

# THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTIONS

WRITTEN BY SKIP DOYLE



The only purpose of this instruction is that there should be love, coming out of a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a sincere faith.

1 Timothy 1:5

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From the prophet Amos:

*See what days are coming – a famine not of bread,  
a drought not of water,  
but of hearing the word of God.  
They will stagger from sea to sea,  
wander from north to east,  
seeking the word of God...*

The prophet Jeremiah writes:

*Put yourselves at the crossroads,  
look and ask about the ancient paths:  
which is the good way?  
Take it then, walk upon it  
and you shall find rest.*

These passages are followed by the prophet Baruch:

*Had you walked in the way of God,  
you would have lived in peace for ever.  
Learn where knowledge is,  
where strength,  
where understanding,  
and so learn where length of days is,  
where life,  
where the light of the eyes,  
and where peace.*

And from the prophet Micah:

*This is what God asks of you:  
Only this – to act justly, to love tenderly,  
And to walk humbly with your God.*

Your holy path of peace and joy awaits – merely for the looking, the asking, the learning, and going out into the world and walking with the Spirit in the way of God.

*Skip Doyle*

# The Greatest Commandment

In biblical times, Jewish religious laws were so numerous and complex that only some priests and religious lawyers could fully adhere to that religion. In modern times, dogma and catechism seem equally obtuse so that we need a cadre of theologians and catechists to interpret and instruct.

In the synoptic gospels, each of the evangelists are diligent in recording how Jesus culls from the Law (the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible) and the Prophets (recorded in later Old Testament books) that which is most important. First, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5-7 <sup>[1]</sup>, Mark 12:30-33 <sup>[2]</sup>, Matthew 22:37-38 <sup>[3]</sup>, Luke 10:27-28 <sup>[4]</sup>). Second, “You must love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18 <sup>[5]</sup>, Mark 12:31 <sup>[6]</sup>, Matthew 22:39 <sup>[7]</sup>, Luke 10:28 <sup>[8]</sup>). These greatest commandments are echoed in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1:30 <sup>[9]</sup>): “God has made you members of Christ Jesus and by God’s doing he has become our wisdom (mind), and our virtue (heart), and our holiness (soul), and our freedom (strength).” and in chapter 14 verse 15 “pray not only with the spirit, but the mind as well” <sup>[10]</sup> and also in Galatians (5:14)

“the whole of the Law is summarized in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself.” This simplicity of faith is repeated in John’s letter (1 John 3:23-24), “His commandments are these: that we believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and that we love one another as he told us to. Whoever keeps his commandments lives in God and God lives in him.” These scripture passages are reflected in the Prayer of Saint Benedict <sup>[11]</sup> of this 6<sup>th</sup> century founder of western monasticism: “I pledge myself to do your will in all things: To love the Lord God with all my heart, all my soul, all my strength... Not to do to another what I would not wish done to myself.”



**Chinese depiction of  
Jesus and the rich man**

In the gospels, each of the evangelists couple with the key commandments above, instruction on how to pray (Mark 11:22-25 <sup>[12]</sup>, Matthew 7:7-9 <sup>[13]</sup>, Luke 11:1-13 <sup>[14]</sup>). American Indians, conscious of our place in nature, took the time to pray toward each of the four directions. As a prayer practice, today, as you go from place to place, pray towards each direction (Mark 13:27 <sup>[15]</sup>,

Matthew 24:27 <sup>[16]</sup>). To the east, pray with your soul releasing fear whether mild as worry and anxiety or severe as terror (Matthew 6:25 <sup>[17]</sup>), and replace that with faith in God's will and acceptance. To the south, pray bodily with your strength (Ephesians 6:10 <sup>[18]</sup>), releasing anger whether mild as irritation and frustration or severe as fury (Matthew 5:22-25 <sup>[19]</sup>), and replace that with gratitude for your health of body and mind and the abundant blessings in this day you are living. To the west, pray with your heart releasing jealousy (Matthew 9:13 <sup>[20]</sup>): cease to covet what others have and let go of the indignation of others having what they do not deserve. Replace that with compassion – even affection – for those you envy and also those you do not envy. To the north, pray with your mind (1 Corinthians 14:15 <sup>[21]</sup>). Release self-doubt (Mark 11:24 <sup>[22]</sup>). Replace that with awareness – of your capabilities, of your surroundings with all your senses, of honoring the divinity within you. Dispelling fear, anger, jealousy, self-doubt – nothing more is needed. Practicing faithful acceptance, gratitude for our blessings, compassion and affection, awareness of reality and truth – nothing less is needed.

❖ The root of each of these four obstructions – fear, anger, jealousy, self-doubt – is being judgmental. Today, be nonjudgmental. The source of each virtue – faith, gratitude, compassion, awareness – is love: love of God, love of life, love of others, and love of self. Today, practice each occasion of love.



## The Spiritual Directions

In scholarly Jesuit tradition, Saint Ignatius brought discipline to prayer with the *Spiritual Exercises*. In keeping with the Franciscan tradition of harmony with the divinity of creation, *Bodily Prayer* attunes us to nature. To pray bodily, our corpus should be exposed to the nature of creation and connected to the earth. And with some mode of mortification: on a hiking trail, or swimming across a lake, or a brisk constitutional through a park, or even a winter walk on a golf course. (If you are sitting in a chair indoors, you are reading the spiritual directions, not exercising them.)

### **Prelude to Prayer: Becoming acclimated.**



**Sermon on The Mount – 1656 – Claude Lorrain**

## **1: Become in-tune with your body.**

Body awareness is integral to *Bodily Prayers*. As you begin your prayer on this day, what is your energy level? Have you eaten? Drank sufficient fluids? Well rested? Been ill or injured recently? Is anything preoccupying your mind? All of these affect how your body is today – and effect the degree of mortification that is appropriate to your body today: the pace, the terrain, the duration of time in the elements. What clothing have you worn today to regulate your temperature; when should you layer off? On a scale of 1 to 10, what is your gestalt health and disposition today? Become bodily and emotionally aware of who you are today – who you are this very hour. Listen to your body; it is talking to you.

## **2: Become aware of your surroundings.**

Where are you praying with your body today? What is the weather like – temperature, humidity, breezy, sunshine, cloud coverage, type of precipitation? What is the environment like – terrain, quiet-level, fellow creatures, vegetation. What colors are there? What aromas?

What makes this season this season? What makes this month this month? What makes this day this day?

## **The first Meditation: Praying with your soul.**



**The Annunciation - 1898 – Henry Tanner**

### **3: Pray towards the East**

What is significant in the east? The sunrise... the ocean... a trip you took to Europe... the Holy Land. Open your mind... open your recollection... open your intentions to what is important to you in the east.

Now, without any planning or analysis, simply Zen-fully be with the east.

Spring is the season of the east; what is spring?



#### **4: Pray with your soul**

Pray to God with your soul. What is our soul? That takes a lifetime and longer to discover. At its core is how we communicate with God at a very connected level. Simply pray inexplicably with your soul, and allow God to be with you – and without distraction allow the grace of God to let you be in Him.

This is the first Immeasurable: May all beings never be separated from the Supreme Joy that is beyond all sorrow.

The element of the soul is air. In Hebrew, the one word *ruah* means both breath and spirit. Thus with our breath we pray with our soul.

The creature of the soul is the eagle (Ezekiel 1:10 [23]).

#### **5: Release fear**

Fear impedes us from loving God with our soul. Fear in all its forms. Fear that is mild as worry or concern or anxiety distracts and preoccupies us. Fear as severe as terror immobilizes us. Think about what fears you face today... this week... in your life.

This is His promise: *“Thus he remembers his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham that he would grant us free from fear...”* (Luke 1:72-74).

The symptom of fear and anxiety is worry. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus exhorts us: “I am telling you not to worry about your life... surely life means more than food, and the body more than

clothing! Can any of you for all your worrying add one single cubit to your span of life? Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself.”

Fear manifests itself in our throat – even gasping when it takes us by surprise. As you itemize your fears, place your hands to your throat, and with a great exhale, release each fear.

## **6: Surrender to acceptance**

The antidote to fear is acceptance. Allow yourself to accept whatever has come your way today. As soon as you surrender to acceptance, feel that peace that fills the void of those fears you have dispelled. Acceptance is central to our faith: do you trust God enough to be certain that He cares for you? Do you wish to do His will? Is the motto “In God We Trust” your currency?

When on a retreat, one of the participants said to me, “I am not going to elaborate, but acceptance does not mean giving up.” In fact, no elaboration was necessary. As Saint Augustine says: pray as if everything depends upon God, and act as if everything depends upon you. So do fully live your life with all its challenges, but in every outcome, have faith in God that everything is working out, having the patience to understand in hindsight how it has.

## **The second Meditation: Praying with your strength.**



**The Healing of Ten Lepers (Guérison de dix lépreux) –  
1890 – James Tissot**

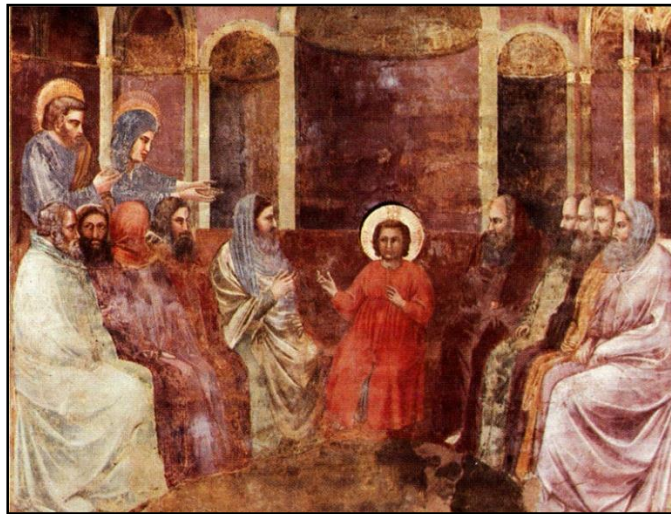
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## **The third Meditation: Praying with your heart.**



**Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus**

## **The fourth Meditation: praying with your mind.**



**Christ Among the Doctors - 1305 - Giotto di Bondone**

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## **The fifth Meditation: reflections.**

What do each of the impediments – fear, anger, jealousy, self-doubt – have in common?

What do each of the virtues – acceptance, gratitude, compassion, awareness – have in common?

How have you changed during this meditation – body and disposition?