

Introduction: What is a “Busy Person’s Retreat”?

A “Busy Person’s Retreat” is a way to grow in awareness of self, others, the world, and God as you ask yourself: who you are at this moment, what are you busy about? How you can get in touch with your true self, and where you can find God in daily life.

This self-paced retreat gives you a chance to nourish your heart and soul, to find spiritual energy and meaning in your life, and to see where you are on your journey to God. Online guidance lets you make a retreat whenever and wherever you have time and access to a computer.

Taking just a few minutes out of your busy day to tap into your spiritual energy will give you the serenity you long for. While sitting uninterrupted in a quiet space, you can think over a concern or lift your mind and soul to God. This pondering about or reflecting on is sometimes called “meditation.” Meditation is really very simple—quieting the usual “busy-ness” of your mind and spirit.

Part 1. How Can You Make Each Day Count?

Part 2. How Can You Live God’s Blessings?

Part 3. How Do You Love Others?

Part 4. What Is Your Attitude toward Work?

Part 5. How Do You Find God in Creation—and Re-creation?

Part 6. How and When Do You Pray?

Part 7. Where Is Your Life Journey Leading You?

Before you begin: focus yourself by sitting quietly for a few moments, closing your eyes, and taking some deep breaths. Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you to guide you and fill you with peace.

Part 1: How Can You Make Each Day Count?

Take one minute now to think about how you plan to use your time today. Can you think of ways you might celebrate time? Can you plan ahead so you won't waste time? How can you use your time to bring yourself peace of heart and mind today?

*"There is an appointed time for everything....
A time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to uproot the plant....
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn and a time to dance....
A time to seek and a time to lose;
a time to keep and a time to cast away....
a time to be silent and a time to speak.
A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war and a time of peace."*

Book of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

How does your attitude toward time compare with these lines from the Book of Ecclesiastes? These "time to" phrases describe significant events in human life. Think about this beautiful passage in terms of your own life. How have you experienced birth or death among your family members and friends? Think about the times in your day or week when you weep, laugh, mourn, dance, speak, love.

How often do you hear or use these expressions?

Time marches on!
She's living on borrowed time.
It's a matter of timing.
Time is money.
I'm just killing time.

Or, as a child, did you learn this verse about using time well?

*"I have only just a minute, only sixty seconds in it.
Forced upon me, can't refuse it, didn't seek it, didn't choose it,
but it's up to me to use it, give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it."*

Time is a prized possession for all of us. We Americans value time as money, and we admire people who accomplish much in a short time. We automatically measure our lives in segments of time: years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, even nanoseconds.

What matters is how attentively and lovingly you live each day. "Any day is a good day to be born and any day is a good day to die," according to Pope John XXIII of blessed memory who gave the world a wonderful example of how to face death. In his long dying process he recognized that time is a gift from God to be used to the best of his ability.

At this point make a list of all your essential activities for today: showering and dressing, eating, sleeping, working, etc.

Next list your optional activities for today: watching television, reading, hobbies, social activities with your friends, etc.

Mark the activities in either category that you find life-giving and energizing. Mark those activities you find boring or tiring. What makes an activity life-giving or boring?

During the time you are devoting to this "busy person's" retreat modify or add to your list. Through your prayer and reflection these days you may discover a rhythm and balance that will help you live more attentively and lovingly.

How can you make your time holy? As a "busy person" you probably race against time to get everything "done." Our culture values speed, and many of us are constantly "on the go." As a result, at the end of a day you may be exhausted with very little to show for your efforts. This retreat may help to make your time more meaningful, even holy!

For one day you might try to go to bed earlier and get up earlier so that you have time and energy for living more attentively and loving. How can you find more space in your day (and night?) for reflective living? How can you move from being time-bound to making time count?

Ways to be more attentive to God begin with being more aware and loving toward those around you, even as you do tasks of daily living.

Even just taking some deep breaths will quiet you down and make you more loving and peaceful.

A magazine like *Woman's Day*, some years ago published an article entitled "Food for the Spirit: 50 Ways to Grow in Grace All Day Long" (June 29, 1993). The section entitled "The Stolen Moment" includes ideas like these:

Use waiting time for God for prayer and contemplation (e.g. while commuting, standing in line).

Meditate in motion (e.g. while washing the dishes or doing other household tasks, while running or jogging, while driving a car).

Say a prayer when you hear a siren (for all those who need help or are helping).

People in other parts of the world can help us put time in perspective. Those who help new immigrants adjust to American culture are amazed at what these newcomers can teach them. Mary Pipher in her recent book, *The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town*, tells how refugees she taught showed her how to slow down to the "speed of wisdom." How can you too learn to slow down your pace and live in a more reflective way?

Remember in the Book of Genesis: "So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it God rested from all the work . . . of creation" (2:3). In this story of creation God made time holy.

Other passages in the Scriptures speak about placing life and time in God's compassionate hands. This is a good prayer to say several times a day: "I will bless the Lord at all times; God's praise shall be ever in my mouth" (Psalm 34:1).

The Bible will help you understand that time can be experienced in ways that are deeper than clock or chronological time in expressions like "The time is at hand" (Luke 21:8) and "But the hour is come, and now is" (John 4:23). These lines refer not to chronological time but to a unique time beyond measurement.

For Jesus the words "time is at hand" and "hour is come" refer to the completion of his earthly mission leading to his passion, resurrection, and glory.

You may have experienced special moments which changed your life forever. Some people know the exact moment they fell deeply in love or realized in a special way what God was asking of them. Such a moment out of time can take your life in a new direction.

To live in the present moment is the best way of being attentive and loving to God and to others. Spend a moment to reflect on each of these passages from the Bible:

"If today you hear God's voice, harden not your heart." (Psalm 95:8)

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart." (Psalm 90:12)

"Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Now look again at your list of essential and optional activities for today. In light of your attentiveness to time today ask yourself how your spiritual energy has increased.

You may wish to turn to Part 2 of this retreat: How Can You Live God's Blessings?

Part 2: How Can You Live God's Blessings?

*"The Lord bless you and keep you!
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you!
The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!"*

(Book of Numbers 6:24-26)

God blesses you always. And from morning to night you can have a blessing in your heart and mind for all that you receive and all that you give to others. Think about how just waking up in the morning can be a blessing.

Our word "bless" comes from the Latin benedicite which means "to speak well of" and by extension "to confer well-being or holiness upon." Blessing is a way of sending loving thoughts to and about one another.

"May I be a blessing to all I meet today. May they be a blessing to me." This is a beautiful morning prayer that can help you to begin each day on a positive and loving note. All day think about how you can be a blessing to others.

Remember the blessings you have received from others in the past few days. Remind yourself to become more aware of the blessings that surround you every day.

In one of her popular novels about the town of Mitford Jan Karon has created a very lovable and charming character, Father Tim. This elderly Anglican priest knows everyone in Mitford and everyone knows him. As he starts out for his walk around town each day, he prays that he will be a blessing to each person he meets. He is certainly that. And as the day goes on, he is aware how each person in turn has been a blessing to him.

Have you seen the movie, "Paying It Forward"? This movie can also remind us of blessing: always to do something for someone else in response to the good deed that another person has done for you. This can make for an endless circle of blessing as good deeds continue to be extended.

How often do you think of all of the blessings in your life? Perhaps you might want to make these blessings part of your morning and evening prayer. God blesses you with so much each day. Being grateful is the best prayer you might make. There are so many ways to grow in grace (to receive blessings) all day long.

"God bless you" can sometimes seem like a wornout phrase. But if you say it as if you really mean it, that will be a blessing to you too. What about asking a blessing of the other drivers on your commute each day? What about "conferring a blessing" on the unwanted caller on the phone? There is nothing and no one that you can't "confer well-being upon."

These ways of growing in grace take almost no time at all, but ask only for your attention and intention:

Use waiting time to turn your heart to God.

Give thanks for any and every blessing of the day.

Hold your tongue rather than use it to hurt.

Restore God's creation by picking a weed or picking up a piece of trash.

Choose a bible verse for the day and reflect on it as you walk or ride along – or before you go to sleep tonight.

Notice how often the words “bless” and “blessing” appear in the Bible. Life itself is a blessing. Reflecting on some passages from the Bible will be a great blessing if you let them really speak to you.

Let the Beatitudes (or Blesseds) come to your mind and open yourself to Jesus speaking to you through his gospel. In his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12) Jesus describes the way to blessedness or happiness. “Beatitude” means “blessed” but it can also be translated as “happy” or “holy.”

We all want to be happy. But true happiness is difficult to find – unless we follow the way of Jesus. The Beatitudes call us to be happy in the midst of a troubled world by asking us to live God's way, not the world's way.

This loving, demanding way of living was first fulfilled in the life of Jesus. As Jesus' followers, we too are challenged to live the good news (the gospel) which gives us an outlook on life very different from the world's view.

Living out these Beatitudes is the way to holiness. In Matthew's gospel (5:3-12) you can read how Jesus calls blessings on those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek (humble), those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful, those who are clean of heart, those who are peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

Look for the eight Beatitudes (Blesseds) that can bring the greatest blessings to your day – or to your life. The brief reflections that follow may give you a start.

Blessed (happy) are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (5:3).

This first beatitude can remind you that everything is from God and that you have nothing without God. Being poor in spirit does not mean having no possessions but it means not being possessed by your possessions, be they many or few. This blessing asks you to realize that your possessions, your time, your everything come from God. How carefree about everything you can be if you share God's gifts with open hands. You are as blessed as are those to whom you give the blessing of yourself, your time, your talents!

Blessed (happy) are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (5:5).

You are blessed when your whole life is dominated by gentleness, not by violence. You are "meek" in the true sense of that word when you try to reverse the world's attitudes about power and prestige.

When you are meek or nonviolent, you shall inherit the earth, not if you violently seize it—but if you gently show your strength. Your meekness or nonviolence can grow out of your realization that God's power holds you. Being sure of God's acceptance means that you don't have to exert power to prove yourself or to lord it over others.

Think of Mother Teresa of Calcutta whose gentleness and kindness were her strength. She gave hope to the sick and suffering of India and hope also to those who supported her in her efforts to bring about peace and healing.

Blessed (happy) are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness (justice), for they will be satisfied (5:6).

If you hunger and thirst for what God wills, for what is right and good, for what is just and holy, you will be truly blessed by God. You will be happy. God empowers you to be just so you can complete the circle of God's care for others. By being part of this circle of care, you will be truly blessed because you will be satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and made whole.

What positive, immediate action of justice can you do in your neighborhood or your workplace today?

Blessed (happy) are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (5:9).

You cannot be a peacemaker unless you have peace in your own heart. Peace is an inner attitude. How can you make peace from inside out? You need to be able to forgive yourself (as well as others). One person begins each morning by saying, "I begin today with a fresh forgiveness." Isn't this a simple way to inner peace? Isn't this a way to bless the entire day?

You can make peace in yourself and in the world by living all the other Beatitudes, the other "blesseds." What a blessing to be truly care-free, to give and receive comfort, to be gentle, to be

live in justice, to be compassionate, to be open-hearted, to have peace in your heart. In these ways you can help to bring peace to our families, our neighborhoods, our world.

Which “blesseds” speak to you most strongly today? Jot down a few words reminding yourself of a way you can live out a beatitude that particularly speaks to you right now.

You may wish to turn to Part 3 of this retreat: How Do You Love Others?

Part 3: How Do You Love Others?

Have you hugged anyone today?

*“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.
No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*

(John 15:12-13)

How loving have your relationships been today? Did you show love to your family this morning as you began the day? Did you greet your friends, neighbors and fellow workers graciously? Will the sun go down with your love intact for all the people in your life?

In the gospels Jesus shows his love for others. He refers to God’s commandments as the source of all human relationships: “Now a young man approached him and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” Jesus answered “There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:16-19).

And, of course, the greatest commandment is LOVE: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27-28).

The goal of the good life is to become more other-centered, to love others as ourselves. Good relationships are signs of God’s love. The Ten Commandments guide our relationships with God and with others. The first three recognize our relationship to God and the final seven tell us that God cares about the way we treat each other.

Think of “you shall not kill” as telling you how to treat others with respect for their human dignity. “You shall not commit adultery” and “Honor your father and mother” are at the heart of all human relationships. The other seven commandments also show how God cares about the way human beings treat each other.

In your family have you learned to live Jesus’ teaching to love your neighbor as yourself? How can you keep loving relationships with the people in your life? Do you show your love in the simple acts of daily living such as doing the dishes, mowing the lawn, dealing with money problems? How do you express your love in dealing with problems occurring between generations?

Your family is surely very important to you. How about your friends? The great American writer, Henry David Thoreau, once wrote: “Friends give each other hope. They are kind to each other’s dreams.” To how many people do you give hope? How kind are you to their dreams?

These are some questions you might ask yourself today:

Where do I find God and God's love in the place where I am at the present moment?

How do I affirm each member of my family and community?

How can I love deeply without possessiveness?

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (13:4-8) is often the reading of choice at wedding ceremonies. Perhaps you can think of it also as the reading of your choice for daily living. You are no doubt very familiar with this passage:

"Love is patient, love is kind.

Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish.

Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger, neither does it brood over injuries.

Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth.

There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, power to endure.

Love never fails."

A good way to make an examination of conscience today is to substitute "I" for "love" to see what the verses tell you about yourself. For example: "I am patient, I am kind." Or "I am not rude, I am not self-seeking, I am not prone to anger, neither do I brood over injuries."

When you say, "God is love," to what extent can you also say, "I am love," knowing, of course, that no human person achieves the fullness of love? Nothing is impossible because God loves you! And you can only love because God first loves you. A saint, Julian of Norwich, reminded herself constantly: "God loves and delights in me." Do you do this? And do you in turn love and delight in God?

So let this day be a day of love and loving! A day of delighting in. Love is an attitude in the heart—and in the mind. To love does not take any time at all!

You will find it helpful to practice loving more deeply one day at a time. Decide the priorities of your love. God? Family members? Friends? Neighbors? Those who are suffering? Those in greatest need? How far does your love reach? The more love you give the more you will receive.

One poet, Miriam Therese Winter, writes of the circle of love:

*"The life we live extends through a widening circle of friends,
'til all are caught and held in a circle of love."*

Everyone knows a circle grows, all around the globe it goes,

'til all are caught and held in a circle of love."

(Woman Prayer, Woman Song, Crossroad, 1987, p. 246)

Tonight after your day quiets down, let your mind and heart reflect on these words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta:

*"Love cannot remain by itself – it has no meaning
Love has to be put into action and that action is service.
A mission of love can come only from union with God.
From that union, love for the family,
love for one's neighbor,
love for the poor
is the natural fruit."*

You now may wish to turn to Part 4 of this retreat: What is Your Attitude Toward Work?

Part 4: What is Your Attitude toward Work?

*“Whatever you do, do from the heart,
as for the Lord and not for others,
knowing that you will receive from the Lord
the due payment of inheritance.”*

(Letter to the Colossians 3:23-24)

What kind of work do you plan to do today? Do you look forward to what you will be doing? Or do you dread it?

As a human being you are called to do two things in your life: to love and to work. You prayed about love in Part 3, How Do I Love Others? Today pray that your work will be satisfying.

Your work probably includes first taking care of daily life activities. The rest of your work may helping other people at home, serving in various volunteer capacities, and/or earning a living. Psychologists tell us that meaningful work and meaningful relationships are necessary to human wholeness.

What are the meaningful activities you spend your time and energy on each day? Maybe you work at home caring for your family, writing, studying. Maybe you go to a classroom, an office, a factory. The key word here is “meaningful.”

How much effort do you put into this activity? Does it involve both your mind and your heart? How much immediate personal satisfaction do you receive from your work? Do you find your work does not engage you fully? In the long run, do you think what you do really matters to yourself, to others, to society as a whole?

Whether your work involves physical or mental effort, do you see it as meaningful, purposeful activity? How does it contribute in some way to the building up of your family, your neighborhood, your civic and church communities? When you build life-giving relationships, show compassion, or serve others – all of which are work – your work is purposeful.

Take a few moments to think and pray about

the work you have done or will do today

how your work has helped someone

the quality of your relationship with a fellow employee, a customer, your boss;

whatever you may have learned about yourself at work.

You may think of “work” as only something you get paid to do, but, work is essential to the lives of every one. Of course, getting paid to work is the way most people are able to provide food, clothing, and shelter. Paychecks buy transportation, security, education, recreation. The money earned can be used to support your church, the government, and worthy causes.

Does your salary also enable you to reach out to those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, ill, and imprisoned? As Jesus tells us in the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Most of us find more ways to spend money than we have bank accounts or credit cards! How did you manage last month? Jot down the major categories in which you spend money. What do you discover about your values?

Extending your heart and mind beyond yourself involves creativity in using your imagination. Working creatively can move you beyond the merely routine and repetitious. If you feel trapped in a job or a family situation that gives you little joy or fulfillment, can you think of ways to be creative about your work?

A book you may find helpful as you think about your relationships and your work is Dorothy Soelle’s *To Work and To Love: a Theology of Creation*, Fortress Press, 1984.

Ask yourself now:

In what one way is my work (either daily tasks or my job) life-giving?

How do I deal with difficulties at work and with my own limitations?

What is one way I can be creative at work, relate to someone at work, or change a dehumanizing system?

While work is a vital dimension of humanity, for some people it can become obsessive or addictive. Do you know people who replace God and even family with the gods of success, ambition, or power? Being a “workaholic” means being addicted to work and, as a result, being subject to burnout and despair. True work needs to be balanced by prayer and leisure.

Ideally through your work you should be able to express yourself, share with others, and contribute to the building up of the world. Perhaps you know people who have boring or distasteful jobs but yet bring a positive attitude to their work. Satisfaction is found not only in work well done but also in human relationships.

Have you encountered people in service jobs who can either make or break your day by their attitude toward their work? One bus driver in particular is fondly remembered by many riders for

the hospitality he offered as he greeted each rider warmly. His genuine interest in each rider brightened their lives. He obviously enjoyed his job very much and made the job into a daily blessing for himself and others. Any work, no matter how routine or “boring” can become a blessing for others as well as for ourselves.

God, who sees all work as good, shows that work, any work, can be holy and good. As a human being, can you be challenged today to be a co-creator with God?

As you think about any work you do, can you say “how good it is”?

Remember these words from the creation story:

Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness Thus evening came, and morning followed—the first day (Genesis 1:2-5).

God continues with the other “days” of creation, always seeing “how good it was.” You remember how the creation story ends with these words:

Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work God had been doing, God rested on the seventh day from all the work God had undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work God had done in creation. Such is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation (Genesis 2:1-4).

The creation story is, of course, a poetic interpretation, not a scientific account, of how the world and everything in it came into being. But it shows that there is a rhythm to all creation, including your own creativity and work. Like all of creation, human work is good – and good for you.

Remember also how Jesus shows the value of work. During his lifetime he is identified as a worker, the carpenter’s son. In his stories or parables Jesus shows knowledge of all kinds of work: sowing grain, working in a vineyard, building houses, sweeping floors, making bread, fishing. Like Jesus, try to look at your work as an expression of your love for God.

Many psalms in the Bible praise God for the work of creation. Here are a few lines adapted from Psalm 8 that can remind you of God’s work of creation and your participation in it:

O Lord, our God, how glorious is your name over all the earth!

You have exalted your majesty above the heavens....

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you set in place—

What are we that you should be mindful of us, or that you should care for us?

You have made us little less than the angels, and crowned us with glory and honor.

You have given us rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under our feet...

O Lord, our God, how glorious is your name over all!

You now may wish to turn to Part 5 of this retreat: How Do You Find God in Creation – and Re-Creation?

Part 5: How Do You View Creation – and Re-creation?

God looked at everything God had made and found it very good. (Genesis 1:31)

...we, the peoples of Earth declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. Earth Charter

What makes you feel really alive and at your best? Today think about what is life-giving for you and how your own creativity can bring re-creation to others.

Do you feel like this quaint little girl who wrote in her diary her exuberant “joy song of nature”?

“The sun was up, and the birds were singing... I did have hearing of many voices – they were the voices of earth, glad for the spring. They did say what they had to say in the growing grass, and in the leaves growing out from the tips of branches....

Most every day, I do dance. I dance with the leaves and the grass... I feel like a bird, sometimes. Then I spread my arms for wings, and I go my way from stump to stump, and on adown the hill....

Then I nod unto the willows, and they nod unto me. They wave their arms, and I wave mine. They wiggle their toes in the water a bit, and I do so, too. And every time we wiggle our toes, we do drink into our souls the song of the brook—the glad song it is always singing. And the joy-song does sing on in our hearts” (Opal Whiteley in her diary written at the beginning of the twentieth century).

Centuries ago many of the Psalms in the Bible expressed this same joy in creation and this same sense of wonder. In Part 4 of this Busy Person’s retreat you prayed lines from Psalm 8 which say in more adult language what this little girl is feeling.

Think about all the biblical stories and psalms about God’s creation that you know. How do they remind you that everything God made is good and to be praised?

Familiar hymns can also lift your heart in praise and song.

All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice and with us sing: Alleluia!

O burning sun with golden beam And silver moon with softer gleam: Alleluia!

Dear Mother earth, who day by day Unfolds rich blessings on our way, Alleluia!

The fruits and flow’rs that verdant grow, Let them God’s glory also show. Alleluia!

In our own day the earth is being harmed by human indifference and also by wars, violence, and greed. The Earth Charter, a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful society in the 21st century, seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for all our earth.

Just think, you are one of the creatures capable of making decisions that will preserve the earth! Are you becoming more aware of the need for wise decisions to be made to preserve our planet? For example, how careful are you in the use of water? Pollution of air and water are endangering the survival of human beings on earth.

This is an overwhelming problem, but just stop to think about your own use of water. How is water essential to you? In what ways can you preserve water today? Thank God for the refreshing gift water is to you.

Maybe you are very aware and involved in dealing with environmental problems. Or perhaps you feel overwhelmed and helpless. In either case, the saying, "Think globally, act locally," is the first step, helping you to get a handle on the problem.

Your ecological consciousness can be closely related to a spirituality of creation. Find the sacred in material things like water, bread, wine, and oil. When you look at God's creation with eyes of faith, can you see signs of grace everywhere?

Any created thing can raise your heart and mind to God. Your appreciation of natural beauty in its many forms – land that is productive, streams and lakes that are pure, open skies that are unpolluted – can make you more fully human and grateful for God's gracious gifts.

How you act, individually and collectively – in insisting that the goods of the earth exist for all the earth's people and not just for a few—is not a small matter. If you can help in any way to protect the natural environment in light of the current situation of war, violence, and destruction, you will be effectively living out your role as a loving creature of God.

Remember that you do not own any of the glorious wonders of creation but share with others the gifts of God's creation. Let the Earth charter remind you that, in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and abundant life forms, you belong to one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your role in the universe. Thank God for the privilege of your creation as a human being and for your responsibility to care for the earth. An ancient saying from the Jewish tradition speaks of a human being as "a speck of dust and a spark of the divine". What does this saying mean to you.

How do you describe yourself? If you have a “spark of the divine” and describe yourself as “spiritual but not religious,” your prayer may include projects like planting trees, restoring prairie grasses, and making a compost heap.

Compassion – and a contemplative attitude – are the core of true spirituality.

To be re-created involves relaxation and silence. One of the first steps is to learn to sit still and keep silence which is much more difficult to do than it sounds. A sign in the kitchen of a retreat house advises, “Don’t just do something, stand there.”

Spend some time in prayer delighting in the fact that God chose to create you. Thank God for all of created life and pray that you will treat all creatures with reverence and love. Make it your goal to be as responsible as possible for the preservation of the earth and for all the people who inhabit it, now and in the future. Rejoice that you are alive!

You now may wish to turn to Part 6 of this retreat: How Do and When Do You Pray?

Part 6: How and When Do You Pray?

*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.
In all circumstances give thanks,
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

How and when do you pray?

So far in this Busy Person's Retreat you have been praying every day!

Through your prayer and reflection on how you use time you may have discovered a rhythm to help you live more attentively and loving.

You may have found the blessings of each day as part of your prayer.

You have tried to show increasing love to your family, friends, and neighbors?

Your work may have become more life-giving to yourself and to others.

You may have been delighting in the realization that God has created you and sustains you in life?

Busy as you are, during this Retreat you have been attempting to find God in your life. In this part of the Retreat you will find more specific helps for your prayer life.

Prayer is a loving attitude toward God and others. Praying is not part of living but all of living—if your mind and heart are always open to God's grace and blessing. If you realize that prayer is more than the saying of set prayers, you can pray "without ceasing."

As you know, formal vocal prayers are part of the prayer life of all people of faith. You probably learned to say vocal prayers as a child in your family. And you probably continue to pray formal prayers in your private prayer times and in community worship. The greatest of Christian prayers is the prayer Jesus taught to his disciples, the "Our Father." Regular formal prayer is an essential part of the life of all who seek to love and grow closer to God and neighbor.

What would be your answers to these questions? How and when do you pray? What is your rhythm of formal prayer during the day or during the week? Think about when and where you spend time in formal prayer.

But what about praying "without ceasing"? How is this possible? Praying without ceasing does not mean saying prayers, but rather trying to live in the presence of God no matter what else you are doing.

The apostle Paul in the passage quoted above is suggesting praying day and night, in joy and sorrow, at work and at play, without intermission or breaks. For Paul prayer is not part of his thought but all of his thought, not part of his feeling and emotions but all of them. This is radical! How can you live your life with its demands and obligations as an uninterrupted prayer? What about the endless distractions that intrude on you at all times? How can your sleep, your re-creation, your work be lifted into unceasing prayer?

A popular writer about prayer, beloved Henri Nouwen, writes, "To pray, I think, 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" (America, August 5, 1978, p.48).

St. Teresa of Avila, a great mystic and teacher of prayer who lived centuries before Henri Nouwen, speaks of prayer as a conversation with a friend who loves her, the God who loves her. For you too such prayer moves you away from your own distractions and direct all that is yours to God in simple trust and love.

Some people have the great good fortune to have a soul-friend with whom they can converse on anything that affects their life. Not everyone is so blessed, but God's love of everyone makes possible this conversation with God as a loving friend.

Take a few minutes now to talk to God about what concerns you at this moment.

Throughout this Retreat remember that God is your friend. You are always in God's presence. In the language of today's technology God's cell phone is always turned on and God knows your number! What is God saying to you right now?

Today try to be open to a dimension of reality beyond your five senses and the material world. Put your love in action remembering to respect yourself and to have a loving regard for everyone you meet. This includes having a "passion for justice" for the suffering people you hear about from TV or the newspaper.

As you watch the TV news tonight, let peace and compassion be in your heart for all those you hear about. A Buddhist practice is to extend your peace to the whole world. This is a practice worth cultivating into a habit. Instead of being angered or frustrated by what you hear, you will be living the news with compassions and peace in your heart.

The point is that prayer is a relationship, an attitude, and not a matter to time spent. In an article entitled "Wasting Time with God," (Weavings, March/April 1999) Marjorie Thompson, an ordained Presbyterian minister and spiritual director, writes: "I sometimes wonder if most of us do not live as if time spent with God in prayer were wasted energy – a superfluous exercise in an already over-exerted schedule" (p 27).

She continues with reminding her readers that petitions and intercessions have their place, of course. Didn't Jesus encourage his friends to ask for what they need? But prayer is more than an activity for Sunday morning. Rather it is an encounter and relationship with God involving listening and responding. Such prayer is a discovering and enjoying companionship with God.

As a busy person, you may say, "I don't have much time for prayer." But don't you have time, as you go about your day, to listen to God, to raise your mind and heart to God's goodness, to say thank you for blessings received? Prayer means to acknowledge God's presence in your life. When/how do you do this? These suggestions tie in with other parts of this Retreat but they relate this time to praying.

Use waiting time for God. Block out all sounds and sights around you, but include all the other people waiting in line, as you raise your heart and mind to God.

Pray in motion. While you are jogging or gardening or washing dishes, remember that God's loving presence surrounds you.

Give thanks for little blessings. As you drive to work or on errands, tell yourself the good things that have happened to you in the last 24 hours and give thanks for them.

Help the traffic. Include the drivers in the next cars as you ask God to bless them with patience and good will.

Take time to be quiet, wherever you are. In silence you can hear what's going on in the deepest part of yourself – where God is.

How has this Retreat helped you, as the retreat introduction suggests, "to get in touch with your true self" and to "find God in daily life"? Spend some quiet time on how and when you pray.

See if you agree with these words: "Prayer and life must be all of a piece" (Roberta C. Bondi, "The Paradox of Prayer," Weavings, March/April 1989. p. 13).

You now may wish to turn to Part 7 of this retreat: Where Is Your Life Journey Leading You?

Part 7: Where Is Your Life Journey Leading You?

*You will show me the path to life,
fullness of joys in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.*

(Psalm 16:11)

Think back to when you began this retreat. Did you think of your life as a journey?

What does the photo of a woman walking along a woodland path say to you? Your journeys can take many forms: a path like this one, your drive to work, a trip to a faraway place.

Your journey is also a spiritual one. Where are you right now today – on this journey? Are you at the beginning of your spiritual journey? off on a side track? stuck in one place? moving along at a good pace?

Your journey does not go in a straight line, of course. Are you familiar with these lines from T. S. Eliot's poem, Four Quartets?

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

Your life, like all human lives, is wonderfully varied. Perhaps at times your life even goes in circles!

Whether you think about this or not, your life's journey is a birth-to-death process because you live in time. You are still the same person whether you are a child, a teen-ager, a middle-aged person, a senior citizen. You are somewhere in the life process.

Your body, rather than your spirit, takes most of your attention during its years of growth in childhood and adolescence.

In middle age, your spirit continues to grow as you have more and more life experience. At this time your spiritual energy comes into balance with your physical being.

As you grow older, your spirit continues to grow and mature. It expands and expands until your body can no longer contain it. When your spirit so fills you, your spirit goes beyond your body to the wisdom of full maturity.

In which of these life stages do you find yourself? At what stage are you in your physical health and growth? Where are you in terms of spiritual energy?

The Psalmist in Psalm 139 can make you very aware of the wonder of yourself – whatever your stage in life:

*“Truly you have formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother’s womb.
I give you thanks that I am ... wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works!
My soul also you knew full well;
nor was my frame unknown to you...
How weighty are your designs, O God;
how vast the sum of them!”*

You can be aware of your physical well-being by how alert you are to the wonders of your body.

Spend a few moments being aware of your five senses. What do you see? What are you hearing? Are you aware of any smells or tastes? What can you feel by touching?

How do you feel physically right now? Do you have a sense of well being? or are you tired or hungry? Do you have any pains?

Live with this physical self for a few moments accept yourself, value yourself, maybe even rejoice in yourself! Keep in mind the stage you are in your physical life.

What about your spirit? How is it growing? Think about your life’s journey as a spiritual quest. Deep down what is your goal for your life?

What is one question you have right now about life? Keep thinking about this question. Make it your prayer for today. But don’t expect an easy answer tomorrow.

Pray for good sense and wisdom!

One of the best maps you can have for your journey to/with God is the Bible. As the Psalmist tells us, “You will show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever” (Psalm 16:11). This can be a prayer for today and every day. Following God’s path will bring you joy and delight every day, now matter what the day brings!

Pray for wisdom on your journey by pondering these scripture passages. Choose one for each of the next few days and spend a few minutes with it:

Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths (Psalm 25:4).

Lead me in the path of your commands, for in it I take delight (Psalm 119:35).

A lamp to my feet is your word, a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).

All the paths of the Lord are kindness and constancy toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees (Psalm 25:10).

He guides me in the right path for his name's sake (Psalm 23:3).

But the path of the just is like a shining light, that grows in brilliance till perfect day (Prov. 4:18).

Remember, as the saying goes, tomorrow is the rest of your life. In the journey of your life you need take only one step at a time. Be patient with yourself and don't expect to be "a shining light" too soon! Just keep walking!

This is the last part of "Busy Person's Retreat." As you continue your journey, you may find it helpful to reflect again and again on how to make each day count, how to live God's blessings, how to love others, how to find work meaningful, how to find God in creation, and how to pray.

May God continue to show you the path to life and fullness of joy in God's presence.