

“Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you're not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned or counted on.” Henri Nouwen

My journey as a ‘modern-day monk’ has been going strong for fifteen years. Being a contemplative is a lifestyle for me. I don’t have to think about how to do it anymore. When I first started sharing my passion for living a contemplative life, more and more people started to ask me for ideas on how they could do the same. But what I noticed is that a lot of people weren’t at home most of the time alone like myself. They are usually in a “daily grind”, at work, raising children, or in survival mode. Or all of the above. Life is a grind after all and that can feel life-sucking.

A common comment I’d get in response to how I lived my life was “That seems easier for you to have that kind of life than for me.” I realized what was simple for me was not so simple for others: solitude, contemplation, prayer, meditation, and many other spiritual practices that have become a way of life for me. As a matter of fact, silence is deafening for most people. Our grind culture doesn’t really support or encourage folks to rest, let alone be contemplative. Folks kept asking me, “Can you please create something that we can use daily that is simple enough for our busy lives? Not everyone lives in solitude Gina!” I appreciated the candid ask! It’s true, not everyone lives in solitude Gina. Except for the Monks.

So here is my attempt to fulfill this precious request from many. I hope you find ease, beauty, and God/Spirit in the pages provided. I hope this page and the coming pages meet you where you are.

The first step in becoming a modern-day monk:

One of the first hurdles to overcome when learning how to be contemplative in everyday life is to learn to sit with yourself. Every moment that passes, we are tempted to fill. Not only do we think we *have* to fill it because of the voices that tell us we must keep busy, we must be productive, but also because we are most literally busy. We really do have things

to do. But when we do get a moment or two, we start to get anxious. We fidget, we don't want to be bored. We pick up something. Our phones, the remote, the dishes, and work. We start filling the moments. Even if we get some free ones, we are tempted to start to fill them again.

We don't have to do this. We don't have to listen to the shoulds. Shoulds are there to remind us that we aren't good enough. No thanks, shoulds.

You can stop filling and interrupt your usual pattern and in the moment say to yourself, "I'm not going to fill these next few moments; I'm going to look out the window, look at my dog or look at nothing. I'm free to just have a moment with nothing in it. With myself.

Let me tell you, it will feel strange; you will have the urge to fill up the moment. But don't. You can *learn* to sit with yourself. It might not feel comfortable at first, because you're not used to it! I promise this will become more comfortable the more you practice. Like any practice, you have to actually practice! No one can just sit down and play the piano unless they've practiced. And much of the spiritual life is practiced. **Sitting with yourself is a spiritual discipline.**

3 contemplative tips to learn to sit with yourself:

- Eat your meals mindfully. Start with just one meal without your phone, work, or TV. You will be able to enjoy your food more, it will taste better and digest easier! If you have trouble at first, sit next to a window if you are able and focus on something outside, preferably nature. But whatever you do, don't be hard on yourself, anything you're learning to do has to be learned, it takes time.
- Take a few minutes and do some deep belly breathing, (expand your belly like a balloon for five seconds in and ten seconds out), every day. Doing three of these little treasures, especially when you're feeling stress, pressure, or anxiety, will help immensely. Intentional breathing will bring you back to yourself. Back to the present moment. And belly breathing is scientifically good for you! Doing this brings you into parasympathetic. Deep breathing actually changes your physiology and creates calm. Centering and re-centering yourself will happen often as you learn to sit with yourself. That's it!

- Take a few minutes and give thanks. Once you start you won't be able to stop. This is not a cliché gratitude list, this can become part of you intentionally.
Or ask yourself, **“What is good right now in this moment?”** Make a list.
Write down. This is a beautiful practice of gratitude to incorporate yourself into the present moment, helping you learn to sit with yourself.

These three suggestions will take you into a different space and will give you a mental break. These practices allow you to be mindful, breathe, and be thankful on purpose. Much of being a modern-day monk is intentionality. Learning to sit with yourself takes a lot of intention. Practicing these suggestions guides you into the **slow**, which is very healthy for our bodies. Slowness tells our bodies most literally that we are safe, and sometimes when we are going all day long without any contemplative practices, our bodies do not know that we are safe. Our bodies don't always want to be responding quickly, they need rest. By intentionally adding slow in, you are sending a wonderful message to yourself that you're ok!

If you prefer not to do any of these but want to learn to sit with yourself, you can always offer up a prayer right where you are. Just take a moment, sometimes that's all you need.

REFLECTION

What is one reason it is hard for you to sit with yourself? What gets in the way?

How does it feel when you try to sit mindfully when you eat?

How did you feel after you did the belly breaths? What did you notice in your body or elsewhere?

How did you feel when you brought to mind what is good now? Or when you made a list of what you are grateful for?

What are you wanting to get out of learning to sit with yourself?

God's already with you. God resides within us.