

THE MONASTERY OF THE HEART



An Invitation to a Meaningful Life

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BlueBridge

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A Seeker's Path



"Your way of acting should be different from the world's way."

The search for God
is a very intimate enterprise.

It is at the core
of every longing in the human heart.
It is the search for ultimate love,
for total belonging,
for the meaningful life.

It is our attempt
to live life and find it worthwhile,
to come to see the presence of God
under all the phantoms and shadows—
beyond all the illusions of life—
and find it enough.

But the search depends,
at least in part,

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on the complex of energies within us
that we bring to the challenges
of this seeking.

We do not all hear the same tones
at the same volume,
or see the same visions
in the same colors,
or seek the same goods of life
in the same way.

The search for God depends, then,
on choosing the spiritual path
most suited to our own spiritual
temper and character.

For some seekers,
it is in withdrawal from society
or by immersion in nature
that God is most present.

For others, the face of God
shows most clearly
in the face of the poor,
or is felt most keenly
through the support of those
with whom they share
a common spiritual regimen.

For many, it is a bit of both,
a balance of community,
contemplation,
and commitment
to the people of God.
It is the search to belong
to a group of fellow travelers
who will hold us up
when we fall,
and urge us on to greater heights
when we are afraid to strain for more.

These are the seekers who are looking for others
who seek what they seek,
who care about what they care about,
and who set out with them
to make life richer
and the world better
than they know they could ever do alone.

But whatever the nature
of a seeker's lifestyle,
the search for God
depends, as well,
on the spiritual maturity it takes
to move from one level
of spiritual insight to another—
rather than cling to the spiritual satisfaction
that comes with earlier,

less demanding, practices.
The search for God depends on the desire
to grow to full stature as a spiritual adult,
to come to know the God
who is as present in darkness
as in light.

It depends on the willingness
to let God lead us
through the deserts of a lifetime,
along routes we would not go,
into the Promised Land of our own lives.

Most of all, the search for God
depends on fidelity
to the demands of the search itself.
It is the constancy of commitment
which we bring to the spiritual path
that prepares us
to recognize and receive
the fullness of it.

There is, as a result,
more than one way
to go about the journey
to God.

We may seek God alone,
in the silence of our own hearts,

where our attention is centered
in a keen and conscious way
on developing an ear
for the leavening penetration
in our lives
by the mind and Word of God.

This is an extremely private
and individual spirituality
that emphasizes personal prayer
and contemplation
of the presence of God in life.

But it is not the only way to God
and, in fact, not the most common way.

Another kind of journey to God
leads us to seek God with others
in a covenantal common life,
where by the physical joining of our lives together
we become a daily witness
to create in the world
a community of strangers
bound together by the will of God.

In our time, in a society
that is both mobile
and connected
at the same time,

there is still another
possible way to make the journey to God—
and that is
in a Monastery of the Heart.

Here we choose to seek God
in step with others,
even though not always in common with others—
each of us on an apparently separate path
and yet all of us in veritable community
with one another on the way—
as lifelines,
as mentors,
as guides,
as models,
as brothers and sisters in whose loving company
we choose to make our common journey to God.

The Rule of Benedict recognizes
the major differences among seekers' paths
and alerts us as well to the subtle distinctions
among them,
so that we can begin our own spiritual journey
aware of the complex character of each separate lifestyle,
and prepared to bring our selves to the way best suited
to the enterprise for us.

Going the road alone, for instance—
developing a solitary spiritual discipline—

is a rare but well-worn tradition
of spiritual figures both known and unknown.

Those who go this road to God,
Benedict tells us,
have come to a point in the spiritual life where,
already well-formed in a proven and established
monastic tradition,
they move beyond the structures which maintain it
in order to go deeply
into the struggle with the self—
both physically and mentally—
that comes with solitude.

These seekers, Benedict says,
“Have passed beyond the first fervor of monastic life . . .
They have built up their strength
and go to the single combat of the desert.
Self-reliant now,
they are ready with God's help
to grapple single-handed . . .”

Theirs is the path that strips away
the common supports of life—
the companionship of a partner,
the counsel of others,
the strength of a community,
the traditions of the group—
and throws them on the designs of the Spirit

and deep, deep concentration
on God
alone.

These seekers
feel the impulse of the God within.
They give their lives
to the God who beckons them inward,
sure that the One who calls them
to such a life
will also guide them through it—
alone but not lonely.

The major concern with this lifestyle
is the human tendency to turn in
on ourselves
and to forget our obligation
to build up the entire
human community.
“Whose feet,” St. Basil asks,
“will the hermit wash?”

In its stead, Benedict says simply,
are those who
live immersed in a community,
accountable to its standards,
cemented in its values,
and responsible for making
the human community

ever more human,
always more of a community.

In whichever of the lifestyles we find ourselves—
the spiritually solitary of any stage of life,
the intentional living groups of every size,
the networks of similarly committed individuals
whose community life
is stable but not necessarily daily—
we are on tried and true pathways to God.

We are all seekers of the God
who is here
but invisible to the blind eye;
who calls to us
but is unheard by those who do not listen;
who touches our lives wherever we are,
but is unfelt
by those whose hearts
are closed to the presence of God—
who is everywhere,
in everyone,
at all times.

When we seek
to wed all three lifestyles in our own time—
solitary,
intentional,
and communal—

we seek to be
in a Monastery of the Heart.

Then our Rule is this one.
Our spiritual guide is the Word of God.
Our formative community
is with those of one heart with whom
we join on this way
in a Monastery of the Heart—
to find the God who emerges
with inexorable fidelity
in human form.

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A Single Vision



*“Perform the Opus Dei where you are . . .
Those on a journey are not to omit the prescribed hours but to
observe them as best they can.”*

The Benedictine Rule
is based on the notion
that community life
is the preeminent form
of the spiritual journey,
because it provides for
immersion in communal worship,
private contemplation,
shared wisdom,
common ownership,
and mutual service.

But community life,
life in concert