, Oxford University Press, 1998, New York

## When Pamela Gordon

On days, when your vision is clouded  
and your cup of creativity is dry,  
may your wellspring of inspiration  
burst into blossom like a cherry tree  
warmed by the welcome spring sun.

When grief and loss are so heavy  
you sink into a grey and silent landscape,  
may you hear sweet music once more,  
and a symphony of rainbows  
dance before your eyes.

When anxiety tightens its grip around you  
until you are hunched and bound with worry,  
may you be released by the knowledge  
that courage and strength will prevail  
and be there for you and for those whom you love.

When loneliness overcomes  
and you feel diminished and discarded,  
may you find a place of such gracious self-remembering  
you can reach out in generosity and kindness,  
showing compassion toward both yourself and others.

And, when you feel bitter and resentful  
with the cards life has dealt you,  
may you come to a place of acceptance,  
and with gratitude, see the glistening gems  
you also hold within your hand.

May these words weave  
a soft and warm blanket  
of comfort and love around you,  
so you can safely nestle in,  
and be at peace.

(Inspired by the writings of John O'Donohue)



Oberammergau Passion Play billboard AJ ©



# A fairly pedestrian kind of practice

Lesley Ayers

When I first saw the topic of 'Practice', in last year's winter edition of Refresh, I immediately thought, "Count me out". My life has involved many attempts to develop an orderly rule of life, with the salient word being 'attempts'.

The loose pages of notes in the front of my bible testify to this.

First there is a good summary of the Examen. This is a practice which appeals to me, but which I have taken up then slipped away from.

Then there are notes from a retreat where I studied Lectio Divina. Yes, this is a wonderful practice and, if I could do it consistently, I know I would gain from the depths of scripture.

The prayer of St Francis is there too and, although not in note form, the ideas of Brother Lawrence in *The Practice of the Presence of God* are what I aspire to.

So, I have had influences from Benedictine, Ignatian, Carmelite and Franciscan strands. But there was still nothing that looked like a rule, a consistent practice in my life.

Then came Covid-19, and with it the time of lockdown in 2020 and its continuing uncertainty. This was where I found treasures in the darkness and now have a reflective practice that I can follow. I'm glad to have something good come out of this truly awful time of pandemic.

So, what happened? There were three parts to this - Walking, Reading and Prayer. These combined to form a practice that fits so well with who I am.

## 1) Walking

My decision in lockdown, to photograph something of beauty each day as I walked around our village, raised my awareness of the intricacy and wonder of nature. I noticed details from the tiniest of mosses to the tallest kauri. There was time to really 'see' things in the unhurried hours. These walks became precious times of reflection.

After lockdown and in our 'new normal' my walks continued. These have become early morning times of praise and gratitude to God for the beauty of the day and for the wonder of creation. It is a time to put aside any concerns, a time to just be with the Lord.

In places on the bush track, fern fronds gently touch my head and the word 'benison' kept coming to my mind (not a word I am in the habit of using!) I wasn't even sure that it was a real word, though I presumed it had origins in the Latin 'benedictio' for blessing. When this had been happening regularly over the weeks, I

finally remembered to look it up. I found that it was indeed a blessing, especially a spoken one.

Since lockdown I have carried this practice into longer walks, perhaps into town six kilometres away. I delight in seeing the sea and estuary birds as I cross bridges, and walk near the water. It is a time of simply being and of delighting in God.

I realise that I am fortunate to live somewhere with both a temperate climate and a quiet bush walk. There are few days of the year when I am unable to walk. Winter simply requires another merino layer and mud-proof footwear.

But recently I have also been exploring other ways to carry over this praise and thankfulness on days when early morning walks are not possible. Today a friend was picking me up early to go to the local farmers' market. He overslept, so I was waiting by the roadside for half an hour. My temptation was to get out my phone and scroll through the news of the day or catch up on emails. Instead I was able to be aware of a stunning blue-sky morning, see the mist rising from the valleys and notice the autumn colours coming on the trees. What could have been a time of frustration/annoyance became a time of awe and gratitude.

*Fern fronds gently touch  
my head and the word  
'benison' kept coming  
to my mind*

## 2) Reading

One thing that I have managed to be consistent about for some years, is following daily bible reading notes from Scripture Union. But last year I was also given the gift of a book, *Hearing God Through the Year: A 365-day devotional* by Dallas Willard. I find this complementary to my readings and it has easily slotted into my practice. There is much wisdom, challenge and encouragement in Willard's reflections. I find myself eagerly reaching for the book each morning. Then, when I get to the end of the year... I will simply begin all over again ( that sounds a bit Benedictine).

## 3) Prayer

During lockdown a friend forwarded a selection of morning prayers for people in lockdown. They were all helpful, but one in particular has become my own form of Examen. I have made this into a bookmark, praying it each morning.

### Greeting God in the Morning

*Dear Lord you have brought me to the beginning of a new day. As the world is renewed fresh and clean, so I ask you to renew my heart with your strength and purpose. Forgive me the error of yesterday and bless me to walk closer in your way today. This is the day I begin my life anew: shine through me so that every person I meet may feel your presence in me. Take my hand, precious Lord, for I cannot make it by myself. Amen*

That final sentence moves me deeply each time I read it.

I am grateful, and excited to have found a spiritual practice which flows so well with my everyday life.

My practice is, of course, still being fine-tuned. I continue looking for a helpful pattern for prayers of intercession. It's time to explore the many volumes on my bookshelf with the word 'Prayer' in the title. Unfortunately, mere proximity does not mean I can absorb their wisdom through osmosis!



AJ ©



Janine Ross Johnstone ©



## Daily Devotions – It Takes Practice

Stephen Whitwell

This subject can be the making of our lives. That's a sweeping statement but one I believe. Over the years of my Christian pilgrimage, now nearly fifty years, I have seen this to be true. I have observed ones who have established a regular routine and rhythm of setting time aside to read God's Word, meditate and pray. Their lives seem to be more ordered, peaceful and purposeful. Not without trial and strife, but there definitely is something different about their lives.

But it does take practice, and this is my story. When I was about fifteen years old I went to a Boys Brigade camp at the Maitai Valley near Nelson. A youth band was playing the Saturday night and I gave my heart to Christ. In fact, I wept my way to the Cross! I will never forget that night.

What started then has continued to this day. I don't remember too many details but I do remember doing by correspondence a few Bible courses. That whetted my appetite for more. In fact the contemplative practice started then has largely been a regular part of life ever since.

A new Prime Minister was being interviewed and presented to the country. I was impressed by something she still did. Every morning at 6.00am she was in the gym, working out. It was her regular practice and had been for many years. Becoming Prime Minister did not change her regular practice and routine of physical exercise.

Before she was the PM, she was in the gym at 6.00am. When she became PM she was in the gym daily at 6.00am. When she transitioned into another role, same thing, she was in the gym at 6.00am every day. Her role, whatever it was at the time, was made to fit around her regular practice of a daily 6.00am workout.

It made quite an impression on me. It solidified my resolve to do what I do, and maintain my regular morning routine. There've been days and seasons where I've missed my morning practice, but it remains my goal.

My time is the morning. First thing in the morning. Before the day gets going and the demands of the day present themselves. I am by nature a fowl. Someone once said that we are either an owl or a fowl. An owl is not a morning person, but a fowl is. I am definitely a morning person. So for years my regular practice has been to rise before others in my household, go into my office, and there read, study, meditate, pray and write. It has enabled me to follow ideas, explore words and phrases, research information, write what I discover my heart is really saying, and connect the dots of ideas and themes I previously didn't make the effort for.

The benefits have been extraordinary. Articles and books have even come from it. It is my most important part of the day. It is an appointment I look forward to, a meeting I can hardly wait for.

My regular Bible reading plan is my own system. Personally, I have never been a big fan of following someone else's daily reading plan. I'm not sure why that is. I know they work well and are ideally suited to some people. However, early on in my Christian walk, I just started reading three chapters a day beginning with *Genesis*, *Psalms* and *Matthew*. So I generally read a chapter in each of those sections, *Genesis* to *Job*, *Psalms* to *Malachi*, and *Matthew* to *Revelation*. I have continued on that plan all these years.

I confess – I am a lover of God's Word, the Bible. Over the years I have read it from cover to cover numerous times. Yet, in these days, at my morning meetings, I am seeing things I have never seen before. I am writing insights and allowing my heart to express itself better. I am amazed time and again at the ability of God through His Word to directly address issues my family and I are facing, and to bring encouragement and perspective for life.

One thing I am sure of is the influence of two of my mentors in my early years. My neighbour Rex (I grew up on a farm in the Wairau Valley, Marlborough), was my Bible School teacher, and also my Boys' Brigade Captain. His input into my life when I was an impressionable teenager was invaluable. I remember to this day travelling somewhere with him many times in his old Citroen car, and having discussions about God, the Bible, faith, girls, work, holiness, and relationships. He was an example. He lived what he talked about – he walked the talk. He often spoke of things he'd read, learnt, or spiritual insights he'd received during his own personal devotions.

... to write what I discover  
my heart is really  
saying

The other was my pastor of the church I went to growing up, and in my early years of working. Ian was a great leader, incredible speaker and Bible teacher, and he became a mentor and friend. He took our wedding and sent us into the ministry! His influence on my life and my own pastoral work (I served as a pastor for 30 plus years) is almost immeasurable. He too often spoke of Biblical principles and confirmation for leadership decisions he'd received from his personal devotions.

Their influence in my life was shaped by their own practice of a commitment to regular time spent in Bible reading, prayer and meditation – personal devotions.

Jesus says: *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (Jn 17:3 NKJV).*

I believe God loves us, and sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us, so that... we can come to the Father! Jesus came to give us eternal life – yes! But He also came to bring us to the Father. Jesus is the way, the Father is the destination. A relationship with God the Father is the major reason Jesus came to the Cross.

In my readings over the last few months a theme was developing. Each time I came across it I would journal with the heading, *It's Personal*. It's about how we can know God

personally. For example in the story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there seems to be a shift in their faith and understanding of the promise (*Gen 12*), when they had come to a place of knowing God personally.

Another thing that surprised me from my morning devotions is journaling. I used to think if I journalled it would be too dark, too negative and dreary. But the opposite has happened. I have written from my heart about the issues we face, and some of it is pretty raw and painful. However, I have found a great freedom in expressing exactly as I am at the time, plus thanks to the Lord, praise to Him for the things we have, for His guidance and provision, for my family and for His grace that helped us in times of need. I look back on those entries now and sometimes I am amazed; at what I wrote, at the encouragement it was, and I remember how I felt then but how we have moved on from there.

We were in a difficult season early this year. Financially we were going backwards. I had had a good job but the business eventually closed. My health had taken a turn for the worse which meant I was unable to work. I'd had another heart attack, and was recovering. So some things were against us.

But my daily schedule still included time in the early morning for my quiet time. That time and connection to the Lord in that way, became a life-line for me. One morning, I was just there reading the next chapter in my reading plan; there was nothing special about the morning, but there it was! A Word from the Lord. A very clear promise of what He was going to do. It was amazing. It included these verses:

*He calms the storm, So that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet;  
So He guides them to their desired haven. (Ps 107:29-30).*

I'd heard the Word of the Lord for our situation. I *knew* this was God speaking to me. The storm would be calmed. There would be quiet. We would be in a *Haven*.

In the painful months of waiting that followed, the promise I'd received gave us hope. It encouraged us. It lifted our spirits. I had it printed out and in pride of place in my office. It calmed our hearts with the knowledge that God was up to something, He was going to work and change and do Divine stuff on the human level.

Long story short – we moved house into a new place. The Word of the Lord came to pass. It is wonderfully quiet. I tell people that in our new place the quietness is deafening. The financial storm is now gone. It is a *Haven*. A safe, quiet, restful, refreshing place. I can't imagine what life would have been like during those months of waiting, if we hadn't had that promise to lean on. It came from my regular, routine and commitment to getting up early and being in my Heavenly Father's presence.

At this time when all around the world we're facing the COVID-19 crisis, we're being told regularly to, *keep in contact, and stay connected*. Because relationships are powerful and vital to personal survival in tough times. So to face everything that might be against us,

to be at peace and not living in fear, to survive and thrive in these times, to hear God's Word on the issues, the best thing we can do is to *keep in contact, and stay connected* to the Lord.

How do we establish and build and strengthen our relationship with God and stay connected to Him? It's pretty much the same as any human relationship. Time is the big one. And quantity time always leads to quality time. *We can know God better!*

James writes in the New Testament; *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...* God the Father loves us, and wants to commune with us. He wants a relationship with us.

I recently wrote, *Oh how we need to be people of The Word. Regular readers, with a resolute rhythm, disciplined delvers, prevailing purveyors, systematic students, and perpetual pupils of God, His Word, His will and His ways.*

There are phenomenal jewels waiting to be discovered. There are insights for our eyes to see. There are words of life to be read and devoured. There is health for the heart.

It takes practice but the rewards are exponential. It's all waiting for us in that amazing place of our own personal *daily devotions*.

*There are phenomenal  
jewels waiting to  
be discovered*



Christ Church, Russell: AJ ©

## In the Silence

Carolyn Officer

In the Silence  
I found a place  
A place beyond words  
Where the sun shines  
In every corner of my heart  
Where the water flows  
Washing over my soul  
Where in the silence  
I know without doubt  
God is love  
And His love surrounds me



AJ ©



## Getting over yourself

Mike Riddell

All right, enough tomfoolery (inside joke for the more astute regular readers of this column). It's a classic Central Otago autumn day, with the temperature in the low 20s. I'm taking a break after shifting a ton of rocks by hand. I feel like the soundtrack should be 'Big Rock Candy Mountain' from the Coen's 'O Brother, Where Art Thou?'

The high dome of the sky is stretched above, with the sun beating down on us. Somebody didn't get the memo about how cold it's supposed to be. I should be out riding my bike, but I'm sitting in my studio thinking about what I might possibly write that could make any difference to such a perfect day. Nothing at all, is the correct answer, but it's never stopped me before.

All of us live with some sort of unsatisfied desire. It's what drives us forward, draws us onward, or makes us despair. For the last generation or so, it seems that the universal quest has been for fame. By definition, fame is unattainable for the vast majority of people. If we were all famous, none of us would be famous. But it doesn't stop the aspiration luring the hordes toward a destination that can never be reached.

It seems to escape most of us that fame has something of a tangential relationship with talent. When young people are asked what they want to be famous for, they adopt a look of glazed incomprehension. They don't know or care what people do to become famous – they just want to reach this mythical land where they might be adored and known. Some commit murders to try to get there.

The quest for fame tragically renders us all aspirational for a communal fiction. To be dissatisfied with one's own life and accomplishments is painfully debilitating. I've watched it foment bitterness in the hearts of people who deserve to feel good about themselves. It's why I subtitled my memoir *Notes on a Small Life*. I've finally reached a place where I'm content for my life to be small.

Underlying our neurotic hunger, it seems to me, is a sense of loneliness. Surrounded by thronging masses of people, we are desperate for our lives to be somehow worthy or remembered. Here's the ache: we want to be noticed. We yearn for our existence to be of some sort of significance. There's an easy solution to such unrequited longing – buy a cat or a dog (hint: one of these will give you unconditional love, the other not so much).

Another suggestion, bordering on the metaphysical, is to find time to meditate and observe. To dip below the surface into the tranquil depths of the soul is to encounter a space where we are known and loved. Here it is enough to be who we are, without striving to be worthy of anything. This is the healing we all seek.

To know it is to understand that we neither need to or are able to find this in the approval of flawed people like ourselves.

It provides the greatest gift of all – the freedom to be ourselves without hungering for adulation from others. In such liberty we can turn the tables. Instead of the hunger to be loved, we are able instead to practise loving the very ordinary people who surround us. No matter how much they ride their achievements, the chances are that they too are lonely and wanting to be noticed.

The vast majority of us quite rightly live in relative obscurity. We go about our small tasks with no more recognition than the occasional pat on the back from those around us. I feel strongly that we need to find our worth not from universal acclaim but from the simple dignity of our own lives. Each of us has something to contribute to this wonderfully delicate web of human community.

*I've finally reached  
a place where I'm  
content for my life  
to be small.*



Our Lily had a small op today. Oakley is being her carer.  
Janine Ross-Johnstone ©

**Portal**  
Martin Stewart

wishing  
a door opening  
to where  
I've been before

not to escape  
please understand  
I do not desire  
to wish this life away

but to relive every single step  
in that period where even  
a bleak day was  
yet a great day

giving permission  
to revel in being less  
and being careless  
is a gift of fulness

to teach me how  
to be this side  
of the door  
I need to walk through



Galicia, Camino de Compostela: Martin Stewart

## Winter 2020

Judith Dunlop

Winter is here

The winter solstice passed on June 21st

Matariki is now high in the sky.

Genesis 8 verse 22 says –

“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest,

And cold and heat,

And summer and winter,

And day and night shall not cease.”

As I look out the window from where I sit

I see bare branches.

God has given them their rest to be ready for the springtime.

Without winter, spring and summer would not be what they are.

It seems as if winter is a season of death.

Why I ask?

Why do I have to pass through winters with barren branches?

Why times without flowers and fruit?

I wonder why so much rain here when others do not have enough.

I wonder.

I come to understand that in reality it's a time of rest.

It gives me the opportunity to get off life's treadmill.

I will have two winters this year of 2020 – a lockdown in autumn,

A June, July and August.

It seems like an eternity holed up at home as I look forward.

But.....

I have time to prepare for the springtime when all will awaken,

As the cold winds of winter take away my breath

And my nose runs with the cold.

As temperatures are in the single digits

As the washing hangs on the line

And I wait for a sunny day.

I come to appreciate the warmth of the heater.

I enjoy warm bowls of soup.

I give thanks for warm clothes.

I realise that I can give thanks for the silver linings of winter.

In all of this I can hear the voice of God,

Listen to where the voice of God is.

It is winter and I need my warm clothes

I give thanks to God for the ability to be able to be warmly clad

I reflect on winter –

I walk in the park and I hear the voice of God in the bare branches.

It is winter and I walk in the park

I feel the warmth of God in my breath as I exhale in the chilly air.

It is winter and the frost is on the lawn

I walk on the crisp, icy grass and I hear the voice of God in the crunch under my feet.

It is winter and the southerly wind is blowing

I hear the voice of God as it whistles through the trees.

I remember my childhood and snowy days

I give thanks to God for those wonderful childhood memories of snowmen and sleds.

It is winter –

I give thanks that I have time to reflect.

As I reflect I am reminded that winter for some will not have a silver lining.

It is winter and the homeless are cold

I ask God for some comfort to come their way.

It is winter and some children are cold and hungry in their homes and schools

I pray that warmth and good food will come their way.

I speak to the Rest Home folk who are in the winter of their lives

I pray that they will hear the voice of God who will keep them comfortable.

I reflect on the ills of winter and the ongoing Covid around the world.

I pray that those affected will soon know the healing power of our God.

I reflect on those who have become jobless

I pray that they will find new employment that they will enjoy.

I reflect on winter and give thanks to God for all I have.

My faith tells me, after winter will come the spring.

The long, cold winter will melt away.

I look forward to the irresistible pull in my spirit that tells me the winter has gone

I will sing the praises to my God.



## Books for the Journey



### ***Monarch Wonders – Life Cycle Images for Reflection***

**Marion Robison**

**Ark House Press**

**Reviewer: Rosemary Blackwell**

This book, beautifully illustrated through Marion's gift of photography, takes us through the four stages Monarch butterflies go through during their life cycle (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis and butterfly). Along the way Marion helps us to make the connection with our own stages of spiritual growth and change. An image I have not seen before is the magnified photo of a caterpillar hatching from an egg. Absolutely magical! In his book *Immortal Diamond*, Richard Rohr explains that the Greek word for soul (psyche) literally means butterfly (p15/16). Be prepared to enter into the depths of your own soul as you journey through this little gem of a book illustrated with colourful photographic evidence of all the four stages in a Monarch's life cycle.

Book available through Marion Robison - email: marionsrqw@icloud.com



### ***Waiting***

**Barbara Harry**

**Wildside Publishing**

**Reviewer: Kerry Johnstone**

Ideal for the coffee table, Barbara Harry's well-illustrated book intertwines a number of biblical quotations, single challenging words and her own thoughts with images of the monarch butterfly in its various stages of development as a sustained parable on the theme of time and waiting.

Barbara sees waiting as a practice where stillness and listening can bring one closer to God. The images imply that life is a journey of the spirit and that waiting through each stage until one's potential or completeness is attained is an important aspect of this journey. For those contemplatives well along in their journey or those who have newly discovered the reflective practice, this book will reinforce the necessary stage of waiting in a world of haste, pressure and confusion.



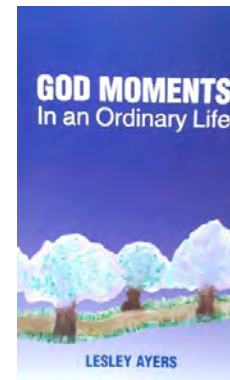
### ***The City is My Monastery: A Contemporary Rule of Life***

**Richard Carter**

**srestelle@paracletepress.com**

**www.paracletepress.com**

In the midst of an established monastic life, Richard Carter answered a new call, leaving his life of 15 years in the Melanesian Brotherhood to answer a need in a busy church in the heart of London, Saint Martin-in-the-Fields. There Carter founded the Nazareth Community, a new monastic community in the Church of England. Its diverse members—in Samuel Wells' words from the foreword, "a community of faith and forsaken, wondrous and woolly"—gather from everyday life to seek God in contemplation, to acknowledge their dependence on God's grace, and to learn to live openly and generously with all. With wit, wisdom, and generosity, Richard Carter tells the story of the Nazareth Community, and offers spiritual insight for daily Gospel life rooted in these seven spiritual pillars: Silence, Service, Scripture, Sacrament, Sharing, Sabbath Time and Staying.



### ***God Moments in an Ordinary Life***

**Lesley Ayers**

There are times in life where coincidence after coincidence seem well beyond random chance. We find ourselves there at just the right time and place to help someone, or we are the ones who receive help. What if these coincidences give us a glimpse of God's presence, God's timing? What if there is a loving God whose time breaks through into our everyday life? Through the stories in this book Lesley tells how she has experienced God's timing and reality in her life over the years. Her eyes have been opened to a world that is much richer than we realise. As Malcolm Muggeridge puts it:

"God speaks to us and the art of life is to get the message".

Book available from Lesley Ayers – ayerslesley@gmail.co. \$25 (includes postage)

## SGM News

Kia ora Koutou friends of Refresh and SGM

Hope you enjoy this edition around 'Practice', the wonderful material for which was sent to Diane who handed it on to Anna Johnstone, our new Refresh Editor. We warmly welcome you, Anna. For many years Anna and her husband Kerry have been proof-readers for Refresh. Anna is an educator, a writer (she has produced at least 6 books), a photographer and a lover of creative spirituality. She joined our workgroup meeting in March, where it was very evident that God is sparking her with imagination for the future of this journal.

I encourage any who feel inclined to begin thinking about contributing to our summer edition, The Deep. This powerful image immediately made me think about the deep of the sea, the power of deep listening, and the call to deep engagement with gritty life stuff....

We value your prayers and ongoing support for our SGM offerings. We have this taonga (gift) of knowledge and practice in the contemplative space and our stressed and troubled world desperately needs to know about it.

Spiritual Growth Ministries is more than a name, it's an ethos. Our kaupapa is 'spiritual growth'. As this edition of Refresh indicates, Practice and practices are part of what helps us grow and we want to put growthful resources your way with a variety of downloadable resources in the coming months and years. From simple things like Body Prayer or a Breathing Meditation to Trove (as in treasure trove) - Fran's six-week encounter with the wisdom of the Church for the bored, stuck, uncertain or curious - we look forward to being part of spiritual growth for you or those with whom you share the faith journey.

May this winter season allow for a bit of hunkering down, reflecting, dreaming, and being welcomed into the deep aroha of God.

Ngā mihi nui

Jane Wilkinson, Convenor SGM Workgroup

## SDFP Co-ordinator's Report

"Dancing on a moving carpet" was, if you recall, how I described the experience of adapting constantly to the shifting requirements of leading the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme last year in the first throes of the pandemic. The carpet is still moving and so the dance goes on; not only for me but for the brave souls who applied for the formation programme in 2020 and have stuck with it – and we acknowledge those who had to withdraw to attend to other demands thrust upon them during the pandemic. Incredibly, despite the difficulties, something surprising has happened – the programme is bursting at the seams! We have 26 participants in Year 1 which is the largest intake since I've been in the role and second only to the intake of 2007. Ranging across a wide spectrum of previous and current career/skills and from varied parts of the Church whanau in Aotearoa these people embarking on this formation journey at such a time can only be good for their faith communities, families, workplaces, and personal growth. Hat tip to you, 2021 Cohort.

I'm aware as I write to you, of several acts of radical generosity in the past few years which enable SGM to offer some individuals financial relief and smooth the way for their participation. Faith plays a part in every person's engagement with the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme but for some, faith for the finances is a much bigger deal than it is for others. My own story is of receiving an inheritance -the only money I have ever received in such a way (and from a neighbour!) which came unexpectedly and freed me from anxiety or guilt about the effect of my training on the family finances as we were raising a tribe of teenagers and I don't need to tell you how expensive they are! God provided for me. It was incredible. I felt so affirmed by this unexpected gift. The gifts/donations which I have been privileged to disburse over the past few years make an enormous difference to the person who receives them, and these gifts keeps on giving – it truly is an investment. You wouldn't be reading this if I hadn't received that beautiful inheritance. Often the gift is from an individual, someone who has done the programme or has benefitted from spiritual direction (or both); occasionally the gift is from a community – I think this is particularly wonderful. A group of people recognising the value of investing in another; one of their own perhaps, or maybe an open-handed gift which allows for God to join the dots between giver and recipient. This year we've seen both. I get to see the joy, relief, and affirmation such a gift brings. Lucky, lucky me!

If you'd like me to give away money for you, just let me know!

Fran Francis



## This time, next time

The wonderful Diane Gilliam-Weeks, Editor of stimulating, beautiful *Refresh* for the past ten years, has handed on the baton to me with encouragement and grace. I'm delighted to take it, choosing to hold it lightly, as did Diane, trusting, as she did, that God will guide, lead and inspire. May you know joy in your next adventures, Diane. Thank you for the amazing legacy you've left. I so enjoyed working with you.

Over the years of being involved with *Refresh*, the SGM Workgroup, carers for and holders of *Refresh* and the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme, had taken on almost mythical connotations in my mind. When I finally got to meet them, I found them to be a group of delightful people with a very tangible sense of community who hold their roles with wisdom and God-love. I'm honoured that they have trusted me with this new role.

My hope for *Refresh* is that it will continue to be a place where truth will sing forth from the pages offering understanding, enlightenment, comfort, strength, guidance. Words from those who walk the deep paths of God with God.

Thank you to those who've waited to see their words in print. I hope there's something in these pages which touches the heart of all readers.

Anna

### **Summer 2022 Refresh – The Deep**

**Deadline: 30th September 2021**

My own definition of Contemplative Spirituality is: *Living in the presence of Love and knowing the deep things of God.*

What does the deep mean for you? How have you experienced the deep things of God? How have they nurtured, guided, blessed you? In the very real places where the deep may be a place of struggle and heartache, how do we live in God's love?

*Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. (Ps 42)*

How do we deepen our sense of intimacy when we are in a place of desolation? What experiences are you having at present on your journey that may be a call to a deeper sense of intimacy with God?

### **Guidelines for writers – please:**

- keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words
- be conversational in style
- leave one space after periods
- use endnotes instead of footnotes
- use inclusive language wherever possible
- ensure images are larger than 2MB
- include a short bio – approx 50 words – in optimism

Flame dancing Spirit, come  
Sweep us off our feet and  
Dance us through our days.  
Surprise us with your rhythms:  
Dare us to try new steps, explore  
New patterns and new partnerships:  
Release us from old routines  
Go swing in abandoned joy and  
Fearful adventure.  
And in the intervals  
Rest us  
In your still centre.

*Women Included*  
The St Hilda Community

## Contributors

**Hilary Oxford Smith** lives in North Otago. She is a Church of Scotland minister and an Associate Member of The Iona Community. She offers retreats in contemplative spirituality, Celtic Christianity and bereavement care and is also a Spiritual Companion. Hilary is a published author and writer.

**Glynn Cardy** is the Minister of the Community of St Luke in Auckland. He is bi-religious – Anglican and Presbyterian – albeit of a progressive hue. He has been tamed by dogs and cats. He loves coffee, cycling, tramping, and being on or beside the ocean. He is a strong advocate of building a society that leaves nobody behind, or outside. Glynn is married to Stephanie, and they have four children, Michael, Andrew, Maria, and Anna.

**Val Roberts** is a Spiritual Director who lives on the Kapiti coast and is loving being a grandmother to two boys. She also loves writing, creating, dancing, connecting to God in nature and finding ways to encourage others and spread kindness.

**Heather Kelly** is resident in a retirement village in Invercargill, where she endeavours to practise a pastoral ministry in a casual role. She is energised by worship leading, creative writing and in the glory of the Creator's handiwork.

**Bruce Nicholls:** I love God's world. During my 38 years in India, Kathleen and I loved walking in the Himalayan foothills. My new book, *From Groaning to Liberation: Our Christian Response to Creation Care and Climate Change*, is now being published in Europe. I am in zoom contact with India and Nepal. I live in Selwyn Village, Pt Chevalier, Auckland.

**Ana Lisa de Jong** is a contemplative poet who is inspired by the power and wonder of words, art and the myriad ways it speaks to us, and the eternal threaded through the natural world. She enjoys connecting with readers and creating collections to gift to others. [www.livingtreepoetry.com](http://www.livingtreepoetry.com)

**Steve Tollestrup** has a background in overseas aid and development, local government politics and environmental activism and advocacy. A member of the ACS D executive, he attends CitySide Baptist Church, Auckland. He complements his spiritual direction practice as a consultant for community groups and not for profits, exploring bush and coastal wilderness, pursuing the sacred in art and being a grandad for five awesome grandkids.

**Clare Lind** is a Presbyterian minister. She recently moved back to Otago after years away and is enjoying reconnecting with the landscape of her childhood.

**Pamela Gordon** has lived on a community organic farm in the hills of Puhoi for the past 40 years. She loves the seasonal cycles and the precious people in her life. Poetry is her way of savouring the moments and cherishing that which we have been given.

**Lesley Ayers** lives in Tauranga. She enjoys walking (bush and beach), coffee (fair trade), music (classical), books (many and varied) and is just learning to draw (never too late). She is grateful for family, friends and community (both local and global).

**Stephen Whitwell** is husband of one, father of two, grandfather of eight! He loves God, the Bible, his family, life, fine food, writing, living in the Bay of Plenty and helping people discover who they really are. A retired pastor, he writes and publishes including Brief Word (a free eletter/blog), and serves on two Christian Trusts. [www.goodwords.nz](http://www.goodwords.nz).

**Carolyn Officer** is married to Allan, with three adult children. Living in Blockhouse Bay, Carolyn enjoys gardening, swimming, writing, and making her home a haven for sojourners. The spiritual practices she discovered in a Graduate Diploma in Theology at Laidlaw College continue to transform her life.

**Mike Riddell** writes novels, plays, films and apology notes. He cooks when he can and breathes intentionally on a daily basis.

**Martin Stewart** is a Presbyterian Minister based in Christchurch and is currently serving as Executive Officer of Alpine Presbytery. Writing, photography and tending a rural property compete for his attention!

**Judith Dunlop:** I am a long time member of Johnsonville Uniting Church together with my husband Boyd. Poetry has always been something I enjoyed to write so the Lockdown in 2020 gave me plenty of time to reflect.



