

reservoirs & canals



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“If then you are wise you will show yourself to be a reservoir rather than a canal. For a canal spreads abroad water as it receives it, but a reservoir waits until it is filled before overflowing, and thus communicates, without loss to itself, its superabundant water.

“In the church at the present day we have many canals, few reservoirs.”

Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th Century

explore

How do the thoughts above land in your heart today? With the help of the questions and activities on the following pages, listen for God in the image of the reservoir and canal!



canals

At this time in my life, with all the longings, needs and demands I feel, what does the image of the **canal** stir in me?

What would my heart like to say to God about this?
As God's beloved child, share your heart fully with God, with as much realness as you can.

What is God's word to me in return today?

reservoirs

At this time in my life, with all the longings, needs and demands I feel, what does the image of the **reservoir** stir in me?

What would my heart like to say to God about this?
As God's beloved child, share your heart fully with God, with as much realness as you can.

What is God's word to me in return today?



filling

Ultimately reservoirs become a rich source of life to everyone around. But the first duty of the reservoir is not to give itself away, but to receive from its Source. Allowing ourselves to notice our emptiness, and make the hard choices involved in living from a place of fullness with God, requires courage—to go against the grain of culture and sometimes to break from our own past.

skim the reservoir filling postures and activities below

Do one or two of these especially call to me or feel life giving today? What practical steps will I take this week to experiment with them?

- live daily as a deeply loved child
- live with God in my real needs, anxieties, joys and brokenness
- make space in life to gaze on God (*pages 5& 6 below*)
- mine the treasures of solitude
- abandon anxious canals and false-thriving projects
- live my real life
- listen for God through Scripture, prayer, nature, books, others, my own heart
- respond to the Spirit's quiet intuitions
- embrace myself as Jesus does – fully, with compassion, as my own best friend
- become allergic to self-criticism, self-contempt, self-hating “loops”
- choose joy & gratitude
- do compassion
- live this moment
- laugh, dance, get a little crazy
- hang out with others who think these things are important!!

Our first invitation is not to *do* something for God, but to *embody* God, in becoming a reservoir of God's presence.



courage

The reservoir should not attempt to be more lavish than the stream that fills it.

Bernard of Clairvaux

gaining courage

Attending our emptiness and fullness often requires courage to set out in a new direction with unexplored, unmarked paths. Spend some time with the thoughts below. What help do they offer you to say “yes!” to a continually filling reservoir?

Scripture

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey... Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1

By faith Abraham, when called to go...obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8

How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD... Blessed are those whose strength is in you... As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools... Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere... Psalm 84

Strength for new directions

You've got to jump off the cliff all the time and build your wings on the way down. –Ray Bradbury

Not a fig shall I care then for all the devils in hell who oppose me; It is they who will fear me. I do not understand these fears: “Oh, the devil, the devil!” we say, when we might be saying “God! God!” and making the devil tremble. Whatever are we thinking? –Teresa of Avila, Teresa of Avila’s Life

When you don't know where to start, go to a place you miss so much. –Toba Beta



gazing

The vision we serve

We *always* serve the vision we see. If we don't serve a growing vision of Jesus, we'll find ourselves reflexively serving someone else's vision: loud voices in the culture, influencers and demanders, the sideways vision that spiritual forces urge on us. Finding chunks of time to just gaze into God grows our personal vision, and fills our inner reservoir.

the story is told

of a French cleric who heard that a congregation member, a peasant farmer, had an unusually deep prayer life. At first the cleric was miffed that someone in his congregation, no less a simple peasant, should be considered to pray more deeply than he! But he swallowed his pride and went to see the peasant. "Tell me," said the cleric, "what is the method of your prayer life?" The peasant looked at the cleric with some bewilderment and responded, "There is no method. I just look at Jesus, and Jesus looks at me."

Gazing into God

Take 10-20 minutes a few times a week to simply lean your deepest self quietly and attentively into God. There is a deep part in you that yearns to relax with God. Give that part of yourself room to let go of the rest of the world for a few minutes and just gaze with interest, love and attention into God. Let the Holy Spirit teach you this way of prayer.

NOTE: It can be helpful to recall the physical posture of Mary in Luke 10 as she listens at the feet of Jesus—gazing, attentive, interested, loving, quiet, surrendered, listening. Her interest is more in Jesus himself than in the things he says. Lean your inner self into God in this way. When stray thoughts come, don't worry. Each stray thought is an opportunity to lovingly return to God!

Gazing with God into my Life

At times a question, problem, or stuck spot arises in life. Instead of reflexively attacking the problem, strategizing, praying hard (and often worrying and freaking out) it can be really helpful to simply sit with God and be together calmly, patiently, and gently with your issue.

Take 10-20 minutes a few times a week to sit in company with God with your question or problem. Leave your assumptions, timetables and demands behind. While holding your issue loosely and lovingly, place your gentle attention in God. As the days pass notice changes in your perception of the situation, including a growing sense of new possibilities. Let the Holy Spirit teach you this way of prayer.



gazing continued...

Prayers of Gazing

You have said, "Seek my Face." My heart says to you, "Your face Lord, do I seek!" Psalm 27:8

Praying Scripture

Select a piece of Scripture, maybe starting with the psalms. (Move on to other passages later.) Notice which portions of the passage connect with your own longings, joys or fears. Join your inner intention with the Scripture and pray it as your own prayer. From time to time pause to let your spirit lean toward God in wordless, worshipful union.

Stepping into Scripture

Through God's gift of imagination step inside Scripture passages. Experience the story through the eyes of each participant. Be aware of the moments of the story that most touch you. Pause occasionally to let your deepest self gaze in union, fellowship and worshipful inquiry into God. Gospel passages are a good place to start.

Creation

God's face is shown in nature in beautiful and healing ways. God is uniquely present in his creation. While walking in nature, occasionally let your spirit lean wordlessly and worshipfully into God.

Your word

Think of one or two words that both express and request union with God at this time in your life (e.g. "I need you," "I love you," "you're my home," or your own special words). Quietly speak these words aloud as you go about your daily routine.

Your art or hobby

Your art or hobby are creative gifts that intimately connect you with your Creator. They are lenses into God who shares in the joy you take in your art. Pause occasionally with your art or hobby to receive God's happy gaze.

Your pen

Many people find that when they put pen to paper their roaming thoughts get focused and God's words become more clear. As you journal from the heart, pause sometimes to let your spirit lean into and take comfort in God.



Those who stand and wait, also serve

The poem below was written by John Milton, the author of such classics as *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and a wide variety of tracts, plays and poems. In the second half of his life Milton became blind and anguished that this loss of eyesight kept him from serving the Lord as fully as he desired. This poem reflects his struggle—and the transcending truth he eventually rested in.

On His Blindness

John Milton, 1608 - 1674

*When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."*

What moments of the poem intersect with my yearnings and struggles at this moment of my life?

As God's dearly loved child, what would I like to say to God about this?

Take some time to simply wait upon God as your most precious service to Him.



My Letter from God

As you reflect on your inner emptiness or fullness, what are your heavenly Father's thoughts and feelings of care and invitation toward you? If you could sit down for a few minutes with God and hear his heart toward you today, what would God long to tell you?

Write a letter from God—to you

That's right—a letter to you—from God!

Fully write God's loving heart toward you in all you experience, suffer, and enjoy today. And write his hopes and dreams for your future.

If you've never done something like this before, just imagine as well as you can what God would love to say to the hopes and longings of your heart today—and write it down!



RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT GROWING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LISTENING

- ◆ *Open Mind, Open Heart*, Thomas Keating
- ◆ *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, Ruth Haley-Barton
- ◆ *Sleeping with Bread*, Dennis Linn
- ◆ *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer
- ◆ *Soul Craving: An Invitation to the Feast*, Joel Warne
- ◆ *How to Eat Your Bible: God's Word as Food for Your Soul*, Joel Warne
- ◆ *Practicing the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence
- ◆ *The Cloud of Unknowing*
- ◆ *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly
- ◆ *The Way of a Pilgrim*

Wellbeing & Intimacy

- ◆ *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *The Tree That Survived the Winter*, Mary Fahy
- ◆ *The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You*, James G. Friesen
- ◆ *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, Madame Guyon
- ◆ *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Francis de Sales
- ◆ *Anthony DeMello, Writings*
- ◆ *A Tree Full of Angels*, Macrina Weiderkehr
- ◆ *Hinds Feet on High Places*, Hannah Hurnard
- ◆ *Twelve Steps to a New Day*, Ron Keller
- ◆ *Dark Night of the Soul*, Gerald May
- ◆ *The Critical Journey*, Guelich and Hagberg
- ◆ *Can You Drink The Cup?*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan

Journals

- ◆ *The Story of a Soul*, Theresa of Lisieux
- ◆ *The Genesee Diary*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *Journey to Daybreak*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *The Journal of John Wesley*
- ◆ The Journals of Thomas Merton
- ◆ *Confessions of St Augustine*