

The Basics Of Deep Prayer

Book One of the System of God

By Dean Thomas

The Basics of Deep Prayer

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Contents of the Chapter:

What This Book Is About

How to Read This Book

Why You Should Read This Book

What This Book Is About:

The Basics of Deep Prayer is a book that outlines meditation fundamentals that are rooted in Catholic mysticism. This "how to pray" book will take the shortest path to contemplation. In many cases, your current practices can be modified to meet the meditation basics that leads to contemplation.

How to Read This Book:

This book can be read in either the abridged or unabridged methods. The abridged way bypasses all of the explanations of why we need to do certain things and cuts the book down to two short sections which are "The Basics" on page 14 and "Putting It All Together" on page 84. The first section lists the basics we will need for deep prayer, and the second section is a step by step procedure for reaching an unimaginable mystical reality.

If there are questions about following the procedure, they will be answered by E-mail. You may E-mail me at:
Dean.Thomas@RestorationPeople.org

Why You Should Read This Book:

This book can be challenging. Why read it? We can not find happiness by always taking the easy way. This book shows you how to find what you have always been looking for.

You have been chosen. God has a specific plan for your life that will make you very happy now and forever. If you are trying to hear God's call, this book was written for you.

God does not hide the plan, but after we sin, we follow Adam's example of hiding from God. Hiding might seem safe, but safety is an illusion. We are all going to die; how safe is that? Death is not a punishment from God. Death is part of God's plan to overcome sin without violating the integrity of our identity. From our perspective, it might seem that God punishes us, but God is always trying to help us. God always has a plan for a brighter future. We need to believe that God is on our side, and we need to have hope because everything is in God's hands.

The intent of this book is to state what is needed to find God and His Plan for your life. There are certain things, such as oxygen, we all need in our biological life, and our prayer life requires a few basics as well. The intent of this book is to list these basics and to write why each is needed.

There are many ways to meet these basics, and there are a number of books with fabulous spiritual recipes that were written by holy people. As people practice these spiritual diets, however, some of the basics are almost always

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missing. When the basics are not met, the prayer life is much less than it should be.

You don't have to read this book to find your calling. Thousands of people across many centuries have found their vocation before this book was written. On the other hand, most people who want to find their calling fail to find it because they don't explicitly understand what they need to do.

It will probably take you quite some time (usually 5 to 15 years) to implement the book's message into your life, but after the basics are met, you will be on your way to a very rewarding life and afterlife.

Introduction

This book is not about laws. I am not a lawyer.

This book is not about psychology. I am not a psychiatrist.

This book is not about science. I am not a scientist.

This book is not about theology. I am not an theologian.

If you have noticed that the categories of denial are in alphabetical order, you have probably guessed that I am an engineer.

Why would an engineer write a "how to" book about contemplative prayer? Contemplative prayer is not only for those in a cloistered monastery. It is for everyone. In the past, monks were more successful at

contemplation because they had fewer distractions, but many contemplatives have had active ministries in busy places.

An engineer designs solutions to problems. In this problem, people wonder what God wants them to do. The only solution to this problem is to build a relationship with God through prayer and ministry. In recorded history, many people have succeeded in this. In each case, the basics of the following method would have been implemented.

The following method is not a hypothesis, theory, or opinion. Everything obeys a specific set of laws. This book is meant to be a definition of when we are either inside or outside of those laws. The book doesn't require a rigid recipe. The basics can be incorporated into many different systems.

I didn't invent these laws. In fact, most of them were known in medieval times. Many people have wrote a great amount about them, but no has ever wrote what was needed to maintain deep prayer. We will list some of these here.

Saint Thomas of Aquinas identified the final pieces of a static philosophical system needed to derive the basics presented in this book, but he did not specifically develop the basics as they applied to contemplative prayer. In addition, the Thomistic view of how the soul recovers from sin seems to be misunderstood in most theological circles. A working knowledge of these Thomistic elements is needed to determine the basics of deep prayer.

Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross specifically address the basics of consistency and focus, and their teachings are

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usually among the most read in the area of contemplative prayer.

Saint Catherine of Sienna and Saint John of the Cross analogously allude to the role of love in deep prayer, but Faith and Hope have to actively support each other in a spiral engagement to facilitate love. Pope John Paul II wrote on this in his commentary of John of the Cross, and John of the Cross implies it. Saint Thomas of Aquinas directly states it but in a general way that does not mention meditation. When the practitioners (people trying to put this in practice) write on their experiences, however, it is difficult to find a practical determination that attempts to insert this critical objective into the prayer routine. We have the idea, intent, and rhetoric, but we lack the execution.

In the teaching of Saint John Vianney we can find some excellent ideas on developing constancy, and Dominican and Franciscan spiritualities definitely develop the duality between vocation and prayer at a more advanced level.

Centering prayer, which has been primarily developed by the Cistercians in a more modern development, is good at focus.

Of course, the Church has a rigorous system of saving souls which seems to be more defensive than offensive. This is necessary because, as Aquinas says, people usually approach God through fear.

Of course, this list is only a small sampling of the resources available. With the exception of Saint John of the Cross, there is not much of an attempt to tie it all together. This probably happens because the subject seems hopelessly broad.

As it works out, the system of requirements is very short. To be exact, four things are required to have great prayer times and a deep relationship with God. These requirements won't be easy to incorporate into our daily life, but at least we will know the shortest path to take.

These basics were developed through two primary avenues. In the first case, the writings of spiritual masters were gleaned for their recommendations. From these, the writings of all three female Doctors, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa of Avila, and Saint Therese of Lisieux were very helpful. As I mentioned before, Saint John of the Cross is probably the most used source in this area. Of course the Bible quotes Jesus a number of times in this area, and there are quotes from many Saints. For example, Saint Dominic, Saint Benedict, Saint Paul, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and Saint John Bosco are favorites in this area. The attitude and witness of Saint Colette, Saint Clare, Saint Joseph of Cupertino, Saint Martin de Porres, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Joan of Arc, and many others were carefully considered.

The writings of the spiritual masters provided the majority of what was needed. The second avenue of development came from the philosophy that was primarily developed by Aristotle and Saint Thomas of Aquinas. The principle employment of this philosophy was to determine why certain things were needed.

For example, the ancient Greeks proved that larger things are made of smaller things, and the smaller things are made of still smaller things. This cycle continues indefinitely, and

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there is no smallest thing. The same is true as we go into larger and larger things. Aquinas added a significant corollary to this by demonstrating that the smaller parts were as intelligent as the larger parts that they made. From this, he draws the axiom that the smaller parts know the truth before the larger parts. In other words, everything is learned from the inside out. The truth may come from an external source, but it will not be understood by the larger part until the smaller parts understand it, first.

Our prayer methodology should be designed to address our composition. The Greatest Commandment does speak to this, and we use this as a springboard into this area. As Aquinas points out, the soul is the coordinating element. When the soul is properly disposed, a momentum can be built to build simultaneous prayers occurring in multiple or all parts of the body. While this might seem like a stretch to those who are not familiar with deep prayer, praying with the whole body at once is often given as a definition of contemplative prayer.

In the systematic philosophy of Aquinas or Aristotle, the difference between a living being and an inanimate object is whether it has a soul. Aquinas lists three different kinds of souls: vegetative, sensitive, and rational.

As the names imply, a plant would have a vegetative soul, an animal would have a sensitive soul, and a human would have a rational soul. The Council of Vienne of 1311 defined as an article of Faith that the rational soul is one with the vegetative and sensitive souls and is the form of the human body.

Aquinas is sometimes misunderstood because somehow people got the idea that a person had to be rational to have a rational soul

which is clearly not the case. In other words, some modern philosophers assign the notion of soul evolution to Aquinas. In this theory, the soul is vegetative at conception, then evolves to sensitive, then to rational. This concept is given to Aquinas, but Aquinas never said it. On the other hand, Aquinas did say the opposite, over and over again.

As an example, consider the following quote from Aquinas:

"Since the powers of the soul are natural properties following upon the species, the soul cannot be without them. Yet, granted that it was without them, the soul would still be called intellectual or rational in its species, not that it would actually have these powers, but on account of the essence of such a species, from which these powers naturally flow."

In other words, while it is true that the rational act distinguishes a man from an animal, the essence of the soul is what makes a soul human not its rational act.

If this is not enough, Aquinas speaks to this subject many other times, but we will choose two, the final Judgement and original sin.

Since it happened first, let's start with original sin. Aquinas maintained (as did the early Fathers of the Church) that the soul gains its original sin from its father. As Aquinas points out, the semen would need to contain original sin, but only a rational soul can have original sin. The semen of men, according to Aquinas, then carries the nature of a human soul. The point is that by Aquinas not only the fetus but also the semen carries human nature. In other words, Aquinas proved that humans were always human which includes everything before, after, and the offspring of the sexual

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act. If there is still misunderstanding, Aquinas taught that the humans were always human. The semen was human even though it was no longer in the man, and before it fertilized the egg. At the instant of fertilization it was human, and the human was human from instant of fertilization until eternity. Aquinas doesn't directly state this, but you can use his principles to show that the semen which does not fertilize the egg, will die and go on to eternal life. As science has developed, we can see that the principles that were proved by Aquinas are a guiding light to understand molecular biology (but also any other subject). In other words, any part of a human will have human DNA.

This leaves us with the final Judgement. For the uninitiated, our souls are judged individually when we die, but our bodies are not judged until the end of the world. While we might not believe this, these concepts are articles of the Faith. Of course, Aquinas believed them. The concept of DNA was not around in the time of Aquinas, but Aquinas still proved that our smallest parts mix with others smallest parts all the time (which has been empirically verified in our age). Since our bodies are all mixed together, it is impossible to judge the bodies until the final judgement when mortal life has ceased. In this passage, Aquinas proves that DNA (and the parts of the parts of the parts ad infinitum) are humans with rational souls. For mere animals are not judged.

From these passages (and many others) it is clear that Aquinas would consider abortion murder. He would also consider birth control a serious sin because it is a chemical attack on human cells. Both of these practices are violent and will sew the seeds of violence in a larger setting.

As we have shown, Aquinas demonstrated the smaller parts had souls, and together, these souls create the soul of the larger parts. The confusion occurs in terms of time. It takes time for the smaller parts to organize, cooperate, and form a larger part. As Aquinas points out, they are still human even when they are not organized. When the organization does occur, it is so profound that it seems miraculous. Since miracles come from God, we could say that the organization is as if God infused an aggregate soul into the smaller parts. While the smaller parts were human (i.e, rational soul and human body) before the organization, the aggregate part gains its soul at some point before the organization occurred. No soul comes from Heaven to assume the aggregate soul, the organizational intelligence of the smaller parts comes from the aggregate soul. The organizational intelligence is in the nature of the smallest parts, and the natural intuition of the smaller parts is inspired by God. It is incorrect to say that the organizational intelligence is the soul. The organization flows as from an inspiration from God. For example, in the early Church, Jesus named Peter as the first pope. It shows that the initial organization is divinely inspired. The initial intuition is divinely inspired, but the ongoing organizational intelligence is not necessarily divinely inspired as in a supernatural fashion.

We don't say that the Church received its soul when Jesus selected Peter, but the Church did receive its soul within the womb of Mary. Neither Peter, Paul, nor the rest of us received our soul at this point, but our soul finds either life or anguish based on our relationship to the soul of the Church. We become the Body of Christ if our souls are in a covenanted relationship with soul of the Church.

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The point to this is that the Church has a soul, but we do not say that the Church received its aggregate soul all at once. The soul of the Church develops and forms through divine inspiration and human cooperation.

As the Church develops, its powers as the Body of Christ grow, and these powers are demonstrated by the organizational qualities of the Church. When Aquinas says that it seems as if the soul is infused, he is saying that the organizational qualities have reached a point that the powers of the soul are demonstrated.

For without organization, there can not be rational thought which is the definitive power of the human soul. In other words, the organization is caused by the soul and is divinely inspired.

Aquinas also shows that within a fetus, this organization occurs before birth. In a broader statement, the organization occurs before a change in phases (where a new phase represents an entirely new kind of life), because the soul drives the phase change.

In terms of salvation history, Adam is the conception. We suffered a problem with the fall, but Jesus accomplished more than redemption. In the Divine Incarnation we see a new Eucharistic movement towards cooperation that allows the organization needed for the phase change. If we scale this, Jesus, among other things, is the infusion of the soul into the human race. Jesus established an organized movement (read the Church), but we can not say that the Church has grown to the critical mass needed for a phase change. We can, however, expect this to occur soon.

The naive might think that the Church is only one organization among many and the Church

certainly is not a model of organization, but the Church is the only organization that attempts to bring about the phase change. While this might seem ridiculous to those who do not follow the logic, the Church does strive for a happy ending to salvation history.

Let's go back to the fundamentals. Every organization has a goal. For most corporations, the goal is to create wealth for the investors. The goal of most governments is to protect its citizens and provide other services. Most religions strive for inner peace and external righteousness, but the Church strives to become the "Body of Christ" which is more than a cute motto of some fraternal order.

By divine inspiration, the Church uses a spiraling strategy that seems to be bringing about massive change. Most of us see the Church as some organization that promises, through the Cross and Resurrection, eternal happiness or we see an organization that makes extravagant claims of happiness to raise money, but Jesus made the Resurrection more of a beginning than the end. Jesus feeds His Body to the Eucharistic community which opens channels of grace within the communicant. Empowered by the "Bread of Life" the communicant can elect to be a part of the "Body of Christ". In other words, the communicant can cooperate with God's plan to create an entirely different world. In this new world, we would no longer be disparate individuals who work for diverse causes, rather we would act as one body that is carrying out a greater mission.

The strategy starts with Jesus who feeds us with His own body. By responding to the new life within us, we build the Church, but we have to change before we can change the Church.

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The change needs to come from within, or it will not last.

While we might not be able to see the glory of Christ in world events, we can see the change. Every organization builds through a process of individuation and integration. The individuation is required for each part to understand what it is supposed to do. The power of an organization come from the initiative of the lowest levels. If the smaller parts are confused, they can not work with a directed energy. An organization also needs the lower level initiatives to complement each other, lest at best, the initiatives inefficiently repeat each others actions or at worst compete against each other to the detriment of all. In our day, the waves of innovation are an unmistakable sign of individuation. While effective integration has been spotty, once the process is known, the progress will be rapid.

The process takes time. From our perspective, we may not be able to see the forest for the trees, but let's not forget the system that is empowering the change. We can participate in the solution by setting time aside for deep prayer. It takes time for the process of deep prayer to occur within us, and it takes time for us to demonstrate the process to others.

Neither the Church on a global level nor the soul on an inner level dictate change. Both have to built from within to bring us to a happy ending. The development of the human race is determined by the execution of the Church, and within our own life, we will only be as successful as our souls. In others words, if our souls our lost, then we our lost. On a larger scale, the same can be said for the Church and the world.

The Church knows that regular worship is required, but do we heed the requirement? Our soul speaks to us as well, but can we hear it? The goal of deep prayer is to develop the soul into a working relationship with God and the Church. We will need regular worship to build the required relationship.

The soul defines a large part of what we are, so how can the soul not be in full control? The soul does rule the body as a dictator in all cases. For example, reason which is a power of the soul is the ruler (if we can be considered rational) of the irascible and concupiscible powers, but the rule is more by a political command than an absolute order (from Aquinas).

When a novice tries to be holy, there is often an attempt to make reason the dictator over the other powers of the soul which violates their free will. Holy progress must be made through evangelization and relationships. As Saint Augustine put it, God is approached by: "not by steps of the body but by the affections of the soul." The word, "affections", indicates that the various parts of the soul must be won from within (not ruled from without).

If we want to win the race that Saint Paul refers to, we must do more than bury our soul in a hole for safekeeping as the man in the parable did. The soul is increased by exercising virtue. There are three kinds of virtue: theological, intellectual, and moral. To quote Saint Thomas of Aquinas, "Accordingly for a man to do a good deed, it is requisite not only that his reason be well disposed by means of a habit of intellectual virtue; but also that his appetite be well disposed by means of a habit of moral virtue." As Aquinas expands this thought, he shows that a deed is worth nothing without virtue and refers to the passage from

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Saint Paul that nothing is accomplished unless he has love. From these concepts, we can conclude that deep prayer must be more than sitting still and listening. Deep prayer needs to build habits of virtue.

Let's look at this from an elementary and practical view. When we begin to pray, our thoughts often drift. Aquinas says this is from a weak soul. By focusing our thoughts during prayer we gain a habit of intellectual virtue. As this habit strengthens our soul, our concentration gets better which allows us to pray deeper. The concentration has merit if we do it to increase our love for God, or as Saint Gregory puts it, "contemplative life has greater merit than the active life."

Shakespeare was wrong. The question is not, "to be or not to be," because we are a being. We need to decide whether we are going to join the problem or participate in the solution. Without deep prayer, most of what we do will be remembered as vanity. To be a part of the solution, we must recognize and join the Eucharistic movement, and we must strive to strengthen our soul. The Eucharist feeds the soul, and deep prayer strengthens the soul.

While deep prayer builds habits of virtue, virtue deepens the prayer experience.

This book is a set of guidelines that will maximize the experience and minimize the path to deep prayer. Deep prayer is the development of a relationship, and since each personality is unique, there is no one exact technique that fits everyone. On the other hand, we all need to follow the same set of principles, because we are not that different from each other. The pages of the book do contain some exact techniques to give examples of how the guidelines can be followed, but the book strives

to build a clear demarcation of what needs to be followed and what can be changed.

God's ways are not our ways, and as we develop a relationship with God, our journey is usually filled with surprises. For example, Peter thought Jesus would reclaim the glory of Israel, but instead it seemed as if Jesus intended to die a humiliating death.

This book can't prepare you for the devastating and painful personal losses your journey is likely to have. If you continue to believe, hope, and surrender in the Lord, you will one day see how necessary these losses were. The book can't exhaustively anticipate all the things that might happen, but it does try to give some examples of what has happened to others. In prayer and relationships, the lasting covenants are the most fruitful.

The basics of deep prayer come with a certain assurance of accuracy that those outside of engineering may not be familiar with. In science there are theories, hypotheses, and observations that leave room for interpretation and opinion. It takes a long time to discover a scientific fact and the context and extent of its function.

This book is not a scientific exposition, it is an engineering design. A competent engineer limits the scope and use of the design. The book is not a map of the spiritual journey; it is a vehicle that expedites our progress.

In engineering, we have "open loop" and "closed loop" systems. We have an open loop when we do something without checking for the results. For example, if a dad tells his son to take out the trash and never checks whether the order was carried out, the order is an open loop command. If dad checks to see whether the

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trash can is empty, we call this a closed loop command. In a similar way, a closed loop system samples the outcome and feeds it back to the beginning of the system which creates more stability in the system.

Throughout history, every effort has been made to make systematic philosophy a closed loop system. In other words, all parts of it fit together and form a "seamless garment". Every part can be used to explain and prove every other part. Euclidean geometry, Newtonian physics, and other methods also build systems using these techniques. Closed loop systems in science, mathematics, and philosophy reveal a higher truth with greater accuracy. Systematic philosophy give the skilled philosopher the confidence to explore the fundamentals of life. In this book we stand on these basic truths to demonstrate what is needed by deep prayer.

The basics of deep prayer that are presented in this book are accurate and exhaustive if enough latitude is given to constancy. Deep prayer is a time that we set aside for God, but we need to live our relationship through the rest of day. The time outside of deep prayer contains some specifics and many generalities, and it will impact the deep prayer experience. In fact, deep prayer must be lived outside the prayer time, if the prayer is to be considered authentic. The directives about how we should live the prayer experience, should come from several sources which include the prayer experience itself.

This book can never be the final word because the personal adaptation of the basics is critical. In other words, the book either succeeds or fails on a personal level. It makes no difference whether the book is accurate, if the accuracy is never implemented.

Many of us implement 1 or 2 of the basics, but there is a world of difference between a partial implementation and full immersion. As Saint John of the Cross points out, there is always a shortest distance between two points. By taking the shortest route, you can more quickly find the things you long for. When the basics are not followed, the ensuing spiritual journey is much longer and tortuous. By following the basics, we can reach places in days that often take years of unstructured wandering.

Many of us will feel some benefits of prayer from the beginning, but it is likely that these feelings will be erratic for some period of time. Deep prayer is likely to bring radical changes to our lives, and we will be tested in many ways. We need to decide if we are going to live for God or for ourselves, and we need to make an unwavering commitment to our relationship with God. While the cost can seem far too high, it is inconsequential compared to the reward.

To begin with, most of us are challenged to find enough time to pray. The prayer technique as proposed in this book requires a daily effort that will take at least 35 minutes but no more than 120 minutes of the day. One minute is better than no minutes, but any realistic plan will schedule a significant amount of time.

The overwhelming reason that people don't pray is that they can't find or take the time to do so, but by not praying, our whole life will be less than one percent of what it would be if we allowed God's inspiration to fill us. In other words, we are wasting nearly our whole life by not praying. This should be easy to see as you read through the book.

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Then there is personal change which can be so overwhelming that it could be described as the vicissitudes of life, and it is common for people to get mad at God for allowing it. If we didn't need to change, we wouldn't need to pray.

We are all called to live and experience a deep relationship with God. This is why we admire beauty, strength, intelligence, compassion and the other attributes of God. For we are made in God's image, and in Truth we won't be happy until we are satisfied by God.

Too many people only experience God's attributes through nature, music, or some other indirect reflection of His majesty.

In this work, we want to show how to experience God directly. This direct relationship is not the same as being born again or Baptized in the Holy Spirit, but these events are a part of the direct experience.

Only four things are required to follow these basics. Once they are understood, the implementation of them is short and simple.

The proposed prayer techniques are meant to embellish our current and ongoing prayer techniques. They are meant to show us how to go further with our current technique, and provided that our current techniques are not patently weird and are meant to be meditative, they should be used in addition to the basics that are set forth in this book. It is important to build upon what we have already started; so we don't have to start over which is very difficult and wasteful.

The basics of deep prayer are necessary to establish deep prayer. If we are going to allow

God to develop our lives, they must be followed. These basics should be seen as good proven practices that allow our being to cooperate with God.

The Basics

We can have a consistent inspirational prayer time day after day, but a relationship of this caliber will take time to build. It will also contain these four elements.

- 1. Consistency:** We need to commit a sufficient amount of high quality time to prayer every day. Consecutive prayer times simply can not be missed.

- 2. Focus:** During the prayer time, the person must long for God with his whole strength. In order for the prayer time to be effective, we need to practice setting our appetites on God. Extraneous thoughts, feelings, and experiences need to have a low priority.

- 3. Virtue:** Desire is the sequel to virtue, where virtue is the practice of faith, hope, and love during our prayer (not that virtue should be limited to deep prayer). Virtue builds a quality prayer experience.

- 4. Constancy:** After the prayer time is over, we will want to stay as close to God as possible. The constant prayer during various daily activities should be kept up until the next prayer time.

Since the success of our life depends upon our prayer experience, we will elaborate on each of the four points.

Consistency

As Saint Teresa of Avila emphasized, consistency is the first step towards deep prayer. The Church teaches us to pray every day, but this critical issue is usually lacking.

What Consistency Is:

In this section we will show what is required by consistency.

Regular Attendance:

In order to be consistent (insofar as deep prayer is concerned), we need to spend some time each day to be alone with God. In fact, we need to strive to not miss more than three or four times a year. When a day is missed, more time should be set aside the next day (not that this would make up for the missed day). Two consecutive days should not be missed.

The prayer time should be in the morning, but it is better to get in a time consistently than to get in an inconsistent time in the morning. The morning prayer time is strategic because we need to order ourselves after sleeping. As examples of this, Saint Catherine of Siena did not like her associates to sleep during the day because she was afraid that they would lose what they had gained during the day. Saint John Vianney complained that he had to start over each day which is a common complaint among Saints. While we are sleeping, we lose the holy focus we gained the day before. The morning prayer time helps us restore our frame of mind.

It is usually easier to be consistent in the morning than at any other time of the day. As an example, how often does our phone ring at 5:00 A.M. versus 5:00 P.M.? Whether we answer the phone, is a personal decision.

Prayer is something that involves the whole heart, mind, and soul with all the available strength. The prayer time should not be counted unless the entire attention is given to God. As a matter of efficiency, it is tempting to pray while performing some mundane task such as driving, jogging, or washing the dishes. This temptation should be rejected. Even those with active ministries need a time to be alone with God. Our souls need a time to heal.

Many people can not find a time to be alone with God. For example, a mother might have several young children that require constant attention. Each case requires a unique solution, but as Saint Francis told Saint Clare, "Walk across the field, and you will find a path." In other words, when a solution is sought, an answer will be found. In the case of the busy mother, as she prays while watching the children both she and the children will adjust to this (although there may be some frustration and friction), and this prayer is sufficient for deep prayer to occur.

On the other hand, let us suppose that the mother's attitude is that no deep prayer can occur with all of these children at her feet driving her crazy. Therefore, she decides to pray while doing chores. By doing this, she might have profound religious experiences, but she will not progress into deep prayer unless God miraculously intervenes on a regular basis (basically, this won't happen because it violates the mother's free will). She can't find the path without walking across the field.

We often pray with the mistaken notion that God speaks after we have quieted our mind. God usually speaks, but our internal appetites prevent us from hearing (not the external noise). In other words, the external noise

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triggers the internal appetites, and we become victims of our environment. It doesn't have to be like this. Those of us with active ministries will have to become the masters of our environment if we are to be instruments of God in all seasons.

At first, the avoidance of distractions may seem nearly impossible, but as we build our relationship with God, the armor of God (as St. Paul puts it) shields us from forgetting about God. God will give us whatever we need to be Children of God wherever God leads.

Deep prayer involves the development of a relationship with a living being who controls all things. In the parable of the pearl (Matthew 13:46), Jesus demonstrates the importance of priorities. To get our priorities straight, we must set time aside everyday to be with God.

To paraphrase Saint Peter, only God can save us, and we should take our salvation seriously by exercising our option to build a relationship with God by praying as deeply as we can every day. God expects this of us. We have an obligation to do it.

On the other hand, this process will not occur if God is not given priority over duty for a sufficient time on a daily basis because Faith is never the top priority. We must be willing to give up everything to obtain the pearl.

When we establish a consistent daily time where Faith has priority over duty, Faith will lead to Hope and Love. Then Love will influence our appetites and the pearl will become easier to obtain.

Time Commitment:

The prayer time needs to be long enough to stretch the spirituality of the pilgrim in prayer. As a rule of thumb, an effective prayer time would be between 35 and 75 minutes, but there can be many variables.

For example, attending Holy Mass and receiving Holy Communion before the prayer time, can make a prayer time that is half as long just as effective. This is particularly the case if the thoughts are controlled during Mass (keeping your thoughts on God during Mass is required by the Church). Since Holy Mass, Holy Communion, and a personal prayer time all bring separate but necessary ingredients into the spiritual diet, a serious spiritual pilgrim would do well to see if a daily regimen of attending Holy Mass, receiving Holy Communion, and then adoring the Blessed Sacrament can be establish. The adoration of the Blessed Sacrament can be complemented by personal preferences such as the Rosary or Scriptures.

When we are unable to concentrate, the prayer time will normally be less effective. In most cases, this can be compensated for by praying longer. For example, when we are sick, we might have to pray 3 or 4 times longer than normal before we reach the same level of composure.

Why Consistency Is Necessary:

In this section we will show why consistency is necessary to reach contemplation.

A person is a complex being made up of complex parts. The parts that make up a person are (at least somewhat) independent (even if they live in interdependent relationships). By independent, we mean that they make their own

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decisions, have their specific appetites, form their proprietary opinions, and are guaranteed their inalienable rights by God. For example, the Church's rules on birth control come from this area (most say *Humanae Vitae*, but it's not like Pope Paul VI invented rules against birth control. All parts of the body are human and have human dignity. It is wrong to use other humans solely for pleasure, the same applies to parts of our body).

The concept that all things are composed of parts extends to all things (proven by Aristotle but maybe earlier), but only humans have parts that form original or creative opinions (proven by Aquinas).

Throughout the course of scientific history, the proofs of Aristotle and Aquinas are ultimately confirmed. For example, Aristotle had several basic elements, but he said that these elements would be comprised of smaller elements. The discovery and development of atomic science proved how right Aristotle was. The discovery of cells and later DNA certainly verify how correct Aquinas was.

Modern science, Aristotle, and Aquinas all demonstrate that our identity is formed by smaller parts of similar intelligence who have their own identity. For the purposes of this book, the concept of an aggregate identity being formed by smaller but similar individual identity will be called intelligent recursion.

Since we are the aggregate of our intelligent recursion, we have to have consistency to advance to deep prayer. Massive amounts of intelligent independent parts will never amount to much without some form of civil order that allows the formation of a common consensus. For without cooperating parts, the whole will be compromised with indecision and confusion.

As an example, it is a good thing we have all decided on the same rules when we are driving down the highway.

Imagine an army that had no methods, organization, or hierarchy. What chance would it have of winning? A competing general could probably win by simply convincing them to join the opposing army.

In fact, it can be shown that the entire human race is in the process of forming an aggregate being, but we haven't experienced any global self realization yet. No one can answer the question of, "Who am I?" in particular without solving this riddle of human identity in general.

We can speak of a national legacy, but a nation won't identify a race anymore than an arm will identify a person. The DNA will identify the person, but the DNA is equivalent of an individual. We are not a world of nations, we are a race of individuals.

It could be argued that a group of individuals could band together to form a function for the race, but this is not a nation. Nations are primarily formed for protection (not service or cooperation). If all of this is not enough, a nation does not correctly identify the citizens. Sure, we call ourselves Americans, but America is not a race.

Even if America was a race, this characteristic would only demonstrate our lineage, but it would not show much of our intended function. The more parochial American idealist might argue that the proclamation of the "American Way" is the identity of Americans, but this way is similar to the Greeks, Romans, and Franks. Many of our laws mimic the English who borrowed from their European neighbors. To be sure, freedom

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is necessary to the survival of our race, but the concept of freedom did not originate in America. We Americans may have championed an idea, but an idea is not an identity.

We do not identify the cells in an arm as an arm cell. We identify them as blood, bone, nerve, skin, or some other form of cell. In a similar way, we are more accurate identifying ourselves as farmers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, or some other vocation than by identifying with where we live. Each engineer is very different than any other engineer. While our vocation provides a taste of identity it also falls far short of estimating either the identity or potential of the person. Since we are our recursion, we know that each cell in our body is different from any other cell, and we can not know the potential or identity of any cell in particular without knowing who we are as a person in general.

If we look to our identity as a human race, we find very little. Our identity as a person is more highly defined, and the identity of each cell is more highly defined than our identity as a person. Since we can not know anything without knowing who we are, we have shown that intelligence starts small and aggregates itself up.

This process is a natural occurrence, but busy rigidly dictated lives can retard or even kill the natural order of things. If we are ever going to realize the potential of who we are, we will need an environment that nurtures our identity. We can't let a trivial thought dictate our originality or restrict our personality (especially if the thought had an external origin). For example, we can't find time to pray, but we can find time for trivial electronic sedatives such as music, video, or games.

We are billions of small independent parts that are in search of a common interest. These parts are not of one mind, but they have a better understanding of their identity than we do. We must establish an environment that rallies our recursive population around a common Truth. As more of our recursive elements align along a common cause, we will gradually realize what they hold dear. At first, it will be fuzzy and inaccurate, but with the right environment, we will eventually realize it.

As the ancient Greeks pointed out (with their concept that we are made up of smaller and smaller parts to infinity and we make up larger and larger parts to infinity), the same process that occurs within us also occurs in the things we are a part of. In other words, we can take principles from larger levels of recursion and apply them to smaller levels of recursion. The opposite direction is valid as well.

At our level of recursion, the Church brings people of a single Faith together for common prayer at regular intervals. She requires weekly and prefers daily gatherings. The Church also gracefully fits the interval into the calendar to provide a common experience with greater levels of recursion.

In these gatherings, we remember the death of our Lord, and we celebrate His Resurrection. We are required to feel God's presence and invited to consume His flesh. By these examples, the Church teaches us about many things that should take place in our personal prayer times, because the Church is trying to accomplish the same thing on a global level that we want to accomplish on a personal level. Water is nearly the same whether it is drawn from a kitchen faucet or a mighty river. In the same vein, we are dealing with the same

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issues in our personal prayer times that the Church deals with across the entire human race.

It might be hard to believe, but we are composed of many living things who have their own ideas, opinions, and vices. We can use the wisdom of the Church who has nearly the same problem. From the bottom up, we know that many of the Church's methods came from individuals who were successful in their prayer time.

On a practical note, if we have a massive amount of independent parts, we will not have much organization without an imposed rhythm, and we need the organization to have the self control required for deep prayer. If a concert pianist wants to play at the top level, the pianist will need to practice every day. If a day is missed, the pianist will notice, and if two consecutive days are missed, the audience will notice.

Whole populations behave in a similar manner. For example, professional football has not always enjoyed the popularity that it has today. From its relatively small beginning, it has become a little more popular each year. At this point, most of the nation is mesmerized by the Super Bowl. If the Super Bowl was randomly held at different times and years, it would lose some (if not most) of its following because people would not see it as important.

Taking this down to a human level, if we were to awaken someone every morning at 5:00 A.M. for 100 consecutive mornings. We can be reasonably certain that the person would wake up at 5:00 A.M. on the 101st morning without our help.

A person who eats dinner every evening at 6:00 P.M. sharp, will tend to get hungry at 6:00

P.M.. In fact, it has been shown that people who have regular meal times weigh more than those who don't.

As a minimum, the Church requires its members to gather and pray once a week. When the Church prays together, the members reinforce each other's Faith. Since there are many different appetites in the Church, the common ground that is built by mutually strengthening each other's Faith, bonds the members. Hence the cliché, "The family that prays together, stays together".

Group prayer plants the seeds of Faith, and brings people closer together, but the individual must provide the environment for the seeds to flourish. Just as there are many appetites and wills in a group, there are many appetites and wills in an individual (from intelligent recursion). As Aquinas proved, we have no hope controlling our appetites or uniting our wills without prayer.

All good things work together. As our appetites and wills turn toward a common theme, we will develop a fire and desire that we never knew we had. In this, we will begin to find an unconquerable Spirit living within us.

With the use of consistency, the Church grew to what it is today, but if the Church did not insist on consistency (i.e., compulsory participation in the Mass and Sacraments), it would all be lost rather quickly.

The example of the Church shows us how we can have a very rich and rewarding life, but it will not happen or be sustained without consistency.

Group prayer and individual prayer need each other. For they are prayer at two different

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levels of recursion. Just as a body needs recursive material to makeup the body, so group prayer needs individual prayer to make up the group. On the other hand, if a small part of the body is separated from the rest of the body, it will not flourish like the rest of the body. In the same way (because it is the same thing), individual prayer will die without group prayer.

Establishing Consistency:

Many, if not most us, feel that the level of commitment which consistency requires is not possible for us. We are hurried people with busy lives and full schedules, but as the Bible would say, "Vanity, vanity, vanity, all is vanity". If the beginning of the day is not spent with God, the rest of the day will be spent in vain.

After we understand how important consistency is, some of us can simply decide to be consistent, but for most of us, consistency is more than a step away. God is patient. Consistency can be gradually established if we have a plan.

The simple way is the best. We set that old alarm clock to ring a little earlier. Then we drink some coffee, do some exercises, take a shower, or do whatever is necessary to get awake. I have never seen statistics on spiritual consistency, but morning joggers have a much better chance of keeping the routine than those who jog later in the day.

If we are not able to rise early and pray, we need a conversion of priorities which might come from a retreat or a vow. Before we become consistent, we must decide to keep trying until we become consistent.

It is best to get in the whole prayer time; but if we can't pray all of it, can we pray for 10 or even 3 minutes? If we are successful in getting our foot in the door, we might be able to invite ourselves in.

Falling Asleep:

A common problem among us is to get up early to pray, but we fall back asleep during the prayer time. It doesn't matter how peaceful we feel when we wake; sleeping is not praying, and it does not constitute the consistency we need to advance in our spiritual journey.

There are several solutions, but some are better than others. We can pray with a posture that does not allow sleep. For example, it is difficult to sleep standing or pacing, but it might be difficult to meditate as well. In particular, pacing will usually stimulate distractions, but as we begin the spiritual journey, we are usually distracted anyway.

A painful sitting posture might be effective, but a couple of conditions need to be met: We need to be able to feel God in the pain, and the pain should not cause permanent damage.

If we are beginners, we might try reading the Bible, saying the rosary, or some other more active method to stay awake. As we advance, we will need to use meditation to launch into contemplation, and these methods will not be as effective. On the other hand, they can be mixed with meditation to get the same results as meditation.

An electronic gadget that sounds an alarm when we start falling asleep can also be effective. These devices can be found in many drug stores, and they were originally sold to keep drivers alert. They normally have a switch

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closure (usually a gravity activated mercury switch) when the head tilts down. This gadget tends to be the best solution for most people with this problem (highly recommended).

Oversleeping:

Another problem we have all had is sleeping too long. When we oversleep, we can't just skip the prayer time. We need to make some hard decisions and plans to get it in. It is a matter of having the right priority. We don't want to go so far as to get fired from our job, but we do want to skip meals and reschedule appointments to allow us to meet with God.

We may need to undertake some penance to call attention to our spiritual need. For some people, it might be appropriate to fast from food until the prayer time is over, and most of us will not want to read the newspaper or watch TV until we have had our time with God.

Chronic Interference:

Sometimes we nearly establish consistency, but some sort of persistent interference keeps us from our prayer time. Relatives are a common culprit. For example, your mother comes for an extended stay. She has insomnia, and she wants to talk to the first person who gets up. She can't see how sitting silently in a chair can be construed as prayer.

Of course, there are a number of ways to handle these situations. The best approach is to simply be honest. We should tell them we are praying, and we prefer silence. If they can't or won't honor our wishes, we can be sneaky. For example, we can pretend to be reading something from work that is very important. If

they interrupt, we can tell them we will be with them in a few minutes.

If we keep trying, nearly everyone will respect our wishes. Our relatives might ridicule us, but after they determine we are too much trouble to bother with, we will be left alone.

Big Problems:

Our lives and the world around us are far from perfect. While we might believe ourselves to be praying in some secret, sacred seclusion, we are actually making big waves with significant living forces. Some of these forces are evil and others are good. When we rock the boat, our lives are can be reordered in ways that we don't appreciate.

It is only natural to blame God for these divorces, bankruptcies, deaths, and other vicissitudes of life, but we can't let ourselves become so discouraged that we despair. If we are to be like Jesus, we have to be faithful to God until our death.

Constancy:

Without taking up the subject of constancy, we would like to look at the link between consistency and constancy.

The more we keep our minds on God, the more we will value consistency. When we do not have prayer times everyday, it will still be worth our while to get as many prayer times in as possible. With our intelligent recursion, these inconsistent prayer times will not take us on the spiritual journey, but they will build a prayerful background for us to work from.

For example, some of us are afraid to be alone with our thoughts. These inconsistent

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prayer times will be helpful with these fears. When our fears are holding us back, prayers of inner healing are especially appropriate. The spiritual journey will almost always begin with inner healing. Any grudges or bad feelings that we have for other people need to be resolved, and inner healing can be instrumental to this process.

Even when we don't have consistency, we can still long for consistency. To put this another way, the first step toward establishing consistency is wanting consistency.

The more that we practice constancy, the more that we will value consistency. In other words, if we are going to hang things on our walls, hang religious articles. If we feel that we have to watch TV, we should watch religious videos and stations. Each time that we are reminded of God, we try to remember to long for consistency.

All good things always work together; so any good thing will bring us closer to consistency. With this in mind, we should go to church every chance we get. We should exercise every opportunity to Adore the Blessed Sacrament. We should tithe and practice spiritual and corporal works of mercy. As we do these things, and others like them, we will begin to value consistency.

If we have something in our life that keeps us from praying, we might attach a discipline to it. For example, let us suppose a business man can not pray every day because his business would suffer too much. Assuming that he is in business to make money, he might begin tithing, then it would be easier to justify praying since 10% of what he is working for is going to God.

The key here is to take a look at the appetite that is more important than God (in this example money), and to try to do things that work on that appetite. Tithing or any alms giving will tend to make money seem less important to the person giving the money.

To put this another way, tithing will bring a person closer to consistency, and consistency will bring a person closer to tithing. When we stand before God in the Final Judgement, God will not be looking at the profit and loss statements from our businesses.

In a more general sense, any good thing (such as a kind word to someone who is down and out) will bring a person closer to tithing, consistency, and all other good things, and any bad thing will bring a person closer to bad things (and further away from all good things). For example, a failure to be charitable will bring a person closer to stealing.

All good things go together, and all bad things go together. We can use this concept to prepare a strategy to become more consistent in our prayer time.

For example we could prepare a personal inventory of things that we do as we go through the day. This inventory is not meant to be some sort of feel good or bad self reflection, rather it should be taken in an analytical, objective, or cold blooded sort of way. Once we have the list, we write down beside each listed item why we are doing it.

Each reason for doing something would be further processed to some attribute. For example, washing dishes could be associated with cleanliness. Watching television is usually associated with things that are not from God, but it sometimes has merit.

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The key to this exercise is to think about what we do and why we do it. While society might approve of an activity, God might not (or vice versa). For example, Saint John Vianney complained that people often do well throughout their lives, but then, they fall on their sword of retirement. He has a point. We can't expect to spend the last 20 years of our life taking it easy and expect to be saved, because it gives our ungodly appetites too much time to become important to us.

Regardless of our current circumstances, we need to find a way to serve God by serving each other with most of our day. By reflecting on each activity of the day, we can determine where we can make improvements in our day. By making the day more uplifting, we can string together day after day where we are constantly improving.

The way that yesterday was spent will have a big influence on whether we will begin today with a prayer time, and yesterday's focus (or distraction) will carry into any prayer time we have today. If we reflect on the day's activities before we retire, we will eventually determine how we can make improvement; because God is going to honor any effort of this nature. For our part, our lives will gradually continue to improve to where our best prayer time will usually have been the last prayer time we had. It is impossible for it to occur in any other way.

Many books on time management will tell us to plan the next day before we retire. While some of this is okay, especially for things we need to do early the next day, we need to be careful to not let our agenda take priority over our identity. We are called to be participants in relationships (our identity), and we are not called to be automatons that are

preprogrammed the night before to carry out some duty the next day (our agenda).

Most time management books are written for business people, but in any circumstance, we will do better by placing relationships ahead of time. There are only several ways to increase productivity, but worker productivity is only increased by making the worker more productive. A key part of worker productivity is to have the right person in the right job. For example, 80% of the sales will come from 20% of the salespeople, and 80% of the designs will come from 20% of the engineers. The corporate executive is not likely to hire the next productive salesperson or engineer without having a good relationship with the current people who are highly productive. Hiring is only the beginning of benefits that relationships offer.

The moral to all of this, is that we need a plan, but the plan should not be put ahead of either people or God. In fact, the plan should emerge from our relationships, but we should be careful to not plan during our prayer time.

In the words of Mike Tyson, "Everyone has a plan until they get hit." In other words, everyone seeks execution, and the plan is just the beginning of the execution. Our relationships play the primary role in how effective we are at execution.

Our relationships with others is no better than our relationship with God. We do our best, therefore, when we think about and relate to God during the day. This kind of activity makes us the most effective today, but it also leads us to consistency which opens the door to the infinite possibilities of the spiritual journey.

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Deny Appetites:

Inside each of us, there are billions of voices, opinions, attitudes, and other intellectual attributes vying to influence our consciousness. The eventual person we become is the product of these voices and our choices.

An intellectual attribute can only ascend to the consciousness through internal processes. In some cases, our basic instincts coordinate the internal processes so fast that it seems as if an external message or stimulus reaches our consciousness, but we always elect our thoughts. In other words, a sensual feeling might be so strong that we feel as if our free will is violated, but we always have control. For example if we touch something that is too hot, we might reflexively pull away. We can, however, train our reflexes which demonstrates the mastery of our free will.

The more we think or feel an internal process, the easier we can get to the same place the next time. This is why consistency is so important, and with the denial of appetites, the same phenomenon will have the opposite affect.

When the consciousness experiences an intelligence, the intelligence will gain more permanence if we act upon the intelligence. In a negative example, a lustful thought will cause some damage, but a sexual act will cause substantially more. In a positive experience, we could feel the presence of God, but it will have a greater effect if we act upon the feeling. For example, if the spiritual feeling prompts us to tithe, our spiritual feelings will come more easily after we tithe.

We will tend to gravitate towards those choices that produce the most delight. We might be tempted to think that the best feelings

are sinful, but the denial of appetites should be much more than giving up sinful cravings.

Our penance should always have a death and resurrection theme. While we die to sin, we long for God. Too often, people deny sin and try to resist the temptation to sin again. This is usually a losing battle and always a lost war. The victory comes from our relationship with God (not from our will power).

While we should always resist sin, we should strive for a balance between spiritual delight and holy penance. In other words, the more we can feel God, the more penance we should do. When we deny sinful appetites, we leave a void in our delight. We need to have the relationship with God, to allow God to fill the void.

The amount of penance that we do should never be an achievement. The comforts we give up free us from distractions that cloud our feeling of God.

When we have a losing perspective, we see penance as losing something we like. We should have a prospective attitude towards penance that we would have if we were hoping to find something of great value.

For example, Saint Jean Vianney performed heavy penances for greater spiritual clarity to perform his vocation. We often hear of his extreme penances, but his spiritual advice on penance is more important for us to know. He advised people to not to do penance that would interfere with their work. When one of the ladies of his parish, Catherine, was told that she should not fast during Lent, she complained that he did penance. He told her he was allowed to do penance because it didn't interfere with his work. On other occasions, his parishioners told him that he should eat more,

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but he told them he did a better job in the confessional when he fasted.

Most of us have many secular appetites that hinder our spirituality. In fact, the lifestyle that many of us live is often inconsistent with the penitential posture that the spiritual journey requires. The category of desires that distract us from our duty are the ones we want to mine first with penance.

For example, many of us can not establish consistency because we can not find the time to pray, but the average adult American watches 4.57 hours of television each day (US Census Bureau for 2004). More than 9 people in 10 can find the time needed to establish consistency in prayer by watching less television.

In the tradition of the Church, prayer and penance usually go together. For example, how can we spend more time in prayer without taking time away from some other activity? Since penance is denying a desire, it is emotionally and physically uncomfortable, but the discomfort is a sign that the normal course of affairs has been upset. When business is not as usual, there is excess energy which can be used as an agent of change.

To put this another way, pain is the ability to change. Bodybuilders have to change their body to make progress, and they are notorious for coining the cliché, "no pain no gain."

Pain does not necessarily mean that we will change for the better, but it is the opportunity to change. The possessed man in the Bible, who had the demon named Legion, practiced regular mortification, but the goal was to get worse.

If there is a conscious effort (such as prayer) to get better, served along side the pain of penance, the normal course of affairs can be altered in a positive (and sometimes in a profound) way. Hence, the Church tradition has an exceptionally strong basis, and it has produced many Saints.

By taking this outlook, we can see some of the necessity for Jesus dying on a cross. The amount of emotional and physical pain could hardly be greater. Since He was both God and man, the sacrifice could negotiate a new reality between Heaven and earth, but the pain was necessary. Since we still remain in sin, our redemption needs to imitate the path of our Redeemer. Jesus told us to take up our cross and follow Him. In other words, both penance and prayer are necessary.

In our hedonistic society, penance is often the magical missing ingredient that makes all the difference.

Some would argue (probably not a corporate manager) that change is possible without pain. For example, a 120 pound woman can go to 200 pounds with very little pain. In this case, there would be other things that are missed by gaining this weight, and the woman's health would not be as good which would cause her pain. We could still argue, however, that the pain wasn't proportional to the amount of change. Let's look at this kind of change in a little different way.

Within the cosmopolitan appetites of the busy market (portrayed above as normal recursion), the merchants tend to grow rich if the market is not disturbed (little change). The fat is just the recursion storing a little away for a rainy day. It is not representative of a change of appetite. In contrast, the bodybuilder's extra

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mass came from performing work outside his body. The body reordered itself to achieve a new goal, and therefore, pain was necessary.

Voluntary poverty is a form of penance that helps us to deny appetites. While this penance might seem like repulsive insanity to many in our material world, the happiest people who ever lived, the Saints, practiced it in an almost universal way across many eras and cultures. The Saints would tell us that they did not want to be encumbered by things that were not necessary. After all, the extra things to us has the same impact that the fat has to the woman in the example above. There isn't anything specifically wrong with the fat, but if it is not used, what is its affect on us? The fat affects us in many ways.

Fat is like having too many possessions, and these things separate us from our neighbor which make us less responsive to the life that is all around us. When we are too rich our community does not pull together because another person's problem does not impact us. It is no longer our problem, and it becomes their problem. The impact on the community is to lessen it effectiveness (equivalent to the community's intelligence), and the same thing happens inside an individual who is too fat. Furthermore, people who live in dysfunctional communities are disadvantaged and less able. Lean, responsive, and empathetic communities are healthier and more capable.

When a society has too many possessions, it will not be as operative. People will care about each other less. There will be more of a momentum to maintain status quo. The needs of the underprivileged are less likely to be met. The rich will tend to get richer and die in (often from) their excess. The poor will suffer from want.

In these rich societies, the richer members have the higher rates of suicide which indicates they are not happy and adjusted. For we can not think highly of ourselves without thinking highly of others.

In modern society, the common technique is to exchange voluntary poverty with deductive poverty. This substitution prevents us from reaching spiritual poverty. This is sort of a play on words; so let's go back and explain each poverty.

Voluntary poverty is what we could see the Saints practicing. Two giant champions (although more than a hundred could be named) were Saints Colette and Clair who tried to get the Franciscan order to follow the ideals of Saint Francis of Assisi (the founder of the Franciscan order). The Franciscan ideal was to live the Gospel message in a way that the mendicant (sort of a spiritual beggar) did not hold much property either individually or in common. In this way, the Franciscan was completely dependent upon God (Who usually worked through the charity of others).

Deductive poverty can be found in modern man trying to justify his wealth. The deductive reasoning is taken from Jesus who said that no one could serve two masters. The modern man then theoretically assumes that God is more important to him than his possessions. For example, the modern man might imagine his house on the left and Jesus on the right. Then in this day dream he goes to the right (toward Jesus). Therefore, he reasons that his possessions have no hold on him.

We are much more complex than deductive poverty assumes. In the first place, we should not attempt to judge ourselves because we are

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not Jesus, and secondly, either possible outcome is dysfunctional. If the outcome is positive, it only reinforces our laziness and robs our initiative. As Jesus put it (at least several times), the self-righteous do not try to reform. If the outcome is negative, we have a better chance of turning back to God. We could never, however, condone a choice that elects possessions over God. For this choice displays a sheer poverty of faith, hope, and love. We will need to practice virtue to build the relationship with God that our salvation requires. It is foolish to practice deductive poverty.

We can be rich and saved, if we, among other things, meet the needs of the poor and avoid luxuriant living. As everyone knows, the needs of the poor are so great that no one could ever meet them, but we can be good stewards with our money. Then we are left with two subject terms: good stewardship and luxuriant living.

We can't be good stewards to the poor unless we stand in solidarity with them. We need to practice a caring empathy that disallows agnostic ignorance. As a matter of spiritual competence, we should give of ourselves along with our money. In other words, we should work for the poor as much as we care for ourselves, and we should practice the same due diligence in our giving as we do in our investing.

Luxuriant living exercises those appetites which draw us away from God. The appetites we indulge become the dominant voices within us. Is it any wonder that richer communities are more selfish? If we are rich, we can't be idle. We must have an active ministry that serves the poor to save us from luxurious distractions. As Saint Vincent de Paul put it, we must establish

a goal of increasing the quality and quantity of service to the poor, and this goal can only be met through commitment and sacrifice. While luxuriant living will draw us toward deadly distractions, our service toward the poor will exercise those appetites that draw us toward God.

If we are unable to establish consistency, it is because we are distracted. After we establish consistency, the quality of the spiritual experience will be determined by how much we are not distracted. The lack of distractions is what a person seeks by entering into a cloistered monastery, but our internal appetites (not external events) are the sources of our distractions.

As far as deep prayer is concerned, voluntary poverty is optional, but internal or spiritual poverty is not. In other words, we can't go far along the spiritual journey while exercising the wrong appetites because we will have too many distractions. All of this will become painfully obvious as we try to incorporate the feedback system in the focus section. Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa of Avila are among many others who complained of the discomfort caused at the beginning of the prayer time as focus was being established.

Spiritual poverty (which is championed by many Saints but Saint John of the Cross stands out) is a step toward contemplation of God. When the person reaches spiritual poverty (in deep prayer), the only desire or thought is for God because there is a preoccupation with God.

These periods of spiritual poverty involve our whole being. It is an active exercise of virtue in our soul, heart, and mind. As in the "Song of Songs", it is a quietness that engages

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the divine relationship. Spiritual poverty is the springboard to contemplation.

Spiritual poverty is the opposite of being distracted. Deep prayer can't occur with regularity, unless we practice spiritual poverty. While it might be appropriate for God to meddle in our distractions in certain circumstances, our freedom would be violated by regular interruptions. We can't expect a relationship to be forced upon us against our will. Love must be freely chosen.

Voluntary poverty is an astute step towards spiritual poverty, but spiritual poverty actually demands the denial of distractions. Our possessions, aspirations, relationships, or any of many other things can distract us from seeking the pearl of great price which costs us everything we have. We were put on this earth to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and anything else is a lie that robs us our identity, happiness, and salvation.

How much money, esteem, comfort, or success we have has little to do with our happiness because we were not made for those things. When we go through the day, we should constantly question the motives behind our experiences and activities. As Saint John Vianney put it, the sinner should watch for sin as close as a fugitive watches for the police.

We don't have to change appetites to build consistency, but we do need to try to deny distracting appetites.

For many of us, denying appetites can be extremely burdensome as well. We should not pick a load that is so heavy that we can not carry it. It is better to try to reign in one or two of our more distracting appetites, and we should attempt to avoid any new appetites. The

more complicated that we make our lives, the harder time we will have in building consistency. Simplicity is an attribute of God, while complexity is a sequel of sin. As we make our lives more simple, we our making room for God.

Practice Humility:

It is often overlooked, but a primary reason for failing to establish consistency is that we are too involved with our own life. Of course, if we don't establish consistency, most of God's vision for us will never be realized. Our actions can convict us of thinking more of ourselves than we do of God. It is no wonder that the Beatitudes play a central role in the New Testament message.

In theory, we should never compare ourselves to anyone else, but in practice we are always making comparisons. For many of us, our happiness is determined by how well we compare to other people. All of this is sheer vanity that distracts us from our calling. No comparison is either necessary or valid. We are not any better or worse than anyone else because we all share the same Creator.

When we awake in the morning and as we attempt prayer, we will have more distractions if we are worried about what we want. If our ego becomes more important than our spirituality, our entire prayer time will become a planning session for the day.

We hear God's calling through our ego. Without a sincere effort to reduce our ego, we can easily confuse the divine call with our own wants. It is also possible to mix the two together. While spiritual direction might help, there is no substitute for humility.

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If we don't strive to put our relationship with God above everything else, we will have a difficult time with consistency because so many other pressing matters will confront us. We must decrease if we want God to increase.

Avoid Anger:

A vital part of going into deep prayer is controlling distractions, and there are few distractions more annoying than anger.

When dealing with anger, people often quote Jesus turning over the money changers tables. The idea is that anger can be righteous. What Jesus did was to take action against an ongoing sin. He was not mad at the money changers; He was intolerant of the sin. He did not stomp off mad or apologize for His outburst; He stayed and defended his actions. Jesus saw His action as a Holy crusade. So, it is not very accurate to use this episode of our Savior's life as a justification of our anger unless we are on a Holy crusade, and in that case anger is not a problem.

As far as deep prayer is concerned, a better scripture passage is where Jesus tells us to leave off praying until we have reconciled with our neighbor. Anger can be like a festering sore, and it requires inner healing.

It is hard to imagine a person who would not need inner healing at the beginning of the spiritual journey. Deep prayer will naturally bring about much of the needed inner healing, but we can speed this process by doing the inner healing separately.

In terms of anger, we will have to become reconciled with everyone before we go very far with deep prayer. Regardless of how bad the relationship was, we need to go back to the

feelings of the relationship and feel God along with the relationship.

For example, a man may be angry that he was sexually molested by a relative when he was a boy. There would probably be many feelings that would need to be corrected by inner healing. In addition, the man would need to forgive the relative, and after carrying the anger for a long time, inner healing may be required before the forgiveness process could begin. The goal would be for the man to feel the presence of the relative and be comfortable with the feeling. Jesus gives us an inner peace, and we need some of His peace before we can successfully reach spiritual poverty.

Besides resolving our past anger, we must be careful not to become so angry with the present that it takes away our peace. Our goal is not peace, but we must be able to focus on God. It is easy to become so embroiled with an ongoing conflict that the conflict becomes our focus.

Nurture Relationships:

Relationships will be the most important part of our lives, and of course, our relationship with God will be the most deciding factor of our happiness.

Since relationships are necessarily emotional, it is hard to supply the stability of reasoning or logic to them. While some relationships will clearly take us towards God, other relationships will take us in the other direction. Sometimes we can choose which relationships we develop, but in many cases, fate just hands relationships to us that we can't walk away from. For example, we are expected to relate to our children.

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The Mistake of Hiding: Relationships can make us very happy, sad, hurt, or comforted. We can (and often do) simultaneously experience agony and ecstasy in a relationship. When some relational experiences cause us pain, we look for something that will protect us from the pain. It is only natural to try to withdraw from pain, and the most common way to withdraw from a painful relationship is to not show our true self by putting on airs. We find these airs to be like a fort, and we get used to hiding in the fort.

While hiding in the fort may seem like a safe and secure option, we are only fooling ourselves. So many of us have put on airs so much of the time that society expects us to act one way at work, another way at Church, and yet a different way at a party. All of this acting is only a vain disinformation project that deprives us of vital relational experiences. God is love, and God calls us to relate deeply.

We can be so busy acting as if we were someone else that we can overlook our primary needs. For example, we can be looking so much for the desired reaction in others that we forget to focus on what our friends are feeling. As Jesus puts it, we must become like little children to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Little children do not put on airs. We can look at them and see the person who they are. It is usually easier to feel the presence of a child than an adult because children do not hide themselves from us. Children often see through the airs that adults put on even when other adults might not notice. For the sophisticated airs of adults is an encumbrance to their intellect and other vital activities.

As we put on airs, we might feel like we are at a slight disadvantage, but we are actually

creating a crippling handicap. We often fool ourselves. We don't see these sophisticated airs as distancing ourselves from God, neighbor, and even ourselves. Therefore we lose our relational ability (from which we derive our intelligence) as we try to act sophisticated. In fact, even animals often have better relational skills than adults.

In a true story, a man was unhappy with his dog. The man was thinking that he would punish the dog, and he went outside to where the dog was playing. The man tried to be real friendly, and called the dog to him; but the dog took off in the other direction at a dead run. This happened several times. If the dog was not in trouble he would come quickly.

The man was an accomplished business person, and he often fooled other adults.

Since the dog did not try to put on airs, he had better relationship skills than most humans even though he had extremely limited intelligence in comparison.

The specific skill that the dog was exercising was the ability to feel the man's presence. Since the dog could feel the presence of the man, the canine could ascertain some things that the man was feeling.

This ability to feel the presence of a person in relationship is fundamental to the spiritual journey.

Adults don't actually lose their ability to feel the presence of another person entirely, they just don't use this relational skill often enough because they can not put on airs while they are using it.

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In another true story, a man, who opened a print shop, had some difficulty with people not paying him for his work. He did all of the normal credit checks and took other precautions, but he would still have trouble with people not paying.

As he became more experience, he did not do any credit checks or take any precautions, but he did not have any trouble collecting. He claimed that he knew when the customer would pay him from just being around the customer. He did not, however, know how he knew.

Many of the Saints, who founded religious orders (e.g., St. Francis of Assisi, St. Benedict), loved their disciples so much that they always knew what their members were doing. This happens a few times in the Bible as well. For example, the time that Jesus asked the disciples what they were discussing on their way home (they were discussing who was the most important). Even though they did not tell Jesus what they were talking about, Jesus warned them about this attitude. So, He knew what they were talking about.

Our ability to feel another person is a vital skill. We would be alarmed if we could not feel some part of our body (e.g., our foot or arm). Since we are the Body of Christ, we should also be concerned, if we have no clue of what is happening inside another person.

In a more cordial and relational world, we would all feel the presence of God and the presence of each other. A person's intelligence would be a measure of how well we could feel his presence, and the presence of personalities that were the most attractive to an individual would indicate the vocation that the person was called to. It would be clear to us the vocation

that each of us were called to because we could feel each others' presence.

In many respects, sophisticated airs are synonymous with stupidity. As we hide behind these airs, our intelligence suffers from sophistication.

Another way of stating this is that we are at our best when we are ourselves. The further that we move away from our identity or purpose, the less effective we become. Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, we have a greatness as long as we are true to our identity. We need to believe in the person God made.

When we are born, we go through a phase of self discovery where we learn how to use various parts of our body. As we get older, we need to continue the discovery process by moving beyond ourselves into feeling the presences of other relational beings.

As a body of beings, we haven't moved much beyond infantile ignorance, because we are paralyzed by egocentric appetites. The grass is always greener on the outside of the fort. Other people need to see who we are, we need other people to see us as we are, and we need to see other people as they are. As a people, God is urgently calling us foremost into the divine presence, and then, in a very vital sense, we are called to feel the presence of others as much as we feel ourselves.

For many of us, it makes no difference whether we are called to this sort of perfection, because, as a matter of pragmatism, we can not feel the presence of either God or neighbor. If we could feel the presence of God, we probably would not have any difficulty establishing consistency. While we might not be able to

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reach our goal, we can, however, still take steps toward our destination.

For example, we can gain a sense of who God is by (among many other things) studying God's laws, reading the Bible, or practicing religious exercises. In a similar way, every relationship can be nurtured by gentleness, caring, and giving, and at the same time, we can develop a better understanding of our neighbor by striving to communicate with them in a deeper way.

The Levels of Communication: Since relationships are a two way street, we can not dictate our desires or decisions to others, but we can subtly guide the relationship to a greater depth and expanse by communicating at a more meaningful level. By looking at the levels of communication (from sensitivity seminars; these were fashioned after some writings by John Powell), we can find the conversation that will help us and avoid the discourse that will lead towards shallow and narrow stereotypes.

The goal is to stay in the higher levels of communication (i.e., levels 1 through 3).

Level 4 takes us away from consistency and deep prayer because it encourages us to put on artificial airs of strength, importance, or other ego feeding nonsense. The ego reduces our chances of finding an egalitarian posture that is conducive to relationships.

As one might suppose, level 5 doesn't have much of an affect on deep prayer.

The following are the 5 levels of communication and a couple of examples each.

1. Feelings: We confess our feelings

a. Telling someone we like them
b. Describing our feelings of the mountains

2. Features: We describe ourselves
a. Discussing our Faith
b. Telling someone about our vocational choices

3. Facts: We discuss something technical or factual
a. Discussing a diagnosis
b. Promoting a course of action

4. Frivolities: We talk to pass the time
a. Gossiping about our neighbor
b. Talking about the game last night

5. Formalities: We greet each other
a. Saying hello
b. Answering with a cliché

By trying to stay in the higher levels of communication (1 through 3), we will reduce some of our artificial airs which will help us move out of our fort. As we come out of hiding, we will begin to focus more on God and others, and in turn, our love will become more pure. By building these relational bridges, we are moving towards the Kingdom of God which is defined by agape.

The Goal of Agape: Before we look at the goal of agape, let's look at how this whole relational process ties together with agape. When we become more selfish by sinning or hiding, we also lose our ability to relate to God which is mediated through our soul. As we move closer to God, our soul becomes more free, open, and functional. The further we move from God, our soul is labored with many impure appetites that call the attention to

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impure activities. It is as if we bury our soul in a meaningless place, and our rational soul has little clout in our conscience.

The parable of the talents applies to this process. If we hide our treasure, we will lose it. We can only become richer by investing our treasure. Our treasure is our ability to love. In this parable, if we don't invest our love, we don't go to Heaven.

In other words, if we emotionally invest in others, we go to Heaven. It has to be this way, because Heaven is reserved for those who love. Before we get too comfortable with this, love means so much that it has little meaning in English, or (perhaps better) love means different things to different people. For its part, Heaven requires agape which is a purer form of love than the contemporary English meaning of love.

For example, in the English translation when Jesus asked Peter whether Peter loved Him, Peter answer 3 times that he did. In the Greek translation, however, Jesus asked Peter whether Peter agaped Him, but Peter said 3 times that he philosed Jesus. After He questioned Peter's agape, Jesus told Peter to, "Feed my sheep" (tend His Church). In other words, Peter would need to agape Jesus to become a pope who could assist the Church.

Let's take the easy part first. When Peter said that he philosed Jesus, he was telling Jesus how much he admired and respected our Lord. Philos is a fraternal or brotherly love. The members of a sports team might admire each other so much that they feel like a family which is philos.

In Isaiah, agape is compared to the mother's consciousness and compassion for the baby at

her breast, but the passage says that God's love for us is even more consistent than a mother's love.

There is an insistence by God, that we need to agape Him. For example, in Matt 25 (The master told the foolish virgins, "I do not know you."), Luke 13 (The master tells those who are locked out of the house, "I do not know where you come from."), and John 10 ("I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and I know my Father."), Jesus places this consciousness or feeling of Him as a condition of salvation. John says that God is agape. From these things, we can conclude that our happiness is dependent upon agape.

Agape leads to self control. Jesus said that if we agape Him, we will keep His commandments, and Paul tells us to resist sin by putting on the armor of Christ (which wouldn't make much sense except in the next paragraph he tells us to pray constantly). This reference to armor is also implied in Saint Patrick's Breastplate ("Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me," etc.). Saint John of the Cross tells us that major vices (he speaks specifically of sexual sin) are not overcome until we find our way into deep prayer where we feel God. Aquinas says that a longing for God is the only common element all our appetites have in common, and only a relationship with God can save us from them. Augustine says that our hearts will be restless (pulled to one appetite after another) until it rests in God. We can only avoid sin by feeling God.

In the "Prayer of Saint Francis", Saint Francis of Assisi points out that Agape is important in everything (not just self control). In his mystical wisdom, Francis longs to be a

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channel of agape, and God tells Francis to rebuild His Church which is very similar to the order he gave Peter that was mentioned above.

Among every other good thing, agape saves our soul, gives us control, feeds His sheep, repairs His church, and defines our vocations. From these things, we can certainly conclude that agape should be our goal, but we need a plan to reach our goal which is to know and love this presence of God. We come to know God's presence primarily by experiencing the full life of God's Church, searching for God in deep prayer, serving within our vocation, and participating in Eucharistic relationships. Since Christians are called to universal love, the importance of Eucharistic relationships are often overlooked, but we are more likely to experience agape in Eucharistic relationships than in any other way.

There are many times where we show up at Church, but we bring very little away. It is extremely rare for us to find either deep prayer or our vocation. On the other hand, if we participate in small Church communities, we will get to know each other. Agape should be the goal of every relationship, but we are often ignorant of how relationships progress to our goal.

While we understand the importance of empathy, politeness, compassion, hospitality, and other good relational traits, we often fail to wonder how God is expressed in each other.

Many of us have heard how we should see Jesus in every one we meet, but the humanness of Jesus and the stereotypes of our society often render this spiritual exercise ineffective. For example, our stereotype of Jesus might be a compassionate man from the Middle East, and we might be unable to relate that image to

to someone who is far from that description such as a woman in Los Angeles. The Jews worshiped God for many centuries, but they did not recognize Jesus.

The Bible says that we are made in the image of God, and God can be expressed in ways other than what we think of Jesus. We can use the attributes (e.g., powerful, holy, perfect, beautiful, happy, intelligent, merciful) of God to help us meditate on who God is. It should be rather easy for us to find some of these attributes in every person, and the constellation of our attributes hint of our vocation. If we follow our vocation, we become instruments of the God of love on earth.

External relationships (those that we have with other people) are not very different from internal relationships (those we have inside ourselves), and in fact, they often reflect each other. For example, if we are happy on the inside, we will tend to make other people happy (and vice versa).

In the agape relationship, we draw the attributes of God out of a person, and others do the same for us. For example, while Peter may have philosed Jesus, it is clear that Jesus agaped Peter. Jesus said that Peter was the rock that the Church would be built upon. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and Peter reflected some of God's stability. Jesus declared Peter's vocation while proclaiming Peter's stability. Peter denied Jesus three times when Jesus was before the Sanhedrin, and Jesus questioned Peter's agape three times. With the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter must have begun to agape Jesus because he never vacillated again.

When Mary was called to be the Mother of God, Gabriel called her blessed which is the

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only time in the Bible that an angel calls someone blessed. A few weeks later Elizabeth calls Mary blessed. In both of these cases, Mary is confirmed in her vocation, while both Gabriel and Elizabeth agape Mary by identifying her as blessed. Of course, the source of Elizabeth's agape was John who was inspired by God in her womb.

We need to keep in mind that we are looking at agape (not vocational calls), but people are called in God's love which is agape. There is no requirement, however, for the vocational call to contain agape. For example, when Paul was called everyone was afraid of him. In another case, Moses was called because of his ancestry which God pointed out during the call and the Bible builds the same basis by giving the lineage of Moses and Aaron.

It is commendable to feel the presence of another person, but agape focuses on feeling the attributes of God in the person's presence. While this might seem rather specific, with a little thought, we can quickly conclude that it can't be any other way. Many of us may protest that we can't feel the presence of another person, but in reality, we all do. For example, we showed how a smile is contagious, but the connection to other people can have a dark side (such as the hate and violence in a mob). Agape is either the love of God or a close relative, and it does not have a dark side. We can't have the pureness that agape requires without focusing on a characteristic of God.

If we strive for agape in our relationships, we will be drawn out of fort. Without question, we will begin to emotionally invest in our relationships, and superficial relationships that center around level 4 communication will seem so unsatisfying. When we respect and honor the presence of God in other people, we are not far

away from feeling the presence of God in our lives.

In the secular world, it is popular to have the comforts of the friendship to be the objective of the relationship. As Christians, we have the opportunity to find much more in the relationship. Each of us was made in the image of God, and we carry the attributes of God within us. If our relationships accent our divine attributes, we will build the City of God upon a foundation of solid agape that allows the all important grace of God to flow through us like a mighty river.

The Evangelism of Agape: We are attracted to any of the attributes of God, and we loathe anything that is not from God. We are attracted to beauty, intelligence, love, generosity, happiness, truthfulness, and any other attribute of God. From the Bible, we know many of the early Christians were drawn to Christ by the way the Christians loved one another. If people are not attracted to the Church, then agape is not being used to accent the attributes of God.

To put this another way, no one has been able to argue against the Church with any degree of intellectual honesty for the last 800 years, but the Church won't make many converts by winning an argument. As it is with all things, only God is attractive, and the Church is seen as attractive to the degree people can see God in the Church. There is no better public relations than the emotional rush of agape, and the attributes of God provide a perfectly consistent marketing theme that is always fresh and attractive.

While God's attributes are satisfying, they are never filling. We can't have too much beauty, intelligence, love, joy, hope, or any other attribute of God. We never grow weary

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of any of God's attributes, they are always fresh and inspirational. With these features, the attributes of God enable permanent covenants. After Jesus agaped Peter by comparing Peter to a rock, then Jesus told Peter that the Church would be built on the immutable attribute of God.

The Covenant of Agape: The seeds of agape will never bear much fruit without taking root in a permanent covenant. Where is the witness of agape, if we do not believe and hope in the relationship? If we look at the fruit of either Peter or Paul whom were respectively commissioned by the Jesus and the Spirit, we can see that agape requires a covenant to bear fruit. All of us are called to vocation (where the type of vocations are as imaginative as God). If the City of God is not flexible enough to covenant these divergent calls, we can not expect the vocations to yield fruit. This fact is stamped into reality everywhere we look. For example, what fruit will eros yield without the covenant of marriage? After God called Moses, what fruit would the call have borne if the Israelites did not commit to following Moses? As Paul put it, all gifts are for the community, and (we might add) the community must accept the gift before it has value.

As it is in the community, so it is inside us. We need to covenant that calling with God, but before this can happen, several things need to happen.

Our Identity in Christ: Our bodies are a mixture of many different appetites. Our appetites often oppose each other which slows the understanding in our bodies. In this state, our bodies can not understand how the Lord is calling us.

Jesus acts a liaison between God and man, and our souls play a similar role in us. We need to take deliberate action that will increase the respect our souls receive, if they are going to be heard over the din of our appetites. If the soul is overruled by the appetites of the body (such as the person living in the fort), the body can not realize the call.

We could try to go directly to God, but we need to remember that even the illustrious Saints sometimes advanced far into their vocation before they realized what God was calling them to do. Yes, deep prayer will ultimately lead us to our vocation, but we would need consistency to establish deep prayer. At this point, we are still trying to establish consistency.

As we become emotionally engaged with each other, the attraction between us might start as eros or philos, but despite the quality of the love, the only attraction comes from our attributes that reflect the attributes of God. By focusing on those attributes, we will gravitate towards a purer relationship. The attributes that draw us closer together will bring us closer to God.

If we knew why other people were attracted to us, we would partially know how the Lord is calling us. As we find out who others are, we define who we are, and the City of God begins to take shape. The Eucharistic community accelerates our relationship with Christ, and it strengthens our ability to resist deception by helping to define our identity in Christ.

The Egalitarianism of Christianity: In Heaven, everyone knows each other. On earth, as Jesus feeds us with His Body, we gain the ability to understand each other, because the Eucharist brings us closer to Heaven.

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Non-Christian communities are exemplified by rigid power structures that devalue individual identity and magnify state rule. These communities reflect very little of God's attributes. Civilization, wealth, and other needed attributes are sorely lacking. In the System of God, we find inspiration in the identity of individuals. The City of God is able to capitalize on individual inspirations because we hope and believe in each other as agape demands of us. Agape is initiated in the Eucharistic celebration.

It might be argued that the process occurs in the market place which is outside the City of God, but the degree of the reflection is proportionate to the proximity of the Faith Community. In other words, the process starts with the Eucharistic Celebration and it is contagious. In our human nature, it doesn't continue unless it is continually fed. We find then that wealth centers around pockets of agape.

In a top down fashion, wealth is moved from one country to another through the arbitrary manipulation of exchange rates (the relation of one nation's currency to another's), but these diabolic influences are only temporary setbacks for the City of God.

God is not a hedonist, and we don't mean to imply that an individual who is holy will be wealthy (i.e., the heresy of the Reformation which was driven by money in the Church's treasury). We are trying to show that God's attributes flourish in an agape centered community. A holy person will have everything that money could buy plus a lot more, even when money is scarce. As Augustine or Paul would testify, money means little when compared to God.

Agape extends to all attributes of God. For example, Aquinas showed how free armies defeat armies that are controlled from the top. In other words, the best soldiers have the freedom to use their best judgement. For example, the only American ace in the Vietnam war shot down MIGs (enemy aircraft) with such precision because he knew what they were ordered to do next. We could find many other examples from many other wars. Our point is that agape extends to power, but it only does if we hope and believe in each other.

The Command to Serve: Most Eucharistic communities have only a small understanding of what God is trying to accomplish. In the eyes of many people, the primary role of the Church is to save souls. While salvation is certainly central to our being, we need to be saved because we didn't love God enough to keep God's commandments. We definitely need to understand that Jesus did not come to establish a set of rules, practices, and traditions that if followed will save our soul. God is personal and relational, and a community of God needs to imitate God's qualities. The rubrics of the Church assist our salvation, but our salvation depends upon our relationship with God. Jesus is the Judge, and Jesus says (several times in the Bible as demonstrated above) that He will save those whom He knows.

Jesus also makes it clear (again several times in the Bible, e.g., "thief in the night", "oil in the lamp") that the relationship with Him has to be maintained.

Since Jesus feeds the Eucharistic Community with His Body and Blood, there is an acute presence of Jesus in the community. The Eucharistic Community is the Body of Christ. If

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the Eucharistic Community knows us, Jesus knows us.

God is not concerned whether the Eucharistic Community knows our phone number, E-mail address, family members, work place, monthly income, or leisure activities. These are superficial facts that are similar to level 4 conversation. We have a unique calling in God. To save us from our sins, Jesus commands us to serve the other members of the Eucharistic Community with those attributes that define our vocational calling.

The Necessity to Commission: For its part, the Eucharistic Community can not love God unless it believes and hopes in God, but the City of God can not believe and hope in God unless it believes and hopes in us. For we carry the calling of God.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our soul communicates these attributes of God to our body, but more importantly, the soul miraculously coordinates the attributes of God into our being as Aquinas points out. While we may not understand what our attributes are, the Body of Christ sees them through its faith in us.

As our DNA identifies us, we identify the human species. Therefore, we are the recursion of the species. Inside our body, the fate of some cells may be different than others, but we don't think of each cell acting in a different way (although a little more thinking like this would be helpful).

God has called the human race, and the Church knows the call. The Church has tried to embed the global call into the human family, but as the holy appetites of the soul are not the only voice inside us, the Church is not the only opinion in the world.

The evil inside a body can be so pervasive that every cell in the body is condemned to Hell, and it is no different with us as a race. In exemplary cases, every cell can be saved. In these extreme cases, it is easy to see how strongly we affect each other.

Our Choice of Relationships: Since love is the highest domain, our relationships can either be our strongest ally or greatest impediment. In particular, some avoidance is necessary when the friend strives to distract us from our goal, but evangelism is better than avoidance.

In too many cases, we seek relationships with the rich, powerful, or famous, but we should seek relationships with those who are holy. Why should we expect our destiny to be any different than our ambition?

Relationships are the keys to our destiny and fate. Jesus told us that we would be judged by whether He knew us. Then He said that whatever we do for the least of our brothers, we do for Him. Jesus specified the least of our brothers because He was concerned about our intent. We need to be trying to help people. The rich and powerful usually don't need our help. With so many others in desperate need of our help, what is our intent when we help them?

The primary point in this passage is that we save ourselves by helping others. In other passages (some of them previously mentioned), we learn that we can not be saved unless God knows us. In other words, the Father calls us to serve one another, and God knows us only through the service we extend to each other.

We are called to help others. If we engage in a selfish pursuits, we will be judged defective.

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We can only save ourselves by becoming the servants we are called to be.

Grace is the key to our salvation. As the strongest current is in the main part of the stream, the most grace is in the most central part of the Church. To experience the strongest grace, we must be in the main part of the spiritual community. For example, bi-locations, stigmata, and other supernatural signs almost always fall inside the central part of the Church. Only a few healings and other miracles fall outside the Church.

Our response to God will have a significant impact on how our friends respond to God. In the history of the Church, many Saints knew each other. For example, Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas of Aquinas were good friends. Saint Dominic had a close relationship with Saint Francis of Assisi whom in turn was close to Saint Clare of Assisi. Saint Teresa of Avila worked with Saint John of the Cross, and the two of them knew other Saints as well.

Since Saints are so rare, it is statistically unlikely that any one Saint would know another Saint, yet it happens scores (if not hundreds) of times. As a matter of fact, if we become a Saint, it is very likely we will know someone whom makes the heroic climb with us.

Saint John of the Cross gave the analogy that a single piece of coal might catch on fire, but it will not burn to white ash unless it is close to other coals that are burning.

Maintaining Consistency:

After consistency is established, the next issue is to maintain it. While maintaining consistency might seem simple enough, it is

often more difficult than it seems, and in most cases, there are some very significant issues which need to be addressed. As a matter of fact, consistency is rarely established for more than a few weeks. In the few cases where consistency is established, it is usually lost in a matter of months.

We tend to look at consistency as only having the discipline of maintaining a certain schedule, but almost everyone maintains a schedule while hardly anyone maintains consistency. Consistency puts us on the path towards deep prayer, deep prayer is the most powerful thing that can happen to a human. At the very least, it is a life changing event, and although few people realize it, the course history often revolves around it.

For example, given the holy development in Avila, it is not surprising that the Spanish discovered the New World and converted most of it Christianity. Christianity went from a European religion to a North American, South American, and European religion. A secular historian would argue that it was a natural development of imperialism, but evangelism doesn't occur naturally. For example, look at Asia. The one country the Spanish took an interest in, the Philippines, is the only country in Asia that is mostly Christian, but all of Asia suffered from imperialism.

The evangelical success did not occur because the Spanish were better at evangelization. The Spanish did not enjoy this measure of success either before or afterwards. The success occurred because the deep prayer brought God and the world closer together. It was a grace given as a gift between friends.

While most of us would be highly skeptical that Avila had anything to do with the spread of

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Christianity, so many similar circumstances have occurred throughout history that the cause and effect can nearly be reduced to a mathematical equation. We only need to look at the impact and effect of the lives of Saints Dominic (of Guzman), Benedict, Thomas (of Aquinas), Paul (the Apostle), Francis (of Assisi), Colette, Clare (of Assisi), Catherine (of Siena), and many others. With possible exceptions similar to those of Dominic at Muret or Joan (of Arc) at Orleans, secular historians won't record the historical linkage which is why they can not foretell the future, but through the eyes of Faith, the Church knows well in advance the course that will be taken. As more recent examples of this phenomena, look to Fatima or "Humanae Vitae", and the historical examples, that could be used, would fill many books.

Consistency changes things, and change doesn't come easy. The greater the change, the harder it is, and God is restoring the world to a sinless state. As we become consistent, we begin participate in God's venture of change. To say the least, we should expect consistency to be troublesome. This is most likely why consistency is such a rarity.

Consistency requires that we at least attempt to focus our thoughts. If we lose our focus during prayer and allow ourselves to engage in idle chatter, we will find these prayer times to come much easier than deep prayer. To be perfectly clear, chatter is not consistency, because deep prayer requires focus. In deep prayer we listen to God (not vice versa).

Many of us have been taught that prayer is talking to God. While this can be an accurate definition, in any reality, what are we going to tell God, that God doesn't already know? We can't participate in God's design, if we don't

listen to it, or as Padre Pio puts it, "Don't be a nuisance."

Since we know how difficult consistency is going to be, let us look at some practical problems we might encounter when trying to maintain consistency. These are common problems that people have after they found consistency.

Before we get into the list, we should keep in mind that any list of this sort can never be exhaustive (although these problems are some of the more common ones), and we can easily have more than one problem at a time. Progress isn't made as much by solving the problem as it is by moving towards spiritual poverty which we might call the second step of deep prayer.

The Boredom of Control:

For some of us, maintaining consistency is as easy as getting up earlier and praying. When we are able to do this, the greatest danger to consistency is probably dry (read boring) prayer times.

Dry prayer times have a number of problems. For example, since the prayer times are boring, we might decide that the prayer times have little value which isn't exactly inaccurate, but we want to use virtue to eliminate the boredom. We don't want to give up the consistency.

When we have so much control over what we do, we often control our prayer times, but at some point, we want God to control our prayer times. The same discipline that established consistency makes it difficult for us to, "Let go and let God."

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When we have this much discipline, we probably value our time. If we are not getting much out of the prayer time, at some point, we might decide that the prayer times are not working for us. We need to avoid this line of thinking. Since we are all called to love God, prayer times are for everyone. Boring prayer times are the result of bad technique (not good routine). God doesn't need good technique, but we have to work with who we are.

The technique we need to escape boredom will be more fully developed later, but we will touch on certain points here.

We can not expect to know much about meditation during our first session. As Jesus told Martha, we are worried and upset over many things, and during quiet times these things can percolate. In the "Song of Songs", the lover comes in the stillness of night and under the cover of darkness. We want to establish techniques that move us toward a productive stillness.

For example, when most people begin to meditate, they can only hold their undivided concentration for maybe 2 to 6 seconds. In addition, concentration is as much emotional as it is mental. As we begin concentration techniques, emotional turmoil is likely to surface, and we will need inner healing to deal with these things in an effective fashion. The inner healing could come with the aid of others in our prayer group, but in most cases, so much healing is required that we need to understand at least some of the basics ourselves. We won't cover inner healing here, as there are many good books on the subject.

After the inner healing phase, we usually go through the creative phase. All kinds of new ideas pop into our heads while we are trying to

pray. Our concentration is getting better, and we are becoming more intelligent. These ideas are likely to be some of the best ones we have ever had, but we can't let them distract us from our march towards spiritual poverty. In other words, we need to ignore these creative urges. We can take advantage of them after the prayer time is over, but during the prayer, let us not forget to keep our undivided attention on the meditation.

The phases are different for different people, but the following phases are typical for those of us who prefer discipline.

1. **Interesting Activity:** For example, we may feel ourselves developing a relationship with Jesus as we read the Bible.
2. **Inner Healing:** As we grow quiet (perhaps we are concentrating on a certain passage from the Bible), all kinds of past events, that haven't been emotionally resolved, come to interfere with our meditation.
3. **Creative Impulses:** Once we are quiet for short periods, we are likely to feel creative surges which must be ignored. As Saint John of the Cross put it, let us not be running towards Jesus through a field of flowers only to stop and smell the roses!
4. **Boring Inactivity:** When everything is quiet, we are likely to be bored. While the inactivity is necessary, we must double our virtuous efforts (i.e., practice faith, hope, and charity) to bring an experience of God out of the quiet (Ed Note - Don't worry; we will cover this in detail later).

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Boring prayer times are neither necessary or desirable. Since they are unpleasant, we will find them emotionally repulsive. We can easily get frustrated with the lack of progress and start thinking that we will never make real progress. Boring prayer times are an indication that we are not making as much progress as possible. In other words, we are close, but we are not practicing good technique.

Before the music resonates with the crowd, we need to have the right music playing to the right audience. Along the same line of thought, we want to pick a meditation that has the right theme with the right amount of activity.

Let's consider the activity first. When we are new to deep prayer, our prayer times will need to be more active. As we gain control, the amount of activity in our prayer should be reduced. If there is too much or too little activity, we will tend to be bored.

Activity is somewhat like clothes for our ego. At first our ego will be large, and we will need a lot of activity to fit it.

As we find God, our ego becomes smaller, and we will need less activity. If we have too much activity, the clothes will get in our way. In other words, we will be spending time on the activity, when we could be spending time with something more meaningful.

If the clothes of activity are too small for our ego, they will seem restrictive and confining. When the activity is too little, the prayer time can almost seem painfully rigid.

Let's look at some examples of too much activity. Spiritual readings are highly active. For example, it would be considered highly

active to read the Bible without stopping to ponder it. If we are reading the Bible for the first or second time, we will be finding out about Jesus, and this is the primary purpose of the Bible (as Saint Paula convinced Saint Jerome - Jerome compiled and edited the Bible as we know it). At this time, continuous reading is probably the correct amount of activity.

At some point, the study of the Bible begins to be less about the personality of God, and more about facts that surround the story of Jesus. For example, we might notice inconsistency, humor, and other items that will never lead us to spiritual poverty. Then, it is time to ponder.

When we ponder, we can't worry about what clothes Jesus wore or roads He traveled. We need to ponder something that takes us into the infinity of God. In other words, we should ponder something mysterious. For example, it is unlikely that the pondering of who won the roll of dice for the clothing of Jesus will lead to much progress. It would be better to ponder, for example, why Jesus had to die.

While pondering is not as active as reading, we won't reach spiritual poverty by pondering. We need to learn to relate to the person of God, but pondering tends to dwell on the attributes of God.

We can also make the mistake of using too little activity. When this happens, we usually don't have enough structure to carry us through our own prejudice, bias and other personality quirks that we may have. In a typical example, we would be using too little activity if we tried to maintain consistency with the Jesus prayer. There is nothing specifically wrong with the Jesus mantra, except that it is usually too little activity for us.

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With too little activity, the mind wanders which is okay as long as we don't justify the distraction. To put this another way, any authentic prayer time has a structure and a goal. In terms of the structure, we use the commemoration to reach spiritual poverty. Then we drive the spiritual poverty with virtue to reach contemplation which is the goal. If this seems overly simplistic, we need to remember that God is infinitely simple. We are suffering a distraction any time that our heart, mind, or soul wander from the commemoration. With too little structure, we might wander from the simplicity and then justify the waste.

The distraction is not that harmful and certainly not dangerous, unless we endanger our simplicity by letting the distraction become our destination. We might even make some progress while meandering here and there, but we are certainly not taking the shortest distance between two points.

The structure can be either personal, social, or both. In our Jesus prayer example, a personal structure would be to empty ourselves as we are breathing out, and let Jesus fill us as we breathe in. When the breath is either completely out or in, we would ask ourselves if we are on track. A social structure would be to quietly use the Jesus prayer during a social prayer such as a Mass or Rosary.

Activity is something to be aware of, but the root cause of boredom is a lack of virtue. We need to practice virtue as we pray. Virtue is the key that opens the door to the contemplative experience.

Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint John of the Cross, Pope John Paul the II, and others wrote about the connection between virtue and

contemplation, but for most of us, it is still an area that lacks a general understanding. We can't cover what is needed about virtue here, but we will begin to explain what it is.

Virtue and activity are somewhat related as Saint John of the Cross so adequately demonstrated. In other words, we should practice virtue in the meditation, and as we begin to leave contemplation, we reemphasize the virtuous meditation.

To be more clear, when we pray, we don't doubt God; we believe that God loves us, and want to have a relationship with us. We believe that God will give us a deep contemplative experience to help us build a relationship with God.

A virtuous meditation needs a focus (or actually a window) and only Jesus and Mary provide the perfect window (for they are without sin). The Saints provide good windows, and we should be able to see a little of God in just about anyone. In a hopeful meditation, we long to feel the presence of either Jesus or Mary.

The stage before contemplation involves the surrender of our own agenda to feel and to belong to our focus (i.e., Jesus or Mary). This is the virtue of charity, because we give up ourselves to feel the presence of Jesus and Mary.

We continue to feel and drive the virtues of faith, hope, and charity throughout the contemplative and meditative experience. Of course, we will cover this in much more detail in the chapter on virtue, but we can easily see that such feelings are anything but boring.

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The Value of Time:

Once a prayer time is consistent, it might take awhile to find the results. During this time, we might wonder whether the prayer time is being wasted. A number of years often go by before the prayer time becomes the central and critical event of the day. There will likely be many times where something else seems more important than the prayer time. Once a few prayer times are missed, we lose consistency, and in a short while, we are back at the beginning of the process.

To resist succumbing to the importance of time, we need to keep our focus by going back to the greatest commandment. Our whole life should revolve around God. The value (as in most valuable player) of our lives is not dependent on what we do, but in how closely we follow God.

For example Saint Francis of Assisi and Emperor Frederick lived at about the same time. Frederick was the ruler, and his time was valuable. As such, (it is safe to say because the fruit of his labor did not last) he did not have time to maintain consistency.

On the other hand, Francis was considered to be a fool at first. His time was not considered to be as valuable as that of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire which was Frederick's title, but Francis used his time more wisely. Francis would not stay at a house unless it had a good private place to pray.

Even though time was so much more important to Frederick than Francis, Frederick's contributions (either positive or negative) did not stand the test of time. In fact, Frederick died an early death, and his son lost the battles and influence almost immediately. On the other

hand, the ministry that Francis inspired is still going strong.

As we grow in God, we can feel God working through us, and God's work is both necessary and lasting.

When we don't spend time with God, we are wasting our time. To put this another way, God gives us the grace to find the meaning in our life. When we ignore God, our lives become meaningless. In other words, the people who shape the world are the people of God. Everyone else is chasing the fame of their own ego.

The Vicissitudes of Life:

The dramatic changes of life are probably the main reason we don't maintain consistency. Deep prayer novices are not aware and do not believe the power of deep prayer. When everything is done right, we should expect things to happen. When things do happen, we don't trust God enough to believe He is working in our best interests.

In fact, even the suggestion of God helping us through hard times makes us bitter and resentful. In our pain, we ask, "God where are You?" During these times, most of us temporarily lose our Faith in God, and of course, consistency is lost completely for the foreseeable future. After years of healing, many of us will still not see the coincidence between the deep prayer and the painful times.

Deep prayer is powerful. It was designed by Saints who knew God. With this close divine relationship, they were able to put together a package that delivers. We can be fooled when we see deep prayer as just another spiritual exercise. It is much more than that.

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When we begin deep prayer our lives will pivot toward our real identity. We will begin to become who we were called to be at our creation. Those things in our lives that stand in the way of our authentic identity will crumble. Vocational decisions are often reversed. Here are some common examples. The married person gets divorced. The business person goes bankrupt. The family person grieves the death of a close family member. The religious person is expelled from the community for embarrassing reasons. It is also common for there to be some combination of these and other calamities.

The fortunate few of us, who maintain consistency through these hard times, are rewarded with more than a conventional life time can deliver. It is greater than human love, material wealth, or any other combination of rewards from a normal life. If we stay with it, these hard times usually occur simultaneously with our first encounter of God. For example, we will probably experience the first flight of the soul (i.e., words used by Saint John of the Cross to describe the first contemplative experience) during these hard times.

It is easy to get mad at God when our lives are falling apart. We want answers, and we want them now. Yet, during these times, our emotions are hurt, and no answer is going to address our emotional pain. Furthermore, this state sometimes continues indefinitely. Instead of allowing God to put our lives on track, we turn our backs on God.

Consistency and good technique don't necessarily bring us bad things. If our lives are already on course, we will simply see the doors of infinite spirituality open before us.

The Crisis of Faith:

We can not continue to progress along the spiritual journey indefinitely, unless the spiritual journey is carried past the prayer time and into the day. Two countries might have all sorts of peace treaties but still be at war. If we don't live our covenants, they will mean very little. At some point, we need to make progress towards integrating our prayer time into the rest of the day. Of what use is Church on Sunday, when it makes no difference to the rest of the week?

To be more to the point, deep prayer moves us along the spiritual journey, and this is a life changing (even world changing) event. It is not just something we do with God that is nobody's business but our own. God has an agenda, and to maintain consistency, we will have to be vehicles of that divine agenda.

While this might seem easy, it is often much more difficult. God is great, and He calls us to be like Him. There are many problems associated with this Divine Calling, but to save space, we will only look at four of the more common ones as they affected the lives of some famous holy people (namely, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Francis of Assisi, Moses, The Blessed Virgin, Mother Teresa, and Saint Colette).

The reason that we are going to go into this with such elaborate detail is that the following discussion is nearly entirely unknown. Furthermore, it is absolutely essential, and yet, it seems completely ridiculous. Normal people would probably ascribe the following short biographies to the eccentricities of Saints, but deep prayer isn't normal. The Saints have a method to their madness that makes everything else either inadequate, insane, or both.

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To put this crisis of Faith in the proper context, why do we Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yes, Jesus told us to, but why did He prescribe these words? We know, from the Bible, how the early Church experienced and referred to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and many people have experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the Church. For example, Saint Anthony of Padua spoke in tongues before the Pope and a large gathering of people at the Vatican on Pentecost. Just as with Saint Peter (as related in the Bible), each person heard what Saint Anthony was saying in their own language. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is about enthusiasm and evangelization.

There is also the Baptism of the Son where we give our lives completely to Jesus Christ. This personal conversion is usually reflected in the turning away from sin and the associated redemptive graces. We try to live our lives with a personal Saviour and doing what He would do.

Some of us think we received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit twice, but, of course, this is impossible. The Holy Spirit is such a strong, indwelling force that we can never forget it. We experienced two separate Baptisms. The Baptisms of the Son and the Spirit. History is replete with examples of each. The Baptism of the Spirit is described by Jesus, Saint John of the Cross, and the Biblical account of Pentecost. The Baptism of the Son is related many times in the Bible where Jesus forgives people their sins. There are many examples of people who underwent the same conversion such as Saint Augustine or Matt Talbot. After these Baptism(s), we personally know the Son, Spirit, or both.

Jesus also told us to Baptize in the name of the Father. Jesus said a lot of things that seemed crazy at the time, but we now know that he meant what He said. The Baptism of the Father is no different. There is a Baptism of the Father, but it seems that few of us can recognize it. History gives us numerous accounts of this Baptism. For example, the Baptism of the Father is all through the Bible from Adam through Paul. This baptism is a radical calling from God where we dramatically decide to become the authentic person who God made. The Baptism of the Father is about identity and vocation. At some point, we have to go back to being who we are if we want to continue the spiritual journey of deep prayer.

Our crisis of Faith occurs when we are between a rock and a hard spot. On the one hand, we see the value of deep prayer, and we know we want to continue, but God often calls us to impossible and unreasonable things that seem too crazy to take seriously (our imitation of Christ?).

It is a crisis of Faith because God doesn't necessarily appear to us with explicit testimony. While the calling can be overt, it is more likely to be an interior urging. Will we have the Faith to proclaim from the rooftops, what we heard in secret?

Since the Baptism of the Father seems to us to be an incredible reach, we might think of ourselves as egomaniacs rather than servants of God. Our false sense of humility may make us want to suppress these inner urgings, but the Blessed Virgin, a model of humility if there ever was one, had no qualms about the Magnificat. Few of us have the Faith of Mary that moves us to place ourselves in God's hands and be the subject of impossible circumstances.

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Then, if we don't follow the Baptism of the Father, we can't maintain consistency because God requires Faith to make progress. God is the rock, and the practicality of life is the hard spot. While it might seem like we are faced with a dilemma, we are being given the infinite opportunity to accept ourselves for who we are which is children of God.

To move forward in our spiritual journey, we need to follow the example of Mary and make this incredible leap of faith by saying, "Yes", to God. This radical decision can be made easier by becoming more familiar with it. Towards this objective, we will examine the Baptism of Father as undertaken by six heroic models. To pursue these accounts with discipline and structure, we will force each biography into a format that covers the same four difficulties (not that these are the only ones possible). Then we will look at how it all worked out for the glory of God. By going through these real cases, we will gain an understanding of how the Baptism of the Father occurs.

- 1. Committed:** The person might have already committed to something else.
- 2. Outrageous:** The calling seems so bizarre that we wonder how it could be from God.
- 3. Surrender:** The calling often means that we need to give up everything we have to follow God.
- 4. Illogical:** The calling isn't just impractical; it is impossible.
- 5. Anecdote:** In this part, we will cover how God worked things out for the obedient servant.

Saint Teresa of Avila: Teresa was called to reform the Carmelite order which would involve either the conversion of convents to her way or the founding of new convents from scratch.

- 1. Committed:** She was already a nun in a convent who had vowed obedience to her superior whom already followed a certain practice.
- 2. Outrageous:** Why should she assume that God was talking to her and no one else? If God wanted the convent to undertake a different practice, why didn't God speak to the mother superior?
- 3. Surrender:** She had to leave her sisters, friends, and the security of the convent to undertake a risky venture, and she had to trust her inner voice to do something that she had no way of doing.
- 4. Illogical:** Besides taking the vow of poverty, she had no money or even friends who had enough money to undertake what God was asking. She didn't have anyone to join her. With her vow of obedience she couldn't try to find either money or other Carmelites.
- 5. Anecdote:** God drew attention to Teresa by placing miraculous events in her life. For example, she would float in the air (especially when she was singing). After her reputation for holiness grew, she became very ill. Since the nuns could not take care of someone as ill as Teresa was, she was sent to a rich lady to die.

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At the rich lady's house, Teresa recovered, and the rich lady became a benefactress of Teresa's undertaking. Since Teresa had the miraculous reputation, some other nuns joined her.

During the Spanish Inquisition, Teresa's new order was scrutinized because it was new. The Spanish Government confined Teresa to her original convent which was not part of her new order. While she was there, the convent, which had many nuns, decided to join her new order, and under Teresa's care, it became even larger.

Saint Francis of Assisi: Francis was called over several messages which is typical. On his first call, he was called to follow God instead of fighting for the Pope. After a while, he was called to rebuild the Church. At first, Francis thought God meant to rebuild the church he was in which he did by begging for building materials. After a while, Francis came to the understanding that God was calling him to rebuild the entire Church.

- 1. Committed:** He had committed to go fight for the Pope, and he had left Assisi. If he returned to Assisi without fighting, he would be considered a coward. It was very expensive to outfit a knight, and his family had sacrificed to buy the gear that Francis had.
- 2. Outrageous:** Are we not called to serve the Church to build the Body of Christ? Why would God wait until he was on his way to battle before calling him? How would Francis rebuild the Church through poverty when the Church had

more money and property than most Kings? Everyone esteemed Francis for what he was doing, and everyone would pity Francis for what God would call him to do. How could Francis be right, and the rest of the world be wrong?

- 3. Surrender:** He had to give up the chivalry and prestige of knighthood, and in their place he was required to do embarrassing things that would subject him to ridicule. For example, instead of wearing the fancy clothes as the son or a wealthy clothing merchant, Francis wore the rags of a beggar. While fate had reduced some people to misery, Francis chose to suffer poverty.
- 4. Illogical:** How was he going to rebuild the Church by embracing poverty which most people found repulsive? He was not a Priest, and he didn't even belong to a religious order. Who would listen to a person whom had no credentials.
- 5. Anecdote:** Francis followed his interior inspirations which generated a lot of talk around Assisi. Some people thought he was holy and others thought he was crazy. He did attract a few followers such as a 16 year old girl, Clare.

The local bishop told Francis that he needed permission from the pope to start a religious order. At first, the pope said no, then God gave the pope a dream which caused the pope to change his mind.

In another dream, Dominic saw a stranger and himself as working towards a reformation in the Church.

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The next day Dominic saw Francis for the first time and realized that Francis was the stranger in the dream.

Besides their respective orders and their associated ministries, these two founders built a vision in the Church which focused on radical spirituality. By following this vision, people could aspire to the highest levels of spirituality.

Many people were attracted to this new vision, and Francis, Dominic, and Clare were able to carry out the vocations that God gave them.

Moses: Nearly everyone knows the story of the burning bush, but for those who don't, we summarize it. Moses grew up as royalty in Egypt. He ran into trouble and fled into the desert. He married a desert girl and settled down as a shepherd. Then, one day Moses saw a burning bush that did not burn. When he went to look closer, God told him to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to set the Hebrews free.

- 1. Committed:** He had the normal family obligations, and in his day, the family was necessary for survival. He had both plans and responsibility that needed his attention.
- 2. Outrageous:** How could he free his people? He knew that Pharaoh would not let his people go. He had no army to fight Egypt which was one of the stronger nations.
- 3. Surrender:** He had to give up the peace and tranquility of his current home to

go to a place where he was wanted for murder.

4. Illogical: Well God gave Moses a staff that would turn into a snake and back to a staff and a brother who had the gift of gab, but these things were supposed to impress Pharaoh? Moses and the Hebrews didn't even know each other. How could he speak for them? Why would God speak to Moses when Moses had never practiced the religion of the Hebrews?

5. Anecdote: Of course, this is all found in the Bible. God worked a number of miracles, but He saved the best for the final departure. God led the Israelites with a cloud by day and fire by night, until He had them trapped by the Red Sea. Then God split the waters of the Red Sea to save the Israelites and destroy the Egyptians. Moses then led the Israelites through the desert for a number of years before they finally entered the promised land.

The Blessed Virgin: God ask Mary to be the Mother of His Son. She seemed to understand what this meant very quickly. For example, she went to visit Elizabeth immediately after Gabriel's visit, and in the "Magnificat" she outlines her vocation to Elizabeth with very good accuracy. Since Mary was without sin, the understanding and acceptance of her vocation was apparently very simple.

1. Committed: She was promised to Joseph, but she had not lived with him yet.

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2. Outrageous: Mary was very young, perhaps 13, 14, or 15, when she was called. Had she told her high school (or junior high) counselor, what do you suppose the counselor would think?

3. Surrender: In Mary's day, being pregnant without being married was a big problem that carried significant penalties. Mary had to give up her reputation and risk being exposed to the law.

4. Illogical: In Mary's view, she wondered how she was going to have a baby without a male partner.

5. Anecdote: Since Mary was conceived without original sin, her story began before she was born. Not only does the dream of the Chosen People reach its fruition in Mary, but Mary becomes the perfect woman (the new Eve) that most accurately witnesses the feminine side of God. Holy people need to meditate on the life of Mary just as they meditate on the life of Jesus. For her part, the Church recognizes major Marian Feast Days such as the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception.

Mother Teresa: Mother Teresa was a nun in India when God called her to serve the "poorest of the poor." As she understood it, she would have to establish her own convents and attract her own nuns.

1. Committed: She had already promised to serve her current order.

2. Outrageous: How could she go work among the poor with no resources?

3. Surrender: She had to give up her friends and the security of the convent to go live in a dangerous environment and its uncertain future.

4. Illogical: Wouldn't she just become involuntarily poor like the people she was assisting?

5. Anecdote: One of the most extraordinary things in Mother Teresa's life is how she answered yes to God's call. If only more people would follow her example! Her yes was not just momentary. It lasted the rest of her life, and her sisters still celebrate the day of Teresa's call. The beginning of her journey was so difficult that she destroyed her journal of it, but she remained faithful to the call. Today her call, to serve the poorest of the poor, is a household phrase throughout the world.

Saint Colette: God called upon Colette to reestablish poverty as a central part of the Franciscan order.

1. Committed: In front of her entire town, she had taken solemn vows to be a recluse (this is like being in solitary confinement; usually along side of a church). Recluses were usually for repentant sinners who were in the autumn of their life. Colette's vows were sensational because they were for the prettiest girl in town. It would be difficult and embarrassing to break the vows. At first, Saint Colette resisted this as a matter of honor.

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- 2. Outrageous:** To reform the Franciscan order, she would need the support of some Franciscans, and she didn't even know any of them. How could she reform an order she knew nothing about? How could she reform any order if she broke her vows of a recluse?
- 3. Surrender:** She had never undertaken a task of this sort before. She was used to serving God in some minor role. Therefore, she would have to give up her solitude to become a manager and organizer of a great undertaking.
- 4. Illogical:** Why would God ask her to reform the Franciscan order when she was not a Franciscan? How was she going to get permission from the Pope to reform the Franciscan order when she was not a Franciscan? God did not ask her to join the order, but simply to go to the Pope to ask permission to start a reformed order of Franciscans.
- 5. Anecdote:** While Saint Colette's life would make good material for a movie, many people are unfamiliar with her life. Colette wasn't just holy; she was miraculously holy! She performed some first class miracles such as multiplying food and stopping the sun. When she went into a trance and communed with Heaven which happened with some frequency, she was encased in a white light. Perhaps her modesty prevails even in death.

We have a very good record of her life because many people recognized her holiness when she was alive and several began writing her biography, but

Colette found one of the better biographies and burned it.

Saint Colette was called when she was a recluse. Since she did not want to break her vows, God had her go blind to help her see His way. She finally said yes, and God gave her sight back. A priest was called at the same time, and two worked together to have a bishop rescind her recluse vows.

They then appealed to the Pope (at least to them, he was the Pope - there were two or three people who claimed to be Pope at the time) who granted them the right to begin the reformed order. The two carried out this work for the rest of their lives.

Since Colette was so extraordinary, she attracted a lot of attention and support. She rejuvenated the ideal of poverty in the Franciscan order, and the reform eventually spread to the other orders.

In these six examples, we can begin to see why many people fail to answer yes to the Baptism of the Father.

It is not uncommon for the Baptism of the Father to come with some supernatural experience. In the examples above, there is a visit by an angel (Mary), a bush on fire that didn't burn (Moses), a talking crucifix (Francis), and other things. It is as if God uses these things to help us place more believability in the experience. Even with this divine aid, hardly anyone accepts the Baptism of the Father.

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Some people might hold the opinion that the Baptism of the Father is an experience only a few people have a chance to receive, but the way of the spiritual journey dictates that the Baptism of the Father is for everyone. A saint in development goes through the following steps.

1. Consistency in daily prayer
2. Spiritual poverty
3. Contemplation
4. Vocational development

These steps are consistent with the methods of spiritual masters (e.g., Benedict, Dominic, Francis, Ignatius, among others) throughout the history of the Church. For example, Saint Dominic's motto, "Action through contemplation," sums up the last two steps. In another example, Benedict had a monk who pretended to go into ecstasy, and then he would leave daily prayer to do other things. Benedict took care of this problem by beating the monk with a stick while the monk was pretending ecstasy which shows that Benedict believed in consistency. Of course, daily prayer is required in all religious orders, but in this case, Benedict was concerned about a specific type of prayer that meets the definition of consistency we gave earlier.

Perhaps the strongest case for spiritual poverty is made in the "Song of Songs" which is from the Bible, but the phrase, "spiritual poverty", was most likely coined, many centuries later, by Saint John of the Cross. Many other Saints, including Saint Catherine of Siena, wrote about the need for this singular desire.

These four steps have been established for a long time, but they are not practiced by almost all people. God is inclusive, and all are called. If

we practice these steps, we will be called to do something for God with the attendant attributes we listed in our six examples that were just given.

While these four steps occur in order, the Baptism of the Father can occur at any time. It is not uncommon for the Baptism of the Father to occur before consistency, and in the case of Colette (and probably Mary and others) the Baptism of the Father did not occur until after the third step. Of course, it can't occur before the fourth step because we can't develop a vocation that we know nothing about.

This leaves us in a predicament. We are all called, but very few are ready to be taken because we don't have the relationship with God to trust the call.

In fact, many of us are called, and we don't even recognize the call. The call is often over several events, but we don't realize that the events are all different parts of the same thing.

It is easy to tell when anyone accepts the call because God doesn't light a lamp and put it under a basket. Lamps are easy to see in the dark. This allows us to look across the world and see how many people accepted the call. In any single century, the number of people who accept the call can usually be counted on ten fingers.

We shouldn't take this to mean that very few people are saved because we are judged by our appetites, but it does mean that many of our appetites won't be saved because we never developed our vocation. When we attempt the spiritual journey, we often face this crisis of faith. On the one hand, God requests something that is completely unreasonable, and on the other hand, we can't become the children of God without accepting our identity.

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There are those who would argue that this is not fair in some cases. For example, if we die as an infant, how can we develop our vocation? We need to remember that God judges us as a group as well as individually, and secondly our identity stays with us after we die.

In other words, whether we are a minute or century old, we are judged by our appetites. An infant's appetites are mainly inherited (i.e., for example original sin but also the good deeds of the ancestors). Therefore, the ancestors which the infant favors play a large role in the appetites of an infant. While modern science now testifies to these facts, Aquinas actually proved this about 800 years ago.

Let's look at this from a different angle. We are the recursion of smaller parts. In other words, we can be identified by these smaller parts. These smaller parts have a free will, mental capacity, and the independence to make their own choices. In turn, these smaller parts (most likely a cell) are made up of still smaller parts that have all the same characteristics. This process goes on to infinity in both the smaller and larger ways (from Aristotle or before). We, therefore, create a larger being (probably the human race) that has the capacity to be saved or lost.

Infant deaths, along with all other problems, are the result of sin in the human appetites. Without sin, we would all reach our vocation. An infant who dies is all part of this larger process. For example, in our age, the mothers who are assisted by medical personnel often kill their babies either at conception or a little latter. Our children can not reach their vocation when they are murdered. Is God not being fair by allowing us the ability to be able to be pro-choice?

Original sin is not a grudge God holds against the human race. We have sinful appetites, and we can not escape this sin except through grace. This is one reason why we say that Mary is full of grace, because all grace flows through Mary. Mary can do this because she is without sin. We can never escape original sin without turning our appetites back to God. We pass these appetites to our children through heredity and example. The Church holds the keys that can solve this dilemma.

From these philosophical facts, we can expect salvation to be both an individual and collective process. The process is more collective in an infant and individual choices play a larger role as we age.

The Baptism of the Father is not required for salvation, but we need to develop our vocation if we want God to recognize the design He created. If we love God and follow His commandments, God will recognize some of our appetites. Without the development of our God given identity, however, we can expect fewer of our appetites will be saved. In some ways, we can receive the power of the Holy Spirit (Baptism of the Spirit) and be saved from our Sins (Baptism of the Son), and yet we might only be talking the talk. With the call to our identity (Baptism of the Father), we have to walk the walk.

There isn't anyway to accept the call of the Father without living life in the Spirit and Son. While these Baptisms might be years apart, they are all interrelated. For example, call of the Father is a call to our identity, but the Baptism we receive first says a lot about who we are (from Abbot David of Pecos, NM).

The crisis of Faith that the Baptism of Father emphasizes is the same problem we have in all parts of our lives. For example, as engineers,

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we might do the practical thing and support our family with a job that is a dead end, when we could have taken the step in Faith to pursue the invention that God is calling us. In another case, we might decide to accept a prestigious position when we know that it is not from God. In each case, we bow to pressures from the community, family, or practicality, when we could have given ourselves to God.

The vocation should not be casually or accidentally chosen. It needs to be from God and of God. We are likely to take the less traveled road for God's sake rather than taking risks merely for the sake of gain. We can not simply choose to be another person; we have to accept who we are.

It doesn't mean that we won't fail. If we look at the lives of the Saints, we will find a number of times where they failed. For example, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, failed several times before the Jesuits got off the ground, and the same can be said for most other Saints.

We have covered a lot of ground in this section. The Baptism of the Father is the "crisis of faith" for God calls us to some impossible task. Then our practicality kicks in, and we have a hard time of accepting who we are. We can't expect to continue the spiritual journey by pretending to be someone else. This means that our prayer times will suffer, unless we accept the call. This crisis of Faith has proved to be a major stumbling block for almost all of us.

The Disruption of Routine:

Most of us have a routine that we fall into. In most cases, the routine is something that is established partly by chance and the rest by necessity. When we begin to establish consistency, our prayer times are often dependent upon our schedule. Every time our

schedule changes, we are at risk of losing our prayer time.

In a true life example, a man established a prayer time over the summer. His routine consisted of walking around a golf course before his prayer time. When fall came, he did not want to walk around the golf course in the dark, and his prayer time left with the walk.

Relatives have a strong tendency to change our schedules and hinder our prayer times. While it is not common for us to establish a prayer time in the first place, we have even a harder time maintaining consistency when we visit relatives or relatives visit us.

If our relatives won't respect our prayer time, then we can resort to tricks. For example, we can pretend to be reading a book or taking a nap, or we might just slip away to be by ourselves.

Many of us try to justify missing prayer times due to busy schedules, but consistency won't come from excuses. Furthermore, we all have a number of things that we do everyday (e.g., eating, sleeping, dressing, etc.). The reason we are on earth is to love God through living our vocation, but we can't follow our vocation without striving for spiritual poverty. As we pointed out, spiritual poverty can only come from consistent internal meditation. When we miss prayer times, we are not getting the basics we need.

One strategy is to tie the prayer time to a daily necessity. For example, we might decide to not eat until after our prayer time.

Different problems require different solutions. If it is impossible to pray at home, we might leave earlier for work, and pray at a

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church on the way to work. If we have a constant companion, we might have the companion share the prayer time in silent reflection. If we have small children, we might still do the prayer time while letting some of their needs interrupt the prayer time. We could compensate by using a longer prayer time.

Our schedules are supposed to help get the necessary things done. If our schedules are not letting us get our prayer times in, we need to rework the schedules. There isn't much reason for us to live, unless we live for God.

Focus

The Need to Focus:

After we have established consistency, our next step is to reach spiritual poverty during each prayer time. As Jesus said to Martha, we are nervous and distracted about many things, and as in the "Song of Songs", we need to grow quiet to experience a close encounter with God. Of course God is not limited to this environment. God would, however, ultimately override our free will, if we kept experiencing God above our nervous distraction. Since we can expect God to respect our free will, we can, therefore, conclude that our focus will determine our success or failure on this next step.

Common Sense:

By using our common sense, we can conclude we need to focus on God during our prayer time. If we showed up for work each day and let our thoughts drift from one thing to the next, the quantity and quality of our work would suffer. We can't expect our prayer time to be that much different than every other part of our life.

Structured Prayer:

Prayer times will advance faster if they do not randomly wander wherever our fantasy takes us (such as in talking to God with whatever pops into our mind). It could be argued that the purpose of the prayer time is to build a relationship with God, and a relationship can't be reduced to a formal structure. While this attitude is certainly prayer, a formal structure addresses the issues and problems we are dealing with much faster.

When God establishes relationships, He usually does so with a formal structure of a covenant. We find these covenants in both the Old and New Testaments. To be in relationship with God, we are given a series of steps. In the New Testament covenant, Jesus established the sacraments and Church, and He even went so far as to choose the first pope. God knows we have many appetites in our intelligent recursion, and structure is needed to bring these in line.

Intelligent Recursion:

Before we look at the reform we need, let's take a look at who we are. Aristotle (or perhaps someone before him) proved that everything is made up of smaller parts, and Aquinas demonstrated that the smaller parts would have to have the same nature and intellect as the larger parts. Modern science has born out the accuracy of these proofs. We therefore are billions of small things that have their own ideas, opinions, appetites, and free wills. It has been philosophically proven and scientifically verified.

We are made up of certain DNA. This DNA will identify us, and the DNA itself is made up of even smaller parts that haven't been discovered. We know that DNA communicates in an intelligent fashion by passing RNA. Since we find both identity (the DNA identifies the person) and communication in our DNA, we can easily show that our intelligence flows from our DNA which was proved by Aquinas (he didn't call it DNA). As shown by Aquinas, if we are comprised of DNA, then our DNA has same problems that we do.

DNA is passed from generation to generation. The DNA carries sinful appetites that we call original sin. While Baptism gives us the grace to overcome original sin, it doesn't

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take away the appetites. If it did, no one would commit sins after they were Baptized or at least not very often. Children of Baptized parents have original sin because Baptism doesn't remove the appetites. DNA couldn't have original sin and the propensity to commit more sin unless it had a free will. Only intelligent beings have free will. DNA is not just a blue print that is passed from generation to generation, it is an intelligent living being that has its own free will which can and does sin.

As Aquinas pointed out, we can't be much different than our parts. The parts which constitute our being would bear our identity and traits. In other words, the smaller parts would have the same appetites as the larger parts. We can't be different from our DNA. We can't become better people unless we can get better DNA. While we might think that we are stuck with the DNA that we have, it is easy to show that the DNA changes all the time. We can't learn, forget, or experience without our DNA respectively learning, forgetting, or experiencing. We change and adapt, and our DNA changes and adapts along with us (or better - we change and adapt to our DNA). We are unique, and the DNA in one cell has a different identity than the DNA in any other cells. We draw our free will from the fact that the DNA in each cell has its own free will. We have many different appetites, and so does the DNA in each cell. We are the composite of our DNA, we can't expect to be different from it.

Any system of prayer has to work across the DNA in billions of cells with all of their different personalities, if it is to work for each of us individually. In a large organization with many different personalities and agendas, we can only make progress by working together through an organized structure, lest the work of one group being ruined or contradicted by

another group. The organization will need a direction, objective, and a plan to be organized. The focus in our prayer time needs to become these things for us.

The organizational plan can not simply be marching orders for mindless pawns. The DNA has its own free will, and we derive our intelligence from it. Our system of structured prayer needs to be one that draws out the genius from our DNA. Genius only occurs in an extreme minority of our DNA. We need to find a way to let the genius speak.

We can often find what we are looking for by looking deeper. Any change that debuts on the outside, is already old news on the inside. As molecular biology, nuclear physics, and many other disciplines have shown, the best predictor of the future or diagnosis of the present is to examine what is happening at a lower level of recursion. The phrase "central intelligence" is an oxymoron. For example, in the market place it has been proven (at a tremendous cost) that centrally governed economies are a stupid way to do business. In fact, Aquinas proved that freedom at the lower levels produces the strongest aggregate military. Within this proof, Aquinas effectively proves that everything happens from the inside out.

Inside Out:

Let us reduce this philosophical concept to a more specific example or ramification. As a people, we don't say that intelligence of mathematics comes from the masses of people who are ignorant of mathematics. We know instead that basic mathematical principles were the contributions of Pascal, Newton, Pythagoras, and others. Inside each of these brilliant minds were a few strands of DNA

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which advanced the mathematical ability for the whole human race. As they are being realized, all concepts start as an extreme minority of an extreme minority and avalanche through the population. Our prayer times need to facilitate this process. If the whim of the mob always runs roughshod over the thoughts of the minority, the little that we have will be taken away from us. Without the discipline of free speech and individual rights, democracy is an ignorant and ugly tyranny.

Before the voice of the minority can be heard, the din of the crowd must be reduced if not silenced. Then a single topic is introduced as the focus of discussion. Order must be held, so only one person is speaking at a time. Within a disciplined structure, the genius of the extreme minority can become common knowledge to the masses.

Jesus did not go to the marketplace to pray, He instead went to desolate places where all was quiet and He was alone with God. We need to follow our Lord's example in this. If Jesus, in His perfection, needed quiet time with God, we, in our sin, have an even greater need to feel the presence of God. We begin to pray like Jesus prayed by going to some desolate place where all is quiet and we are alone with God. In other words, we won't get regular and sublime results from unstructured and inadequate discipline.

In our stillness, we introduce the presence of God. We know what the presence of God feels like because it has been witnessed to us by Jesus, Mary, and the Saints. While admittedly these witnesses are in the extreme minority, we want the concepts they represent to ripple through our being in the same way that all intelligence is realized by the masses. As Jesus put it, the mustard seed is the tiniest of all

seeds, but it can grow into a Faith that moves mountains. Our young Faith needs to be nurtured in a relationship that is fed by discipline and virtue.

Self Consciousness:

Why does a God, who cares about us so much, seem so inaccessible to us? Before the fall of Adam, God visited with Adam each day. By cherishing curiosity more than God and eating the apple, Adam violated the relationship he had with God. The apple gave Adam the knowledge of right and wrong. This knowledge made Adam self conscious. Then Adam hid from God, so God would not see him naked. Adam was too self conscious to relate to God, and as sons and daughters of Adam, we still make the same mistake. We are too nervous, upset, anxious, interested, and absorbed in our self consciousness to feel God's love for us. In other words, God doesn't hide from us, we are too absorbed in our humors and affairs to feel God.

Of course, our mistakes are not limited to a strategic flaw. With a little searching, we could find many other things wrong with the picture. All good things go together. If we mess up in one area, we can expect many other (actually all - this is the concept of good and bad) things to be affected in a negative way. On a brighter note, the reverse is true as well. If we do well in one area, all other parts of our lives benefit from it. As proven philosophically by Aristotle (ranking of domains) and mathematically by Einstein (theory of relativity - I doubt that he understood the philosophy) all things are connected together through our relationship with God; so when we mess up in one area all things about us begin to unravel.

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We are still making the same choice that Adam and Eve made. By choosing knowledge over love, Adam lost paradise. Across thousands of years, we have gained many appetites that keep us away from love, but we haven't completely forgot the love of God. A part of us still knows the divine. When we experience, beauty, truth, discipline, order, or any of the attributes of God, we can still feel what paradise was like.

The focus in our prayer time is an attempt to reverse the mistake of self consciousness that has been made all through the ages. In our prayer times, we focus on feeling the presence of God rather than following our wills, emotions, or thoughts.

To put this another way, God did not hide from Adam, but after Adam sinned, he hid from God. Adam was too self conscious to relate to God. If we are to reverse the embarrassment of sin, we need to concentrate on building a consensus to feel God. As we feel God, we will realize that God doesn't condemn us in our embarrassment, He saves us from our guilt.

The sacrament of reconciliation is a good way to get past the embarrassment of sin, because we remember our sins and ask for forgiveness. While we will receive grace with the help of this sacrament, we may not consciously feel the presence of God which is what allows us to build an appetite for God. In other words, the sacrament of reconciliation is a necessary start but not necessarily the finish.

We still need to be able to relate to God by feeling God's presence. Within each of us, there is an extreme minority that still knows God. We feel the presence of God by giving this small part of us our attention. In due time, the appetites of the small minority will ripple

through our being and become common knowledge to the masses that make each one of us. The masses still won't have a personal experience of God, but at least we have opened the door of a possible relationship which leads to paradise.

The purpose of the focus is to quiet the competition for the consciousness. We all know we need to be quiet in church, so we can hear the Word of God. When the church is not quiet, there are many conversations about many different things. The few people, who are praying, are probably distracted. The process is no different inside of us. The quiet helps us to pray.

Receptive Cooperation:

In our culture, we seem determine to let our attention drift. Television, radio, and other electronic sedatives enforce the notion that focus is no fun. Movies and in some cases books also set the theme of undisciplined focus. We do try to concentrate or focus at certain times at work or school, but even at these moments of focus, a part of our body overrides another part. This becomes tiring after several hours, and we relapse into the recreational activities that have no focus.

While suppressing a certain part of ourselves might seem successful in the short term, it is a poor strategy for several reasons. The following reasons are not exhaustive, but they serve to illustrate that suppression is unhealthy.

We can't expect to be at our best when most of our energy is spent on keeping another part of us at bay. The conflict is similar to 50 men rowing a ship. If 24 row the wrong way, it will take another 24 to offset the wrong rowing. The ship is operating at 4% of its capacity. If

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8% percent of our work is maintenance, we can expect for everything to become worse with a 4% effort.

It is hard to give God our love when we are uptight and tense. One of the more common phrases from the Old Testament is God complaining that His people are a "stiff necked people." If we have "stiff neck", we are probably tense. Stress and tension come from one part of our body trying to rule another. If every part of the body was doing as it pleased, why would we be tense? On the other hand, happiness is not found by indulging the appetites. Since we can not let our appetites run amok and we can not enforce order, we are left trying to preach (not enforce) the Word of God. In other words, our job is to explain to each appetite in our body how it can have a relationship with God, but we can not demand that our appetites love God because love must be free. When faced with the temptation of ungodly appetites, we tend to work against our free will by demanding compliance which introduces a competition for the consciousness. One part of us screams for one thing and another part is yelling for something else. The thought that reaches the consciousness is the one that has won a yelling match. Of course, this is a very intense environment, and we can not expect God to be screaming to get through which would only make everything worse. To hear the voice of God, we need to turn our appetites to God through persuasion (not by enforcement).

Within a competitive environment, the thought that reaches the consciousness tends to be a hard, driving, and insistent thought. Even when the thought is holy, there is a good chance that the winning thought is too much of a control freak to listen to God. The love of God is a relationship not a discipline. Another

word of advice that is repeated a number of times in the Old Testament is, "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts." The goal of the focus is spiritual poverty which has a strong sense of humility in it. To reach spiritual poverty, the ego that is driving the consciousness turns the keys over to a different kind of consciousness where humility and obedience are predominant. These attributes are not love, but they take us to the place where we can be receptive to a relationship.

God is more likely to speak to the poor and unfortunate than to the current ruler. God goes to where the need is the greatest. If the thought that presides over the consciousness does not respect the rights of the rest, we will not profit fully from what God said to the least among us.

By respecting the rights of all, the competition for the consciousness will become less. We will begin to draw our intelligence from more varied and diverse sources. Respect decreases the tension of competition and increases the intelligence that comes from cooperation. We gain respect by informing rather than enforcing.

Relationships require two way communication. Besides informing others, we need to listen. We are not likely to know what God has said unless we listen to the poor and unfortunate. Besides receiving this communication, we need to be poised to be inspired by it, lest God speaks to us in vain.

In many ways, we are like Mary and Martha. While Mary was listening to Jesus, Martha was nervous and upset about many things. Martha did not ask Mary what Jesus told her, she only asked Jesus if He would send Mary in to help her. In fact, Martha thought Jesus was less than

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considerate because He allowed Mary to listen to Him!

It is no better for one part of us to take a superior and ruling position over another part of us inside our body than it is within society. Overriding the will of a certain part of us is a violation of the minority rights. The minority needs to be involved in the works of the majority before the minority can find their own worth and identity.

Contemplation requires spiritual poverty. In spiritual poverty all parts of us are seeking the same thing, God. We can never reach spiritual poverty when we are war with ourselves. Spiritual poverty is achieved by winning the cooperation of all parts. To put this another way, our will is the aggregate of many smaller wills. If these wills are not with us, they are against us. We gain little benefit by resolving the conflict through force. Our best chance is to launch a campaign that is designed to win the will of the masses. Spiritual poverty comes through cooperation rather than conflict.

Holy Will:

While it is often masqueraded as something else, the will is intrinsically linked to the predominant appetites. An appetite is a desire or tendency in some part of ourselves. The appetites of one cell have an affect on the appetites of the next cell. The congruence of appetites forms a more public opinion among groups of cells. These opinions work their way into the consciousness. The conscious thoughts then form the will, where the will is similar to public policy. Of course, policy can be opposed, and with our fallen state, the will is never set in stone.

To restate this in a more classical sense, the will is the rational appetite. The will rules the sensitive appetites, but through a sort of political command (as Aquinas puts it). The sensitive appetites are broken into irascible and concupiscible. Thirst, hunger, sex, and other appetites which have a biological component are grouped into concupiscible area. "All the manifestations of the sensitive appetites are called passions." There are six passions for the concupiscible appetites: love and hatred, desire and aversion, joy and sadness; and five for the irascible appetites: hope and despair, courage, fear, and anger (Summa Theol., I-II, Q. xxiii, a. 4)." (from New Advent).

Before the fall of man, these appetites led us to God, but since we have sinned, we can no longer be so certain. All appetites are influenced by habits, and some habits are sinful. It takes a large amount of time (perhaps 40 years) to convert the habits and appetites. While we can't expect immediate results from deep prayer, we can get success by practicing successful strategies. To demonstrate this with a negative example, we need to resist temptation at the first opportunity. We can't enjoy the temptation for as long as possible and hope to turn away from it at the last instant. As Jesus pointed out, the enjoyment of the temptation is a sin by itself.

Sin can only feel good by indulging a sinful appetite. Years of sinful habit by ourselves and our ancestors have twisted the appetites to long for something sinful. To become holy, we must change the habits, but our will power will not be able to do so. Since these appetites are the tendencies of our intelligent recursion, we can't escape them, because we are no more than our parts. Jesus said that for man it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.

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We begin to correct these bad habits by taking a solemn vow to reject them in our Baptismal vows. In Baptism, God also changes the character of the appetites to be more receptive of the Divine relationship. Baptism gives us a chance, but it is only the beginning.

The Baptismal vow is an attempt of a holy will, but most of the work still lies in front of us. By fully participating in the Church, we gain the graces that will definitely help, but we know from experience that many sinful things still remain within us.

As we begin deep prayer, we need to remember our ongoing struggle. Our will is not strong enough to save us, but it is strong enough to establish a relational strategy with our Saviour. As we have strong experiences within holy relationships (especially Jesus and Mary), we will begin to have the power to change some of our sinful habits which in turn correct our appetites. For sure, the power is from the relationship and not from our will.

When we focus to reach spiritual poverty, these same unholy appetites distract us from our quest. The prayer solution is no different than the strategy we deploy to save our souls. In other words, we strive to reach spiritual poverty by stimulating our relationship with God. We will never reach spiritual poverty through concentration because the will does not have absolute control over the sensitive appetites. Spiritual poverty can only be reached through our relationship with our God. To be more precise, spiritual poverty occurs when our sensitive appetites begin to long for God.

From above (the quote from Aquinas), we know the sensitive appetites are engaged in holy pursuit when we have a passionate prayer time. To put this another way, we know we are

beginning to have success when our prayer times become more passionate. We have all experienced something similar to this; when we are the most passionate, we are the least distracted.

Passionate prayer experiences occur when the sensitive appetites voluntarily join the holy will in the quest for spiritual poverty which begs the question of how we encourage the sensitive appetites to volunteer. We don't want to be too quick to assume that we appeal to the sensitive appetites through the senses, because sensitive appetites are a feature of the soul. On the other hand, the soul is not divorced from the senses. Our key is that the sensitive appetites longed for God before the fall and still primarily belong to their intended function. This is why music, nature, and other sublime experiences often take our minds to the spiritual realm. With the exception of diabolical influences, humans are universally attracted to certain sensual experiences that relate to one attribute of God or another, and even in diabolical cases, the original intent seeks a divine attribute. With these things in mind, we know that we can petition the sensitive appetites with practical techniques and supernatural practices. The practical techniques are the subject of the focus, and the supernatural practices will be left to the section dedicated to virtue.

How to Focus:

"Give me your undivided attention." How many times have we heard that? Unless God is speaking, however, it is actually impossible because the sensitive appetites only have a common (but not exclusive) longing for God. Of course in our prayer time, an undivided

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longing for God is possible, and we call it, "spiritual poverty." In this section, we cover techniques that we can use to persuade our sensitive appetites to participate with our holy wills as we pursue spiritual poverty.

Beginning Tactics:

The "Beginning Tactics" are not necessarily things that we graduate from; they are practices that don't require any experience.

Meditative Plan: Meditation is a very large category that involves a number of different things such as personality, simplicity, timing, and history. While this list is not exhaustive, it does give us some objectives to work with with.

Personality: As we pursue spiritual poverty, we will want to find meditations that work for us. The Church has a rich history of meditations that include the Bible, Rosary, Eucharist, icons, and many more specific meditations such as inner healing, saintly devotions, spiritual exercises, and the Jesus prayer. We want to keep sampling different meditations until we find one that works for us. The more that we find to our liking the better our chances are. The meditations can be mixed together, and we can invent our own. Picking a meditation is similar to buying a pair of shoes; we need to find what we like and then own it. As we practice our meditation, it should become a part of us.

Simplicity: As we progress in prayer, the meditation will necessarily need to become more simple. We want to be still like Mary and not distracted like Martha. Nearly all meditations can be simplified. For example, if the rosary is our meditation, we would gradually work towards meditating on one mystery per day. If we read the Bible for a

meditation, we can gradually work toward meditating on a single sentence. While this might seem rather boring if we are beginning, we need to keep in mind that the passion does not come from the content. It comes from the relationship with God. As our appetites become familiar with God's presence, we won't want all the distractions that remind us of God, but we will want some simple meditation even after we are in spiritual poverty.

Timing: We are all one body. We feel what other people feel, and it is very important to pray to the same feeling as the rest of the Church. In other words, the meditation should fit well into the calendar of the larger Church. For example, if our meditation involves the mysteries of the Rosary, we wouldn't want to do a Nativity meditation on Good Friday. In fact, we would want to spend some time to make sure our meditation is in harmony with the rest of the Church on any given day.

History: Our meditation is a tool that we use to relate to God. We want our relationship to grow each day, and our meditation should reflect this growing relationship. In her perfect state, Mary was a master of relationships, if there ever was one. She reflected on past events that were important to her relationship with Jesus. As she grew in her understanding, she began to know Jesus in a deeper way. We can follow Mary's example by remembering our past meditative experiences to add to our experiences each day.

Initial Meditations: As we begin the spiritual journey some meditations are nearly universal. The following two categories are very common, and they make popular retreat topics.

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Asset Privation: Jesus covers this theme in the "Pearl of Great Price" parable (Matthew 13:45), but let's add an analogy. The theme involves surrendering all that we have. In our material state, we are like living in a diseased oasis. We are not dead, but we are not thriving, either. To become healthy, we have to leave the oasis, and head for verdant mountains. We have accumulated emotional baggage at the oasis, and to make it across the desert to the mountain of the Lord, we are going to have to leave it behind us. The following two meditations speak to this analogy, but of course, we could find many other themes.

Sanity: This is clearly a "let go let God" meditation. Many times we verbally commit to God, but within our emotions, we set conditions that makes our oaths little more than formalities. When things don't go our way, we complain that God has deserted us. In reality, we have some sinful appetites, and we can't expect to feel good all the time. We are not in the Garden of Eden anymore. As we develop a personal relationship with Jesus, we often (perhaps usually) ask ourselves if we would give up everything for God, and we can be sure that we are being prompted by the Holy Spirit. We usually start with material possessions and work our way towards health issues. For many of us, one of the last things we want to offer up is our sanity. God wants friends who are going to "stick tight" and keep the Faith. We should consider this meditation a covenant with God.

Family: If we want to give up everything for God, we will also have to give up our family. This does not mean that Jesus wants us to abandon those who depend on us, but it does mean that our foundation needs to be built on our relationship with God. Familial relationships are God's way of creating and nurturing life, but God needs to be our central

relationship (not our family). The strongest relationships are those based in agape; and no relationship is based in agape, unless it is based in God. As Saint John puts it, "God is agape." A relationship, that is based in agape, can never be lost, and therefore, God is not in a relationship that fear causes us to cling to.

Inner Healing: During the early phases of deep prayer, we almost always go through an inner healing process. Since we have many good books that cover inner healing, we don't need to spend much time on it here, but we do want to emphasize the affect of inner healing on the spiritual journey. Jesus said that, before we approach God, we need to be at peace with others. It is unrealistic for us to expect to be a channel of God's love when we have these outstanding issues with other people or within ourselves. Inner healing shows us how to get past these impasses.

Childhood: If our early years were less than perfect, we will probably need to drop some of the baggage that we are still carrying from that period. We can get so used to carrying it that we can forget we have it or remember why have it. It is possible or even likely that we don't remember issues from our childhood, although they may be nearly dictating the way we live today. For example, some emotional trauma that we suffered during birth could be causing severe headaches on a daily basis, and after we deal with this trauma, the headaches disappear. We can go through inner healing with other people, but deep prayer will certainly cause these issues to surface. How we deal with these issues is well covered in other books, but the fundamental is to go through the experience with either Jesus or Mary. We feel their presence while we relive the problem. We know we have some problems if we experience fears or agitation as we try to meditate. If we

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want to drop the baggage, we will have to face the problem.

Family: As we grow closer to others we become more vulnerable to them, and in most cases, the members of our family can hurt us the most. For these reasons we often need healing in our family relationships. All of our problems have the same solution. We revisit some of the more disturbing events, and feel the agape of Jesus or Mary as we relive the times that trouble us. Since we have often spent a large amount of time with our family, we can probably expect that the inner healing will take regular sessions over several months. The time it takes is well spent, because the process is a very liberating experience which will make our family relationships stronger and healthier.

Enemies: Of course, God forbids us to have enemies, but we are likely to suffer from resentment, anger, and other types of emotional distress which are the sequel to social conflict. We can be sure that this emotional baggage will be too heavy for us to carry on the spiritual journey. Inner healing helps us to get past these issues, but it might be helpful to put a different twist on it by sorting through the reasons that we dislike our enemy. If the bad feelings come from an injury, then the normal presence of Jesus or Mary at the time of the injury will be good. In other words, the same exercised we used in other areas. In many cases, the dislike comes from real or perceived personality flaws in the other people or in ourselves. For example, we might dislike the person because they are fat, lazy, or (God bless us) all of the above. On the other hand, we might have the problems and dislike someone else because they don't suffer from them. In either case, we should not give up hope. We should pray for person who has the problems. If we pray with confidence, we will feel like we are in control

of the situation and helping someone. These feelings indicate that we are on the road to recovery.

Diabolic Possession: At the beginning of the spiritual journey resident demons will sometimes protest in a vehement way which makes the focus all but impossible. For our momentary purposes, let's break the possession into two categories of lower and upper possession. For the most part, if we have a personal relationship with the demon, it is an upper level demon. When we have lower level demons, we seem to have a bad side; but we are not sure why it happens. If we have upper level demons, we are unlikely to attempt the spiritual journey. We would need to find a very good exorcist to get rid of upper level demons. The possession of the lower levels, which includes the occult, can be cast out by most priests by using the triple rites of exorcism. If we seemed to have been possessed from birth, we will need to be unconscious during the exorcism. We are often tempted to play the exorcism card too fast. Those of us who don't need exorcism are usually the ones who seek it. If we need exorcism, it is likely that we would be able to explain how we came into possession. If we practice sin (e.g., sexual prostitutes, drug dealer) on a regular basis or the occult even experimentally, we would have a good chance of being possessed. In terms of the spiritual journey, we won't get very far while we are possessed.

Meditative Strategies: When we first attempt to focus, we often complain that our thoughts wonder so much and far that spiritual poverty will always be impossible, but even the Olympic runner had to learn to stand, take steps, and go through the toddler phase. Ours minds are much more complex than a large building, and it takes more time to build the focus than it

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does a large structure. By practicing these techniques, we will be on our way towards spiritual poverty. The techniques should be used in conjunction with our meditation regardless of which meditation we prefer.

We might be overwhelmed by the number of things that focus involves, but at this point, we are only learning how to do some exercises. We do not need to worry about doing them all at once. At the end of the section on virtue, we will learn how to gradually put these exercises and virtue together to reach spiritual poverty.

Visual Meditation: To reach spiritual poverty we need to pray with all our appetites which are located throughout our body. If a part of our body has feeling, then it has appetites that need to be focused. Visual meditation is one of the techniques we use to bring the focus to different parts of our body.

Most of us can close our eyes and visualize something. We form a mental image of what we want to see. If we are unable to do this, then we should practice it until we have it down.

Of course, when we "look" at something with our eyes shut, we don't actually see it. We can, however, recall it from our memory or even construct it from our imagination. When the image comes from our memory, we might strive for the highest accuracy; but the image that comes from our imagination will likely have nuances or modifications that suit our fancy. We are not like a computer that stores an image and recalls it, we are rather like the Internet which stores and modifies the image many times in different places with various biases.

If we wanted the people on the Internet to focus on a certain subject, we might ask them to submit their images that pertain to the subject of focus. Within our body, we can focus on a meditation by asking a certain part of the body to recall or construct an image of the meditation. In other words, let's suppose the meditative image was Jesus hanging on the cross. We could try to see the cross within our stomach, heart, or mind, and we could also ask those parts to visualize the image somewhere else. For example, at first we might visualize the cross in our stomach. As the stomach picked up the feeling that is associated with the meditation, the stomach would gain the ability to visualize the cross itself. Then the stomach might visualize the cross a few feet from the stomach. If the stomach is able to feel the presence of Jesus, the visualization will be even easier.

We want to visualize with our stomach and other parts of our body to give the stomach the ability to worship independently of our other parts. In spiritual poverty, we have all parts worshipping independently, and the importance of the independence can not be overstated. For example, when Aquinas proves the holiness of Jesus or Mary he demonstrates that each part of them was acting free of the other parts. We can not be fully worshipping God when parts of us are busy making other parts of us pray. Each part of us should be able to visualize and meditate without assistance from another part.

Audio Meditation: If we don't use audio to help our focus, it will probably become part of our distraction. We don't need to turn our thoughts off to have a passionate and loving prayer experience, but we do need to focus our thoughts on our meditation. In fact, we must gain control of our audio thoughts to have

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focus. Most of us are accustomed to forced audio concentration, but for the purposes of deep prayer, our audio focus needs to be more relaxed and complete which are techniques that should be used all the time. It takes too much energy and effort to dictate our thoughts. We need to use a cooperative approach that is accepted by all parts of us. Every part of us has an appetite for God, and we want bring all parts of us together to worship our Lord. Our audio meditation is one of the most effective means for doing this.

We practice audio meditation and visual meditation in nearly the same way. We hear things inside our head, but we can also imagine hearing with something other than our mind. For example, we can listen with our hearts or stomachs. We might think that by listening to our stomach that we will know when to eat, but we are striving to stimulate the spiritual appetites in our stomach and other places. Each part of our body has many different appetites, but as was demonstrated by Aquinas, all parts of the body have an intrinsic appetite for God. We are trying not to listen to the predominant appetite that is normally associated with some body part. With our vision, we strive to see something holy, and with our hearing, we want to hear something holy.

We control the meditation by picking some picture and saying that relates to the daily meditation. Then we try to see the picture and hear the saying with different parts of our body. For example, the picture might be Jesus hanging on the cross and the saying could be, "Lord have mercy." Then, we would try to see the picture with our stomach while hearing "Lord have mercy" with our stomach. We would then repeat the process with our hearts and then our minds. If we become practiced at it, we can meditate with all parts (these three

and all the rest) at the same time, and we would not be that far from spiritual poverty.

At this point, it might seem that the meditation is getting complicated, but we are only covering meditative techniques. We want to gather a set of techniques which will be tools that we later build with. It is not necessary to combine the audio, visual, and other meditations at this time. That will come later. We want to build with those things that are comfortable to us, and we can pick up more skills as they attract our interest.

Local Exercises: When we are in church, it is distracting to us if some of those present are not participating. It is no different for our focus which is within us. The more participation we have within us, the more focused and ready we are. We can't use force to get the people in church to participate because participation implies a voluntary effort. In the same way, we can't struggle to force participation within us, we need to evangelize and engage the nonparticipating parts of us. To be completely focused, we need full voluntary participation from every part of us.

At first, full participation might seem to be an impossible task, but the focus is contagious because spiritual appetites are in all parts of us. As one part of us begins to pray, it awakens the spirituality of another part of us.

With constant prayer, all parts of us will eventually be evangelized, but the passive approach takes too long. As He was ascending into Heaven, Jesus sent his disciples into all parts of the Earth to proclaim the Good News. We need to take a similar approach by evangelizing all parts of us.

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If it is on the center stage, it should be the primary focus at every location within us. We have covered visual and audio meditation which are two local evangelical methods, but any meditation can be carried out in any venue. While it might seem impossible to get all parts to participate, in practice, every part voluntarily participates after it has been evangelized. We should not accept any excuses from parts that don't want to participate. While we don't force participation, we know we can evangelize all parts because they have an appetite for God.

Breathing Basics: Breathing can either work for us or against us. It can be a source of distraction, or it can help our focus. We have so many appetites at cross purposes which make us inconsistent. To consistently get outstanding prayer times, we need to have a sense of timing and rhythm, and breathing can become a big part of establishing this harmony.

Many mechanical functions and all living things have a cycle. For example, the Church has a liturgical cycle that starts each year but repeats itself every three years. These cycles take us through all critical parts of salvation. Then, inside the liturgical cycle is an obligation to gather at least on Sunday and a few other days for Holy Mass. The Mass has its cycle and cycles inside of cycles. We would do well to observe the wisdom of this design. Within these pages, we will setup various cycles in our prayer life, and breathing constitutes a basic and bridging cycle.

Breathing has several bridging characteristics. It has voluntary and involuntary attributes. It is a physical cycle that we want to tie to a spiritual cycle. The Church sets the example for us by tying spiritual year of the Church to the physical year of the earth's orbit.

In our prayer time each breath should be the beginning of a new spiritual cycle.

With each breath, our lungs are replenished with oxygen, and each breath should begin a cycle of renewal within us. In particular, we should renew the audio and visual themes of our meditation. For example, if the visual meditation is the, "Crowning of the thorns", then we should visualize this at the beginning of each breath. If the audio meditation is, "My Lord and my God," we should hear this at least once during the breath. Before we take in a new breath, we should get into the habit of checking whether we engaged the audio and visual meditations during the last breath.

Besides the audio and visual meditations, each breath should be a renewal of our virtuous practices as they relate to our prayer time, but we will leave that discussion to the next chapter.

Each breath should be the beginning of a new cycle that is a part of a larger cycle. We could emulate the Church which has three years of scripture readings but begins a new cycle each year. A new breath should revisit a local exercise. If we break the exercises into 3 areas such as the stomach, heart, and mind, then we would start a new breath with the audio and visual meditation in the stomach. The next breath would move to the heart. The last breath in the cycle of local exercises would move to the mind. Then the cycle would start over again in the stomach.

The physical breathing cycle has two parts: inhaling and exhaling. We can't be using the full cycle, unless we are using parts of the cycle. We should assign tasks to each part of the cycle. For example, we could begin the inhaling with the audio and visual meditation in a new

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part of the body. Then as we exhale, we could quickly revisit the other parts of the body and check whether we are still thinking about the meditation. Practices such as these will lead us toward a spiritual flow which is a more advanced meditation. Each part of the cycle should help us to maintain our focus.

We might protest that all of these items forced into a single breathing cycle make prayer difficult, complex, and unpleasant, but this attitude means that we are forcing the issue. If this is too many things, then we are trying to accomplish too much too fast. Our focus takes time to build. We should start with something that is comfortable but not too relaxing. As we grow accustomed to what we are doing, we can add to it. The focus should not be too taxing.

We might also be under the impression that all of this busyness seriously detracts from the prayer experience, but as it turns out, this is more of an excuse than a valid complaint. We have already demonstrated the need to collect our thoughts during deep prayer. If we didn't do these exercises, our minds would still be very busy. We can't slow our minds down, but we can think about things that build a focus. The busyness of the meditation is distracting, but it distracts us from the pleasures of our own vanity.

Theme Variety: We are more comfortable in neat and organized environs with everything in its place, but God doesn't fit. God doesn't fit in our hearts, minds, beings, or even our imaginations. God is wider, longer, smarter, nicer, happier, and greater than anything else. When we constantly use a single meditation, we are narrowing our scope of what God could be to us. While we can never

know all things about God, we should try to know and relate to God as much as possible. God can never be put into any place, because our experience of God is always expanding.

When our meditations always focus on one thing, it makes it harder for us to know God in multiple ways. For example, if our only meditation is Jesus hanging on the cross, we would not be as likely to see God in a child, infant, or woman. All things have their creation and being in God, and therefore, all things bear witness of a part of God. While God is expressed in all things, God is infinitely simple. The simplicity of God is in all things. We can not find the simplicity of God, without discovering the common simplicity between all things. This concept of discovering God reaches across all attributes of God. By consistently taking a narrow meditation theme, we are taking a longer path in the spiritual journey.

Different people relate to God in different ways, and different parts of us relate to God in different ways. Our spiritual banquet should have something for everyone. Our stronger appetites might try to convince us that this is not necessary, but each part of us needs to identify with the theme and be fed by the theme of the focus. Our conversion and conviction will be much stronger if we vary the theme of our meditation to meet the needs of all parts of us.

The Church sets a good example for us. We celebrate Lent, Christmas, Easter, Assumption, and a number of other feasts and observances. When moving from feast to feast, the point of focus can change from a baby, to a man, woman, or spirit. The themes range from repentance to celebration. Our meditation sequence should not only emulate this variety

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but also synchronize with the theme on a daily basis for we are all part of the same body.

Common Meditations: Since most of us are not students of meditation, it may seem difficult to find a meditation that varies the theme and follows the liturgical calendar, but we have a number of meditations that meet these requirements. To give us a feel for how all of this comes together, we will look at two of the more common meditations that do all things well.

Lectio Divina: Lectio Divina is a reading, meditation, application, and contemplation of a passage from the Bible. There are many good discussions on this ancient practice, so we will not repeat them here. We should, however, offer a few words for those of us who are beginning this practice. We often make the mistake of reading the Bible as a handbook from God, but we should read it as a personal letter from God. In a more pluralistic and practical application, we sometimes see people filling out work sheets during a sermon. While there is nothing wrong with this, God is more about agape than legalism. It is possible to know many things about the Bible without knowing much about God. In other words, it is good to search for biblical principles, but it is better to build a relationship with God. If we are going to use the Bible as the focus of prayer, we should use Lectio Divina. Pope Benedict XVI is convinced that the promotion of Lectio Divina would bring about a renewal in the Church.

In Lectio Divina technique, a significant emphasis is placed on the audio meditation, but the other practices (e.g., visual meditation, local exercises, and breathing basics) need to be followed as well. The practices that we will cover, such as virtuous, will also be needed. In

short, all good practices are still used within the Lectio Divina method.

The actual passages from the Bible are not specified, but we would do well to practice passages that are consistent with the liturgical calendar of the Church. An easy way to accomplish this is to simply use the readings from the Mass. In particular, we should meditate upon the Gospel reading.

We haven't covered the meditative commemoration yet, but the Lectio Divina technique will make this harder to build than it is with some of the other methods. This is by no means a red light, but it is something we want to take into consideration. If we keep in mind (i.e., try to commemorate) the actual presence or relationship with Jesus, Mary, or some other representation of God, we can overcome some of this. We should also remember that virtue (to be covered later) drives the meditation (the commemoration is more of a prop).

Besides a slight weakness in the commemoration, Lectio Divina has an extremely strong pacing attribute. As beginners we can read more, and the readings tell us about God. As we learn more about God, we can actually begin to experience God as we advance in meditation. By watching what we are interested in (either reading or meditation), we can figure out how to implement a prayer time that is most effective for us. Since we usually have very little spiritual direction, this aspect of Lectio Divina is priceless. No other technique paces the pilgrim as well as Lectio Divina.

Rosary Meditations: The rosary is probably the most common of all meditations which

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speaks volumes about its effectiveness. Millions of us say a rosary nearly every day.

By some accounts, the rosary got its start from the Divine Office which uses a recitation of the Psalms, among other things. The monks advised the peasants to simply say an Hail Mary rather than recite the Psalm because the peasants didn't know how to read. In this way, the peasants were able to join the monks in the Divine Office.

Saint Dominic added the mysteries to these Hail Marys. In the legend, Dominic received the mysteries directly from the Blessed Virgin after he had spent some time in prayer and penance. We are not sure whether the legend is true, but we are certain that the mysteries demonstrate a keen spiritual wisdom as we shall see.

In any meditation, there is a tradeoff between the theme variation and meditative commemoration. As we have shown, we need to vary the theme, but as we shall see, the commemoration can't be varied too much without losing many of the benefits of previous meditations. We can't imagine a meditation that surpasses the rosary in this area.

The rosary doesn't just vary the theme, it varies the theme with a number of cycles that balance the meditation in a number of ways. We can often find more than one theme variation balanced in a single cycle. The entire system has such extreme spiritual insight that we are drawn into spiritual orbits without always being aware of the process. For example, the mysteries of the rosary evenly cycle through the Holy Trinity with Joyful Mysteries demonstrating the attributes of the Father, the Sorrowful Mysteries concentrate on our redemption through the Son, while the

Glorious Mysteries exude the charismatic power of the Holy Spirit. To put this another way, in the Joyful Mysteries, Jesus and Mary demonstrate how we are called by God and how we are to answer the call. In the Sorrowful Mysteries, Jesus shows us how to be saved through reconciliation and sacrifice. In the Glorious Mysteries, we are promised a new life in the Spirit, and we are shown how the Holy Spirit works through us. Besides the Holy Trinity, the rosary meditation balances the theme variation from the young to the old, between the divine attributes of the masculine and feminine, from God as spirit to God as man, and in many other ways. The Rosary provides all of these balances simultaneously without sacrificing any cycles, and even more importantly, the meditative commemoration seems to complement the theme variation rather than distract from it which would seem to be a necessary problem. While it would seem to be impossible, the theme variation and meditative commemoration of the rosary make each other stronger.

Since so many themes are balanced in a single cycle, the rosary is able to cycle at an optimum frequency to build the meditative commemoration. When we cycle too often, we might grow tired of the meditation. Besides being boring, we can often place many of our own appetites into a meditation that moves too slow which slows our spiritual progress. On the opposite side of the spectrum, if we visit the meditative theme too infrequently, we won't be able to build on the past experiences as easily. Besides being forgetful, we won't be taking as many steps on a single theme. It is as if we have too many pots to stir. With 15 mysteries, the rosary is able to hit an optimum frequency. By taking one mystery per day, we cycle about twice a month which is a very good frequency.

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Intermediate Tactics:

The road from meditation (the starting point) to contemplation (the finish) can be a long one, but the length of the journey is determined by the consistency of the focus. By including the intermediate tactics into our prayer routine, we will make the journey as fast as we can.

Meditative Commemoration: While the journey to contemplation is not exactly a ladder, we can build on past experiences. To put this in a different context, repetition will help.

We can find an excellent example of how to build the commemoration from the liturgical cycle of the Church. We have seasons and feasts that occur once in the annual cycle. An annual event tends to become a large and traditional event. Since so many people know about an annual event, it tends to act as an evangelization tool that brings more attention to the event. For example, a number of people cooperate with, participate in, or even celebrate Christmas who are not Christians.

By now, Christmas happens to everyone, and many people make an effort to feel the Christmas Spirit. In many ways, this gathering Christmas force at Christmas time is very much the same as a successful prayer time, so let's look at how it developed in more detail.

Over the centuries, various Saints left their marks on Christmas by establishing traditions that are still with us today. These experiences add to the Christmas time of today and make the Christmas season more spiritual. We can be sure that God worked through them to create such a glorious and happy season.

Saint Nicholas, with his generosity, started the Santa Claus myth, and certainly generosity

plays a part of the Christmas spirit. The magi from the East also contribute to this tradition.

Saint Boniface started the Christmas tree by both modifying and adopting the cultural traditions of the German people.

We need to treat different parts of the body with respect by adopting and modifying the attributes of that part of the body. For example, we don't want to insist that thinking is bad; we want to modify and adopt thinking to add to the prayer experience. The ascetics felt emotions were a distraction from logic, but the universal or Catholic way is to use these ardent desires to long for God. In the same way, the energy and identity of our sexual side should be modified and adopted to add a vibrant and exciting part of God. In other words, all parts of the community are celebrating in the spirit of prayer. We are not trying to force any part to be quiet or still. By modifying and adopting the practices of all, we hope that our prayer will enjoy universal participation.

Saint Luke wrote the quiet and beautiful Christmas narrative into his Gospel, and Saint Jerome decided it belonged in the New Testament. The Christmas story is a way of attracting new Christians, and it evangelizes new areas inside of us. When the story of Christmas is told over and over, it begins to become an audio commemoration of Christmas. We may not be aware of it, but the tradition of the Christmas story has been a part of us so long that it is recognized by our DNA. As the Christmas story is told, parts of us are propelled toward the Christmas Spirit without our understanding or direction. The Christmas story has become an audio commemoration that evangelizes everyone.

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Saint Francis of Assisi invented the Nativity scene that is so prevalent at Christmas. Of course, this is a visual meditation that helps us feel the Christmas Spirit. When we see a Nativity set we are likely to be reminded of a joyful, happy, and holy season. The church often receives special decorations for Christmas. For example, Christmas trees and lights are often set up. A few years ago Christmas plays were a part of the school year for both public and private schools. As in a social distraction, this visual commemoration of Christmas has weakened, but we can be sure that the demand lingers. By now, Christmas has many visual commemorations, but all of them stir the same feelings.

When we have Christmas today, we use all these signs, stories, and traditions, of the past, to get into the spirit of Christmas. Our prayer time should not be any different. We should have a certain regularity in our meditation that brings the same meditation to our spirit on a regular basis. With each meditation, we draw on past experience to enrich the present. If we have focus, it will be our best meditation yet, and it will become a tradition to our future meditations.

While these things stir our memories, we are participating in a mystery that is much deeper, richer, and more animated than any memory. In fact, we are contributing to a functional relationship that goes back many centuries. Our contribution, no matter how small, becomes an invaluable attribute of the mystery of Christmas. As Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Nicholas, Francis, Boniface, and many others continue to contribute to the Christmas mystery, so too, our participation builds a part of mystery, love, and appetite of Christmas. Commemorations are our guides that stir our appetites to the deeper experiences and love of God.

Let us now exchange the Christmas celebration for that of the Eucharist. Among other things, the Eucharist commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus. There are many symbols that are typically used, but the crucifix definitely reminds us of the death of Jesus. The Resurrection is represented in the breaking of the bread among other things, because we recognize the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread. The ceremony includes a theme, yet sometimes there are exact words. There are parts of the ceremony that are often set to music. Saint Pious X didn't like to see much variation in the music, and we probably have too much variation of music in the Mass. All these things point to certain principles that allow us to have the most rewarding prayer time.

All Catholic Masses have certain expectations, and all prayer times should have similar expectations. For example children's Masses are not quite like Teen Masses, and Teen Masses are not exactly the same as the normal Masses. While the Masses for younger people are a little different, we try to build an expectation of what the Mass is. We have some latitude when we adjust prayer times to individuals, but we also have to own up to certain expectations if we want the prayer experience to be maximized.

Since there are no official prayer time rules or rubrics, we might get the idea that different prayer times work better for different people, but in reality, much of the prayer time should be structured the same for everyone. During the Mass, we are trying to unite many different people into a common focus, and during our prayer time, we have many different parts that need to cooperate with a single focus. On a global scale, all the churches worship the same

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with the same theme, it shouldn't be any different for the members of the churches. While all us and each part us make individual choices, our salvation comes from participating in the same structure that is provided to everyone in the same way.

We are trying to build a common behavior across billions of cells that have different appetites and personalities, and a systematic plan of organization can reap huge rewards. Like the Mass, a regular and structured prayer time builds an expectation of what we should experience. An expectation can only be based on a previous experience which means we will want some repetition in our worship. The power of the prayer comes from different cells praying the same prayer. To follow the Church's example, the same Mass is said everywhere across the world. We need the same prayer in all parts of our body. As more of us participate, we have a stronger experience. When we are dealing with a multitude of diverse opinions and appetites, we need an organized plan to be successful.

To put this another way, the degree of repetition is an important part of our prayer time. We need enough repetition to build the expectation that we plan to commemorate.

Every part of us has to participate in the prayer. The parts of us that are not praying tend to disrupt those parts of that are praying. We have all experienced that at Mass.

When we are at Mass, we don't allow other groups to have dinner parties, ball games, or other distracting activities in the sanctuary. All are welcome, but all are expected to participate. The Mass has a long list of rules, and we encourage every one to heed the rules. We will even enforce the rules as necessary.

We can't force people to pay attention at Mass, but we do ask them to pay attention. In other words, the rules extend beyond external behavior and into our inner beings. As Saint Paul put it, we are to have discipline and order at Mass.

At Mass, we are expected to behave in a certain way, and we expect certain things to happen at Mass. These expectations are some of the building blocks of our prayer experiences at Mass, and hence, expectations are vital connections with God.

The Church allows each Mass to have its own personality but keeps many things the same in all Masses. For example, we commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ at every Mass.

We should have the expectation in our prayer time to commemorate previous experiences. Any regular commemoration in our personal prayer should involve our personal relationship with God. In other words, no prayer time should be without it. If it is left out, then we can't call it a prayer time. The commemoration is critical because it becomes the building block of our prayer time.

When dealing with the focus, we have three aspects of the commemoration to consider.

Audio Commemoration: The Church uses very little silent prayer during the Mass. During most parts of the Mass, the Church exercises an audio commemoration which comes in various forms and frequency. The Priest might be saying prayer, we sometimes sing, and we have readings, among other audio worship. Some of this (usually the most prominent) is repeated at every Mass, and most of it is repeated at one

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time or another. Is it not obvious that the Church uses the audio commemoration to keep our thoughts focused?

The Mass teaches us at length about how we should build the audio commemoration in our prayer time. For example, we strive for focus more than we want quiet. This doesn't mean that we want to turn on gospel music when we are striving for deep prayer, but a silent mantra will help deep prayer. The external gospel music holds us captive to some sound track. If the mantra doesn't work for us, we could allow some external stimulation (such as gospel music) at the beginning of the prayer time. The goal, however, is for the music to flow out of us (not into to us). At Mass, the music is meant to encourage participation; we are not at a concert. We want everyone to sing. In the same way, the mantra is meant to get all parts of us participating in the meditation. Both the Mass and the meditation are meant to be active (not passive) experiences. When the external stimulation is used, the goal is still internal participation. In prayer, we seek a spiritual (not musical) experience.

The silent audio commemoration could be any of different types of sound that are a part of Mass. For example, it could be a Scripture reading, common refrain, musical refrain, consecration phrase, or some other part of the Mass as long as it keeps our mind on the theme of the meditation. These all work for us, because the commemoration of the Mass is the DNA of the our personal commemoration.

While the meditation should always have the same theme, we don't have to use the same commemoration throughout the meditation. The audio commemoration can change to assist different parts of the prayer time.

In general, the commemoration is simplified as the prayer time advances which we can see from the commemoration used at Mass. Mass starts with commemoration of repentance which are mostly ad-libbed, moves to readings of scripture which repeat usually seasonally, proceeds as incantations of consecration which follow exact prayers, and is often silent at Communion with perhaps a meditative song for the more restless members.

Since the Mass is the heritage of our personal commemoration, we should copy the process.

When we begin the prayer time we are often distracted by any number of things on our mind which we need to start dismissing. If we are mad at someone, we forgive them. Should we feel guilty, we ask for forgiveness. When we are anxious, we need to place our trust in God. The idea is to start the prayer time with the mind as a clean slate. Yes, there will be some indelible markings, but we do our best to come clean. For if we don't try to rid ourselves of distractions, we can't give our attention to God.

After we empty ourselves of our own vanity, we acquaint ourselves with the theme which should be the theme the Church has chosen for the day. We can do this in any number of ways, but we should think of the theme. The daily scripture readings would work, but we don't have to be that formal.

With our theme in mind, we should begin following the strict rules of the focus. At this point, the audio commemoration would be something we have used many times before, and we would have feelings that we remember from previous times. We want to build on those feelings. This part of the commemoration should not be too long. If the words flow

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without us thinking about it, then we are fine. The words should assist in making us pay attention to God. When we are distracted by the words, the words are too long. If the words don't hold our attention (provided that we are saying them), then they may be too short (of course there could be other issues as well). At the beginning of this discipline, we may feel uncomfortable because we are not yet mesmerized by God's presence, but we hold to the rules of the focus.

With any success, the focus will become more easy, relaxed, and comfortable, as the prayer time progresses. It often feels so good that we don't want to quit, but the prayer time should begin on time and end on time.

As in the Mass, the prayer time also has a dismissal, but this is covered in the last section, constancy.

Visual Commemoration: That, which we visualize in our mind's eye, also needs to be commemorated during our meditation. Along with the audio commemoration, we need to have an appropriate visualization of the theme we are meditating on. These visual experiences become part of the tradition that is associated with the theme. For example, the Nativity set or Christmas star could be a part of a Nativity meditation. As we revisited this theme time after time, the scenes would start to trigger experiences from past Nativity meditations. Rather than moving the visualization from one thing to the next, we would commemorate the scenes that we have by using them over and over again. We should be able to build on them which is what we strive for in the commemoration process.

In the same way that we moved the audio meditation to different parts of the body, all parts of the body should participate in the visual commemoration. With a little practice, we can imagine that we see things with parts of our body that are not normally associated with vision.

As a matter of fact, this is a very significant tool in our quest for self control. Temptations come from appetites, and appetites are usually heavily associated with a certain part of our body. For example, hunger is usually associated with the stomach. When we fast, we don't gain as much if we don't substitute the hunger pains with spiritual feelings. We begin to do this by having our stomach visualize the meditation theme. If we can control the feelings in different parts of our body, we are beginning to acquire the self control that we need in every area of our life.

At first, all of this self control might seem extremely boring. How can we live life with so much discipline? This pessimistic attitude is nearly opposite of how it works out in real life. If we give God (actually ourselves) some time, the spiritual delight crowds out sinful delight. We seek delight which comes when our appetites are satisfied, but we often forget that our most innate appetite is for God. While other appetites can fade, our appetite for the divine will last forever. We can not know how exciting and joyful life is until we exercise feelings associated with our appetite that longs for God.

Commemorative Frequency: How often should a theme be repeated? The answer has several dimensions that include religious, psychological, and physical.

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Religious: Let's start with the religious. As we have shown, the theme should agree with the Church calendar. We are all one body. If we are not working together, we are working against each other. The Church repeats its calendar with different frequencies, and our prayer time would necessarily have the same repetition.

Physical: Organisms that are physically larger need a slower repetition than smaller organisms. A mouse's heart beats about 700 times per minute and an elephant's about 30. Smaller things such as nuclear physics are measured in billionths of a second, but larger things such as planetary motion are measured in years. The repetition of a church will be much slower than the repetition of an individual in the church.

Psychological: On the psychological side, the theme should repeat often enough that we can remember it. The Mass is construed to grab our attention and hold it, and our prayer time should follow the same flow. We want to begin by asking forgiveness for anything that is bothering us. Then we pick a theme out of the readings. Then we concentrate on the theme by commemorating it with a frequent repetition that holds our attention.

The most frequent (or fundamental) repetition strives to keep our thoughts from straying. Thoughts are always continuous and changing. Since thoughts are always moving from where we are now to some new point, we need to target the new point to be a memory of a past experience, if we want to continue the feelings associated with the experience. During each cycle of the fundamental repetition, we

need to recommit ourselves to our destination by reviewing the audio and video commemorations.

The appetites associated with traditions and commemorations are very small which means the fundamental repetition needs to be very frequent. Each day in each of our lives, our DNA is changed with each experience. Then the DNA is passed on to the offspring. Carl Jung may not have proved this with logical deduction but he certainly proved it with empirical observation.

The DNA creates the appetites for the tradition that is passed through the Church. It is not the customs of past generations that interest God, but rather God longs for the feelings which are made possible through the appetites that were inherited from past generations. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained how Scripture foretold the death and resurrection of the Christ, but the disciples didn't recognize Him until He commemorated the Last Supper. Traditions and commemorations open the treasury of feelings and appetites which allow us to experience the relationship. Relationships need to be felt, if they are to be real.

In deep prayer, we want to experience the love of the Divine Master, then we want to build upon those feelings by focusing on the relationship through the use of commemoration. If we haven't had a personal experience, then we should build upon our collective commemoration. Since we are all one body, the collective commemoration should always be the central theme, anyway. In other words, all of our sensitive appetites in every part of our body know God, we only need to open our feelings to the 6,000 years of our collective relationship. The key to unlocking

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those feelings is the collective commemoration that we have experienced through the Church with its Sacraments and Tradition.

While the commemoration of a traditional theme is not our only tool, it is a critical tool that we need to build our personal prayer experience. The religious appetites that were formed by our DNA usually begins as an extreme minority, but the commemoration will help it take the center stage of our attention. Of course if the commemoration is not from tradition, it will not resonate with the audience of sensitive appetites which were formed by the DNA. Without the commemoration of a traditional theme, we will be forced to reinvent the proverbial wheel. Our relationship with God goes back thousands of years. We definitely do not want to start over.

The commemoration of the traditional theme may seem to be off the subject of frequency, but we need to point out that we are dealing with something that is small which requires a very fast repetition. While spiritual appetites are in all parts of the body, they are not likely to be the predominant appetite in any part of the body. Since one appetite influences another appetite, this also means that the commemoration needs to be revisited very quickly. In fact, the commemoration needs to be revisited so quickly that to our conscious it will seem like a continuous repetition.

While we are born with appetites, we need to build our relationships. We can't build on a relationship that we can't remember. By reminding ourselves of experiences with God, we stimulate our appetites for God. In deep prayer, we need to keep coming back to the same themes to allow ourselves a chance to build our relationship with God around them.

Quality Tests: If we don't want to get in a rut and stay in a rut, we need to make some determination of whether we are in a rut. It is not enough to have a map that charts a course; we also need instruments that we will call quality tests to make sure that we stay on course. We will make much better progress if we utilize quality tests to make sure that we are mentally and emotionally on course.

What is the course? In terms of the focus that is required by deep prayer, the relationship is the course, and we follow the relationship through the commemoration. In other words, we are on course while we are practicing the commemoration and virtue, but we will leave virtue to the next chapter.

We need to strive for constant commemoration. Before this occurs, we will nearly be checking for quality on a constant basis. For example, we can start with a quick quality check during each breath which we covered before.

Each breath is the fundamental quality check, but we should also add multiples (called harmonics) of the breath to the test. For example, we could (or better - should) count the breaths for a specific number of counts. Since we have other things going on inside our thoughts, we should count exhaling and inhaling each as one count. In other words, if we breathed out to two, then we would breath in to three. If breathing out is always even and in always odd, then it is easier to keep count. Then depending on how experienced we are, at the end of 4, 10, 20, or 100 counts (the smaller the count the less concentration) we review our thoughts during the count to determine whether we kept the commemoration. With this check, we are trying to find out if we made the wrong turn before we are in the next state. Counting

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allows us to establish a harmonic test that helps us stay focused.

We should be able to maintain our focus during most count cycles. If we can't, the count is too long. If the focus is no problem, the count is too short.

All of this counting might seem to be a severe distraction, but with the regular practice of deep prayer, the counting becomes a part of the focus. We need to remember that our minds are always wandering towards the direction of our appetites which are often sinful and seldom as holy as we would like, and we need to bring them back to the focus. In the other methods that we discussed, repetition is used to maintain the focus. *Lectio Divina* does not specifically use counting, but the Rosary does. The Rosary refocuses and changes the commemoration every tenth fundamental repetition. This isn't exactly a quality test, but it is an attempt to correct the focus at short intervals. We don't typically complain about the counting during the Rosary, so maybe the counting is not a problem. The counting is absolutely necessary if we are going to structure the focus.

Counting is a relational discipline that allows us to give the focus a harmonic (i.e., a fundamental repetition with multiples of the fundamental) structure. It is so easy to follow the procedure and say the words but yet be distracted. The most progress is made with the most focus. For example, if we exchange formalities with a friend in passing, we don't build the same relationship as we do in a heart-to-heart talk which requires that we pay attention. The harmonics, which are made possible through counting, allow us to put a second layer of control on our wandering thoughts.

Since the counting comes from inside of us, we don't have to keep track of some external event to maintain the count.

It is wise to use the count to time an external control such as a clock. To do this, we would check the clock after some set number of counts. For example, we might check the clock after 100 counts to see whether 5 minutes have passed. With all of our various complex appetites, we need a certain rhythm to assert control. The clock becomes our metronome for establishing a sense of timing and rhythm to our meditation. In our example, if our thoughts were wandering, 100 breath counts would come to 8 minutes or 3 minutes. A breath count that is on time means that our rhythm and its underlying focus has the integral features that deep prayer requires.

Advanced Tactics:

These tactics can be used by those who have practiced consistency and focus for some length of time (usually several years).

Prayer Standards: The spiritual journey should always be moving forward, and prayer standards can help to insure that we are experiencing a ratcheting effect (i.e., only moves forward) during our prayer time. As we begin to reach consistency, a constantly improving prayer experience probably seems to be an unrealistic ambition, but unlike our physical limitations our relational ability is nearly infinite which allows each prayer experience to be better than the last. Our inattention and distractions prevent us from relating as well as we could. Prayer standards alert us of substandard attention while we still have a chance to correct it.

Vocational Engagement: We can't just commune with God and never do anything with

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this empowerment. God will not allow it. As Saint Dominic put it, we must become active through our contemplation. To become active, we must develop our vocation which goes beyond the scope of what we are discussing here, but it is more than picking something to do that is good (yet, there is nothing wrong with that). We must act upon what is revealed in our prayer time, but not every notion that comes into our heads is a command from God.

While we might not know what to do, it is a mistake to do nothing. Our prayer life needs an active expression; even if it is only tithing of our time to God.

Our vocation and identity are both part of who we are. As we find our identity in prayer, we will find our vocation. There can be different parts of our vocation, but they should ultimately form a single theme. We have as many vocations as we have identities. We have one vocation, and it never changes.

There are many more things that can be said about vocational development, but we will leave them for another time.

Virtue

The Role of Virtue:

With consistency and focus we have built the vehicle that we need for deep prayer, and virtue is the fuel that powers it. When Jesus was engaged in His public ministry, He practically made it a habit of testing the person's faith before He helped them. After the person was healed, He would say something like, "Go in peace for your Faith has saved you." In deep prayer, we are dealing with the same God who tests our Faith before we are led to contemplation. From our perspective, we are constantly practicing virtue in deep prayer and practice makes perfect. Consistency introduces us to the possibility; focus takes us to spiritual poverty; and virtue disposes us towards contemplation.

Virtue is the key that unlocks the treasure of deep prayer. Prayer times will not be consistently rewarding until virtue has been properly developed.

Virtue is our identity as demonstrated in these examples. "The Chosen People are a people of hope." "We are a faith community." "They will know that we are Christians by our love for each other." Virtue is what sets holy people apart from atheists. It is our defining attribute.

Faith, hope, and charity are three components of a higher hierarchical intelligence. We can not agree someone unless we also believe and hope in them. If we have hope for someone, we are extending charity to them. We could not hope in someone without also having faith in them, and vice-versa we can not have faith in someone without hoping in them. If we believe or hope in someone, then we also have

some love for them. In other words, the practice of any one virtue, implies the presence of the other two because they are all part of the same higher intelligence.

Since virtue is our highest intelligence (Note - rational thought is normally called our highest intelligence, but more is accomplished through virtue than any other trait that we might have), it is necessarily our least understood ability. For our highest part is not understood by the lower parts, but the lower parts can be understood by the higher parts. In other words, reason can understand sight, but the eyes can not see thought. In deep prayer, we only use senses or reasoning to promote virtue which is our highest ability.

When we neglect virtue, we don't award it with the attention that it deserves. With the common phrase, "I won't believe it unless I see it," we are trusting only the dumbest part of ourselves, whereas Jesus challenges us to use the highest part of ourselves. In other words, we are more likely to get everything exactly backwards than to rely on our strongest capability, virtue.

Virtue is not just our strongest ability, it makes us infallible. For Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans says, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God." We will never know a virtuous person whose efforts come to naught. We will find no faith in the New Testament that does not produce a result. If this sort of failure occurred, it would be intellectually dishonest for the writers to omit it. In fact, they wrote the opposite by saying that He did all things well. It is not possible for virtue to fail.

All of our other abilities are completely dependent on virtue. With our modern

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emphasis on education, we might be led to think that knowledge is our highest facility, but we all know very knowledgeable people who are highly ineffective and therefore unintelligent. As Aristotle proved, all effectivity comes from God. We have already shown that God demands virtue before fulfilling a request. While it can seem that we have ability without virtue, that ability comes from our belief or love in ourselves even if the virtue is not consciously expressed. We can therefore conclude that our ability is dependent upon our virtue.

We can not answer God's call by merely showing up and going through the motions. As Saint Paul so eloquently demonstrated (1 Corinthians 13:1), God demands virtue. Our prayer time, earthly vocation, and eternal life all hinge on whether we develop the practice of virtue. When God calls us, we don't answer with "here" or "present" but with "I believe" or "Amen!"

How To Develop Virtue During Deep Prayer:

Virtue sets apart Christian meditation from all other forms of meditation. To paraphrase Jesus and Paul from the New Testament, if the meditation doesn't develop virtue, of what use is it? To be sure, neither Jesus nor Paul spoke of meditation, but both emphasized that our relationship with Jesus requires that we believe in Jesus. In other words, to have a relationship with God, we need to believe that Jesus is God. The goal of Christian meditation is to improve our relationship with God, and therefore we need to improve our virtue. If the meditation does not attempt to increase our virtue towards God, it is not a Christian meditation.

To make our virtue stronger, we must use it. We get stronger, when we use our muscles. To become more intelligent, we need to use our intelligence. As Jesus put it in the parable of the talents, if we don't use our virtue, we will lose what little we have. In deep prayer, we want to use our virtue.

Our virtue should always be increasing. When we practice something, we expect to get better at it. Our virtue is not tied to our health. Our health will fail, but our virtue should always be getting stronger. For virtue, carries us into the next life.

Faith:

We practice our faith during our prayer time by believing we will find the objective that we seek. For example, one of our objectives is to feel the presence of either Jesus or Mary. Without using much Faith, we can look at pictures, imagine the feelings, or carry out any number of other mental exercises, and these things might sort of work for a while. The only long term solution is to believe that Jesus or Mary will show up. If we are having a hard time believing they will, even an attempt to believe will strengthen our belief. After we felt the presence very strongly, we should believe that it will keep getting better. God doesn't have any limits.

Hope:

To have hope, we need to long for something and attempt to get it. We can increase our hope by creating a better idea or vision of what we want. In deep prayer, a part of our meditation should be directed toward some goal of what we are trying to achieve during that prayer time. For example, we might form a mental image of the Nativity scene as we are meditating on the Nativity, but we

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would also hope to feel the presence of baby Jesus. In other words, we hope for the feeling, love, or experience, because we hope for the goal rather than the meditation. When we are attracted to another person, we naturally think about the person. This builds our hope and longing for the person, and a similar process occurs in deep prayer.

We only have hope if we carry out our plan. In other words, hope is not only a plan, it is a plan that we are actively working toward. In our prayer time, our hope is not only a desire to experience God, it is working towards feeling God. It is not only the goal, it is the walk towards the goal.

While we might remember the experience from a previous meditation, we can hope for either a new or different experience. We may be able to feel the familiar commemoration and associated experience, yet we can hope to add, change, or refresh the familiar experience. The commemoration of the specific meditation would not change, but our hope can change. If we are hoping for something different, we should have some notion that might be pretty vague about where we want to go. We would want to hope for an experience that is within the context of the divine relationship. As Saint John of the Cross points out, love is the only valid goal. When we hope, we are not required to always hope for the same experience.

Our hope should always be increasing. As we progress in prayer, we should expect better experiences. With each successive prayer time, our goals should be greater. We should carry out the plan with more focus, and with God as our helper, we will ultimately master the interplay between the commemorative focus and virtuous goals. After all, each experience makes our habits deeper, truer, and more

focused. It wouldn't make any sense that we would keep getting better at execution and at the same time have worse actual experiences.

The concept of increased hope runs contrary to what is often associated with, "The Dark Night of the Soul" which was coined by Saint John of the Cross (John). John's system actually contains 2 dark nights which are differentiated as little and big. The little dark night comes as we gain self control and give up our habitual sins, and John specifically mentions that God gives many consolations during the little dark night. At some point after the little dark night, we will run into the big dark night, if we progress far enough. The big dark night is associated with the breaking of the false self, and all the vain joys of our self made world seem to evaporate. The prayer experience will need to be stronger to compensate for the lack of joy which used to come from our self made world, or we will likely fall into a depression. In neither the little nor big dark night of the soul, does the prayer experience lessen. On the contrary, our prayer experience should always be growing.

Love:

Love has many meanings, but within the context of deep prayer, love is a supernatural power that is given to bring us to a supernatural end which is a divine relationship. Since God is more intelligent than us, we can not know God without some supernatural power that reveals to us the divine relationship. In other words, we only know supernatural love through divine revelation.

Our response to the divine revelation is always changing and hopefully growing. It usually starts with the an attempt to keep God's commandments. We might not have the best reasons for being obedient. For example, we

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might be keeping the commandments under duress, because we will be punished if we step out of line. As our love for God grows, our response to the divine revelation becomes stronger and purer. Besides keeping the commandments, we might become more sympathetic or polite, and rather than being forced into something, we become more giving because of the good that is in our heart. We also begin to understand more about God, others, and ourselves. For example, we might know that we are nicer because God is making us more loving. This process strengthens and accelerates in deep prayer.

If we are persistent in our good intent, it will become a habit which usually forms somewhat gradually. The habit is rooted in our will, but it is a part of the divine revelation. In other words, the habit of good intent does not occur without sanctifying grace infusing us with the ability to become more like ourselves. By this, we mean that the grace allows us to love God more than ourselves which could not logically occur without God's initiative.

While the divine revelation is obviously outside of our control, we can cooperate with it by being consistent with our commemoration. In other words, the purpose of the commemoration is to strengthen the good habits that came from the divine revelation. The same commemoration is repeated and built to assist the habit. Within our feelings, the habit triggers the commemoration and vice versa. The more we practice the habit the greater the divine revelation. As we can see, we are beginning to form loving and feeling relationship with God which is our only possession that will last forever. By keeping the commemoration consistent, we provide fertile soil for the divine revelation. Nothing grows in soil that is being constantly turned.

Since the commemoration is repeated so many times over such a long period of time, it becomes a part of us. The commemoration helps us initially to long for God, but as we gain experience, we will find that the commemoration helps us to get past ourselves into a purer intent of increasing our love for God. To put this another way, the enthusiasm contained in the greatest commandment may seem rather abstract to us initially because we are torn in so many different directions, but as our whole body recites the commemoration together we open the only appetite which is common to every part of us (i.e., love of God). When the feelings start flowing through this appetite we will feel delight which without the commemoration would cause us to be distracted. As John of the Cross puts it, we are running through the flowers to Jesus, but then we stop to smell the flowers. After we have some experience with the commemoration, we will be able to stick with it through all sorts of feelings which allows us to pursue God even when the divine revelation is propagating through our body as waves of ecstatic delight. The commemoration is so natural to us, that we live it through these peaks which allows us to pursue the divine revelation rather than mere human delight.

Besides the commemoration, we want to use faith and hope to empower the habits that became possible through the divine revelation. We can have faith and hope and still be in serious sin that might bring about our ruin, but love is incompatible with sin. While, as we have shown, faith, hope, and love are all part of the same thing, love is more of the completion of faith and hope. In other words, faith and hope are meant to uncover the divine revelation.

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If we love God, we go to Heaven. It is that simple. For example, Saint John Vianney was consoling a woman about the loss of her husband who did not go to church. John told her that her husband was saved because he once was attracted to the Blessed Virgin during one of her Marian adorations, but according to John, the husband was "way down" in purgatory and needed a lot of prayers. Yes, Mary is not God, but in her sinless state, she accurately portrays the feminine side of God. We hope that faith will lead us to salvation, but we know that God will save those He loves.

Love is more than salvation; love is meant to be the fulfillment of life, or as Jesus put it (John 15:11), "so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." Within the context of prayer, love means we must identify with or conform to God. In other words, we no longer identify with ourselves; for we now identify with Christ. It is the sanctifying grace of the divine revelation that causes us to give up on our life to live for God. As Saint Paul said (Galatians 2:20), "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Without the divine revelation, life is usually dreary, boring, and unfulfilling. On the other hand, love creates heaven on earth, or as Catherine of Siena put it, "The road to heaven is heaven."

Putting It All Together:

By now, we have covered so much material that it would seem impossible to implement it; so let's make it easy by breaking it into a 10 step program.

Before Starting:

We need to pick a meditation or reading. Any number of good meditations have been created. Two good examples are the Holy Rosary and Lectio Divina. When picking a

meditation, we should keep in mind that we are looking for one that will expand with our growth, is conducive to our commemoration, and can change with the church calendar.

If we have trouble staying awake through the meditation, we should take the measures we need to be alert. This might be coffee, exercise, or some mechanical device.

We will take this step by step. When we go up a step, we are still practicing everything in the steps below it. After we are familiar with the levels, we will feel comfortable with moving up a level during the prayer time. Since we need to move between steps during the prayer time, we would profit from committing the steps to memory. If that is too hard, we might have them printed out and in front of us. After we have used them for a while, we would remember them without trying.

Before we start, we should have a clear notion of what we are going to do. We need to know what our meditation is going to be, and we need to know what step we are going to start with. In most cases, we would want to start a couple of steps lower than we finished the last time. Within our mind, we need to know when to move to another level. We could use the following guide.

a. Overwhelmed: Drop down a level.

b. Inspired: Stay at the same level, unless we feel we can move up a level.

c. Bored: Move up a level.

During Prayer:

10 Steps to Heaven:

Beginning Level:

1. **Establish Focus:** We should establish the focus which has two parts.
 - a. **Audio:** We should silently vocalize the meditation.
 - b. **Visual:** We should visualize the meditation. In other words, we should shut our eyes and imagine that we see it.
2. **Feel Presence:** We should try to feel the presence of the personality that is the focus of meditation. [Continued on Note 2]
3. **Check Results:** Every few seconds we should ask ourselves if we are still thinking about the commemoration.
4. **Practice Virtue:** We begin to practice virtue. [Continued on Note 4]
 - a. **Hope:** We hope to feel the personality of the meditation. If we already feel the presence of the personality, we hope for it to grow stronger.
 - b. **Faith:** We believe we will feel the personality of the meditation. If we already feel the presence of the personality, we believe it will grow stronger.

Intermediate Level:

5. **Meditate Within:** In this step, we will start moving the meditation around within our body. We will start with three locations. [Continued on Note 5]
 - a. **Abdomen:**
 - b. **Heart:**
 - c. **Mind:**
6. **Breathe Prayer:** The commemoration and virtue are practiced with each breath. The area that we meditate within (e.g., abdomen, heart, or mind) is moved to the next area with each breath. [Continued on Note 6]
7. **Validate Breath:** At each breath, we check whether the commemoration and virtue were practiced. If we are more experienced, we should get 3 of the four parts with every breath. In other words, the next breath is not started until we have 3 of the following four parts.
 - a. **Audio:** We should silently say the words of the commemoration (e.g., Hail Mary full of grace - 1st Joyful Mystery) from within the part of the body that we are targeting.
 - b. **Visual:** With our eyes shut, we should imagine seeing the commemoration (e.g., Mary - 1st

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Joyful Mystery) inside the targeted body area.

c. Faith: The target area (e.g., heart, mind, or abdomen) should believe that it will feel the personality of the commemoration (e.g., Mary - 1st Joyful Mystery) during the current breath. If we already feel the presence of the personality, our targeted area should believe that it will feel it stronger during the current breath.

d. Hope: Our targeted area should hope to feel the central personality of the commemoration. If we already feel the divine presence, we should hope for a stronger feeling.

8. Reach Goals: The intermediate level should have quality goals that we consciously reach each day. The two counts are centered around the number of valid breaths. [Continued on Note 8]

a. Between Distractions: We should count the number of valid breaths between distractions. [Continued on Note 8a]

b. Total Count: We should keep an overall count for the entire session, and we should have some goal that we are shooting for. [Continued on Note 8b]

Advanced Level:

9. Pray Unceasingly: As in the seventh step, we move the commemoration and virtue from each region (e.g., abdomen, heart, mind), and we continue prayer, albeit without the goals, in the untargeted regions. In other words, the targeted areas must still reach the goal to validate the count, but the untargeted areas should continue to pray without the goals.

10. Nurture Flow: At this point, we have continuous prayer in three regions of our body, and in this step, we connect these regions with a flow that moves from the abdomen to the heart, and then to the mind. The flow is created and maintained in two ways.

a. Target Rotation: We continue the target rotation that we started in the seventh step.

b. Holistic Virtue: For most of us, it is hard to create the flow through some mental process or meditation, but the flow will occur naturally if we long for it and believe that it will occur. [Continued on Note 10b]

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Addendum to the 10 Steps:

Note 2 - Presence:

Prayer is relationship. Would we say that we love someone, if we did not have any feelings for them? In deep prayer, we try to build a relationship with God by feeling the divine presence as it is portrayed by the personality in the meditation. We have to pray with our feelings if we are going to build a relationship.

Our concentration is governed by our emotions. In the meditation, we should try to feel the subject of the meditation. For example, if we are meditating on the first "Joyful Mystery" of the Rosary, we would try to feel the presence of Mary or at least wonder what it might feel like.

Note 4 - Virtue:

After some amount of time which might be a few minutes or several weeks, we may find that we can not emotionally connect to the meditation. We would be unable or unwilling to feel the presence of personality. If we are unwilling, we need to practice hope which is to want to feel the divine presence. If we are unable, we should practice faith by believing that we will feel the presence of personality.

For most of us, our minds simply wander off the meditation. The solution to this problem is practicing both the focus and virtue simultaneously. With persistence, we will eventually become focused at these beginning stages by using focus and virtue together.

Note 5 - Commemoration:

At this level, we should have been consistent for long enough to build some level of commemoration. We may need to put in some slight adjustments, but we should have audio and visual commemorations that repeat

at effective intervals and stay within the correct season of the Church. The commemoration may not be paying much in dividends, but it is still a good investment. As we move forward, it will become vital.

Each part of the body should practice the commemoration. The body has many parts, so to begin with we will keep things simple by beginning with only three parts: the heart, mind, and abdomen.

Note 6 - Breathing:

Intermediation: By mixing breathing into our protocol, we actually make it easier to keep track of the individual meditations in our heart, mind, and abdomen. With each breath, we move the meditation to the next area.

Note 8 - Counting:

After we are comfortable with the breathing (which might be days, weeks, or years), we want to start counting the breaths to gain some control over the quality of our meditation.

Breathing out is one count, and breathing in is another. It is easier to maintain the count, if we know that every exhale is an even count.

If we have progressed to where counting is mostly automatic, we want to have a firm quality goal in our mind when we begin the meditation. The quality goal should include the number of counts during the prayer time, the number of the counts between distractions, and what constitutes a valid count in terms of focus and virtue.

Note 8a - Distractions:

At some points, we will take invalid breaths. We want to know how many valid breaths we took until we lost our concentration. It is more important to meet the goal than to be overly ambitious, so we should

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initially set the bar low. For example, if we are new to all of this, number of counts between distractions might be 5. As we become more proficient, we will want to increase the number. If we are distracted before we reach the number of breaths between distractions, then we would start the count over.

Note 8b - Total:

We should maintain a count that only moves forward at the successful completion of the number of counts between distractions. For example, if the count from distraction to distraction is 10, the overall count would count by 10s each time we completed 10 counts without a distraction. In other words, if we counted to 3 and had a distraction, we would start the distraction count over because the goal was 10. If we made it to 10, the distraction count would start over, and the total count would move forward by 10. The easiest way to do this is to go back to the multiple of 10 when we have a distraction. For example, if the count was 13, then we would go back to 10 if there was a distraction.

Note 10b - Contemplation:

After we have established the flow, it won't take us long to reach spiritual poverty. In fact, an adequate flow is approximately the same thing as spiritual poverty. If we have more experience at reaching spiritual poverty, we will return to it faster.

Spiritual poverty is the final thing that we can do to reach contemplation, but after we reach contemplation, we need to keep driving all of the things (e.g., commemoration, vulture, etc.) that brought us to contemplation. For example, when we are in contemplation, we wouldn't leave our focus to listen to or record a message from God. We are interested in the relationship with God (not the gifts). God is the ultimate communicator, and we will know and

understand anything we are supposed to. By focusing on the relationship, we will receive the gifts in a purer way. We maintain our discipline during our contemplation, lest we are immediately distracted from our communion with God.

While contemplation is not guaranteed, it usually occurs shortly after spiritual poverty. It occurs faster with more experience. If it takes more than 50 breaths of spiritual poverty to get to contemplation, we need to become more aggressive with our virtue. For the most part, virtue takes us from spiritual poverty to contemplation.

In contemplation, the presence of the personality seems to come alive. Of course, it was always alive, but as contemplation begins, we realize it. There is a popular misconception that it is okay to talk to God. It is when God talks back that we know we are crazy. If we use that erroneous concept, contemplation and insanity are the same thing. With that said, God doesn't do a lot of talking, and we should follow the divine example. As Padre Pio put it, when we are before God, we should not make a nuisance of ourselves.

There is no guarantee that the animated personality is God, but as Jesus put it, we will know them by their fruits. For example, in a typical Marian contemplation, Mary will simply smile, and somehow that smile makes the whole day utterly sublime. It is something that we will never forget, and it often contains thousands of bits of wisdom though nothing was said. On our own accord, it would be hard for us to manufacture such an experience, and an evil spirit leaves a bad after taste though it might seem heady at first. God is love and has no sin, and any communication from God would have the same characteristics.

Constancy

Carrying the Residual Focus:

The prayer time might feel so good that we don't want it to end, but the prayer time is meant to be the beginning of the day. During the prayer time, we develop the technique and desire that we intend to use the rest of the day. The focus, personality, and virtue of the prayer time are meant to be our companions for the rest of the day.

As Saint Martin de Porres has told us, the success we have, in carrying the prayer time during the day, will prominently affect how well we do during our next prayer time. This concept goes beyond psychological momentum and discipline, because, as Saint James points out, God participates more with those who cooperate with the divine plan. If we are serious about our spiritual journey, during the day, we need to express the inspiration we received during our prayer.

When we have had a good prayer time, it will naturally carry over into the day, anyway. Saints John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila called this carryover coloring. Of course, we want to exploit coloring like any other good window of opportunity. While coloring might seem like a distraction to our next activity, it actually makes us much more focused.

Our mind is always moving. If we don't use our mind to be with God, we will allow our mind to drift from one appetite to the next. When we are at work, with a little practice, we will be able to concentrate better with our commemoration than without it. As our mind drifts from appetite to appetite, we become more confused. By contrast, when we are closer to God we are more focused and

intelligent as demonstrated by Aquinas. Jesus was clear about staying focused. We can not put our hand to the plow, and keep looking back to our old appetites (Luke 9:62). Our day belongs to God, and we need to maintain a prayerful composure throughout the day. We are always moving towards God or away from God.

Striving for Simplicity:

We should strive to be like God, and God is infinitely simple. A lifestyle of extravagant living has many selfish temptations. It is easy to feel important, protective, or relaxed in an environment of indulgence. While these may not seem to be that much of a handicap, they often stand in the way of God's plan. As servants, we must see the needs of others as something that demands our attention. When we have wealth, insurance, and social esteem, will we abandon everything to follow the Lord like Peter did? How are we exactly carrying out God's plan when we watch 4 hours of television each day? We can not fully live, unless we live for the Lord with a singular intent.

If we pray, we will be called. The more complicated our life is, the more difficult it will be to follow Peter's example. To make matters worse, the call often seems impossible. We will be given the grace to answer the call, but we won't be able to count the cost. Jesus lived simply and gave everything. If we are going to follow the Lord, we will need to be simple and generous.

Watching Our Appetites:

Our prayer is for the Body of Christ. We are not as interested in taking care of our own appetites as we are in channeling God's love to the Body of Christ. For example, while meditation may relieve stress, the primary

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purpose of our prayer is to be instruments of the Divine (not to relieve stress). Love moves us to share our gifts for the common good, whereas selfishness longs to fill an internal need.

It is not so much that we need to question our intentions which might lead to scruples, but to carry out the inspiration which we received in our meditation. Our ministry is more of a plan than a need. As Saint Francis of Assisi put it, we should strive more to love others than we would seek love for ourselves.

Keeping Our Balance:

Love is a communal activity. A deep prayer life doesn't necessarily make us immune from poor personal choices. Somewhere along our spiritual journey we are likely to suffer from debilitating scruples, dangerous asceticism, or other personal issues. While our families and communities might not help us with these things, they can hold up a mirror; so we can see them. For example, we should be just as concerned about the moral mistakes in our communities as we are of our own faults, and we wouldn't fast so much that we didn't have the strength to help the less fortunate.

By far, the larger issue is under commitment. Deep prayer is not something that makes our life better, it is what we build our life around. It is not enough to feel God in our prayer, we pray and believe that we will bring God to the world.

Glossary

active ministry:

A ministry that has many secular distractions.

consistency:

One of the four basics of deep prayer. It requires us to strive to enter into deep prayer each day.

constancy:

One of the four basics of deep prayer. It requires us to keep close to our prayer experience as we move through the day.

contemplative prayer:

A state of prayer where the body is in quiet communion with God. As a reference, the mind is active in meditative prayer. When we meditate, we quietly think about something. When we contemplate in prayer, we experience God.

focus:

One of the four basics of deep prayer. It deals with concentration during the prayer time.

Greatest Commandment:

A commandment given in both the Old and New Testaments. "Thou shalt love the Lord the God with thy whole heart, soul, mind, and with all your strength."

intelligent recursion:

The concept that we are made up of parts that are as intelligent as we are. The concept that everything is made up of parts came from the ancient Greeks. Then Aquinas showed that we could not be that much smarter

than the each individual part. (Note - See recursion)

personality:

In deep prayer, the personality is the presence of the person that we are focusing on. Either we can feel the presence, or, at least, we can hope to feel the presence. For example, during the first joyful mystery, we would feel the presence of Mary, or during the first sorrowful mystery, we would feel the presence of Jesus. The focus is usually on Jesus or Mary because they are without sin, and as such, they are a true and unlimited channel of the divine. In the third glorious mystery, we might try to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. If that isn't working, we could simply feel the Spirit of Jesus.

recursion:

The word, "recursion" is used to describe a class of parts that create the identity of a larger thing. For example, an arm or leg are not the recursion of a human being because they do not identify the human being. On the other hand, a cell from an arm or leg is recursive to the human being because the DNA of the cell identifies the person. A steel molecule is recursive to a piece of steel because it identifies the larger piece. On the other hand, a head of a bolt is not recursive to the whole bolt because it does not identify the bolt.

Recursion works from the smaller pieces that comprise larger pieces, and the process works vice versa as well. A cell can be identified by the characteristics of the human it came from.

spiritual journey:

A phrase that refers to our journey towards God over the course of our life.

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spiritual poverty:

A state of being where nothing matters except God. In other words, we want only God, and the singular purpose extends to all parts of the body. The phrase was made popular by Sts. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

systematic philosophy:

A philosophy that completes a system. In this book, systematic philosophy is another phrase for the systematic philosophy of Saint Thomas of Aquinas.

virtue:

One of the four basics of deep prayer. It deals with the cycling and practicing of Faith, Hope, and Love.