

Quotations about the Inner Life

Mourning is love with no place to go. – Unknown

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Give your sorrow all the space and shelter in yourself that is its due, for if everyone bears [their] grief honestly and courageously, the sorrow that now fills the world will abate. But if you do not clear a decent shelter for your sorrow, and instead reserve most of the space inside you for hatred and thoughts of revenge - from which new sorrows will be born for others - then sorrow will never cease in this world and will multiply. – Etty Hillesum, quoted in Marc Ellis, Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation

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To demand that others should provide you with textbook answers is like asking a strange woman to give birth to your baby. There are insights that can be born only of your own pain, and they are the most precious. – Janusz Korczak

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It is not physical solitude that actually separates one from others; not physical isolation, but spiritual isolation. It is not the desert island nor the stony wilderness that cuts you from the people you love. It is the wilderness in the mind, the desert wastes in the heart through which one wanders lost and a stranger. When one is a stranger to oneself then one is estranged from others too. If one is out of touch with oneself, then one cannot touch others. How often in a large city, shaking hands with my friends, I have felt the wilderness stretching between us. Both of us were wandering in arid wastes, having lost the springs that nourished us - or having found them dry. Only when one is connected to one's own core is one connected to others, I am beginning to discover. And, for me, the core, the inner spring, can best be refound through solitude. – Anne Morrow Lindbergh

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Without mental prayer, it would be virtually impossible for frail humanity to bear the fierce struggles of religious life. You can inebriate with sweetness your dryness of heart, making use of the water of prayer drawn from the fountains of the Savior. As a tree experiencing drought sheds its unripened fruit and leaves, so the soul that is deprived of the dew of prayer brings forth incomplete works infected with distaste. – Ludovico Barbo, “Form of Prayer,” quoted in Hugh Feiss, Essential Monastic Wisdom

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It is the rare person who, looking back over his life and seeing what he has done to it, hasn't sighed for a chance to redeem what he has cheaply used or carelessly ruined. If only somehow, somewhere, there was a way to live again the days we have darkened with our blind haste - the innumerable occasions when our indifference trod on all the pearls of God's graciousness; the times when our pride, or our fear, or our meanness poured the acid of contempt over the fair countenance of another's soul! If this grace were ours, how we would leap to the chance! – Samuel Howard Miller, The Life of the Soul

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The rhythm of life for a kingdom dweller puts *chronos* in service of *kairos*, the cyclical in service of the directional, the calendar in service of the kingdom. ... As we submit our anarchy to a rhythm, in a sort of earthy, mystical way, all of life is lived lucidly, intentionally, and to the glory of God. Every washing becomes a baptism; every eating a Communion. Every sleeping becomes a dying; every rising a resurrection. – Kenneth Gottman, Ministry and Mission

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All travelers, somewhere along the way, find it necessary to check their course, to see how they are doing. We wait until we are sick, or shocked into stillness, before we do the commonplace thing of getting our bearings. And yet, we wonder why we are depressed, why we are unhappy, why we lose our friends, why we are ill-tempered. This condition we pass on to our children, our husbands, our wives, our associates, our friends. Cultivate the mood to linger. ... Who knows? God may whisper to you in the quietness

what [God] has been trying to say to you, oh, for so long a time. – Howard Thurman, Deep Is the Hunger

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Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted. – Martin Luther King Jr.

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Therefore, somehow, we have to learn to get our satisfaction and our joy in faithfulness and in our intimate relationship with Christ. Then the question of effectiveness and success, in the usual sense of those terms is not the issue. We can transcend that and get energized and nourished by faithfulness knowing we are doing what we must do to live - not what we must do to change the neighborhood. The constant struggle is the deepening of faith that enables us to really trust that somehow the whole show is going to come off right in God's timing. – Gordon Cosby (co-founder and pastor of Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C.), Spirituality and Community: Reflections on Evil and Grace

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Confronting our feelings and giving them appropriate expression always takes strength, not weakness. It takes strength to acknowledge our anger, and sometimes more strength yet to curb the aggressive urges anger may bring and to channel them into nonviolent outlets. It takes strength to face our sadness and to grieve and to let our grief and our anger flow in tears when they need to. It takes strength to talk about our feelings and to reach out for help and comfort when we need it. – Fred Rogers, The World According to Mr. Rogers

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Now and then, set aside for yourself a day on which, without hindrance, you can be at leisure to praise God and to make amends for all the praise and thanksgiving you have neglected all the days of your life to render to God for all the good he has done. This will be a day of praising and thanksgiving and a day of jubilation, and you will celebrate the memory of that radiant praise with which you will be jubilant to the Lord for eternity, when you will

be satisfied fully by the presence of God, and the glory of the Lord will fill your soul. – Gertrude the Great, “Spiritual Exercises,” quoted in Hugh Feiss, Essential Monastic Wisdom

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We are God’s prayer. We are, in fact, God’s thought. And God is hopelessly lost in thinking us. All we can do is stay naked and self-forgetful, ready for lovemaking. The primary temptation is to cover ourselves with roles, controls, successes and satisfying explanations. The mind will discover a million ways to cover itself from its fears and its emptiness. But praying is living in a lover’s world, with no need to affirm or deny, judge or justify. Praying is the unexpected uncovering of perfect goodness after we have done so many things wrong. There is no other place to begin listening or living. Prayer is the only foundation we can trust in ourselves. Be quite and self-forgetful, dear friends. Don’t miss out. You must know for yourself that Someone is thinking you (as opposed to another) each creative moment. The only good choice is to love and trust yourself in God. – Richard Rohr, *Radical Grace*, “The Thought God Is Lost In”

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At our best, we become Sabbath for one another. We are the emptiness, the day of rest. We become space, that our loved ones, the lost and sorrowful, may find rest in us. – Wayne Muller, “Sabbath,” quoted in Joan Chittister, OSB, How Shall We Live

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Prayer and meditation have an important part to play in opening up new ways and new horizons. If your prayer is the expression of a deep and grace-inspired desire for newness of life—and not the mere blind attachment to what has always been familiar and "safe"—God will act in us and through us to renew the Church by preparing, in prayer, what we cannot yet imagine or understand. In this way our prayer and faith today will be oriented toward the future which we ourselves may never see fully realized on earth. – Thomas Merton, Contemplation in a World of Action

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The circumstances of our lives are another medium of God's communication with us. God opens some doors and closes others.... Through the wisdom of our bodies, God tells us to slow down or reorder our priorities. The happy coincidences and frustrating impasses of daily life are laden with messages. Patient listening and the grace of the Spirit are the decoding devices of prayer. It is a good habit to ask, What is God saying to me in this situation? Listening to our lives is part of prayer. – Marjorie J. Thompson, Soul Feast

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I'd been busy, busy, so busy, preparing for life, while life floated by me, quiet and swift as a regatta. – Lorene Cary

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Has it ever struck you that those who most fear to die are the ones who most fear to live? Life is flexible and free, and you are rigid and frozen. Life carries all things away, and you crave stability and permanence. You fear life and death because you cling. You cannot bear the thought of losing a relative or friend; you dread losing a pet theory or ideology or belief. When you cling to nothing, when you have no fear of losing anything, then you are free to flow like a mountain stream that is always fresh and sparkling and alive. – Anthony de Mello, "Free to Flow"

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The importance of detachment from things, the importance of poverty, is that we are supposed to be free from things that we might prefer to people. Wherever things have become more important than people, we are in trouble. That is the crux of the whole matter. – Thomas Merton, "Detachment from Things"

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We are Transmitters
D.H. Lawrence

As we live, we are transmitters of life.
And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us.

That is part of the mystery of sex, it is a flow onwards.
Sexless people transmit nothing.

And if, as we work, we can transmit life into our work,
life, still more life, rushes into us to compensate, to be ready
and we ripple with life through the days.

Even if it is a woman making an apple dumpling, or a man a stool,
if life goes into the pudding, good is the pudding
good is the stool,
content is the woman, with fresh life rippling in to her,
content is the man.

Give, and it shall be given unto you
is still the truth about life.
But giving life is not so easy.
It doesn't mean handing it out to some mean fool, or letting the living dead
eat you up.
It means kindling the life-quality where it was not,
even if it's only in the whiteness of a washed pocket-handkerchief.

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The rare moment is not the moment when there is something worth looking
at, but the moment when we are capable of seeing. – Joseph Wood Krutch

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In the fields and woods more than anything else all things come to those
who wait, because all things are on the move, and are sure sooner or later to
come your way. To absorb a thing is better than to learn it, and we absorb
what we enjoy. We learn things at school; we absorb them in the fields and
woods. When we look upon Nature with fondness and appreciation, she
meets us halfway and takes a deeper hold on us than when studiously
conned. Hence I say the way of knowledge of Nature is the way of love and
enjoyment, and is more surely found in the open air than in the school room
or the laboratory. – John Burroughs

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For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity, and despair. But it doesn't matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not. Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance. – Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation

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Never bear more than one trouble at a time. Some people bear three kinds - all they have had, all they have now, and all they expect to have. – Edward Everett Hale

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We need the tonic of wildness, to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only the wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander. – Henry David Thoreau

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When the wonder has gone out of a man he is dead. When all comes to all, the most precious element in life is wonder. Love is a great emotion and power is power. But both love and power are based on wonder. Plant consciousness, all are related by one permanent element, which we may call the religious element in all life, even in a flea: the sense of wonder. That is our sixth sense. And it is the natural religious sense. – D. H. Lawrence

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A quiet spirit is one in which all of those mixed emotions are sorted out, understood, shared with trusted friends, and submitted to a spirit of contentment. The butterflies in our stomach don't die; we just teach them to fly in formation. – Karen Lee-Thorp and Cynthia Hicks, Why Beauty Matters

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It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am the more affection I have for them. Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say. – Thomas Merton

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To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not, rich; to listen to stars and birds, babes and sages, with open heart; to study hard; to think quietly, act frankly, talk gently, await occasions, hurry never; in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common – this is my symphony. – William Henry Channing

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Waiting is not a very popular attitude. In fact, most people consider waiting a waste of time. Perhaps this is because the culture in which we live is basically saying, “Get going! Do something! Show you are able to make a difference! Don't just sit there and wait!” For many people, waiting is an awful desert between where they are and where they want to go. And people

do not like such a place. They want to get out of it by doing something. In our particular historical situation, waiting is even more difficult because we are so fearful. One of the most pervasive emotions in the atmosphere around us is fear. People are afraid – afraid of inner feelings, afraid of other people, and also afraid of the future. And fearful people have a hard time waiting. – Henri Nouwen, Waiting for God

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The creator goes off on one wild, specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy sprung from an unfathomable font. What is going on here? The point of the dragonfly’s terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdson, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork—for it doesn’t, particularly, not even inside the goldfish bowl—but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek, that it all surges in such a free fringed tangle. Freedom is the world’s water and weather, the world’s nourishment freely given, its soil and sap: and the creator loves pizzazz. – Annie Dillard, Teaching a Stone to Talk

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A man has to live with himself, and he should see to it that he always has good company. – Charles Evans Hughes

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Take a rest; a field that has rested gives a beautiful crop. – Ovid

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Usually, when the distractions of daily life deplete our energy, the first thing we eliminate is the thing we need the most: quiet, reflective time. Time to dream, time to think, time to contemplate what’s working and what’s not, so that we can make changes for the better. – Sarah Ban Breathnach, Simple Abundance

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For those who listen for Christ's coming, a knock sounds over and over again. The things that come forth are not necessarily highly spiritual. Sometimes they are very simple. For instance, we may be told, "Don't neglect your body. Don't you know it is a temple of the Spirit?" (1 Cor. 3:16) Or we may be asked, "Why do you drink so much wine? Why do you eat so much food?" Such matters seem contemptibly small. Yet whoever is wise will open the door when God's messengers speak. And whoever is wise will act on what he or she hears, and do so joyfully and confidently. – C.F. Blumhardt, "Action in Waiting"

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We forfeit three-quarters of ourselves in order to be like other people. – Arthur Schopenhauer

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I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody. – Bill Cosby

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We warn young people against going to dens of iniquity, even out of curiosity, because no one knows what might happen. Still more terrible, however, is the danger of going along with the crowd. In truth, there is no place, not even one most disgustingly dedicated to lust and vice, where a human being is more easily corrupted – than in the crowd.

Even though every individual possesses the truth, when he gets together in a crowd, untruth will be present at once, for the crowd is untruth. It either produces impenitence and irresponsibility or it weakens the individual's sense of responsibility by placing it in a fractional category. For instance, imagine an individual walking up to Christ and spitting on him. No human being would ever have the courage or the audacity to do that. But as part of a crowd, well then they somehow have the "courage" to do it – dreadful untruth!

The crowd is indeed untruth. Christ was crucified because he would have nothing to do with the crowd (even though he addressed himself to all). He did not want to form a party, an interest group, a mass movement, but wanted to be what he was, the truth, which is related to the single individual.

Therefore everyone who will genuinely serve the truth is by that very fact a martyr. To win a crowd is no art; for that only untruth is needed, nonsense, and a little knowledge of human passions. But no witness to the truth dares to get involved with the crowd. His work is to be involved with all people, if possible, but always individually, speaking with each and every person on the sidewalk and on the streets – in order to split apart. He avoids the crowd, especially when it is treated as authoritative in matters of the truth or when its applause, or hissing, or balloting are regarded as judges. He avoids the crowd with its herd mentality more than a decent young girl avoids the bars on the harbor. Those who speak to the crowd, coveting its approval, those who deferentially bow and scrape before it must be regarded as being worse than prostitutes. They are instruments of untruth.

For this reason, I could weep, even want to die, when I think about how the public, with its daily press and anonymity, make things so crazy. That an anonymous person, by means of the press, day in and day out can say whatever he wants to say, what he perhaps would never have the courage to say face-to-face as an individual to another individual, and can get thousands to repeat it, is nothing less than a crime – and no one has responsibility! What untruth! Such is the way of the crowd. – Søren Kierkegaard, “Against the Crowd,” from Provocations

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On His Blindness

John Milton

When I consider how my light is spent
E're 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-labor, 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.

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The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys his own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful. – Thomas Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander

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[Jesus says:] “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message Bible)

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‘Seek ye first God’s kingdom and His righteousness’. What does this mean, what have I to do, or what sort of effort is it that can be said to seek or pursue the kingdom of God?

Shall I try to get a job suitable to my talents and powers in order thereby to exert an influence? No, thou shalt first seek God’s kingdom.

Shall I then give all my fortune to the poor? No, thou shalt first seek God’s kingdom.

Shall I then go out to proclaim this teaching to the world? No, thou shalt first seek God’s kingdom.

But then in a certain sense it is nothing I shall do. Yes, certainly, in a certain sense it is nothing, become nothing before God, learn to keep silent; in this silence is the beginning, which is, first to seek God’s kingdom. – Søren Kierkegaard, quoted in Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline

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Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify. – Thoreau, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” from Walden

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And this is the simple truth: that to live is to feel oneself lost. He who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look around for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. – Søren Kierkegaard