

Study Guide for

THE MONASTERY  
OF THE HEART

An Invitation to a Meaningful Life

by

Joan Chittister





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THIS STUDY GUIDE is designed to assist individuals and groups who are reading *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life*. It encourages prayer, listening, discussion, reflection and discernment. Individuals and groups will find here an opportunity to explore Benedictine spirituality and discern whether becoming a member of Monasteries of the Heart is a call they wish to follow. Information on Monasteries of the Heart can be found in the back of this study guide.



## HOW TO START A GROUP

### • *ONSITE GROUPS*

Find out if other people in your area are interested in reading *A Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* with the intent of learning more about the Monasteries of the Heart movement. Contact your e-mail friends, members of your parish, other existing groups to tell them about this new book and new movement.

Those who are participating in the group should have the book at least a week before your first meeting. Books and study guides can be ordered at [www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org) or by calling 814-459-0314. The study guide is also available free on the website.

Once the participants receive the book, they should also receive the study guide materials. You may want to photocopy the study guide or download it.

Ask participants to take time to prepare the assigned chapter before the group meets. The study guide questions and action suggestions will serve as a vehicle to share insights, clarify questions and reinforce learning.

Go to [www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org) and follow the steps for onsite groups.

### • *ONLINE GROUPS*

Go to [www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org) and follow the steps for group formation.

## HELP FOR ON SITE LEADERS

1. Make sure all participants know the time and place of the first meeting. If possible, choose a pleasant meeting room with comfortable chairs that can be set in a circle. This setting usually helps discussion. You may also want to arrange a focal point for prayer in the center of the circle—a candle, incense, a meaningful symbol.

2. Decide with the group on a leadership style. Will one person lead the discussions? Will there be co-leaders who work together or alternate sessions? Or will leadership be rotated among the participants?
3. The study guide provides suggestions for gathering prayers, mostly based on the psalms, the prayers that are recited each day in monasteries around the world. In the section on “Our Promises”—a listening heart, stability of heart and conversion of heart—the gathering service uses the same psalm recited by monastic men and women when making final profession.
4. The closing prayer, found on the last page of the study guide, is the prayer that is recited daily by all members of Monasteries of the Heart. You are asked to close each meeting with this prayer and encourage participants to pray it daily. You may copy the prayer for participants, download it at [www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org) or order individual copies of the prayer at the same website.
5. The discussion format in the study guide is simple. Select a good reader(s) to read aloud the chapter the group is discussing and then begin the questions. Don’t feel that you have to “get through” all the questions. Be flexible and open to the direction of the group.
6. Allow at least 10 minutes at the end of each session for the last question on each chapter. Encourage participants to share how they feel about their Monastery of the Heart on an individual and group level.
7. Be careful that one or two people do not monopolize the discussion. Call on other participants to share their thoughts. Likewise, try to keep the group on focus. If it goes off on a tangent, gently call it back.
8. Encourage openness and trust in the group by creating an atmosphere in which all ideas are treated with respect, dignity and seriousness.
9. Please send comments, suggestions and ways to improve this study guide to [www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org)

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER  
OF MONASTERIES OF THE HEART, GO TO  
[www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org)  
AND REGISTER BY CREATING A LOG IN.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS OF ONLINE AND ONSITE GROUPS  
CAN BE FOUND AT  
[www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org)

# Introduction

## GATHERING

Ring a small bell or chime.

Recite or chant together:

*Listen with the ear of your heart. (Rule of Benedict)*

Repeat 5 times.

## WISDOM READING

Read the “Introduction” aloud.

## WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this “Introduction”? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- Can you share a little about your search for God? What are the questions that “stalk your soul” in the pursuit? Would you agree that the “search for God is the attempt to complete the incomplete in us”? Why or why not? If so, how has that been true for you?
- In the last paragraph, the author invites seekers of every kind—individuals, families, small intentional communities—“to create within themselves a Monastery of the Heart.” Is this something that interests you? Can you imagine yourself doing this? If so, what might it look like? What might it mean?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of the “Introduction” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

## CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Thomas Merton

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think that I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You.  
And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
And I know that if I do this,  
You will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost  
and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.



# OUR SEARCH

## CHAPTER 1: A Gentle Invitation

### GATHERING

Ring a small bell or chime.

Recite or chant together:

*If today you hear God's voice harden not your heart. (Ps. 95)*

Repeat 5 times.

### WISDOM READING

Read "Chapter One: A Gentle Invitation" aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- "Listen" is the very first word of the ancient Rule written by Benedict. Why do you think the author chose that word? Is it still a good word for seekers in today's world? Explain.
- The author writes: "It is a gentle, tender invitation, this call to create within ourselves a Monastery of the Heart." And she reminds us that in following this call we can start over again every day. This echoes a tale from the Desert Fathers and Mothers: "Abba Poeman said about Abba Pior that every single day he made a fresh beginning." React to "every single day a new beginning." How important do you think this advice is on the spiritual journey? Why?
- Read "Other Voices of Wisdom" for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of "A Gentle Invitation" for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

"The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart." (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Ancient Story

A seeker searched for years to find the meaning of human life. One night in a dream a Sage appeared bearing the answer to the secret. The Sage said simply, “Stretch out your hand and reach what you can.” “No, it can’t be that,” said the seeker. “It must be something harder, something more satisfying to the human spirit.” The Sage replied softly, “You are right, it is something harder. It is this: stretch out your hand and reach what you cannot.”



## CHAPTER 2: A Seeker's Path

### GATHERING

Ring a small bell or chime.

Recite or chant together:

*Happy are those who seek God  
with their whole heart.* (Ps. 119)

Repeat 5 times.

### WISDOM READING

Read "Chapter Two: A Seeker's Path" aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- Are you a seeker? How do you know? Has your image or idea of the God you seek changed through your life? Have your "spiritual practices"? Explain.
- At this time in your life what spiritual path do you find bestsuited to your journey into God? A solitary path? A traditional covenanted community? Or something like A Monastery of the Heart—a network of similarly committed people whose community life is stable but not necessarily daily? Other?
- Read "Other Voices of Wisdom" for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of "A Seeker's Path" for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

"The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart." (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Saint Augustine

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.



## CHAPTER 3: A Single Vision

### GATHERING

Ring a small bell or chime

Recite or chant together:

*How good, how delightful it is for all  
to live together like brothers and sisters.* (Ps. 133)

Repeat 5 times.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Three: A Single Vision” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- How would you describe the “single vision” that unites all members of Monastery of the Heart?
- At the end of his life, Saint Benedict saw a vision of “the whole world in a single ray of light.” What does this say to you about how a Monastery of the Heart should view the world? What can a monastic heart bring to the world?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “A Single Vision” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—

Nikos Kazantzakis (from *Zorba the Greek*)

“You have seen what happens when you hold a glass to the sun and concentrate all the rays onto one spot, Zorba? That spot soon catches fire, doesn’t it? Why? Because the sun’s power has not been dispersed but concentrated on that one spot. It is the same with human minds. You do miracles, if you concentrate your mind on one thing and only one.”



# OUR INTERIOR LIFE

## Chapter 4: Prayer

### GATHERING

The group sits quietly for three to five minutes with hands extended, palms up, either in silence or with soft instrumental music or a favorite chant playing in the background.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Four: Prayer” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- The author writes “as regular as the movement of the clock, Benedictine prayer becomes for us the pulse of the day, the rhythm of a life....” Do you feel that prayer is regular in your life? Would you like to pray differently? Do you have any hopes or expectations about your prayer life and your association with Monasteries of the Heart? Explain.
- The author says that monastic prayer “is not mindless repetition of endless formulas,” but “immersion in the mind of God.” Is that how you view prayer? How would you describe a person who is immersed “in the mind of God”? Or has “put on the mind of Christ”? Explain.
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Prayer” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together :

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM

A Sufi saint set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca. At the outskirts of the city he lay down by the road exhausted from his journey. He had barely fallen asleep when he was brusquely awakened by an irate pilgrim. "This is the time when all believers bow their heads toward Mecca and you have your feet pointing toward the holy shrine. What sort of Muslim are you?" The Sufi did not move; he merely opened his eyes and said, "Brother, would you do me the favor of placing my feet where they won't be pointing to the Lord?"

+++

Once the Master was at prayer. The disciples came up to him and said, "Sir teach us how to pray." This is how he taught them....

Two men were once walking through a field when they saw an angry bull. Instantly they made for the nearest fence with the bull in hot pursuit. It soon became evident to them that they were not going to make it, so one shouted to the other, "We've had it! Nothing can save us! Say a prayer, quick!" The other shouted back, "I've never prayed in my life and I don't have a prayer for this occasion." "Don't be so particular. The bull is catching up with us," his friend yelled back. "Any prayer will do." "Well, I'll say the one I remember my mother used to say before meals: For what we are about to receive, Lord, make us truly grateful."

+++

A rabbi entered a room in his home and saw his son in deep prayer. In the corner stood a cradle with a crying baby. The rabbi asked his son, "Can't you hear? There's a baby crying in this room." The son said, "Father I was lost in God." And the rabbi said, "One who is lost in God can see the very fly crawling up the wall." —Abel Herzberg



## CHAPTER 5: Silence

### GATHERING

The group sits quietly for three to five minutes with hands extended, palms up, either in silence or with soft instrumental music or a favorite chant playing in the background.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Five: Silence” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- The author writes, “It is of the essence that in the Monastery of the Heart space for silence be treasured and guarded, sought and made sacred...” How do you feel about silence? Is it essential or peripheral to your life? Do you “make space for silence”? When? How? Why?
- The author lists many benefits of silence. Find one that speaks to you and explain why you chose it. Can you think of times when silence is not beneficial? Discuss.
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Silence” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Mother Teresa of Calcutta

To make possible true inner silence, practice:

Silence of the eyes, by seeking always the beauty and goodness of God everywhere, and closing them to the faults of others and to all that is sinful and disturbing to the soul.

Silence of the ears, by listening always to the voice of God and to the cry of the poor and the needy, and closing them to all other voices that come from fallen human nature, such as gossip, tale-bearing, and uncharitable words.

Silence of the tongue, by praising God and speaking the life-giving Word of God that is the truth, that enlightens and inspires, brings peace, hope, and joy, and by refraining from self-defense and every word that causes darkness, turmoil, pain, and death.

Silence of the mind, by opening it to the truth and knowledge of God in prayer and contemplation, like Mary who pondered the marvels of the Lord in her heart, and by closing it to all untruths, distractions, destructive thoughts, rash judgments, false suspicions of others, vengeful thoughts, and desires.

Silence of the heart, by loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength; loving one another as God loves; and avoiding all selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and greed.



## CHAPTER 6: Prayerful Reading

### GATHERING

The group sits quietly for three to five minutes with hands extended, palms up, either in silence or with soft instrumental music or a favorite chant playing in the background.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Six: Prayerful Reading” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- *Lectio* usually involves a slow reflective reading of the scripture, meditating on the word as it applies to your life, opening your heart to God in prayer, resting in God and then taking the Word into the marketplace. Do you pray with the scriptures? How? Why? Is *lectio* a prayer style that you are attracted to? Want to know more about? Discuss.
- Some have expanded the notion of *lectio* to include sacred reading of all of God’s Word—nature, art (music, poetry, literature, painting, etc.) and the events of daily life. Is this a form of *lectio* that you are attracted to? Want to know more about? Discuss.
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Prayerful Reading” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Daniel J. Harrington

*Lectio divina* is Latin for “spiritual reading.” It is a method of reading and praying on Scripture and other classics of spirituality like Augustine’s *Confessions* and *The Imitation of Christ*. It has deep roots in the history of monasticism. There are four basic steps in *lectio divina*: reading (What does this text say?), meditation (What does this text say to me?), prayer (What do I want to say to God through this text?) and contemplation or action (What difference might this text make in my life?).

The text to be read can be long or short. And the full process of “reading” could take 15 minutes or be spread over 15 years.

For individuals and groups just beginning the practice of *lectio divina*, it may be wise to follow the four-step outline rather mechanically. But I must confess that I now seldom consciously work through the various steps all in one time period. In fact, the point of *lectio divina* is to foster an immersion in scripture so that the various questions arise naturally in their own time. For one who has been privileged to study, teach and write about scripture for many years, the framework has become so habitual that eventually all the steps get covered in one way or another. A wise teacher once told me, “When you have mastered a method or skill, then you can throw away the instruction booklet.”



## CHAPTER 7: Retreat and Reflection

### GATHERING

The group sits quietly for three to five minutes with hands extended, palms up, either in silence or with soft instrumental music or a favorite chant playing in the background.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Seven: Retreat and Reflection” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- The author writes, “In a Monastery of the Heart the Benedictine soul learns always to return to the cave of the heart where the superfluities of life do not distract from the significance of life.” How do you feel about entering the “cave of your heart”? Willing? Eager? Reluctant? Discuss.
- How do you build retreat and reflection time in your life to “freshen the embers and stoke the fire” of your spiritual quest?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Retreat and Reflection” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Nathan D. Mitchell

Many of the world’s religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam among them—set aside special days or seasons for taking personal inventory. The aim of such soul-searching is to find the facts about our lives and face them, with a view toward spiritual growth and renewal. Such an inventory, in Catholic tradition, is often called an “examination of conscience,” a process by which, with God as guide, we try to see if our “insides” match our “outsides”—whether our lives embody primarily our plans or God’s. The point is not to badger ourselves by picking at scabs or woefully beating our breasts. Our purpose is to get honest—and to get real—about who we are. The fact is that we often waste a good deal of time and energy trying to live someone else’s life instead of our own. Our personal histories are often littered with “borrowed identities”—tried on, found wanting, cast aside, and then buried under layers of denial and self-deception. An inventory helps us lower the barriers, shed the denial, and—without fear or panic—discover our “original faces.”

Who we are, of course, isn’t limited to our individual identities. We belong to a pilgrim people, so our responsibilities are social and public, not just private and personal. We take our inventory as adult citizens of a troubled and troubling world. It isn’t enough simply to consider whether I was distracted at prayer or I snapped at my spouse. A serious inventory is never only about me; it’s about us. It asks whether we’ve heard God’s Word in the cry of the poor, whether we’re handing our children a living future or a polluted planet, whether we’re willing to control our consumption to feed the hungry.



# OUR COMMUNITY

## CHAPTER 8: Mutuality

### GATHERING

Stand together in your gathering space.

One individual prays aloud:

*God blesses and gives life forever.* (Ps. 133)

At the same time, each individual bows slightly.

After a very brief pause, repeat two more times.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Eight: Mutuality” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- How does a Monastery of the Heart community differ from a more traditional form of community? How is it the same?
- Would you agree with the author that it “takes a great deal of energy to create community”? Explain by speaking from your own experiences of creating community.
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Mutuality” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Michael Casey, OCSO

The humanity of Jesus is a mirror in which we can see our own humanness more clearly. We are saved by the initiative of Jesus who incorporates within himself the totality of our race. We are lost to the extent that we exclude ourselves from this all-inclusive embrace. We cannot hope to receive salvation if our relationship with God is confined to a private chapel from which others are excluded.

Community corrects individual defects; what one lacks another supplies, what one breaks another repairs, when we fall there is someone to lift us up (Eccl. 4:10). One body has many irreconcilable inconsistencies; many bodies together neutralize their potential to do harm. In a choir of thousands, who notices if I sing a wrong note?

Perseverance in the spiritual life demands a community of common faith—with one heart and one mind. The closer and more complete the bonding, the more effective such a community will be in bringing us to that simplicity of heart in which God becomes progressively more apparent.



## CHAPTER 9: Equality

### GATHERING

Stand together in your gathering space.

One individual prays aloud:

*Your works are justice and truth,  
your precepts are all of them sure.* (Ps. 111)

At the same time, each individual bows slightly.

After a very brief pause, repeat two more times.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Nine: Equality” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- The author clearly values the presence of wisdom in every individual and challenges the community to let the Spirit move in and through each. How does this compare to your own experience of decision-making within the groups in your life?
- React to this statement: “Equality, the offshoot of humility, sees in the face of the other—all others—the face of God.”
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Equality” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Thomas Merton

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God gloried in becoming a member of the human race. A member of the human race!

I have the immense joy of being human, a member of a race in which God became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

It was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time.

There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed.... I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.



## CHAPTER 10: Direction and Counsel

### GATHERING

Stand together in your gathering space.

One individual prays aloud:

*God, you will show me the path of life,  
the fullness of joy in your presence. (Psalm 16)*

At the same time, each individual bows slightly.

After a very brief pause, repeat two more times.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Ten: Direction and Counsel” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- Have you experienced, worked with, or observed leaders who are “faithful to immersion in the Spirit and open to the presence of God in the mind and soul of the community”? What difference would they make in the growth and development of the community they serve?
- Discuss as a group where you believe the authority resides in your emerging community: scripture, individual(s), the group itself? How do you know? Is this emerging as you wish? Why or why not?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Direction and Counsel” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Parker Palmer

The hallmark of the community of truth is in its claim that reality is a web of communal relationships, and we can know reality only by being in community with it. We invite diversity in the community not because it is politically correct but because diverse viewpoints are demanded by the manifold mysteries of great things.

Becoming a leader of that sort—one who opens, rather than occupies space—requires the same inner journey we have been exploring for teachers. It is a journey beyond fear and into authentic selfhood, a journey toward respecting otherness and understanding how connected and resourceful we all are. As those inner qualities deepen, the leader becomes better able to open spaces in which people feel invited to create communities of mutual support.

The decision to live an undivided life, made by enough people over a long enough period of time, may eventually have social and political impact. It is a deeply personal decision, made for the sake of one's own identity and integrity. To decide to live divided no more is less a strategy for attacking other people's beliefs than an uprising of the elemental need for one's own beliefs to govern and guide one's life.



## CHAPTER 11: Sufficiency and Sharing

### GATHERING

Stand together in your gathering space.

One individual prays aloud:

*Great are God's marvelous works,  
to be pondered by all who love them.* (Ps. 111)

At the same time, each individual bows slightly.

After a very brief pause, repeat two more times.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Eleven: Sufficiency and Sharing” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- Explain your understanding of the author’s statement: “Benedict’s definition of the relationship between persons and things is sufficiency, not frugality.”
- How does the concept of living “with one eye on the needs of everyone else as well as their own” compare to your concept of simple living? Describe some specific ways one’s life could manifest the concept of common sharing described in this chapter.
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Sufficiency and Sharing” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Edward Hays

The polite response when you've had enough food or anything else is, "No, thank you." It can also be an escape clause when viewing an ad for new clothes. "No, thank you, my closet is already full." You can delightfully say, "No, thank you," to the itch to have a larger house, adding, "I have all the rooms I need." If ever tempted to have a new spouse, say, "No, thank you, I don't need a new lover; I'm still finding great delight in exploring my present love." When facing an avalanche of advertising, you can say, "No, thank you" to more and more and more, adding, "I have more than I need or can use."

To live a simple life is a most attractive ideal; yet in our affluent society, it seems a daunting, if not impossible, task. Don't be intimidated; a simple life is really very easy—all you have to do is make "No, thank you" one of your most frequently used expressions.



## CHAPTER 12: Nourishment

### GATHERING

Stand together in your gathering space.

One individual prays aloud

*God of life, happy are all who trust in you.* (Ps. 84)

At the same time, each individual bows slightly.

After a very brief pause, repeat two more times.

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Twelve: Nourishment” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- How do you feel about food and drink? Do you regard it as: Sustenance? Enjoyment? Temptation? Health? Pleasure? Other? How did you develop this attitude? Finish this statement: A Benedictine attitude toward food and drink is... .
- With so much unemployment, homelessness, hunger and poverty in our world, what can your Monastery of the Heart do to see that “the hungry around us, too, are also full”?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Nourishment” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Norman Fischer

The thirteenth-century founder of Zen in Japan, Dogen Kigen, wrote a famous short book about the importance of the office of monastery *tenzo*, or head cook, in which he emphasizes the spiritual virtue of careful respect in the preparation of food. Based on this, Zen has always held that kitchen work is a form of spiritual cultivation almost equal to meditation. In Japan, monastic cooking is an important practice, and there is even a tradition of monastic gourmet cooking, special lavish vegetarian fare that is prepared at guesthouses on monastery grounds.

With such a Japanese tradition as the source, and, in addition, being in California, land of the hot tub and trattoria, our centers have sometimes been accused of secretly being food cults. We were founded in the early 1970s, around the time that California cuisine was invented, and we were very much involved in that food revolution. Our second abbot was a bit of a gourmand and saw to it that food in our monastery—even during the training period when all meals are taken silently and formally in the zendo, in the traditional three-bowl ceremony—was always carefully and deliciously prepared. Over the years our most creative and talented people have “gone into the kitchen,” and out of their experience has come a wealth of good cooking and its by-products: the perennially best-selling *Tassajara Bread Book* and several other notable cookbooks; four or five world-class chefs; the Tassajara Bread Bakery; and Greens Restaurant in San Francisco, the first and most successful gourmet vegetarian restaurant in the world. Many people the world over know of our centers more through our food-related activities than through our meditation or spiritual teaching.

In the early years of our centers there was much experimentation and debate about food as we worked out our vegetarian diet. The debates tended to be quite emotional, and there were many true-believing advocates of this or that health-saving food regimen who did not acknowledge the need for moderation or the spiritual benefit of simply paying attention to what you consume.



# OUR SERVICE

## CHAPTER 13: Good Work

### GATHERING

Pass a small bowl of water from participant to participant. Each person dips their hands in water and blesses the hands of the person to their right while the group chants:

*May the sweetness of our God be on us.  
Bless the work of our hands.  
Bless the work of our hands.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Thirteen: Good Work” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- Do you agree with the author that the labor of your hands, your “work for the sake of hastening the coming of the Reign of God is every bit as much a part of Benedictine life as prayer times and holy reading”? Why or why not?
- How does the work of your hands—your manual labor—“make the world a better, more just, more fair, and more humane place for everyone?”
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Good Work” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Kahlil Gibran

And what is it to work with love?

It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart,  
even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.

It is to build a house with affection,  
even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.

It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy,  
even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.

It is to charge all things you fashion  
with a breath of your own spirit.

And to know that all the blessed dead  
are standing about you and watching.



## CHAPTER 14: Co-Creation

### GATHERING

Pass a small bowl of water from participant to participant. Each person dips their hands in water and blesses the hands of the person to their right while the group chants:

*May the sweetness of our God be on us.  
Bless the work of our hands.  
Bless the work of our hands.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Fourteen: Co-Creation” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- Do you “hold all things—the earth and all its goods—as sacred”? Explain.
- In your daily life and lifestyle, how do you reflect the call that “co-creation requires us to tend the land, and conserve the waters, to till the garden and protect the animals, to use the things of the earth in ways that enhance all life now and preserve them for later generations as well”? How might you be even more committed to this call to co-creation in the future?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Co-Creation” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM

### Great Spirit Prayer

(translated by Lakota Sioux Chief Yellow Lark in 1887)

Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the wind,  
Whose breath gives life to all the world.  
Hear me; I need your strength and wisdom.  
Let me walk in beauty,  
and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.  
Make my hands respect the things you have made  
and my ears sharp to hear your voice.  
Make me wise so that I may understand the things  
you have taught my people.  
Help me to remain calm and strong  
in the face of all that comes towards me.  
Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.  
Help me seek pure thoughts  
and act with the intention of helping others.  
Help me find compassion without empathy overwhelming me.  
I seek strength, not to be greater than another,  
but to fight my greatest enemy, myself.  
Make me always ready to come to you  
with clean hands and straight eyes.  
So when life fades, as the fading sunset,  
my spirit may come to you without shame.



## CHAPTER 15: Loving Care

### GATHERING

Pass a small bowl of water from participant to participant. Each person dips their hands in water and blesses the hands of the person to their right while the group chants:

*May the sweetness of our God be on us.*

*Bless the work of our hands.*

*Bless the work of our hands.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Fifteen: Loving Care” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- The author writes that “patience and care” are the two pillars of a monastic community. Give one example of how you or your Monastery of the Heart community show patience and care when addressing an issue, a person, a group of people.
- *The Rule of Benedict* lists special concern for the most vulnerable in the community: the elderly, the sick, the young in community. Given today’s world, would you add any other “vulnerable” to the list? Why would care for the vulnerable be so important for a Monastery of the Heart? Explain. How can Monasteries of the Heart reach out to the vulnerable?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Loving Care” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Ancient Story

Ryokan, the Japanese poet and monk, was invited by a relative to speak to his wayward son. Ryokan came to visit the family home but did not say a word of admonition to the boy. He stayed the night and prepared to leave the following morning. As the wayward boy was helping tie Ryokan's straw sandals, he felt a drop of water on his shoulder. Glancing up, the boy saw Ryokan, eyes full of tears, looking down on him. Ryokan departed silently, and the boy soon mended his ways.



## CHAPTER 16: Responsibility

### GATHERING

Pass a small bowl of water from participant to participant. Each person dips their hands in water and blesses the hands of the person to their right while the group chants:

*O God, come to my assistance, O God, make haste to help me.* (Ps. 70)

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Sixteen: Responsibility” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- When it comes to a choice between the structure or the person, monastic spirituality puts the person first. Name one institution, one structure that you are involved in and ask yourself if, in time of conflict, the person had precedence. Discuss.
- The author claims that monastic spirituality is “a different way of being in the world” because it gives of itself freely to others beyond what is required—beyond a 40-hour week—beyond the mentality of paid service for contracted hours—beyond being off duty from the needs of others. Is this idea too radical to be real? Discuss. How does this compare with modern advice to care for the self first, to lead a “balanced” life, to the adage that “my time is my time,” that too much self-sacrifice is harmful to the self?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Responsibility” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Eknath Easwaran

John Donne said, “No man is an island.” That is why selfless relationships lead to happiness, while a self-centered life leads to loneliness and alienation. As human beings, it is our nature to be part of a whole, to live in a context where personal relationships are supportive and close.

Dwelling on ourselves builds a wall between ourselves and others. Those who keep thinking about their needs, their wants, their plans, their ideas, cannot help becoming lonely and insecure.

The simple but effective technique I recommend is learning to put other people first—beginning within the circle of our family and friends and co-workers, where there is already a basis of love on which to build. When husband and wife try to put each other first, for example, they are not only moving closer to each other. They are also removing the barriers of their ego-prison, which deepens their relationships with everyone else as well.

It is important to remember here that putting others first does not mean making yourself a doormat, or saying yes to whatever others want. It means putting the other person’s welfare before your own personal desires. That is what love is: the other person’s welfare means more to you than your own. And love often requires you to say no.

When we put others first, we deepen our own security and dramatically enrich our relationships.



## CHAPTER 17: Hospitality

### GATHERING

Pass a small bowl of water from participant to participant. Each person dips their hands in water and blesses the hands of the person to their right while the group chants:

*May the sweetness of our God be on us.  
Bless the work of our hands.  
Bless the work of our hands.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Seventeen: Hospitality” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- The word hospitality is rather common these days—it is used, for example, to describe fine hotels with the finest products and the finest services. How does Benedict’s concept of hospitality shake up and disturb this more common understanding of hospitality?
- When is the last time someone “disturbed your perfect life”? What was your reaction to the disruption?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Hospitality” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Henri Nouwen

Hospitality is the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveler. Hospitality makes anxious disciples into powerful witnesses, makes suspicious owners into generous givers, and makes close-minded sectarians into interested recipients of new ideas and insights.



# OUR PROMISES

## CHAPTER 18: A Listening Heart

### GATHERING

Group gathers in a circle and alternates psalm prayer with chant.

*Leader:* From early morning, O God, I seek you.

*All:* Sing or recite: *Uphold me, O God, according to your word  
and I shall live and do not fail me in my hope.* (Ps. 119)

*Leader:* My lips are filled with your praise, with your glory all day long.

*All:* Sing or recite: *Uphold me, O God...*

*Leader:* My eyes watch through the night; always thankful for your presence.

*All:* Sing or recite: *Uphold me, O God...*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Eighteen: A Listening Heart” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- Compare the word “obedience” to “holy listening.” How do you react to each word?
- The ancient Rule, the author explains, calls us to mutual obedience. Remember all the times when you were “obedient” to someone or someone was “obedient” to you: parents, children, teachers, military personnel, church or civic authority, a spouse. What was positive about these experiences? What was negative? What do you think healthy mutual obedience would look like in community or in family relationships?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “A Listening Heart” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Brother David Steindl-Rast

Jesus Christ brought a complete revolution of the understanding of authority. This is, I think, the Christian tradition's most central insight and potentially its greatest contribution to spirituality in the world. It occurred in two ways.

First, Jesus placed the authority of God, which was always seen as external, in the very hearts of his hearers. The core teaching of Jesus is not, "I am going to tell you all," or anything like that. No, he presupposes you know it all. "Don't you know it? I'll remind you of it. You know it all." This is his typical voice. This question opens many of the parables, "Who of you doesn't know this already?" It's not sufficiently emphasized nowadays in Christian teaching, but the moment you are alerted to it you see it.

So, one of the really dramatic events that happened in history is that with Jesus, the Divine authority was squarely placed in the hearts of every human being, that the Divine authority is placed in the heart of the earth.

The second aspect is best expressed in the image of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and saying, essentially, "You call me Lord and Master. In other words, you call me an authority. You are right, that's what I am. But in the world, those who have power lord it over others. With you it should be different. The greatest among you, the one who has the most power, should be the servant of all. And that is what I show you because I am washing your feet." So that is the answer to the question, what is authority good for? Authority must be used, but there is only one legitimate use for it, and that is to empower those who are under authority. One of the most important things about Jesus is that he apparently had great authority but did not fall prey to its power. He even emphatically told his followers that that's not what you do—you turn this upside down and become the servant of all. First divine authority was placed in the hearts of everyone. Then human authority was given a task, namely, not to put those down that are under authority, but to build them up and empower them.



## CHAPTER 19: Conversion of Heart

### GATHERING

Group gathers in a circle and alternates psalm prayer with chant.

*Leader:* From early morning, O God, I seek you.

*All:* Sing or recite:

*Uphold me, O God, according to your word  
and I shall live and do not fail me in my hope.* (Ps. 119)

*Leader:* My lips are filled with your praise, with your glory all day long.

*All:* Sing or recite *Uphold me, O God...*

*Leader:* My eyes watch through the night; always thankful for your presence.

*All:* Sing or recite *Uphold me, O God...*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Nineteen: Conversion of Heart” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain
- Benedictines have traditionally taken a vow of “conversion.” After reading this chapter how would you explain the monastic promise of “conversion of heart”?
- The author writes that conversion of heart comes when “we come to realize that all things are of God...all things call us to melt into one great paean of praise for the joy of having found the God we continue to seek.” How does monastic spirituality invite you to that point of conversion? How do we learn to praise God for the whole gamut of our lives?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Conversion of Heart” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.

- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

## CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Ruth Rimm

Now we realize: the miracle stories are not miracles—or even myths. They are transformations. “I once was lost, but now I am found” (Lk.15:24). “I once was blind, but now I see” (John 9:25). I once was sick, but now I am healed. I once was hungry, but now I am satisfied. Most of the miracle stories in the Christian Testament can be reduced to the simple transformational structure: “I once was \_\_\_\_\_, but now I am \_\_\_\_\_.”

The measure of the spiritual genius of a culture is its capacity to transform. The deeper the existential or postmodern despair, the greater the possible transformation. Transformation is the greatest life-affirming principle. We transform the ugly into the beautiful, the mean into the kind, depression into joy, sadness into happiness, tears into laughter, even war into peace. All negatives exist for the pure joy of transforming them into positives. All evil exists for us to transform into good. In fact, this is God’s great commandment to us: love your enemies means transform a relationship of evil into a relationship of good.



## CHAPTER 20: Stability of Heart

### GATHERING

Group gathers in a circle and alternates psalm prayer with chant.

Leader: From early morning, O God, I seek you.

All: Sing or recite:

*Uphold me, O God, according to your word and I shall live  
and do not fail me in my hope. (Ps. 119)*

Leader: My lips are filled with your praise, with your glory all day long.

All: Sing or recite: *Uphold me, O God...*

Leader: My eyes watch through the night; always thankful for your presence.

All: Sing or recite: *Uphold me, O God...*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Twenty: Stability of Heart” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- Simone Weil writes: “To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.” Discuss her insight in light of this chapter.
- Stability of heart, being fixed in the heart of God, is not stability to a place or even to religious practices or institutions. How might you tell the difference between being fixed in the heart of God and aimless drifting? Are there clues in your own life that help with this?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Stability of Heart” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.



- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

## CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—William Stafford

### *The Way It Is*

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.



# OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

## Chapter 21: Humility

### GATHERING

Light a candle or incense.

Chant or recite the song “Peace Before Us” by David Haas, using the following lyrics:

*Love before us, love behind us, love under our feet.  
Love within us, love over us, let all around us be love.*

### WISDOM READING

Choose a part of “Chapter Twenty-One: Humility” to read aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- Which of the twelve steps of humility is most appealing to you? Why? Which of them is most challenging for you? Explain.
- Humility is one of the cornerstones of Benedictine life. How have you defined humility in the past? After reading this chapter, explain if your own definition has changed in any way. If so, how? What place does humility have as we develop our own Monastery of the Heart?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Humility” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

*Conversion*

Just imagine that today  
something different would happen:  
one white peach  
falling perfect  
no bruise, no worm,  
into welcoming grass;  
a brooklet cradling watercress  
clean and cold meandering  
the Alabama Hills;  
or sunrise  
setting Lone Pine Peak to alpen glow.  
Just imagine one reason  
to turn this  
unkind and meaningless life  
into an impulse of  
immeasurable joy.



## CHAPTER 22: Spiritual Tools

### GATHERING

Light a candle in the center of the group.

Chant or recite the song “Peace Before Us” by David Hass, using the following lyrics:

*Light before us, light behind us, light under our feet.  
Light within us, light over us, let all around us be light.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Twenty-Two: Spiritual Tools” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- The author states that “Benedictine spirituality is the strikingly powerful middle way between indifference to the spiritual life and extremism in the spiritual life.” Have you experienced either indifference or extremism in your own spiritual journey? Explain. In what ways do the spiritual tools described in this chapter provide a “strikingly powerful middle way” for your own spiritual journey?
- Do you agree that “to be wholly spiritual we must be wholly human”? What images or ideas come to mind when you consider this concept?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Spiritual Tools” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Morris West

To meet a whole person is a rare experience but always an illuminating and ennobling one. It costs so much to be a full human being that there are very few who have the enlightenment, or the courage to pay the price. One has to abandon altogether the search for security, and reach out to the risk of living with both arms. One has to embrace the world like a lover, and yet demand no easy return of love. One has to accept pain as a condition of existence. One has to court doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing. One needs a will stubborn in conflict, but apt always to the total acceptance of every consequence of living and dying.



## CHAPTER 23: Sacred Art

### GATHERING

Light a candle or incense.

Chant or recite the song “Peace Before Us” by David Haas, using the following lyrics:

*Beauty before us, beauty behind us, beauty under our feet.  
Beauty within us, beauty over us, let all around us be beauty.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Twenty-Third: Sacred Art” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain
- Did the connection between art and monastic spirituality surprise you? Discuss.
- Nikos Kazantzakis wrote, “You have your brush and your colors, paint paradise and in you go.” Reflect on Kazantzakis’s insight in relation to this chapter and your Monastery of the Heart.
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Sacred Art” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Brother Thomas Bezanson

Years ago, when I became committed to the art of pottery, I had a vision of the “perfect pot.” It haunted my imagination, even my dreams. It was an utterly “simple” form; it had a beautiful shining, white glaze. The whole thing was so consummately beautiful, that it almost was not there. A fragile, vulnerable, unearthly beauty. In my youthful ignorance and in my “tiger years” I poured my energies into concretizing that vision. Of course, I never achieved it or even came close to it. Then one day, twenty-five years later, that vision came back...while I was in Japan. It was an entirely new vision: that pot was myself. It always was. I realized that if I were to make the beautiful pot I must first make the beautiful person. As an artist I know and as a person I know—that the beauty of the spider’s web comes out of the beauty of the spider’s spirit.

## CHAPTER 24: Good Zeal

### GATHERING

Light a candle or incense.

Chant or recite the song “Peace Before Us” by David Haas, using the following lyrics:

*God before us, God behind us, God under our feet.  
God within us, God over us, let all around us be God.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Twenty-Four: Good Zeal” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- Consider the qualities of good zeal listed at the end of this chapter. Which one appeals to you the most? Challenges you the most? Explain.
- What does it mean to you to “prefer nothing in the world to the love of God”?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Good Zeal” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Ellen Porter

Some Small Flower of Honesty

I vow to lower myself  
to the level of pure thought:  
not to speak as though I know what I say,  
not to speak to others as if they know less than I.  
I vow to listen to the words of the elder:  
not to seek recognition of honor,  
not to claim friendship,  
but to be quiet  
to be invisible  
until some small flower of honesty  
blooms in my heart.



## CHAPTER 25: Peace

### GATHERING

Light a candle or incense.

Chant or recite the song “Peace Before Us” by David Haas, using the following lyrics:

*Peace before us, peace behind us, peace under our feet.  
Peace within us, peace over us, let all around us be peace.*

### WISDOM READING

Read “Chapter Twenty-Five: Peace” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
- Consider the list of values that the author considers essential to creating peace in our hearts and in our lives—community, prayer, stewardship, equality, stability, conversion, peace—and that they “all make for communities of love.” Does the list constitute a recipe for peace in your opinion? Why or why not?
- As you have been about developing and shaping your own Monastery of the Heart, does it seem to be for you and for others an “oasis of human peace in a striving, searing, simmering world”? Share your reflections on the possibility of such an oasis in your heart and your home.
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of “Peace” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.
- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

### CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)

## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Thich Nhat Hanh

Practicing mindfulness in each moment of our daily lives, we can cultivate our own peace. With clarity, determination, and patience—the fruits of meditation—we can sustain a life of action and be real instruments of peace. I have seen this peace in people of various religions and cultural backgrounds who spend their time and energy protecting the weak, struggling for social justice, lessening the disparity between rich and poor, stopping the arms race, fighting against discrimination and watering the trees of love and understanding throughout the world.



## EPILOGUE

### GATHERING

Ring a small bell or chime.

Recite or chant together:

*Listen with the ear of your heart. (Rule of Benedict)*

*Repeat bell chime and chant 5 times.*

Read the last paragraph of the introduction, slowly, over and over again: “May the women and men, the families, the intentional communities who seek to create within themselves a Monastery of the Heart, find there the God who is forever seeking them.”

Now that you have read and studied the entire book, describe what happens to you as you read these words of invitation once again? Has your image of your own monastery of the heart changed as you have worked your way through this book? Explain.

### WISDOM READING

Read the “Epilogue” aloud.

### WISDOM SHARING

- What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
- The author states that Benedictine spirituality is a lifestyle that is the “work of a lifetime.” How does that make you feel? Hopeful? Depressed? Challenged? Relieved? Grateful? Other?
- Now that you have read this way of life for Monasteries of the Heart, what would be most helpful for you to continue your journey? What information? What experience opportunities? What practical aids?
- Read “Other Voices of Wisdom” for this chapter. Bring another reading, poem, work of art, music that expands the wisdom of the “Epilogue” for you. Share how these other voices of wisdom deepen the meaning of this chapter for you.

- What does this chapter mean for your Monastery of the Heart—on a personal level, as a group or as a community?

## CLOSING

Recite together:

“The Prayer of Those who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart.” (p. 66)



## OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—Rilke

If the angel  
designs to come  
it will be because  
you have convinced  
her, not by tears  
but by your humble  
resolve to be always  
beginning: to be  
a beginner.



# MONASTERIES of the HEART

A New Model  
of Ancient Spirituality



At one time in history, every major region in Europe was defined by a Benedictine monastery that impacted the people of the area and influenced the issues of the times.

From opening hospices, to building irrigation systems, to ransoming captives, to negotiating peace treaties, to preserving learning, the monastery enriched the daily life of people and moved the political and church agendas of the day.

From teaching people to pray, to building community, to providing spiritual direction, to encouraging sacred leisure, to dignifying work, to producing and preserving works of art, literature and beauty, the monastery nourished the human soul and nurtured the contemplative spirit. The world was different—a bit more compassionate, more just, more peaceful, more beautiful—because of a Benedictine presence.

In our own time, the flame for the spiritual burns with special intensity. Ours is an era of spiritual development, spiritual exploration, spiritual emergence and spiritual search.

Monasteries of the Heart is one response to that spiritual quest.

It is an invitation to those who search for community, for spirituality, for peace, for a way of life that is God-centered and life-altering. It is an invitation to live the ancient Benedictine tradition anew in our times. It is a call to become a Benedictine presence in new ways, but in familiar places: families, parishes, neighborhoods, workplaces, prisons, cyberspace and in the center of our hearts.

# What is Monasteries of the Heart?

Monasteries of the Heart is a movement of seekers interested in becoming part of a community of seekers, either online or with others of their own choosing, who form to support one another in shaping their spiritual lives around Benedictine values and priorities.

Groups and individuals will be devoted to Benedictine values but not necessarily bound by geographic stability. It is a monastery “without walls.” Communities may gather for prayer, discussion, and reflection—in families, parishes, neighborhoods, intentional communities, prisons, and on the internet.

Monasteries of the Heart will also honor the enduring hermit tradition in a new way in a society in which great numbers of people, both young and elderly, live alone with little or no particularized support for their spiritual life.

Monasteries of the Heart is especially mindful of celebrating beauty, honoring the sacred and poetic word, and promoting nonviolence as a way of life and method of social change.

Monasteries of the Heart is a response to requests to develop a new form of Benedictine spirituality for a new face of society. Monasteries of the Heart is an outreach of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania.

## Is Monasteries of the Heart for you?

That depends...

**IF YOU SEARCH FOR THE MORE OF LIFE...**if you have a taste for what fullness of life is meant to be, but can find nothing that quenches the thirsts or fills all the cravings—welcome to Monasteries of the Heart.

**IF YOU DESIRE THAT GOD BECOMES THE RHYTHM OF YOUR DAY,** the first thought on waking, the last thought at night, the reason for everything you do in life—welcome to Monasteries of the Heart.

**IF YOU BELIEVE THERE IS WISDOM IN ANCIENT TRADITIONS** like the Benedictine way of life, time-tested insights and values that can illuminate today’s search for community, spirituality, meaningful work, care of creation, listening hearts, and peace—welcome to Monasteries of the Heart.

**IF YOU PREFER THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS NOT DEFINITIVE ANSWERS**, openness of heart and mind not boundaries that define, risk-taking not security, flexibility not rigidity; if you bow before the dignity of each human being regardless of gender, sexual orientation or religious tradition—welcome to Monasteries of the Heart.

**IF YOU CARE TO BE A LOVING LISTENER** of the heartbeat of the world, a caring brother and sister to its wounded, a bringer of peace to a world in distress—welcome to Monasteries of the Heart.

**IF YOU YEARN FOR COMMUNITY**, a network of seekers who wrestle with the great mysteries of life and who together can accomplish something greater than anyone can achieve alone—welcome to Monasteries of the Heart.

**IF THESE IDEAS STIRRED SOMETHING FREE AND FRESH IN YOU**—welcome to Monasteries of the Heart. You are invited to live a “monastic life,” whatever the shape—married, single or religious—the monastery of your own particular soul-life may be.

Seize the Present,  
Renew the Heart,  
Create a New Future.



If you are interested in pursuing the call,  
please go to

[www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org)



# Getting Started

*The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* by Joan Chittister is the introductory resource for the new movement. Sister Joan, a spiritual leader of our times, draws on her lived experience as a Benedictine as well as her years of studying, writing and speaking on the *Rule of Benedict*. In this text, she distills from that ancient Rule its essential values. Her purpose? To make the Benedictine way of life accessible to all seekers who desire to live a “monastic life” in the midst of the modern world.

She writes in her introduction, “After more than fifty years of life in a monastery, I have begun to sift and sort the effects of it all, asking myself, what, if anything, of monastic life is worth passing on to others in this day and age? What of this life has any impact or import to populations other than monastic communities themselves, and how can those outside traditional monasteries, too, join throngs of monastics over the centuries who have found this life both enriching and enlightening?”

Each chapter of the book addresses an essential aspect of Benedictine life. It traces its historical significance and then suggests how this value is relevant in the new Monastery of the Heart.

Getting started is simple. Get the book, *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* and this study guide which accompanies it. (Also available online for free download.) Find a few people who share your spiritual search and begin.

Monasteries of the Heart is a movement for people of all ages and ways of life who are drawn to a God-centered life. Groups of 6 to 12 members will probably gain the most from Monasteries of the Heart and we encourage you to meet at least once a month. Where can you form Monasteries of the Heart groups?

- online • families • neighborhoods • parishes
- college campuses • book clubs • prisons
- intentional communities • in you

Additional resources and personnel for spiritual development, membership guidelines, and sharing among individuals and groups interested in becoming part of Monasteries of the Heart are available on the website, [www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org)

# The Prayer of Those Who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart

Loving God,  
You who dwell in our hearts,  
make for us a cave there  
in which to hear your voice  
more distinctly,

feel your care  
more tenderly,

understand your will  
more clearly,

and come to know  
your presence  
at every moment  
of our lives  
with new clarity  
and new courage,  
with new faith  
and new urgency.



Enable us to grow  
in the Benedictine spirit  
in ways that make us  
compassionate co-creators  
of a world in process,  
creative keepers  
of the human community,  
loving listeners  
to the heartbeat of the world,  
caring sisters and brothers  
to its wounded  
and bringers of peace  
to a world in distress.



Let us sink into your Word,  
let us nourish it to life,  
let it lead us beyond  
the burdens of the day  
so that we may become  
the people you desire us to be.

Give us hearts  
where all may enter in,  
ears to hear your call,  
hands to do your will,  
voices to sing your praise  
and soul enough  
to recognize You  
in everything we do.

This we ask  
through the intercession  
of all the faithful monastics  
who have gone before us  
and through the grace  
of the living God.  
Amen.

—Joan Chittister



Monasteries of the Heart members  
are invited to say this prayer daily.  
Whether you are called to join or called to consider,  
pray with us.

[www.monasteriesoftheheart.org](http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org)



## Acknowledgements for Other Voices of Wisdom

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Wayne, Please insert the bar code.  
Thanks, Judy