

Faith and Reflection by Barbara Ashcroft B.A. M.ED.

Making time for prayer and reflection in our lives is an absolute must for our emotional well being. Having faith and trust in God silences our fears, brings us inner peace and leads to a life filled with joy and contentment.

Our Haste

Western culture values the independent self made man/woman who can do it all, rise to the top of the corporate ladder, and live a lavish life of luxury. We begin to believe in our own invincibility. We look for material goods and prestige to satisfy our inner longings for happiness. Advertisements entice us to work longer and harder to accumulate more 'stuff'. In doing so, we overbook ourselves and live a life of constant frenzy with little time for faith or reflection. Busyness becomes the norm. Our 'to do' lists get longer and are never complete. We become cranky and impatient with our family members as our relationship time dwindles. In turn, our children pick up our impatient manner and habits. Restlessness and anxiety invade our inner spirits. We begin to feel that something is definitely missing.

Slowing Down

When was the last time you just allowed yourself to sit quietly, do nothing and enjoy the present moment? This is often regarded as a waste of time in our goal-oriented culture. We feel that we must always be 'doing' something instead of just 'being' for a while. David Kundtz tells us that "stopping is doing nothing for a definite period of time for the purpose of waking up and remembering who you are". In the midst of constant noise, visual distraction, and hectic daily schedules our spiritual self cries out for some peaceful reflective moments. What we really need are periods of absolute silence. For some people this very thought is terrifying. We have a society that is constantly "buzzing" with audio interference. Our minds are bombarded with multiple sources of input. Mega sensory stimulation keeps us in a state of constant 'on'. We have become so accustomed to all this visual and audio distraction that the thought of silence frightens us. Henri Nouwen states that "today noise is the normal fare, and silence has become the real disturbance".

Setting Up Your Own Sanctuary

Taking a few minutes every day to reflect and refresh your inner spirit in prayer is just as essential to your life as eating and breathing. So often we neglect this part of our life and keep up our whirlwind pace until our emotions are in such a state that we can barely function. Find a quiet personal space to nourish your soul. Make it your own special corner where you can drop out, clear your head and deep breathe. As you begin to incorporate this down time into your day you may find it helpful to read an inspirational scripture passage or prayer or to listen to a beautiful hymn of praise. When you become more comfortable with this quiet time, silence will begin to feel peaceful. (Refer to the previously archived article entitled *The Spiritual Discipline of Silence*)

I always begin my prayer in silence. God speaks to us in the silence of our hearts. Mother Teresa

Getting Back to Nature

Connecting with nature is one of the best ways to restore balance to a life gone out of control. In nature we see all of God's magnificent creation, from a small seedling to a giant sequoia tree; from a bubbling brook to a thundering waterfall; from a snowcapped mountain top to a fertile valley. Nature feeds our soul and reminds us of the natural order of things. Let your eyes take in the beautiful imagery of sunlight dancing among the trees and let your ears pick up on the sounds of the chirping birds and scurrying chipmunks. Let your mind be in awe of all natural life. See yourself as one of God's magnificent and loving creatures. Be thankful for all creation.

Trusting in God

We will only hear the inner calling and voice of God when we begin to quiet ourselves, slow down and acknowledge our dependence on Him. God's help is always there for us. He lovingly waits for us to call on Him. He loves our independent spirits, but He knows that we may run into some serious roadblocks in life. None of us can totally control our expected life outcomes. God waits for us to lean on Him. God knows all of our hurts and sorrows, and our longings and aspirations. When we realize that we don't have to totally go it alone, we can rest in the comfort that God will always be there for us on our journey through life. We can give up trying to be the general manager of the universe. Turn some of your cares and worries over to God. Let God in and see how your burdens become lighter.

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Mt 11:28-30

When we take a few quiet minutes every day to renew our trust in God's love and surrender ourselves, we begin to relax knowing that all is well. God does not expect us to be independent perfectionists in all things. He wants us to work in partnership with Him. He will give us strength in times of need. All we have to do is come to Him. We must remember, however that God does not work on our time-table. When we are going through tough times, it is often difficult for us to see God's plan. When we stay close to Him, however, we know that our life might be taking a new turn and that eventually He will reveal that plan to us. He asks us to listen and wait for further directions. As we spend our silent daily prayer time with Him, the fog begins to lift. We feel His strength and support guiding us as we move forward.

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. Mt. 6:34

Those whose lives are truly filled with joy and contentment do not let consumerism drive their lives. They enjoy the fruits of their labor, but are not preoccupied by the constant need for more. They know that true happiness is an inside job. Those who live in faith and trust in God have a real sense of inner peace. No matter where they are they bring this inner calmness with them. They are sustained through life's trials secure in the knowledge that God has a greater purpose for them. They know that at any given time they have a Constant Friend to whom they can turn for ongoing support and unconditional love. They take time for silent reflection and prayer. They have an ongoing attitude of gratitude. They feel the peace that faith brings and they share this peace with others.

It is only when we learn not to fear, but to trust in God's love, to surrender ourselves, that we learn to relax. Jean Vanier

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