



REVISED & UPDATED

the
SOUL
at
REST

*A 40 Day Journey into a
Life of Prayer*

**TRICIA MCCARY
RHODES**

For those wanting a deeper life of prayer, you'll find Tricia a gentle, thoughtful, and trusted guide.

NATHAN FOSTER, director of Community Life, Renovaré,
author of *The Making of an Ordinary Saint*

Are you tired of how-tos and fixer-upper spirituality guides that leave you more exhausted and in need of God than when you began? Are you soul-sick with striving, always feeling like you need to do more in your life of prayer? If so, Tricia McCary Rhodes has a gift for you. *The Soul at Rest* is what her words promise to form in you—a place to rest, experience, and receive God. This slim volume, full of wisdom both modern and ancient, surprises with metaphors that bring deep truths into focus and exercises that provide practical helps to prayer. I am especially appreciative of the tender and grounded way that Rhodes approaches the dark night of the soul. While so many books on prayer describe the experience of the dark night well, comparatively few provide the sort of kind, compassionate, and concrete exercises and reflections that make the dark night a navigable season of faith.

TARA M. OWENS, CSD, CSDS, president and spiritual director,
Anam Cara Ministries

I no sooner read *The Soul at Rest* than I wanted to send quotes from it to people I know. This is the sign of a great book. Tricia McCary Rhodes opens doors and windows so God's reality can shine into our lives like the views from a mountain cabin. Spending much of my life helping people to hear God led me to discover that most of us are too tired to hear well. *The Soul at Rest* invites us to begin to understand God's love with a nap in his lap and forty days that have been prepared like a vacation bed-and-breakfast.

JIM WILDER, neurotheologian and coauthor of *Living from the Heart
Jesus Gave You*

Well-informed and grace-sustained spiritual practices play an essential role in becoming more like Jesus Christ. In *The Soul at Rest*, Tricia McCary Rhodes offers fresh insights into what you can do to partner with the Holy Spirit in a life-changing experience that will facilitate your growth in Christ and promote a quality of life you scarcely imagined possible.

KEN BAUGH, pastor and founder of The Institute for Discipleship Training

If you are in search of a spacious sanctuary for your soul amid a crowded, noisy, distracted life, take this forty-day prayer journey and recalibrate the inner chambers of your heart. Here, you will find true rest for your thirsty soul and a deeper, more reflective life of prayerful, interactive friendship with the living God.

STEPHEN A. MACCHIA, founder and president of Leadership Transformations, author of *Broken and Whole*

In *The Soul at Rest*, Tricia McCary Rhodes writes with wonder and tenderness of the God who eagerly desires to love us. Her book is a warm invitation, at once deeply spiritual and practically helpful. *The Soul at Rest* flows out of the richness of Rhodes's own prayer life and gives us tools we need to know God's intimate love. I will spend years reading this book.

KRISTEN LEIGH KLUDT, creator of Field Guides for the Way and author of *A Good Way Through*

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INTRODUCTION



“STOP POUNDING ON THAT PIANO—I don’t want to have to tell you again!” It had been four torturous weeks since Mom gamely enrolled four of her children in piano lessons, and she was at the end of her rope with me. Every day I hammered away angrily for thirty minutes, letting her know how much I hated those repetitious scales. Why couldn’t I just learn to play real songs? It didn’t take long for Mom to put us both out of our misery. Piano lessons became a thing of the past, and to my regret, I never did learn to play. Over the years I’ve often sat at the piano, dreaming of my fingers flying across the keys making music, but I never mastered the tools—finger placement or scales or sight-reading—that would have made it possible.

Almost a quarter of a century ago when I first wrote this book, a publisher suggested we call it *Practicing Prayer*. I recoiled at the thought, my mind flooded with those images of me as a child. But the truth is that the only way we develop new skills of any kind, even prayer, is through practice. To that end, since it was first released, this guidebook has helped thousands of people develop a practice of prayer. And while I’m sure many experienced days and perhaps weeks of pedantic monotony in the process, I believe most would say that the practicing was

worth it, that over time they developed a joyful ease in relating to God, and a graceful flow in communing with him; that they discovered a place of rest in his arms.

Our Great Need

I cannot think of a greater need in this day when we seem to live on the edge of chronic anxiety, overwhelmed by the magnitude of our busyness. We never stop—running, working, doing, learning, achieving, moving, climbing, pushing, thinking, planning—and yet the unprecedented rate of change that assaults us daily demands that we keep up or risk becoming irrelevant, relegated to the dusty dreams of simpler times.

Into all this commotion, God beckons: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). But can we hear him? Or, when we do try to carve out a few quiet moments, can we slow the pace of our minds enough to enjoy his gentle presence? What will become of our souls, competing as they must with the cacophony that is our new normal?

There is a hidden beauty in all our busyness: God created us for work, for the pleasure of productivity. Yet our heavenly Father has always intended for our *doing* to flow from our *being*, for our active lives to be energized by souls that have learned to rest in relationship with him.

Can you relate to this struggle for balance? Do you find yourself:

- Hungry to connect more consistently with the stabilizing presence of God?
- Weary of always running but never feeling caught up?
- Longing for a deeper engagement with Jesus’ heart?
- Tired of relying on spiritual sound bites to feed your soul?
- Wishing for a calm to saturate the chaos of your day?

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, people of faith have tried to satisfy these kinds of yearnings by going on pilgrimages, traveling to sacred sites to encounter the divine. In truth, what they were looking for may have been as close as their own heartbeat. This book is an invitation to pilgrimage, but rather than to some faraway land, it takes you to your inner being, where the Spirit of God awaits. It is a pilgrimage of the soul.

The Inner Prayer Journey

The inner prayer journey relies on an ancient form of spiritual communion, albeit unusual in today's world. It thrives amid the uncommon grace of stillness, in the presence of God. We wait, and he attends to our needy souls. We listen, and his voice comforts us, his words breathe new life into our spirits. We discover little by little who he is and who we are as his beloved children.

Today and every day Jesus stands with arms out, eager to accompany us on this journey. He longs to give us reflection in place of restlessness, meditation in place of mindless activity, and waiting on him to balance our running about. All this and so much more awaits—we need only a willing heart. I hope you will join me and the saints of a thousand generations on this pilgrimage of prayer, as we discover together what it means to be souls at rest.



CHAPTER ONE

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Behold, now begins an eternal craving and insatiable longing.

JAN VAN RUYSBROECK

SOMETHING IN EACH OF US is drawn to the transcendent, to experiences that transport us, even for a moment, from the ordinariness of life. We find ourselves strangely affected at random times—a waterfall takes our breath away or majestic worship moves us; the beauty of birdsong beckons or the wind in the trees seems to whisper our name; we tear up at a mother caressing her newborn or feel inexplicably calm as the sun sets on the horizon; a well-worn liturgy heals our wounds or a holy hush engulfs us as we pray. Like quenching a thirst we didn't realize we had, these things both satisfy us and make us long for more.

Ancient Celtic Christians used to call these *thin places*, a metaphor that described their sense of heaven touching earth, of God breaking through the thickness of our daily lives to make himself known. While they identified specific locations

where they felt this was more common, they also believed that thin places were all around, if only we had eyes to see.

As a young woman, I was captivated by the notion of God breaking in. I read mystics of old who heard God speak, who caught glimpses of his glory and knew how to bask in his love. I wanted what they had. I was moved by words like those of David, who longed for God “as the deer pants for streams of water” (Psalm 42:1), or Isaiah, who cried out, “My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you” (Isaiah 26:9). I, too, yearned for this God, but my world was thick—not only with the distractions of life as a wife, mom, and teacher but also with misguided religious zeal that kept me from grasping what was closer to me than the air I breathed.

Knowing about God

With diligence, I pursued the disciplines that I thought would make the difference. I read the Bible, prayed, was active in church, and committed to a life of obedience. But often at the end of the day, I looked back with an emptiness borne of failure to hear God’s voice or see his hand. It was as if I lived in a spiritual world of gray, yet knew that vivid hues of living color were just beyond my grasp. The more I *knew about God*, the more I wanted to *know him*, to experience his presence in the dailiness of life.

This was the impetus behind my immersion into the inner prayer journey, and I’ve never been the same.

Have you experienced this internal tug on your heart? Does something within want to “be taken into the arms of a God who will never forsake us from his embrace”?¹ To find some way of “resting in him whom we have found, who loves us, who is near to us, who comes to draw us to himself”?²

After decades of walking with Jesus, I am still in awe at this

pilgrimage in his presence. I continue to be both baffled and enthralled by the reality that he wants me far more than I have ever wanted him. He longs for you, too. In fact, he jealously yearns for your company (James 4:5). He wants you to see, know, taste, and experience him in ways beyond your imagination. He stands ready to reveal himself, enfold you in love, speak to you with power, and transform you with grace. He has waited for you—for this moment. Will you come along?

Using This Book

As a little girl, I loved to play with my mother's sewing basket. It was filled with mysterious and wonderful things—a veritable treasure chest of tools to bring new life to the knees of worn-out jeans or create a doll of discarded rags. Growing up, my son, the inventor, was perpetually entertained with the tools in our garage—I was often amazed at the things he built with a hammer, some screwdrivers, and various and sundry scraps of wood.

This is how I hope you will approach this book—not as a *how-to* manual but as a package of tools to deepen your walk with God. Like a sewing basket or toolbox, you may use the contents to create and plot your own pilgrimage.

Each chapter is divided into five sections, beginning with an inspirational reading and ending with a personal prayer practice. For your convenience, the sections are labeled as “days,” but many people go at their own pace, sometimes spending several days or even weeks on one section. While the chapters are woven together in a tapestry of time-tested principles, they do build on each other, so you may find it beneficial to follow the book order.

You will need a separate journal to complete the practices in this book. I recommend you use physical paper and pen for two reasons. First, because screens are designed to distract,

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journaling on tablets or computers can easily pull our focus away from God. Second, writing with a pen forces us to slow down. Most of us can only write about thirteen words per minute, while we type well over forty. Writing gives the Spirit time to access deeper thoughts and emotions, ones we may not even be aware of. This is an important benefit of journaling our prayers and thoughts.

DAY ONE

A PASSION



HE WAS A MAN at the top of his game. An upstanding citizen of one of the greatest empires ever built, he was proud to have studied under the premiere scholars of the day and had been inducted at a young age into his religion's most elite and powerful group of spiritual leaders. But all this went up in smoke the moment Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. Dumbfounded by an experience with the risen Lord, he fled to the desert, where the two of them spent three years together. Traveling the rest of his days as an itinerant missionary, it is no understatement to say that the apostle Paul revolutionized the scope of God's Kingdom on earth.

If I had to choose one word to describe Paul, it would be *passion*. He was passionate about getting to know Jesus. Even when that meant being thrown into deplorable, life-threatening situations, Paul's heart pulsed with desire for more as he cried out *that I may know him* (Philippians 3:8-10). Decades later,

Paul could hardly find words to describe the God he had come to know: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Romans 11:33).

Embracing the One Thing

The sheer volume of activity that fills most of our days is mind-boggling. We juggle demanding careers, family responsibilities, religious activities, and community involvement. The moments of our days are programmed—from sports practices to piles of laundry, from business trips to gym workouts, from Bible studies to hanging with our neighbors—we are very busy people. I don’t know about you, but for me, at times it feels as if life itself is closing in, almost like I’m gasping for air.

But the yard must be mowed, the school needs volunteers, and the boss wants a few more hours on this project. Money really doesn’t grow on trees, and we never seem to have enough. The car breaks down, the toilet overflows, the baby has colic, and we forget what it is like to really be still, to know the peace that passes understanding.

Let’s face it. As a culture, we relate far more to Martha, consumed with her *doing*, than Mary, who let everything go to sit at Jesus’ feet and just *be* (Luke 10:40-42). Jesus’ gentle admonition rings with uncanny relevance for us today: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of *only one thing*.”

Jesus is inviting us to one thing—to make space for him amid our busy, chaotic, overpacked lives. He entices us with tender, profound promises: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink” (John 7:37). “Open wide your mouth and I will fill it . . . with honey from the rock I would satisfy you” (Psalm 81:10, 16). It is so simple, we may miss it.

God wants to fill us with passion to know him—this is our destiny as his followers: “Now this is eternal life: that they *know you*, the only true God” (John 17:3, emphasis added). Centuries earlier, the prophet Jeremiah had proclaimed, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to *know me*’” (Jeremiah 9:23-24, emphasis added). Nothing else compares—not what we understand or how powerful, successful, or financially secure we are—just knowing him. That’s it.

Whatever need or desire you sense right now as you hold this book in your hand has been given for one reason—to compel you to come to the Father, who wants to wrap his arms around you and fill you with passion to know him more.

Practicing Prayer: What Is Your Passion Quotient?

Preparing Your Heart

Spend a few minutes becoming quiet before God. Breathe deeply, thanking him for his love and commitment. Take a few minutes to connect with the quiet, being sensitive to whatever discomfort this might bring up for you. Offer yourself as you are, a living sacrifice, letting God guide you as you engage in this practice.

Pressing In

Which of the following best describes your desire to know God more right now?

- It’s a nudge I feel every now and then
- It’s something I feel guilty about most of the time
- It’s a driving force I can’t ignore
- It is there, but circumstances bury it

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- It's something I really wish I had more of
- I don't really think about it very much
- Other:

Below are several descriptions of God. Choose at least one, and read the passages for it, prayerfully pondering the following questions: *Have I experienced this for myself? When or how? In what areas of my life is this passage particularly relevant right now? What might the Spirit be saying to me through this?* (You may want to stay here for several days, engaging with one each day.)

- Shepherd (Psalm 23; Luke 15:3-7)
- Father (Matthew 6:9; Luke 15:11-32)
- Friend (James 2:23; John 15:13-15)
- Lord (John 20:26-28; Romans 14:7-9)
- Sheltering wings (Ruth 2:12; Matthew 23:37)
- Comforting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27; Mark 10:14-16)

Write a prayer in your journal telling God how you feel about the inner prayer journey and what you would like to receive from him. Be authentic, asking for his help where you are weak.