

Making Space for God

Opening Prayer

O God, I have tasted thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, so that I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then give me grace to rise and follow thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

From the Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozer



Give Us a King

Watercolor by Steven Stuckey 2013

Reflection- Looking Back

Take some times to settle yourself. Review your calendar and think back over where you have been this summer and focus on answering this one question: **How has the Lord been present to you?** In the events of your life; in your joys and fears; in what has occupied your mind and heart; in what you dream about or long for; in what you are thankful for. Journal these thoughts and offer them to the Lord.

Scripture Study—Saul and David

Introduction—Around 1050BC Israel was a loose collection of tribes cobbled together by a circuit riding prophet who settled disputes and dispensed the word of the Lord. Then something dramatic happened. The Philistines and aggressive, militarily advanced people migrated from Crete to Western Palestine. They gobbled up land and subjected the local Israelites to their rule. In response the Israelites cried out to their God, “Give us a king like the other nations who will organize us into a unified fighting force so we can defend ourselves.” The aging prophet, Samuel was displeased. Their request sounded like a rejection of God as their king. It was certainly a rejection of the system of governance under Samuel. Eventually a king was appointed—Saul. Tall, handsome, and courageous, he rallied the people and for the next forty years fought their enemies. He was followed by the charismatic David, the most beloved of all the kings. But the unfolding of the monarchy was filled with drama, tragedy, confusion, and intrigue at all levels. And it is that stewpot of characters and events that make the books of Samuel 1 and 2 so interesting and important. We learn more from failure than success and there is plenty of both in this literary gem.

This year we will slowly read through the story of Saul and David. I will supply reflection questions on a separate sheet for each prayer retreat.

Reading for Reflection

Any venture into leadership is hazardous. The long and well-documented Christian tradition confirms this. Leaders are necessary, but woe to those who become leaders. In leadership, possibilities for sin emerge that previously were inaccessible, possibilities exceedingly difficult to detect, for each comes in the form of a virtue. The unwary will embrace immediately a

new "opportunity to serve the Lord," innocent of the reality that they are swallowing bait, which turns, soon or late, into a curse. "Let not many become teachers," warned James, who knew the perils firsthand.

The temptations we face in the early years of our faith are, if not easily resisted, at least easily recognized. If I kill a man, I know I have done wrong. If I commit adultery, I have the good sense not to advertise it. If I steal, I make diligent effort not to get found out. The so-called lower sins, the sins of the flesh, are obvious.

But the higher sins, the sins of the spirit, are not so easily discerned. Is a certain instance of zeal energetic obedience or human presumption? Is one person's confidence a holy boldness inspired by the Holy Spirit or merely arrogance instigated by an anxious ego? Is this suddenly prominent preacher with a large following a spiritual descendant of Peter with five thousand repentant converts or Aaron indulging his tens of thousands with religious song and dance around the golden calf?

It is not easy to tell. Deception is nowhere more common than in religion. Wiser generations than ours did not send men and women into this perilous country without a thorough briefing of the hazards and frequent check-ups along the way. Even then shipwreck was frequent enough. The foolishness of our times is no more apparent than in the naiveté with which we grant leadership and the innocence in which we rely on leaders' sincerity and motives. The religious leader is the most untrustworthy of leaders; in no other station do we have so many opportunities for pride, covetousness, and lust, and with so many excellent disguises to keep such ignobility from being found out and called to account.

.... The congregation (chapter) is the pastor's (staff worker's) place of ministry: we preach the Word and administer the sacraments, we give pastoral care and administer the community life, we teach and we give spiritual direction. But it is also the place in which we develop virtue, learn to love, advance in hope. By providing us contact with both committed and frustratingly inconstant individuals, the congregation provides the rhythms, the associations, the tasks, the limitations, the temptations - the conditions - for our own growth in Christ

*--From Under the Unpredictable Plant
Eugene Peterson*

To pray does not primarily mean to think about God in contrast to thinking about other things, or to spend time with God instead of spending time with other people. Rather it means to think and live in the presence of God. As soon as we begin to divide out thoughts into thoughts about God and thoughts about people and events, we remove God from our daily life and put him in a pious niche where we can think pious thoughts and experience pious feelings.

Henry Nouwen in Clowning in Rome

Thinking Ahead

Take some time to review your fall calendar. As you do so answer these questions:

1. What can you do on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis that will help you walk in and be aware of the presence of the Lord? What should you resist that will blind you to the Lord's presence?
2. What disciplines do you want to practice that will help you maintain physical and emotional health? When in the fall schedule do you anticipate the most stress? What can you do now to prepare for that time?
3. Who is your relational support community and what will you do to maintain and strengthen those relationships.

The Benediction

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you; I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord, into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve, and with boundless confidence.

Charles de Foucauld