



Part Three Being Real About Yourself

1 | [2 Next>](#)

Most commentators would agree that the road to authentic life begins with an examination of the self. Being honest about our fear, our anger, and our shortcomings is the beginning of maturity. When we are open and trusting enough in our relationships to confide in others about our shadow side, then we are on the road to authenticity and peace.

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Meditation

It is important at least to tell from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are--even if we tell it only to ourselves--because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing. It is important to tell our secrets too because it makes it easier that way to see where we have been in our lives and where we are going. It also makes it easier for other people to tell us a secret or two of their own, and exchanges like that have a lot to do with what being a family is all about and what being human is all about. Finally, I suspect that it is by entering that deep place inside us where our secrets are kept that we come perhaps closer than we do anywhere else to the One who, whether we realize it or not, is of all our secrets the most telling and the most precious we have to tell.

--Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991) 2-3.

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I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and the values at the heart of my identity, not the standards by which [I think] I must live--but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.

What is
Benedictine
spirituality?

Behind this understanding of [self] is a truth that the ego does not want to hear because it threatens the ego's turf: everyone has a life that is different from the "I" of daily consciousness, a life that is trying to live through the "I" who is its vessel. This is what ... every wisdom tradition teaches: there is a great gulf between the way my ego wants to identify me, with its protective masks and self-serving fictions, and my true self.

It takes time and hard experience to sense the difference between the two--to sense that running beneath the surface of the experience I call my life, there is a

"True fearlessness comes from the knowledge that we will never lie to ourselves, that we will never evade a single moment of our lives. We will be fully present for every moment and every consequence."

Shylpa Rinpoche
Shambhala Sun
May 2003

deeper and truer life waiting to be acknowledged. That fact alone makes "listen to your life" difficult counsel to follow. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that from our first days in school, we are taught to listen to everything and everyone else but ourselves, to take all our clues about living from the peoples and powers around us. ...

But if I am to let my life speak things I want to hear, things I would gladly tell others, I must also let it speak things I do not want to hear and would never tell anyone else! My life is not only about my strength and virtues; it is also about my liabilities and my limits, my trespasses and my shadow. An inevitable though often ignored dimension of the quest for "wholeness" is that we must embrace what we dislike or find shameful about ourselves as well as what we are confident and proud of. ...

Our lives are "experiments with truth" (to borrow the subtitle of Gandhi's autobiography), and in an experiment negative results are at least as important as successes. I have no idea how I would have learned the truth about myself and my calling without the mistakes I have made.

--Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, (Somerset, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 1999) 4-7.

To live well in this world, we must steep ourselves in the mind of God. We must ask what God wants for the world, rather than simply what we want for our private and personal, our public and national and political selves. We have bartered the future for the sake of the comfort of a few, but no peoples have the right to gobble up the world for their own sakes. We must all come again to fear God. We've made ourselves the gods of the 21st century to whom the rest of the world pays tribute, from whom much is sacrificed by those least able to sacrifice it, and because of whom both blessing and chaos happen. ...

No doubt about it, there's great room for fear of God here. The arrogance of those who make themselves the center of the universe is destroying our world, and our technology has outstripped our souls. No, superiority has not saved us. We need the wisdom of humility now. We need that quality of life that makes it possible for people to see beyond themselves to value the other, to touch the world gently and peacefully and make the whole world better as we go.

Peace is a Benedictine value, and we need it now. Benedictine spirituality is a spirituality consciously designed to disarm the heart, to soften the soul, to quiet the turmoil within. It is a vision of nonviolence in a world for which violence is the air we breathe, the songs we sing, in our national anthems, the heroes we worship, and the business we do. ... Be soft with others, the [Benedictine] Rule teaches, and you will have peace. Be simple in your needs, and you will have peace. Be humble in what you demand of life, and you will have peace. Be giving in what you take to life, and you will have peace. Refuse to make war on the innocent others in order to vanquish your political enemies, and you will have peace. And stop the wars within yourself, and you will have peace. Peace comes from not allowing any part of us to control the better rest of us. Peace depends on our being gentle with ourselves, gentle with the earth, and gentle with the other.

--Joan Chittister

1 | [2 Next](#)

"Enter into yourself, therefore, and observe that your soul loves itself most fervently."

St. Bonaventure



Part Three Being Real About Yourself

[<Prev 1](#) | [2](#)

Living the spiritual life is being spiritual in every situation in which we find ourselves. For example, if you come home tired and you don't feel like cooking, and you suggest to your spouse that you go out to eat and your spouse doesn't think you should spend the money, what is your reaction? Do you sulk, pout, fix dinner angrily, and become silent during dinner? Your immediate reaction is the barometer of your spiritual life. What if you're at work trying to meet a deadline, feeling pressured, stressed, and somewhat put upon, and your boss brings in a new project that is important and asks that you begin working on it today. What is your response? Do you smile sweetly and feel anger rising in your throat or lower back? Do you begin a litany of the things that you are already involved in that are taking time and energy and that you just can't do one more thing without falling apart?

Your immediate reaction is the barometer of your spiritual life. You can begin the journey of holiness by examining your reactions and attitudes to the daily doses of life you are given, for if you cannot find your spirituality there, it is unlikely you would find it if you were free of all responsibilities and had the luxury of thinking of no one but yourself and God. It is the day to day, the minute to minute, the joy and the sorrow, the bitter and the sweet that is the training ground for holiness. So pay attention to your life.

--Renee Miller, "[Pay Attention to Your Life](#)"

A Place for Reflection

Every major religion has some form of spiritual practice of attention or mindfulness. Whether it is meditation or simple awareness, spiritual depth occurs when there is focus and singularity. The number of possessions that we have, the amount of material goods that fill our lives, the clutter that seems to gather all around our living areas, crowd out attention and focus. Our minds, thoughts, energies are dispersed in myriad directions, and in the cacophony of competing claims on us, we cannot seem to find our center, our sense of clarity, our touch with the sacred, our experience of God. One way that I have helped people begin to reclaim that holy core that exists within us is to lead them through the process of creating a simple space within their own home where what is divine may be drawn out. You can begin the process yourself by trying the following exercise:

Questions to Ponder Alone

Who are the people in my life with whom I need to make peace?

What are five personal standards that I hope would characterize my life?

What am I most ashamed of in my life and how can that shame be transformed by forgiveness?

When do I find it most difficult to be real about myself when I am with others?

How do (or can) I "steep myself in the mind of God"?

*Questions
to Ponder
with Others*

How can conflict within our community lead us to deeper authenticity?

Share one secret about yourself with the group and note how you feel sharing it?

Share one strength and one weakness with the group. How does naming them help you understand yourself more fully?

How does insistence on having our own needs/rights met keep us from humility?

1. Choose an area of your home that you find particularly attractive or peaceful. It might be a room, or a corner in a room. It might be a closet or a stairwell. It might be windowless or flooded with light. The size of the space is not important.

2. Begin to clear out that space until it is completely empty of everything.

3. Bring a chair or a sitting pillow into the room and sit for several minutes, feeling the emptiness of the space.

4. Be attentive to the images and impressions that float across your mind. What do you feel is missing in the space? What does the space seem to 'want'? If you were going to meet God in this space, what would you want it to look like?

5. Record in a journal your thoughts and ideas.

6. Begin to bring items into the space one at a time. You might bring such things as a candle, a favorite rock, an icon, a cross, a vase of fresh flowers, a beautifully woven blanket, a holy book, a beautiful piece of glass, a table, etc. Avoid bringing in several items at once because it is much too easy to begin to 'fill' the space rather than 'draw out' from the space.

7. Again, sit in your space being mindful of the change in the space as each item is added. If you feel you have put in too much, take out items one by one just as you put them in. You will know when you have just enough - the space will feel hallowed.

8. When it is 'just right,' take off your shoes, enter the space, and offer it and yourself to the God who is One.

9. You will find that you do not have to force yourself to go into your sacred space. The space and the Spirit in the space will call you from the busyness of your life into that inner stillness where hope and holiness meet.

--*Renee Miller, "[Creating a Sacred Space](#)"*

This Section
in printable
format.

For
Deeper Study

You will need the
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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 139: 1-17

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"

12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

13 For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

[< Prev 1](#) | **2**

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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*.

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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

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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.

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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).

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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.

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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*.

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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).

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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*.

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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>.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

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