



## Part Five Being Really Balanced

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[Saint] Benedict was quite precise about it all. Time was to be spent in prayer, in sacred reading, in work and in community participation. In other words, it was to be spent on listening to the Word, on study, on making life better for others and on community building. It was public as well as private; it was private as well as public. It was balanced.

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Meditation

With the invention of the light bulb, balance became a myth. Now human beings could extend the day and deny the night. Now human beings could break the natural rhythm of work and rest and sleep. Now human beings could begin to destroy the framework of life and turn it into one eternal day with, ironically, no time for family, no time for reading, no time for prayer, no time for privacy, no time for silence, no time for time.

--Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled From The Daily* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990) 74-75.

Featured  
Speakers  
& Writers

What is  
Benedictine  
spirituality?

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We're supposedly a most creative country. There are two poles pulling at the modern concept of work. At one pole is the workaholic. At the other pole sits the pseudo-contemplative. Workaholics work because they have learned that what they do is really the only value they have. Or they work because they want to avoid having to do anything else in life, like family or prayer or living. Or they work because they don't really want to work at all. What they really want is money, money, money. Pseudo-contemplatives, on the other hand, want to spend their hours gazing into space or processing. They spend every new year of life processing last year's life. Nobody ever tells them, "It's over, you can go on now." Pseudo-contemplatives have missed the point entirely that Adam and Eve were put in the garden ... in order to till it and to keep it, not to gaze at it. Not to live off of it. Not to lounge around in it like pigs in mud. They were put there to co-create it. Somehow or other in our Puritan heritage we got the idea that work is a punishment for sin. Work is not a punishment for sin. Even in the ideal world, a world in which there was no sin at all, before sin

entered the world, Genesis is very clear: God expected us to take responsibility for the co-creation of the world. ...

Work is our gift to the world. It's really work that ties us to the rest of humankind and binds us to the future. It's work that saves us from total self-centeredness and leads to self-fulfillment at the same time. It's work that makes it possible to give back as much as we take from life....  
--Joan Chittister

"When we are in rhythm with our own nature, things flow and balance naturally. Every fragment does not have to be relocated, reordered; things cohere and fit according to their deeper impulse and instinct."

John O'Donohue  
*Eternal Echoes*

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When we talk about everyday spirituality..., what I think we are really talking about is the need to achieve some way of entering those places of harmony where all the parts sing, where we hear the music of the spheres and we engage God, that great luminous darkness that is complete light and complete joy. We are looking for the way in which to take the spiritual that we do not know and the corporal that we know so well, and to bring them together.

From the beginning of mankind, certainly from the beginning of Judeo-Christian religion, there have been a number of ways of creating those little interruptions in normal life, those places where we can engage the mystery, those places of harmony and integration. A good Jew two thousand years ago would have known that one of the ways of interrupting life and meeting with the spiritual was the Sabbath. We used to keep the Sabbath. We used to set it aside and say, "Here is a time. Here is an interruption in one of the dimensions that informs life in which we will stop, and we will honor the Spirit of God." As a Christian we would take the host and say to ourselves, believing it, "We're about to eat the body of our God." And taking the chalice we would say, "We are about to drink the blood of our God who dared come among us and assume flesh and blood in order that that flesh and blood might spray out across all of human history and enter each of us." We would honor the time before that consumption and the hours after that consumption by an interruption of all other habits. We would hallow the time around that event--the Eucharist or the Mass or the Communion. That's what the Sabbath was, and it had built around it time and place.

Because we are creatures of dimension, if we wish to integrate all of the areas of experience into one place to meet the mystery, we must interrupt the dimensions. We must carve out space within the dimensions of time and place for that to happen. --Phyllis Tickle, *"Everyday Spirituality"*

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### Questions to Ponder Alone

What are the things that are claiming my life and distorting me?

How does my work shape my view of my world?

In what ways does my work and my attitude toward work serve to build up the world?

If I could spend a Sabbath day anyway I chose, what would I do?

How can I begin to see the world through God's eyes?

What are the fears within me that keep me from balancing contemplation and



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Real leisure, holy leisure, Sabbath leisure, contemplative leisure, has more to do with the quality of life and the depth of our vision than it does with play and vacations. The rabbis taught that the purpose of Sabbath was threefold. The first purpose of Sabbath, the rabbis said, was to free the poor as well as the rich for at least one day a week, and that included the animals, too. Nobody had to take an order from anybody on the Sabbath. The second purpose of Sabbath, the rabbis teach, is to give people time to evaluate their work as God evaluated the work of creation, to see if their work, too, is really life-giving. And finally, the purpose of Sabbath leisure was to give people space, to contemplate the real meaning of life. If anything has brought the modern world to the brink of destruction, it must surely be the loss of Sabbath.

The purpose of holy leisure is to bring this balance of being, not a balance of time, back into lives gone askew, and to give people time to live a thoughtful, a contemplative as well as a productive life. ... Holy leisure, in other words, is the foundation of contemplation. And contemplation is the ability to see the world as God sees the world.

The great Benedictine abbot, Dom Cuthbert Butler, wrote once, "It is not the presence of activity that destroys the contemplative life. It is the absence of contemplation." You are as much required, and I am as much required, to the contemplative life as any cloistered monk or nun. Otherwise, how shall you explain the union of Jesus with God the Creator as He walked from Galilee to Jerusalem, taking animals out of ditches, raising women from the dead, and curing lepers? In Benedictine spirituality, life is not divided into parts, one holy and the other mundane. To the Benedictine mind, all of life is holy. All of life's actions bear the scrutiny of all of life's ideals and all of life is to be held in anointed hands. No, personal comfort, purposeless play, vacuous vacations, however rich, however powerful, have not saved the world. Ask the Romans. We need the wisdom of holy leisure now.

--Joan Chittister

*Questions  
to Ponder  
with Others*

How does the phrase  
'time is money'  
diminish creativity?

How can we be a  
part of the  
re-claiming of holy  
leisure in the 21st  
century?

How can  
'purposeless  
play' still be  
playful?

What was the  
most  
self-indulgent  
vacation I've  
taken and how did  
I feel when it was  
over?

So the young visionary Benedict required specified periods for manual labor, as well as for prayer and prayerful reading. Benedict was not about saccharine piety and theological niceties. Benedict set out to save the world by putting creative work and meditation, contemplation, on the very same level. To Benedict, work was always to be done with that vision in mind. Laziness and irresponsibility, oppression and exploitation, the oppressive, neurotic, insane production of goods of massive, even global destruction, and the ravishment of the planet are all, then, to the Benedictine mind, forms of injustice and thievery because they set out to tear the world down. They risk the tearing down of the world rather than its building up. Work is our gift to the world. It's really work that ties us to the rest of humankind and binds us to the future. It's work that saves us from total self-centeredness and leads to self-fulfillment at the same time. It's work that makes it possible to give back as much as we take from life.

...

The goal of life is to work and work and work because the world is unfinished and it is our responsibility to go on with it in creative ways. No, profit-making has not saved us. We need the wisdom of creative work now.

--Joan Chittister

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'Getting things done' is necessary to life, but it is only one part of the experience of life. We need activity and accomplishment, but not at the expense of the loss of our own inner identity or the neglect of the relationships that are a part of making us more fully human, more fully alive. We need awareness and the presence of mind to keep soul-making and task-making in a healthy balance. ... The problem of being over-committed is not a time issue; it is a spiritual issue. We find ourselves unable to step off the never-ending task treadmill because we are trying to apply a work/business model to an issue of the soul.

The dictionary definition of activity is: 'an exertion of energy.' Every human being can identify with that understanding of activity. We certainly know how we feel when we have exerted too much energy. We become depleted and exhausted. We then scurry about trying to find ways to create more energy in ourselves so that we can continue to perform and produce activity at an acceptable level. The folly of this strategy is that we never address the core issue of the soul -- that of being participants in the great creative work of God. Ideally, activity is not task-driven but inner directed. We are invited to 'show up' at life and exert our energy in being astonished at the wonder of God, in becoming fully human and fully alive, and in being a part of the imaginative creative development of this enterprise called life. In other words, we were not created simply to complete tasks that could be checked off from a daily to-do list. We were created to 'become' and to 'participate.'

-- Renee Miller, "[Simplicity of Activity: Tilling Soil ... Reaping Wind](#)"

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Sometimes our lives seem to get away from us. Our hearts get cluttered, sullied, dispersed among the many attractions and distractions of life. We lose our rhythm and order. We travel down roads that are unfamiliar, even dangerous. And one day we realize our heart is not clean, our spirit not right. Disease has overtaken us and the tempo of healthy order has become a distant memory. We hear a longing in our souls--a longing to 'come to ourselves' again. That longing is the beginning of balance. It is the beginning of finding your soul clean and clear again before God.

--Renee Miller

This Section  
in printable  
format.

For  
Deeper Study

You will need the  
free adobe acrobat  
reader to view the  
pdf files.

## Process for Meditation and Psalm

### Process for Meditation

1. Take a few moments to be silent and center yourself in the presence of God.
2. Read the Psalm completely through once.
3. Read the Psalm again very slowly verse by verse, leaving at least one minute of silence between verses.
4. After going through the entire Psalm, sit in silence for 3- 5 minutes, asking God to feed your soul with the truths of the Psalm.
5. End the time with a short prayer of thanksgiving.

### Psalm 131

1 O LORD, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

3 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time on and forevermore.

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## What is Benedictine Spirituality?

*Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving Father, that by the toil of obedience thou mayest return to Him from whom by the sloth of disobedience thou hast gone away.*

Thus begins the prologue of The Rule of Saint Benedict, an ancient writing instructing Benedictine monks in the ways in which they should govern their bodies and minds while performing the Will of the Lord. Also called St. Benedict of Nursia, the Italian monk founded a community of monks in the sixth century after living three years outside of Rome as a hermit. Made up of cells of 13 monks each, the Benedictine community attracted many followers. Benedict eventually left his community, and at Montecassino, between Rome and Naples, in an old pagan holy place, he started the first truly Benedictine monastery--although the Benedictine order did not come into being until Carolingian times (Seventh Century a.d.).

The fruits of Benedict's experience appear in the Rule of St. Benedict (in Latin), which became the chief rule in Western monasticism under the Carolingians. The Rule's 73 chapters are full of a spirit of moderation and common sense. They set forth the central ideas of Benedictine monasticism; ideas ranging from the ideal characteristics of a monastery's Abbot, to the manner in which the monks should sleep. Benedict's rules speak of common cause, yet also allow for the distinctiveness of the individual and each individual's unique path to God; a singular approach to innovation and laboring to achieve fulfillment.

Benedictine Catholicism is still alive and well today with monasteries all over the world carrying out the Will of God in the manner set forth by St. Benedict. For more information regarding Benedictine monastic life, visit [Andechs Monastery](#) in Upper Bavaria's Five-Lakes Region. Or visit St. Benedict's Abbey in Kansas to read a recent translation of [The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict](#).

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## Being Real FEatured Speakers & Writers

### **Joan Chittister**

A widely published author, columnist and noted international lecturer, Joan D. Chittister, OSB, is executive director of Benetvision: A Resource and Research Center for Contemporary Spirituality located in Erie, Pennsylvania. A member and past prioress of the Benedictine sisters of Erie, she is past president of the conference of American Benedictine Prioresses. The most recent of her 26 books are *New Designs: An Anthology of Spiritual Vision* and *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*. She has been a leading voice on Benedictine spirituality and practice for over 25 years.

**For more information please go to: <https://www.benetvision.org>**

### **David Dark**

David Dark has published articles and reviews in Prism magazine and Books & Culture. His book *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons and other Pop Culture Icons* was published in 2002 by Brazos Press. Dark teaches English at Christ Presbyterian Academy in Nashville.

**For more information please go to: [David Dark Bio](#) and [David Dark's Website](#).**

### **Linda Douty**

Linda Douty currently serves as a book reviewer, teacher, retreat leader and individual spiritual director, sharing her personal experiences as well as knowledge gained at the The Academy for Spiritual Formation, *Bethel Bible Series*, SMU's Perkins School of Theology and the Shalom Institute of Spiritual Guidance. Douty is a regular presenter at the Center for Spiritual Growth in Memphis, Tennessee.

**For more information please go to: [Linda Douty Bio](#) and [Samaritan Counseling Center of the Mid-South](#).**

### **Laurence Freeman**

Father Freeman is a monk of the Monastery of Christ the King, Cockfosters, London. From the International Centre of the Christian Meditation Community in London, he now serves a worldwide network of 27 meditation centres and more than a thousand weekly meditation groups in 50 countries. He travels regularly in North and South America, Europe, Australia and Asia. He is involved in contemplative inter-religious dialogue and led The Way of Peace dialogue with the Dalai Lama. His six books include *Light Within*, *Selfless Self*, and *Jesus: The Teacher Within*.

**For more information please go to: [Medio Media](#) and [World Community for Christian Meditation](#).**

### **Micah D. Greenstein**

Named by *Memphis Magazine* as one of the city's most significant leaders, Rabbi Greenstein became Temple Israel's eighth Senior Rabbi on September 1, 2000, after serving Temple as Assistant and Associate Rabbi since 1991. Former

President of Memphis Ministers Association, he is a board member of the National Civil Rights Museum and faculty member of Memphis Theological Seminary.

**For more information please go to: [Micah Greenstein Bio](#) and [Temple Israel, Memphis, TN](#).**

### **William Kolb**

The Reverend Canon Kolb first came to Calvary Episcopal Church in Memphis, TN, in 1992, after 14 years as Rector of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Mamaroneck, New York. He returned in 2002 to head the Pastoral Care Program.

**For more information please go to: [William Kolb Bio](#) and [Calvary Episcopal Church, Memphis, TN](#).**

### **Renée Miller**

Renée Miller is an Episcopal priest who splits her time between her home in the Arizona desert and her condo in downtown Memphis. She currently serves as an associate rector at Calvary Episcopal Church in Memphis, TN, contributes regularly to [explorefaith.org](#), and serves as a team leader for [CREDO](#) (Clergy Reflection, Education, Discernment, Opportunity).

**For more information please go to: [Renée Miller Bio](#).**

### **Mark W. Muesse**

Mark W. Muesse is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. A native of Waco, Texas, Muesse received his B.A. summa cum laude in English from Baylor University. He completed his graduate work at Harvard University, where he received a Masters of Theological Studies from the Divinity School and the A.M. and Ph.D. in The Study of Religion from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

**For more information please go to: [Mark Muesse Bio](#).**

### **Kathleen Norris**

Kathleen Norris is a recipient of grants from the Guggenheim and Bush Foundations. Her personal narratives, essays, and poetry have been published in a wide range of anthologies, magazines and journals, including *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times Magazine*. She has published five books of poetry, including *Little Girls in Church*, *How I Came to Drink My Grandmother's Piano*, and *The Year of Common Things*, and is author of the New York Times bestsellers *The Cloister Walk*, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, and *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*.

**For more information please go to: <http://www.barclayagency.com/norris.html>.**

### **Parker J. Palmer**

Parker Palmer is known for his work in education, spirituality and social change in institutions including schools, community organizations, primary, secondary and higher education, and business and corporations. He is author of six books, including *Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation* (2000), and *The Active Life: Wisdom for Work Creativity and Caring* (1990).

**For more information please go to: [Parker Palmer Bio](#).**

### **Lee Ramsey**

Lee Ramsey is an ordained United Methodist pastor and is currently an associate professor of pastoral care and pastoral theology at Memphis Theological Seminary. He holds advanced degrees from Candler School of Theology and Vanderbilt University and is the author of *Care-full Preaching: From Sermon to Caring Community*.

**For more information please go to: [Lee Ramsey Bio](#).**

### **Phyllis Tickle**

As Contributing Editor in Religion for *Publishers Weekly*, the international journal



of the book industry, Phyllis Tickle is frequently quoted in sources like *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Life*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *CNN*, *C-SPAN*, *PBS*, *BBC*, *VOA*, etc., Tickle is an authority on religion in America and a much sought-after lecturer on the subject. She is also author of some two dozen books, most of them about religion and spirituality, including *The Divine Hours*, a three-volume contemporary manual of prayer, *God-Talk in America*, and *The Shaping of a Life - A Spiritual Landscape*, a memoir of a life of prayer.

**For more information please go to: [Phyllis Tickle Bio](#) and [Phyllis Tickle's Website](#).**

### **Rowan Williams**

The Most Reverend Rowan Douglas Williams was selected to be the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury after serving as Bishop of Monmouth and Archbishop of Wales. Archbishop Williams has also served as a Dean of Clare College and Lecturer in Divinity at Cambridge University and as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford University. He has published collections of articles, sermons and poetry and written or edited more than twenty books on the history of theology and spirituality, most recently *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (Co-edited with Geoffrey Rowell and Kenneth Stevenson), *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* and a volume of reflections called *Writing in the Dust*, about his personal experience of September 11, 2001.

**For more information please go to: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org>.**

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