

# Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear Friends ~ *To everything there is a season*—a time to work and a time to play, a time to strive and a time to rest, a time to set one’s “eyes on the prize” and a time to pause and notice the wildflowers and others along the way. In our culture, achievement and productivity are valued as the benchmarks of success. If the answer to the question, “What do you do?” cannot be summed up in a job title or a listing of accomplishments, you are left feeling somehow hollow or having been dismissed as insignificant. Yet one can be just as negligent or distracted or untransformed in the busyness of work as in mundane pursuits or the ordinary activities of daily life. If the magic of music lies partly in the silent spaces between notes, the gift of grace may lie in the Sabbath moments between long hours of work and activity. Perhaps the way to find balance in this frenetic, compulsive culture is to perceive our lives not as straining to keep up with the tyranny of the marching drumbeat but attuning ourselves to the rhythm of the heartbeat—to focus not so much on making a living as composing a life and finding joy in its unfolding.



To the Native American, song is the breath of the spirit that consecrates each act of life.

~ Natalie Curtis

We thought of life by analogy with a journey, with a pilgrimage, which had a serious purpose at that end, and the thing was to get to that thing at that end. Success, or whatever it is, or maybe heaven after you’re dead.

But we missed the point the whole way along.

It was a musical thing, and you were supposed to sing or to dance while the music was being played.

~ Alan Watts

The interior place where we experience God is the same kind of place, and as real, as the place where we experience music and poetry.

~ Karen Armstrong



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The sacred is not in heaven or far away. It is all around us, and small human rituals can connect us to its presence.

~ Alma Luz Villanueva



Most people mistakenly believe that all you have to do to stop working is not work. The inventors of the Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking. You cannot downshift casually and easily. This is why the Puritan and Jewish Sabbaths were so exactly intentional. The rules did not exist to torture the faithful. They were meant to communicate the insight that interrupting the ceaseless round of striving requires a surprisingly strenuous act of will, one that has to be bolstered by habit as well as by social sanction.

~ Judith Shulevitz



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Too easily are we inclined to imagine that God created this world for a purpose. We are so caught up in purpose that we would feel more comfortable if God shared our preoccupation with work. But God plays. The birds in a single tree are sufficient proof that God did not set out with a divine no-nonsense attitude to make a creature that would perfectly achieve the purpose of a bird. What could that purpose be I wonder? There are titmice, juncos, and chickadees; woodpeckers, gold finches, starlings and crows. The only bird God never created is the no-nonsense bird. As we open our eyes and hearts to God's creation, we quickly perceive that God is playful, a God of leisure.

~ from *GRATEFULNESS, THE HEART OF PRAYER* by Br. David Steindl-Rast

Each age has its own task... Our hermitage is the act of living with attention in the midst of things: amid the rhythms of work, and love, the bath with the child, the endlessly growing paperwork, the ever-present likelihood of war, the necessity for taking action to help the world. For us, a good spiritual life is permeable and robust. It faces things squarely, knowing the smallest moments are all we have, and that even the smallest moment is full of happiness.

~ from *THE LIGHT INSIDE THE DARK* by John Tarrant

In our culture we are trained to be doers and makers, not dreamers and seers. So I make an appeal for "holy leisure," a leisure that makes us more human. Holy leisure involves contemplation... the personal pursuit of meaning. Leisure allows for the contemplation that will bring meaning and energy to our lives and room within ourselves for holy reading, gentle awareness, and deep reflection.

~ Keith Snow

Elected silence, sing to me  
and beat upon my whorled ear,  
pipe me to pastures still and be  
the music | care to hear.

~ Gerald Manley Hopkins

I sense Lizzie's presence beckoning me away from the only socially acceptable addiction of our time: workaholicism. She asks me to stop and look at what I am doing, at why I am so busy, at who I am and what it is that keeps me so mindlessly driven and competitive. It is not hard work that she questions, for she knows all too well the value of

labor, but she invites me into awareness and honest self-scrutiny. Perhaps it is because I have chosen to live with a divided heart that the idolatry of being busy has claimed me. Perhaps it is Lizzie's faithful attention to what matters most – her focused, un-fussy attentiveness – that makes me think of her as I ponder the meaning of singleness of heart.

~ Elizabeth J. Canham in "Grandmother Wisdom," *Weavings*, Mar/Apr, 2003

Hard work and drawing up plans are helpful, but not always. We do not build our souls as much as we find them along the way. We discover them by accident as much as by intention. There is a time to take our lives in hand, but there is also a time to take our hands off our lives, and to leave what seems apparent and trust ourselves to the hidden.

~ from *ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE* by Marv and Nancy Hiles

Mystery is what happens to us when we allow life to evolve rather than having to make it happen all the time... There is something holy -making about simply presuming that what happens to us in any given day is sent to awaken our souls to something new: another smell, a different taste, a moment when we allow ourselves to lock eyes with a stranger, to smile a bit, to nod our heads in greeting.

~ from *THE GIFT OF YEARS* by Joan Chittister



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Journeys bring power and love back into you. If you can't go somewhere, move in the passageways of the self. They are like shafts of light, always changing and you change when you explore them.

~ Rumi