

SPIRITUAL BOOK NEWS

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APRIL 2007 SELECTION



CHASING JOY

*MUSINGS ON LIFE IN A
BITTERSWEET WORLD*

Edward Hays

There are few people who consistently give us both depth and breadth—while never closing that clever and humorous edge as does Ed Hays.

RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M.

Center for Action and Contemplation

Edward Hays, a spiritual guide for thousands of spiritual seekers of all faiths around the globe, challenges readers to dig through life's miseries and darkest pains to discover the goodness God continues to promise. Hays uses common joys and struggles of ordinary lives, blending them with some of the great wisdom and traditions of our world to lead readers on the chase to discovering joyful living as God intended.

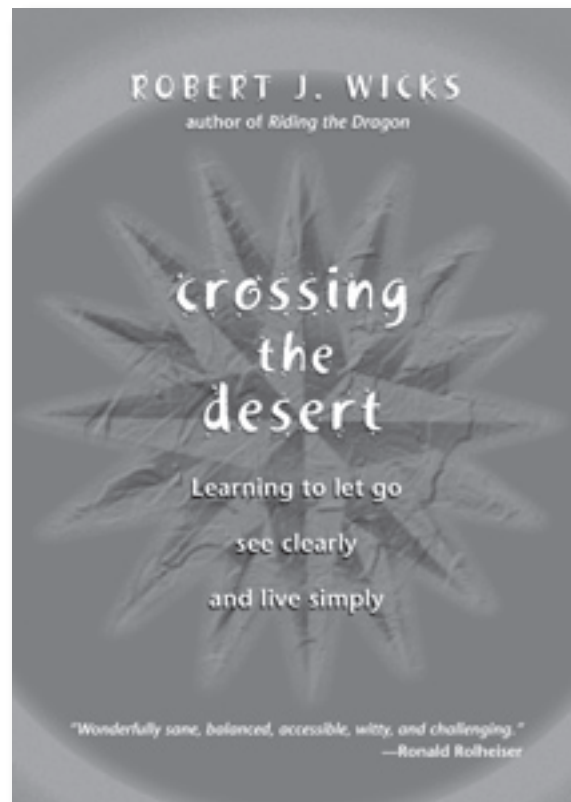
ISBN: 9780939516780 / 192 pages / \$12.95

FEATURED SELECTION

*Only after the desert has done its work in us can an angel come to strengthen us. **Crossing the Desert** tells us why we need the desert in our lives and what kind of angels only the desert can bring. This is Robert Wicks at his best: wonderfully sane, balanced, accessible, witty, and challenging. Mysticism for those who are frightened of that term.*

RONALD ROLHEISER, O.M.I.

Author of *The Holy Longing*



CROSSING THE DESERT

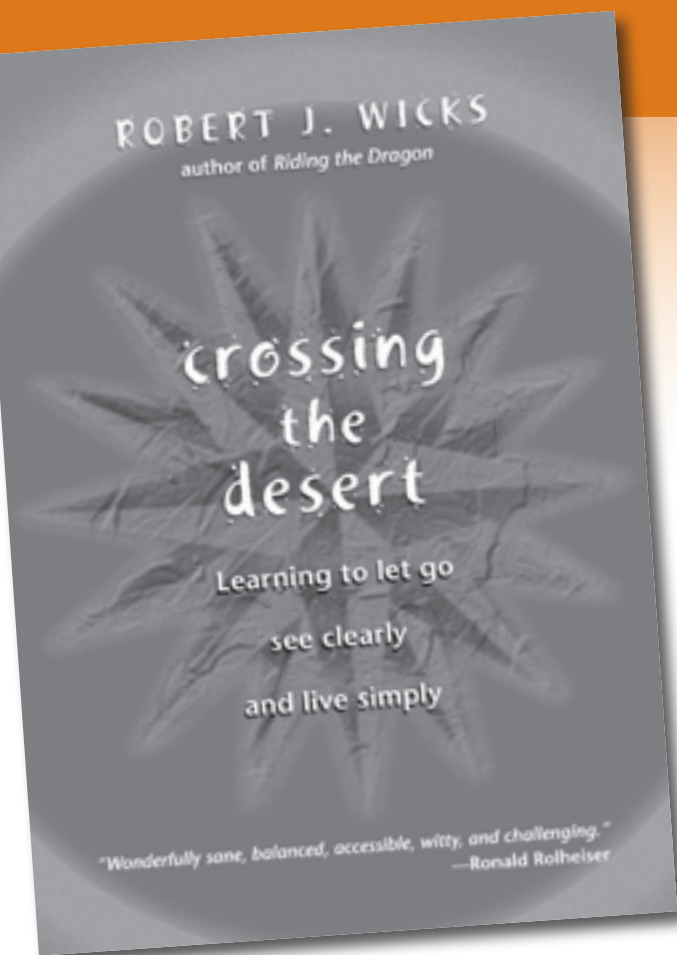
*Learning to Let Go, See Clearly,
and Live Simply*

Robert J. Wicks

Noted psychologist Dr. Robert J. Wicks explores the early Christian monastic movement of the Desert Fathers and Mothers through a psychological lens, using their wisdom to guide readers toward humility and freedom.

ISBN: 9781933495088 / 192 pages / \$18.95





CROSSING THE DESERT

Learning to Let Go, See Clearly, and Live Simply
Robert J. Wicks

Popular culture posits that the desert is a place to be avoided. It is a wasteland, with nothing to offer us. Few creatures live in the desert, and mere survival is considered a success. Robert J. Wicks, drawing on the wisdom of the desert fathers and mothers of old, shows us that the metaphorical desert can offer us keys to a deeper, more fulfilling life.

To avoid being merely a mass of information and undigested experiences, we need focused reflection. Reflection then leads to action and by grace to transformation of the entire self. God loves us in our brokenness. If we receive grace, it transforms our vulnerabilities and brokenness, allowing us to be both fully ourselves and open to others. Authentic prayer life and spiritual direction guide us on this journey in which we can not remain passive. *Crossing the Desert* is not an informational treatise, it is a manual to be lived and practiced.

WHEREVER TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED... SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP USE

Last month's selection, *A Book of Hours* by Thomas Merton was well suited for use by a group for communal prayer. This month's selection delves into the individuals' journey through the metaphorical desert in search of wisdom. Robert J. Wicks discusses the importance of involving others in our journey (see Chapter 4 "Listen to Friends" and Chapter 8 "Become a Desert Apprentice"). Those in your faith-sharing group may be some of the voices he writes about or

they may not, but they can offer encouragement and challenges for this journey. A group can support an individual entering the desert in search of freedom and authenticity.

Use the *Questions for Discussion and Reflection* as you see fit, either in your faith-sharing group, in your personal journaling, or with your spouse. Groups should not neglect their use in journaling; a journal can be a useful tool for those in groups as well as for those read-

ing on their own. Group leaders should have these questions or others ready for group discussion and sharing of individual journeys through the desert. All are encouraged to pose their own questions of themselves and others to make the discussion more meaningful. Deeper faith is always a goal of faith sharing groups—let it be your guide for discussion.

Mark or jot down sayings and stories that speak to you in a special way. Share them with your group.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Ordinariness—the humility of the desert; the desire to be fully oneself, and nothing more.

Passion—sense of commitment, faithfulness, and appreciation of the gift of life, fired by a spiritual sense of awe for what life can be when it is touched by

courage, openness, and gratitude for all that we have been given.

Humility—the ability to fully appreciate our innate gifts and our current "growing edges" in ways that enable us to learn, act, and flow with our lives as never before.

Freedom—transparent, not held captive by worldly values, anxieties, or fears.

Detachment—release of a dependence on created things, people and false ideas of self that allows us to see ourselves with unemotional eyes; see quote on pg. 93.

READER'S GROUP GUIDE

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

CHAPTER 1 — LET THE DESERT TEACH YOU

- There are excellent questions within the text, particularly in Chapter 6. There are also instructions for practicing the wisdom contained in this volume toward the end of the book. These should be your guide to interact with the text and to act.
- What images does the desert bring to mind for you?
- In your journal, jot down the sayings that struck a chord with you. Return to them periodically in your meditation.
- The book is filled not only with sayings but also with personal stories. Our stories have power. Which stories did you find more powerful? Most challenging? Most comforting?
- What does ordinariness mean? How does Wicks use it (see page 24)? Does his usage differ from your use?

CHAPTER 2 — SEEK WHAT IS ESSENTIAL

- How has someone in my life lovingly challenged me in a way that helped me to grow? How did I see such challenges? Do I receive them in the spirit in which they were and are intended, or do I see them as merely negative criticism?
- What practices enable me to make room for creative and generous pursuits?
- Difficulties face us in the pursuit of a full life. What externally stands in my way? What internally stands in my way?
- How has my opinion of what is essential changed over the years?

CHAPTER 3 — ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATES

- The psycho-spiritual gates—passion, knowledge, and humility—guide us on the road to self-knowing.
- How do I understand humility? What was I taught about being humble, and does that encumber me on this journey?
- Wicks talks about channeling our energy into living fully the life we have been given (p. 52), while societal messages demand that we make our lives a success. What strategies help us block out the hurtful messages of the world while still living in it?

CHAPTER 4 — LISTEN TO FRIENDS

- Most of us naturally turn to close friends or family when wrestling with major life decisions. Wicks puts these friends or voices into four categories—prophet, cheerleader, teaser, and wise companion or soul friend.
- Who are serving these roles for you at this point in your life? How did they come to speak these voices for you, i.e. did you seek them out?
- Have others played these roles at different points on your faith journey? How do such people enter and leave your life in these roles? When do you know you need a different voice in your life?

CHAPTER 5 — BE GRATEFUL

- How do we cultivate gratitude? What practices can make gratitude a habit for even a pessimistic person?
- Do I act or refuse to act out of fear? Am I afraid of not having enough or being enough?



CHAPTER 6 — ASK THE FOUR DESERT QUESTIONS

- Question 1: How do I know I am bound? What roles do the voices in my life play in exposing my bonds?

Does this mean changing how I see myself? Do I need to fight against negative tendencies or self-image to do so?

- Question 2: What prevents me from letting go?

Think of an area in your life that is free and flowing. How did you come to that point? What did you have to let go of in order to be this way? How does this inform your journey of letting go in other

areas that are not so free?

What traps do I fall into—blame, self-hatred or self-blame, desperation, anger, hurt, fear, lack of trust, lack of humility, or perfection? Once I have identified my particular traps and resistances, I must find ways to attack them (see “Increasing Sensitivity to Resistances to Change...and Outflanking Them” in Chapter 4).

- Question 3: How do I empty myself?

Wicks writes that “Accomplishment is not the goal, faithfulness is.” Given the

cultural value placed on achievement, even in a religious environment, how do we cultivate a culture of fidelity instead of accomplishment?

In the last Readers Guide and selection, *A Book of Hours*, we read about the key role of silence and solitude for Thomas Merton. What connections do you make between the two books that helps you in this desert journey?

- Question 4: What will satisfy me yet leave me open for more?

CHAPTER 7 — FEED YOUR SOUL

- How do I currently feed my soul? What else would I add to the list at the beginning of Chapter Seven?

- Do I think all of these ways of nurturing the soul are necessary for me? Are some more important to me than others? Why?

- Wicks writes of the dangers to the spiritual life. What are my personal pitfalls? Do I recognize them?

- Think of a time when you were suffering from burnout. What was it like for you to be in that place? What did you learn from your reflection of that

experience? How did you view your life at that time, and how did others view it? What role do you think perception played in your burnout?

- What goals do I chase? Are goals bad?

CHAPTER 8 — BECOME A DESERT APPRENTICE

- Wicks stresses throughout this chapter the necessity of action for change; desire, discussion, and thought are not enough. What happens to us when we act? What happens when we read books about prayer compared to when we spend time in prayer?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ROBERT J. WICKS strives to open people who are used to giving to the miracle of receiving. He accomplishes this goal by marrying sound psychology and basic spiritual truths that set the stage for profound personal transformation. A popular presenter at workshops and conventions, Wicks is especially appealing to people in the helping professions—physicians, teachers, psychologists and ministers—assisting them to integrate the psychological and the spiritual so people can extend their emotional flames to others without burning out in the process.” He has worked around the globe — from the psychological debriefing of relief workers evacuated to the United States from Rwanda to conducting workshops in Cambodia for members of the international community assigned to help the Khmer people rebuild their nation.

Wicks has written more than 30 books, including *Touching the Holy: Ordinariness, Self-Esteem, and Friendship*; *Seeds of Sensitivity: Deepening Your Spiritual Life*; *After 50: Spiritually Embracing Your Own Wisdom Years*; and *Sharing Wisdom*. He serves as a professor and chairperson of the graduate programs in pastoral counseling at Loyola College, Baltimore. Wicks, a Queens, New York native, received a master’s in clinical psychology in 1973 from St. John’s University and a doctorate in psychology from Philadelphia’s Hahnemann Medical College in 1977. In 1996, Pope John Paul II awarded Wicks a papal medal for his service to the Catholic Church. Wicks and his wife Michaele have a grown daughter. They live in suburban Baltimore, Maryland.

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