Series:

Meditations

Episode:

Living “to” the Lord

- How and Why?

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Living “to” the Lord

– How, and Why?

Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

- Romans 14:6-8

Living “to” the contemplative centre of life

You know, Paul, is talking about very ordinary things – whether to eat meat or abstain, whether to observe certain days or not. Practical questions of daily life. And yet tucked inside that advice is something almost breathtaking: our

Ordinary life, quietly offered.

outward practices may differ, but the direction of the heart – that inward turning toward God – can be the same.

Life itself as an offering.

“Whoever eats, eats to the Lord … whoever abstains, abstains to the Lord.”

The contemplative tradition keeps circling back to this. It is not really about what you do. It is about where your heart is pointing when you do it. Turn the heart toward God and suddenly the whole of ordinary life begins to glow with quiet meaning.

Meister Eckhart – the brilliant and sometimes unsettling German Dominican mystic of the 13th century – captured this with one of those lines that stops you mid-sentence:

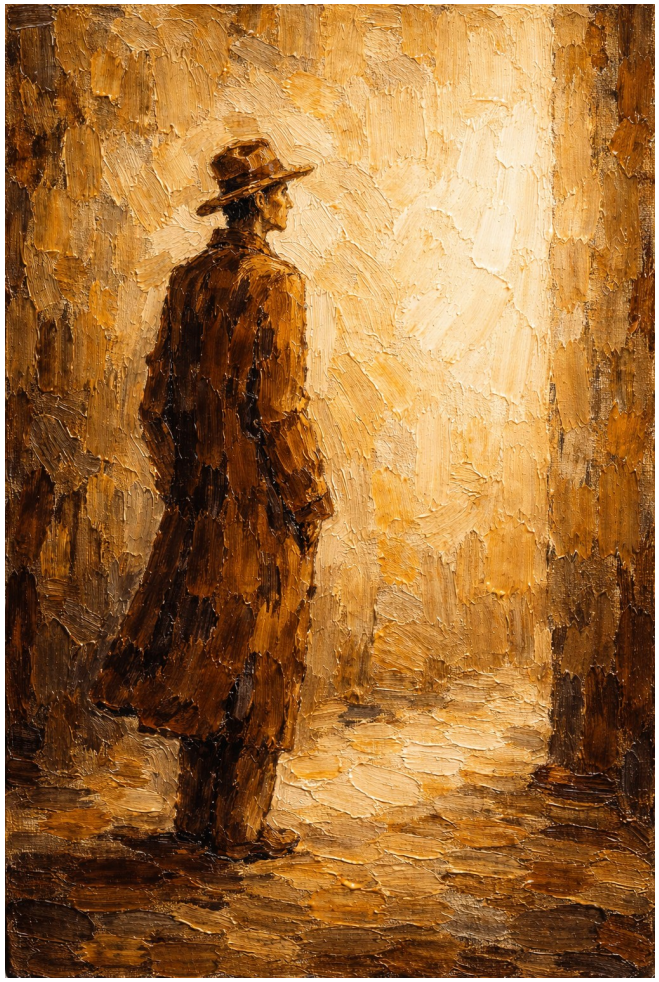
“The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.”

Eckhart was not speaking poetically. He meant it quite literally. At a certain depth, the wall between the sacred and the ordinary begins to thin – almost dissolve. Life is no longer divided into “religious moments” and “everything else”.

There is simply life.

Lived in God.

Seen in God.



The heart turns

– and the day becomes prayer.

Brother Lawrence discovered the same truth in a very different setting. He was not a theologian but a lay brother working in the kitchen of a Carmelite monastery in seventeenth-century Paris, washing pots and preparing food.

His discovery was wonderfully simple:

“The time of business does not differ from the time of prayer.”

He would fry a cake and mean it as an act of love. The activity itself did not change. The heart behind it did.

And then there is Teresa of Ávila, grounding this vision in something steady and deeply reassuring:

“Let nothing disturb you,

Let nothing frighten you.

All things are passing;

God never changes.”

Which is, in a way, what Paul himself is saying. His words are not merely theological statements – they reach right into the fabric of life:

“If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.”

Thomas Merton, writing centuries later from his monastery in Kentucky, described the interior shift that slowly begins to happen when life is surrendered in this way:

In the desert silence the soul learns to stand before God.

"The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves."

When you stop clutching at life – when you loosen your grip and allow it to be given rather than possessed – something changes.

Quietly.

Gradually.

Almost imperceptibly.

The centre of gravity moves.

The wisdom of the desert – learning to live before God

The early desert monks of Egypt and Syria were seeking precisely this transformation. They left the cities and withdrew into silence, where they discovered – sometimes slowly, sometimes abruptly – that peace arrives when the heart turns wholly toward God.

Their sayings have a beautiful spareness to them. Few words. No decoration. Just insight.

Abba Anthony the Great, often regarded as the father of monasticism, said something astonishingly simple:

"I no longer fear God – I love Him."

In those few words lies the whole move-

When the heart finds peace, the world softens.

ment of the spiritual life – from anxiety to love, from performing to belonging.

Another desert elder, Abba Alonius, expressed the same discovery in a slightly different way:

"Unless a man says in his heart, 'I alone and God are in this world,' he will not find quiet."

At first it can sound like isolation, but that is not what he means. It is an inner posture – the awareness that wherever you are, whatever you are doing, you are standing before God.

Seen.

Known.

Held.

Evagrius Ponticus, one of the most perceptive teachers of the desert tradition, expressed the connection between prayer and knowledge with elegant precision:

"If you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian."

For Evagrius, a "theologian" was not primarily an academic thinker but someone who had come to know God through purified prayer.

Prayer, then, is not something fitted around real life.

It is the atmosphere of real life.

The air the soul breathes.

Inner peace and the healing of perception

Here the reflection deepens further.

St Isaac the Syrian – a seventh-century bishop and ascetic known for his remarkable gentleness – repeatedly taught that the condition of the heart shapes how we encounter the world.

Here is a saying to consider:

"Make peace with yourself, and heaven and earth will make peace with you."

The insight reflects the spirit of Isaac the Syrian's teaching very closely.

A note of honesty is needed here. The line circulates widely in spiritual literature, but locating it precisely in Isaac's surviving writings is difficult. The insight, however, reflects the spirit of his teaching very closely.

Isaac believed that inner turmoil distorts perception. When the heart is anxious, wounded, or defensive, the world appears threatening. We interpret people through our own unhealed places. Conflict multiplies because we are seeing through a veil of agitation.

But when the heart becomes quiet, perception itself changes.

Reactivity loosens.

In the end we discover what was always true – we belong to God.

Compassion grows.

The world becomes easier to inhabit.

In the Orthodox contemplative tradition, especially in the Hesychast stream of spirituality, this clarity is cultivated through prayer, humility, silence, fasting, and watchfulness of the heart.

The aim is not escape from the world.

It is to see the world rightly.

So "making peace with yourself" does not simply mean cultivating self-esteem. It points toward reconciliation – allowing God to enter the parts of the heart that remain wounded, defended, or hidden.

As that reconciliation deepens, something subtle begins to change. The world itself no longer appears as a field of threats but as a place of relationship.

Heaven and earth begin to feel less like opposing realms and more like parts of one living reality.

The wider mystical echo – belonging beyond the self

What is striking is that this same movement appears in many mystical traditions: the gradual loosening of the self that insists on living only for itself.

Rabia al-Basri, one of the earliest and most luminous Sufi saints, expressed the simplicity of a heart absorbed in God:

"I love God: I have no time left in which to hate the devil."

When love fills the whole space, there is simply no room left for hostility.

Another Sufi mystic, Mansur al-Hallaj – whose spiritual intensity eventually cost him his life – expressed the deepest work of surrender in a line of piercing clarity:

"Between me and You there is only me. Take away the me so only You remain."

That is the whole journey in miniature. The separate self – clinging, defending, performing – slowly loosening its hold.

And in that loosening, a deeper belonging becomes visible.

Which brings us quietly back to Paul.

Human life is not self-contained.

It is received.

Sustained.

And finally – gently – gathered back into the

In the simple play of shared life, the spirit learns that love and presence are already forms of prayer

One from whom it came.

"Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

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Meister Eckhart (c.1260–1328)

A German Dominican theologian, philosopher, and mystic; one of the most influential figures in the Western Christian contemplative tradition.

Brother Lawrence (1614–1691)

A lay brother in a Parisian Carmelite monastery; known for his practice of "the presence of God" in ordinary work. His reflections, collected posthumously as *The Practice of the Presence of God*, stress continuous awareness of God in daily tasks.

St Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582)

A Spanish Carmelite mystic, reformer, and doctor of the Church; renowned for her interior prayer life and writings such as *The Interior Castle*. She taught that the soul's security lies in union with God, not in external circumstances.

Thomas Merton (1915–1968)

A Trappist monk, writer, and spiritual teacher at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. His works bridge contemplative life and modern thought, exploring themes of solitude, love, and the human person's belonging to God.

Abba Anthony the Great (c.251–356)

An early Christian monk regarded as the "father of monasticism." He lived as a hermit in the Egyptian desert and became a model of ascetic discipline and inner transformation for later monastic traditions.

Abba Agathon (5th century)

A Desert Father known for his gentleness and deep discernment. His sayings emphasize continual inner vigilance and the need to test every thought according to God's will.

Abba Alonius

An early desert monk whose brief saying, "I alone and God are in this world," expresses the inner solitude and God□ward focus characteristic of the Desert Fathers' spirituality.

St Isaac the Syrian (7th century)

A Syriac Christian bishop and ascetic later associated with the Church of the East. His ascetical writings stress repentance, compassion, and the inner peace that arises from a reconciled relationship with God.

Evagrius Ponticus (345–399)

A Greek Christian monk and theologian active in Egypt. He developed a systematic approach to the spiritual life and the passions, and famously taught that prayer and theological insight mutually sustain each other.

John Climacus (c.579–649)

A monk at St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai; author of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a classic of Christian asceticism. His work describes the spiritual ascent toward God through virtues and detachment.

Jalāl al Dīn Rumi (1207–1273)

A Persian poet, Islamic scholar, and Sufi mystic. His poetry, especially the *Masnavi*, explores divine love and the soul's journey toward union with God, blending theology, image, and emotion.

Rabia al Basri (c.717–801)

An early Sufi saint and ascetic from Basra, known for her devotion to God founded purely on love rather than fear or hope of reward. Her sayings exemplify self□forgetfulness in the love of God.

Mansur al Hallaj (858–922)

A Persian Sufi mystic and poet whose teachings on the soul's union with God led to his execution after his famous saying "I am the Truth." He is remembered as a powerful symbol of mystical self-surrender.

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