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FEATURED SELECTION

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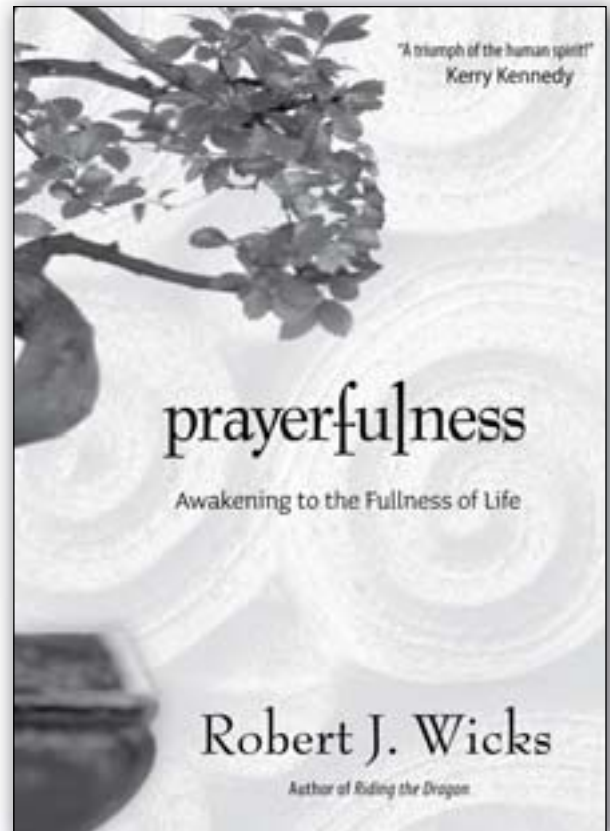
PRAYERFULNESS

Awakening to the Fullness of Life

Robert J. Wicks

Blending insights from Christian contemplative practice and contemporary psychology, Dr. Robert J. Wicks—well-known speaker, therapist, and spiritual guide—introduces what he calls “prayerfulness,” a way of being truly in the present to experience God and life in dynamic new ways. Wicks offers a rich array of insights including seven practical steps, a thirty-day retreat, and a Spiritual Mindfulness Questionnaire. This creative combination of ancient wisdom and contemporary psychology is designed to help readers develop a loving, clear, and spiritually balanced outlook.

ISBN: 9781933495200 / 192 pages, hardcover / \$20.00



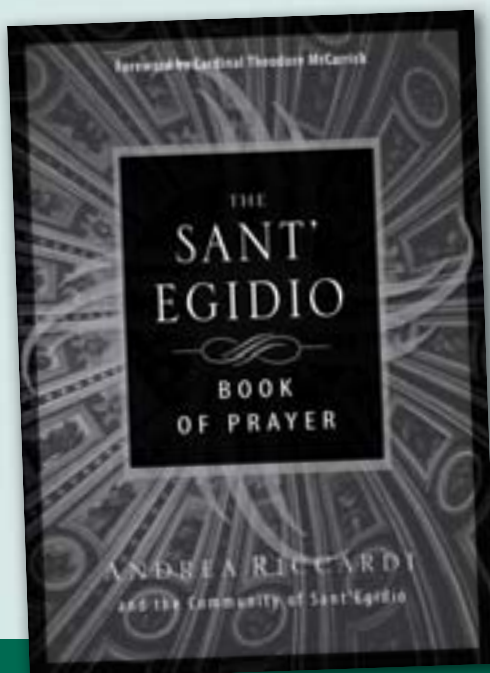
A PREVIEW OF THE OCTOBER 2009 SELECTION

THE SANT'EGIDIO BOOK OF PRAYER

Andrea Riccardi and the Community of Sant'Egidio

The Community of Sant'Egidio is internationally known for its work in justice and peacemaking, and is a growing phenomenon in the United States. *The Sant'Egidio Book of Prayer* invites readers into the community's spiritual life and into solidarity with its mission of prayer, service, and peacemaking.

ISBN: 9781594712067 / 212 pages / \$14.95





DANCING WITH INTIMACY, DANCING FOR GOD

A Midwestern college adopted a new ad slogan: “Follow your Passion.” It appears on buses that travel through a major metropolitan city and on those that drive into classically designed suburbs with hundred-year-old trees and manicured lawns. For each person who reads the sign, the message means something different.

The message beckons the traveler: listen to your inner rumblings and embark on the journey. In much the same way, God’s message for his people is both universal and specific: follow me; do my will; and receive eternal life. Proclaim a resounding eternal yes!

Author Annie Dillard puts it another way: “Make connections; let rip; and dance where you can.” But where do we dance and to what rhythm? The melodies of the lullaby, the cha-cha, and the jazz riff occasionally get lost through the static of anxiety, worry, and numbing daily habits.

In this month’s selection, *Prayerfulness: Awakening to the Fullness of Life*, Robert Wicks makes his own suggestion: “Lean back into the now.” Wicks calls us to rest in the comfort that God has a plan for us. But we must listen attentively, be present in every moment—whatever it brings—and know that it is a part of God’s plan. Live in the present. It’s an easy concept to comprehend, but a difficult one to practice, especially in our modern culture. Hundreds of television programs, thousands of radio stations, and personal hand-held devices all seek our attention at any given moment.

The key to being present, to mindfulness, Wicks believes, is in prayerfulness. By making ritual a part of each and every day, we practice the prayerfulness that can sustain us through both ordinary and extraordinary days—days filled with joy or boredom or extreme pain. Wicks suggests that, like an athlete, the mindful person should purposely establish a routine of prayerfulness. But prayerfulness is more than the act of praying in the present; it encompasses a state of being.

In order to live in the present, to be present, we must live in the moment. God gives us a multitude of opportunities to live fully; to grow and change; to be exposed to new experiences—smiling at a stranger, taking a new route, tasting a new cuisine, or accepting a child’s invitation to play. Dillard, who penned her masterpiece, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, in self-imposed isolation, writes, “Catch it if you can. The present is an invisible electron; its lightning path traced faintly on a blackened screen is fleet, and fleeing, and gone.” Each moment is God’s gift.

Complete mindfulness leads to a surrendering of self: to the moment, to prayer, to spiritual intimacy, to God’s will. The word “intimate,” like the word “passion,” has taken on a common meaning, yet, by definition, it is so much more. As an adjective, the word means “marked by close acquaintance, indicative of one’s deepest nature, essential, innermost.” A perhaps less frequently used form of “intimate” is as a transitive verb, but it’s meaning is even more significant: “to communicate with a hint or other indirect sign; imply subtly; or to announce; proclaim; make known.”

God offers his intimate presence in all things. Take for example the miracle of the mockingbird. When she descends, she falls straight down at thirty feet per second, and at the moment when doom seems imminent, she halts her decent and drops to earth like a hang glider on a windless day. The divine order of things is everywhere.

Precisely in the present, in the moment, we encounter God. The woman at the well in John 4 was a Samaritan who was making what was probably a daily trip for water. When she saw that Jesus was a Jew, she could have delayed her arrival at the well (Jews and Samaritans did not mingle). She could have gone about her routine, politely acknowledging his presence with a nod but without a word. Instead, she stepped out of her rut. She let Jesus draw her into conversation. To her surprise, he told her of her life and of her life-giver. And *in* her surprise, she became present, and open to God’s presence.

Lean back into the now, *Prayerfulness* urges, for in the present, we hear God’s voice.

Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999). (Original edition published in 1974.)

READER'S GROUP GUIDE

FOR GROUP ENRICHMENT

Throughout *Prayerfulness: Awakening to the Fullness of Life*, Robert Wicks uses poignant stories to illustrate the power of centered, deliberate meditation through life's trials and joys. In the final third of the book, he outlines a prayerful 30-day retreat.

Members of a reading group can record their experiences as they walk through the retreat, asking themselves some of the same questions that led the people in the book to greater clarity. When meeting in person or online, the group can share these writings. A group leader can begin the discussion with the following questions:

- What surprises has God put in your life?

- How does spontaneity lead us to greater union with God?
- When has God given you an unexpected break or a time to heal?
- What would you do if you had an unexpected day off? A week? A year?
- Who are the spiritual guides who speak most clearly to you?

Because of the nature of the retreat, the discussion may lead to greater intimacy among the group members. To honor the sacredness of this sharing, conclude the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving. The prayer can be spontaneous or borrowed, such as the one below.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

By Walter Rauschenbusch

O God, we thank you for this earth, our home;
For the wide sky and the blessed sun,
For the salt sea and the running water,
For the everlasting hills
And the never-resting winds,
For trees and the common grass underfoot.
We thank you for our senses
By which we hear the songs of birds,
And see the splendor of the summer fields,
And taste of the autumn fruits,
And rejoice in the feel of the snow,
And smell the breath of the spring.
Grant us a heart wide open to all this beauty;
And save our souls from being so blind
That we pass unseeing
When even the common thorn bush
Is aflame with your glory,
O God our creator,
Who lives and reigns forever and ever.

From *Living God's Justice: Reflections and Prayers*, compiled by The Roundtable Association of Diocesan Social Action Directors.



FOR INDIVIDUAL ENRICHMENT

In *Prayerfulness: Awakening to the Fullness of Life*, Robert Wicks encourages readers to awaken to the present. He writes, “Prayerfulness is the openness to let life get ‘into your bones, under your skin.’” Set aside time for a leisurely meal—either one prepared at home or at a nearby restaurant.

As you sit in front of the food, focus on the moment. What do you smell? Does the aroma of the food fill your nostrils? Or does the delicate scent of flowers or a candle tickle your nose? Is the air heavy or light?

Eat like a chef, paying attention to nuanced flavors. What are the distinct spices you taste? Is the food sweet, savory, bitter, sour, or a combination? How do the flavors blend together? How does the texture feel in your mouth?

Listen like a conductor. What are the specific sounds around you? How do the sounds impact the pulse of the place? If there is music in the air, what are the individual instruments that you hear? What are the musical sections? How do the sounds meld?

Observe objects like a photographer, seeing color, composition and light. What are the interesting shapes around you? Do you see interesting faces? How does light fall on the objects around you?

Through spiritual mindfulness, we become open to God’s surprises. Awareness is the first step to gratitude. After the occasion, write your experiences in a journal. Later, use this journal entry to reflect and focus on prayer.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST



THE MERTON INSTITUTE

www.mertoninstitute.org

Prayerfulness and meditation come with discipline and practice. The Merton Institute was established to awaken and encourage contemplative living. This website offers information about the life of Thomas Merton, suggested readings, and a schedule of retreats.



PRACTICE GOD’S PRESENCE

www.practicegodspresence.com

Practice God’s Presence delivers daily reflections that help the viewer heighten his or her awareness of God in the world. It also provides hymns that the viewer can listen to online, as well as an opportunity to receive the organization’s newsletter.



ANNIE DILLARD’S ARTWORK

www.anniedillard.com/drawings-paintings.html

Annie Dillard, author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, also uses her keen powers of observation to create paintings. The well-traveled writer gives viewers an opportunity to see her world as she sees it.

MORE RESOURCES FROM ROBERT WICKS



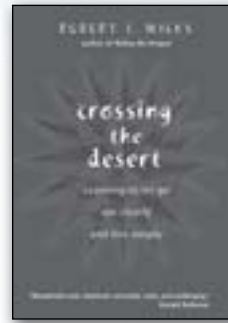
RIDING THE DRAGON *10 Lessons for Inner Strength in Challenging Times*

In this warm, compassionate, and highly personal guidebook, Wicks offers encouragement and 10 lessons to help people engage their problems and grow through them.

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CROSSING THE DESERT *Learning to Let Go, See Clearly, and Live Simply*

In *Crossing the Desert*, Dr. Wicks uses the wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers to guide readers toward humility and freedom and presents them with four desert questions that will lead them to take steps to inner freedom.

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SALE!

SIMPLE CHANGES

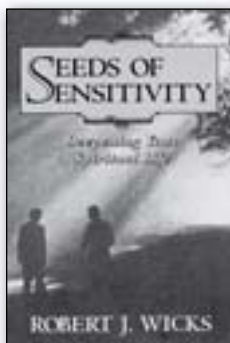
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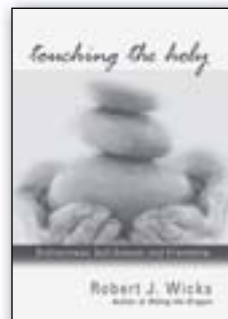
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Everyday Simplicity shows readers that a solid spiritual life is within everyone's reach—no matter how busy they are.

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