

# THE MONASTERY OF THE HEART



*An Invitation to a Meaningful Life*

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BlueBridge

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## A Seeker's Path



*"Your way of acting should be different from the world's way."*

The search for God  
is a very intimate enterprise.

It is at the core  
of every longing in the human heart.  
It is the search for ultimate love,  
for total belonging,  
for the meaningful life.

It is our attempt  
to live life and find it worthwhile,  
to come to see the presence of God  
under all the phantoms and shadows—  
beyond all the illusions of life—  
and find it enough.

But the search depends,  
at least in part,

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on the complex of energies within us  
that we bring to the challenges  
of this seeking.

We do not all hear the same tones  
at the same volume,  
or see the same visions  
in the same colors,  
or seek the same goods of life  
in the same way.

The search for God depends, then,  
on choosing the spiritual path  
most suited to our own spiritual  
temper and character.

For some seekers,  
it is in withdrawal from society  
or by immersion in nature  
that God is most present.

For others, the face of God  
shows most clearly  
in the face of the poor,  
or is felt most keenly  
through the support of those  
with whom they share  
a common spiritual regimen.

For many, it is a bit of both,  
a balance of community,  
contemplation,  
and commitment  
to the people of God.  
It is the search to belong  
to a group of fellow travelers  
who will hold us up  
when we fall,  
and urge us on to greater heights  
when we are afraid to strain for more.

These are the seekers who are looking for others  
who seek what they seek,  
who care about what they care about,  
and who set out with them  
to make life richer  
and the world better  
than they know they could ever do alone.

But whatever the nature  
of a seeker's lifestyle,  
the search for God  
depends, as well,  
on the spiritual maturity it takes  
to move from one level  
of spiritual insight to another—  
rather than cling to the spiritual satisfaction  
that comes with earlier,

less demanding, practices.  
The search for God depends on the desire  
to grow to full stature as a spiritual adult,  
to come to know the God  
who is as present in darkness  
as in light.

It depends on the willingness  
to let God lead us  
through the deserts of a lifetime,  
along routes we would not go,  
into the Promised Land of our own lives.

Most of all, the search for God  
depends on fidelity  
to the demands of the search itself.  
It is the constancy of commitment  
which we bring to the spiritual path  
that prepares us  
to recognize and receive  
the fullness of it.

There is, as a result,  
more than one way  
to go about the journey  
to God.

We may seek God alone,  
in the silence of our own hearts,

where our attention is centered  
in a keen and conscious way  
on developing an ear  
for the leavening penetration  
in our lives  
by the mind and Word of God.

This is an extremely private  
and individual spirituality  
that emphasizes personal prayer  
and contemplation  
of the presence of God in life.

But it is not the only way to God  
and, in fact, not the most common way.

Another kind of journey to God  
leads us to seek God with others  
in a covenantal common life,  
where by the physical joining of our lives together  
we become a daily witness  
to create in the world  
a community of strangers  
bound together by the will of God.

In our time, in a society  
that is both mobile  
and connected  
at the same time,

there is still another  
possible way to make the journey to God—  
and that is  
in a Monastery of the Heart.

Here we choose to seek God  
in step with others,  
even though not always in common with others—  
each of us on an apparently separate path  
and yet all of us in veritable community  
with one another on the way—  
as lifelines,  
as mentors,  
as guides,  
as models,  
as brothers and sisters in whose loving company  
we choose to make our common journey to God.

The Rule of Benedict recognizes  
the major differences among seekers' paths  
and alerts us as well to the subtle distinctions  
among them,  
so that we can begin our own spiritual journey  
aware of the complex character of each separate lifestyle,  
and prepared to bring our selves to the way best suited  
to the enterprise for us.

Going the road alone, for instance—  
developing a solitary spiritual discipline—

is a rare but well-worn tradition  
of spiritual figures both known and unknown.

Those who go this road to God,  
Benedict tells us,  
have come to a point in the spiritual life where,  
already well-formed in a proven and established  
monastic tradition,  
they move beyond the structures which maintain it  
in order to go deeply  
into the struggle with the self—  
both physically and mentally—  
that comes with solitude.

These seekers, Benedict says,  
“Have passed beyond the first fervor of monastic life . . .  
They have built up their strength  
and go to the single combat of the desert.  
Self-reliant now,  
they are ready with God's help  
to grapple single-handed . . .”

Theirs is the path that strips away  
the common supports of life—  
the companionship of a partner,  
the counsel of others,  
the strength of a community,  
the traditions of the group—  
and throws them on the designs of the Spirit

and deep, deep concentration  
on God  
alone.

These seekers  
feel the impulse of the God within.  
They give their lives  
to the God who beckons them inward,  
sure that the One who calls them  
to such a life  
will also guide them through it—  
alone but not lonely.

The major concern with this lifestyle  
is the human tendency to turn in  
on ourselves  
and to forget our obligation  
to build up the entire  
human community.  
“Whose feet,” St. Basil asks,  
“will the hermit wash?”

In its stead, Benedict says simply,  
are those who  
live immersed in a community,  
accountable to its standards,  
cemented in its values,  
and responsible for making  
the human community

ever more human,  
always more of a community.

In whichever of the lifestyles we find ourselves—  
the spiritually solitary of any stage of life,  
the intentional living groups of every size,  
the networks of similarly committed individuals  
whose community life  
is stable but not necessarily daily—  
we are on tried and true pathways to God.

We are all seekers of the God  
who is here  
but invisible to the blind eye;  
who calls to us  
but is unheard by those who do not listen;  
who touches our lives wherever we are,  
but is unfelt  
by those whose hearts  
are closed to the presence of God—  
who is everywhere,  
in everyone,  
at all times.

When we seek  
to wed all three lifestyles in our own time—  
solitary,  
intentional,  
and communal—

we seek to be  
in a Monastery of the Heart.

Then our Rule is this one.  
Our spiritual guide is the Word of God.  
Our formative community  
is with those of one heart with whom  
we join on this way  
in a Monastery of the Heart—  
to find the God who emerges  
with inexorable fidelity  
in human form.

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## A Single Vision



*“Perform the Opus Dei where you are . . .  
Those on a journey are not to omit the prescribed hours but to  
observe them as best they can.”*

The Benedictine Rule  
is based on the notion  
that community life  
is the preeminent form  
of the spiritual journey,  
because it provides for  
immersion in communal worship,  
private contemplation,  
shared wisdom,  
common ownership,  
and mutual service.

But community life,  
life in concert