

# Connect

A newsletter for  
high school  
religion teachers,  
campus ministers,  
and principals

## Practicing Spiritual Wellness: Insights from Genesis *by Pamela Johnson*

Everything depends on the person who stands in the front of the classroom. The teacher is not an automatic fountain from which intellectual beverages may be obtained. [He or she] is either a witness or a stranger. To guide a pupil into the promised land, [a teacher] must have been there. . . . When asking . . . : Do I stand for what I teach? Do I believe what I say? [he or she] must be able to answer in the affirmative.

What we need more than anything else is not *textbooks* but *textpeople*. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read; the text that they will never forget. (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology* [New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2002], pp. 62–63, edited by Samuel H. Dresner. Copyright © 2002, Crossroad Publishing, New York, New York)

Rabbi Heschel has it right, I think. Nourishing and caring for our own spirits is our first task as teachers, as witnesses, as textpeople. The lives and spirits of the young people in our classrooms are deeply affected by the health of our own spiritual practice. As a former high school teacher and a person who has continued to teach both adults and young people across the years, I've found three words that help me stay grounded in God, nourished in spirit, and responsive to

life. These three words are finish, rest, and bless. They are simple to state but more difficult to live. I share them with you, not as an expert who has it all figured out, but as someone who is still very young on the path to becoming a fully alive human being, a deeply rooted Catholic Christian, and a reflective practitioner.

### Finish, Rest, Bless

How do we become textpeople? How do we stay grounded in God, nourished, and responsive? How do we live our lives as reflective practitioners, as healers, as artists? How do we live creative, whole, and holy lives?

When I first started thinking about these questions, a Scripture story came to mind. It was the Creation story found in Gen. 1:31—2:3.

God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had

“It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read; the text that they will never forget.”

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

undertaken. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation. (NAB)

God finished, God rested, God blessed. Finish. Rest. Bless. This is God's pattern in the creative act, and the more I think about it and practice it, the more I find that this is a model for my own creative life. As a teacher, a businesswoman, a mother and a grandmother, there is always one more thing to do. I find that I am especially vulnerable to forgetting to practice God's sacred pattern of finish, rest, bless . . . daily.

### Finish

**Each day's work is sufficient for the day.** In the Creation story as recorded in Gen. 1:1—2:4, each day's work is sufficient for the day. God did not make the whole of creation simultaneously in one effort but rather at a measured pace. God did not dwell in

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(*“Practicing Spiritual Wellness”* continued from page 1)

the past or the future but rather in the present moment, and the work that was right in front of God for that day was where all of God’s energy went.

I’ve been trying to practice that model, staying in the present moment and working at a measured pace. To my great surprise, I’ve found that time is expanding. I feel less hurried, less anxious, less pressured to be somewhere other than where I am. Time is more a companion than a taskmaster. Trying to follow God’s model of “each day’s work is sufficient for the day” is allowing me to do sunset watch on our deck, declare that my work for the day is finished, and enjoy the promise of evening and morning—a new day.

**Each day’s work builds on the work of the previous day.** Another guiding insight I noticed in the Genesis story is that each day’s work builds on the work of the previous day, and there’s a sense that God is involved in an emerging design that is as delightful to the creator as it is to the creation. Thinking about my life and my work as an emerging design goes a long way toward sheer joy! I find myself getting caught up in the humor, the sensuousness, the surprise at what’s unfolding. I am reminded that it doesn’t all depend on me, but rather that it is God’s abiding spirit that continues to create and sustain me and the whole creation.

**Each day’s work is noticed, reflected on, and declared good.** Here’s the greatest challenge of each day, for me. Have I noticed what was created today? Have I reflected on what it means? Have I named what was good and celebrated it? One of

the spiritual practices I am trying to cultivate is exactly this practice of noticing, reflecting, and celebrating the good. You might try practicing it for a week. Each evening, set aside some time to sit quietly and bring the picture of your day to mind. Notice what was created today—new relationships among students, new understandings, new processes, fun, companionship, healing. There is good created each day because that is the nature of God’s creation. Notice that good, reflect on its meaning, and celebrate it by thanking God and by engaging others in conversation or activity that supports and expands the common good.

Practicing spiritual wellness means that I have to learn how to finish, sometimes many times each day. Staying in the present moment and working at a measured pace; living life as an emergent design suffused with awe and reverence and wonderment; and noticing, reflecting on, and celebrating the good are all key to spiritual nourishment and health.

### Rest

Across the years as you’ve read or listened to the Creation story, have you ever noticed what God created on the seventh day? The text says that the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed at the end of the sixth day. But what does it say God created on the seventh day? On the seventh day God created rest.

“Have I noticed what was created today?”

I think I am just beginning to understand the central importance of rest in the whole Creation story and in my life. Rest is so important to the design of the creation, so important to God that an entire day is dedicated simply to rest. After all the brilliant, generative, exciting, important, necessary, creative work of the previous six days, why does God rest? Why do we absolutely need to rest?

**Rest is part of God's design for creation.** For many years, I neglected rest as a sacred part of God's design for life. When I look back at some of that neglect now, I'm shocked by my ignorance, my denial, my arrogance. I am human, and it is necessary for my body and spirit that I rest because it is in that resting that I am awake and attentive to the sacredness of life and the holy presence of God, everywhere. I find that to stay awake and attentive, I must rest often, many times during a single day.

**Rest expands our vision.** Rest expands my vision so that I can see more of what has been created. Rest orders that vision so that tasks and people and ideas come into proper relationship. Rest stimulates my imagination so that I can see what is broken and in need of healing, so that I can see what is whole and able to be more.

**Rest grounds us in who we are.** I'm not sure why, but when I rest I am reminded who I am and whose I am. Rest seems to nourish a profound confidence and trust in the goodness of creation and the closeness of God. I think this may be the gift of the Holy Spirit whose abiding presence I am most keenly attuned to while at rest.

**Rest is an original and ongoing source of blessing.** This insight from the Genesis text has been the most profound for me. The text says, "So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation" (2:3, NAB).

"God did not make a thing holy or a place holy. God made time holy."

On the seventh day, the day of rest, God moved beyond the observation of goodness to the bestowing of blessing. All along the creation was good, but now the creation was blessed. Now the creation was made holy.

I have begun to reintroduce the practice of setting aside each Sunday as a day simply for rest, for worship, for renewal. This of course is the whole idea of practicing Sabbath: drawing attention to the sacredness of life, the holiness of time. The Scripture says, "So God blessed the *seventh day* [emphasis added] and made it *holy* [emphasis added]." God did not make a thing holy or a place holy. God made time holy. Six days a week my attention is given to the needs and gifts of my busy life at work, at home, at church, in the community.

In creating rest and establishing the Sabbath, God created a realm of time where I am meant not to *do* but to *be*; not to *acquire* but to *give*; not to *lead* or *follow* but to *abide with*. The words *be*, *give*, and *abide with* are giving content, form, and flavor to my Sabbath practice.

As I rest daily and as I practice Sabbath, I'm beginning to see that I need to rest because rest is part of God's ingenious and wise design, because rest expands my vision, because rest reminds me who and whose I am, and because rest is an original and ongoing source of

blessing in the creation. And that points me to the third and last word that I want to reflect on.

## Bless

What is this third movement of spiritual wellness all about? Why does the activity of creation move from finish, to rest, to bless? How do I as a human being practice blessing in the world?

**Participating in blessing through service.** By reflecting on this idea that time is holy, it is beginning to dawn on me that all of my time comes from God, belongs to God, and is intended for the service of God. I've always known this intellectually, but only in recent years have I been able to see that service is about both extraordinary acts of justice, courage, and liberation and ordinary acts of accompaniment, partnering, kindness, and play. Both are ways to put blessing into the world and to be blessed in return. Both are ways to be of use, to cocreate, to serve God. It's a mystery I don't fully understand, but it appears that all of life is about service, and

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# from the classroom

## Roots *by Christine Navarro*

This activity, adapted from the *Teaching Activities Manual for The Catholic Youth Bible* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000), is a reflection on Col. 2:6–7. Although it is intended for use with students, consider adapting this activity for your personal use as well. You may be surprised by what you can discover when you bring reflective music and art supplies into your prayer space!

The image of a tree helps the students assess what nourishes them and reflect on the life that the nourishment brings.

1. Ask one student to read aloud Col. 2:6–7, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (NRSV).

Then ask another student to read the following reading, “Where are Your Roots?” from *The Catholic Youth Bible* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000):

### Where Are Your Roots?

What is one thing that motivates you, that keeps you going? Is it a special friendship or a close family? the drive to succeed or to be the best? Maybe it's having a car or holding down a job.

Col. 2:7 says that we should be “rooted and built up in [Christ].” Where you have your roots is where you get your nourishment to keep going. Think again about

what motivates you. Is it enough to nourish a full, rich life?

Journal or reflect on the following questions:

- What things are most important in your life right now? Where is God in each of those things?
- What do you need to reorder so that God “might come to have first place” in your life (1:18)?

(Brian Singer-Towns, editor, near Col. 2:6–7)

2. On the board, draw a picture of a tree and its roots, designating it as a representation of the people to whom Paul or his disciple was speaking. Label the roots “Jesus.”

3. Give the students sheets of blank paper and appropriate art supplies, and direct them each to design a tree representing themselves. For the roots, they should identify persons, experiences, activities, and beliefs that nourish them. For the branches, they should name the results of that kind of nourishment in their lives.

4. Invite the students to share aspects of their finished drawings. Return to the picture on the board and ask them to identify what signs of life should come from a life based on Jesus. Note the following points in your own words: There is a clear parallel between the health of a tree and the health of a human being. Roots nourished by healthy sources produce strong branches and healthy leaves, and nourishment from healthy sources in our own lives produces physical, mental, and spiritual health.

(Christine Schmertz Navarro et al, p. 290)

### About Connect

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# from the press

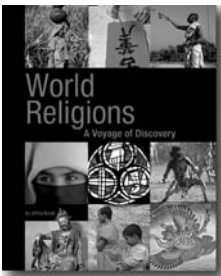
## New Just for You



David Haas's new book *Finding the Calm: Biblical Meditations to Nourish Those Who Nurture Teens* will help you rediscover the fundamental energy of ministry: prayer. Now more than ever, young people need the witness of adults who truly believe in the power of prayer and reflection in their lives. This book is for all

who minister to and with young people, including parents, teachers, youth ministers, pastors, and mentors. *Finding the Calm: Biblical Meditations to Nourish Those Who Nurture Teens* focuses on the marriage of the Scriptures and prayer, and will challenge and help sustain your commitment to young people. 104 pages, paper, \$8.95.

## Updated for Your Classroom



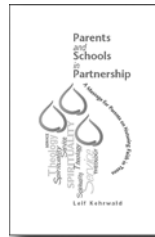
We've just put out a new edition of *World Religions: A Voyage of Discovery*, by Jeffrey Brodd. You'll find that it incorporates the following new features:

- a new chapter on modern trends in religion
- new maps that are more detailed and easier to use
- a new section on the Aztec religion of Mesoamerica
- a sidebar in each chapter offering examples of the seven dimensions of religion
- review questions at the end of each chapter

This edition, like the previous one, is an introductory survey of religious traditions that helps eleventh and twelfth graders understand the basic dimensions of the world's major religions, the people who adhere to these religions, and the answers each religion offers to life's major questions. Text: 320 pages, paper, \$22.00 (\$17.60 each for orders of \$200 or more); teaching manual: 336 pages including 35 handouts, spiral, \$25.95.

## New for Your School's Faith Community

Catholic high schools are challenged to teach theology, nurture spirituality, and promote service. Parents want their children to take their faith with them into young adulthood. Together schools and parents can form a powerful partnership to nurture a lasting and mature faith in teens.



*Parents and Schools in Partnership: Message for Parents on Nurturing Faith in Teens*, by Leif Kehrwald, offers practical ideas and suggestions for each family about how to be a community of faith (with its local parish) and how to work with its Catholic high school as a faith community. Through family faith conver-

sation, ritual and devotion, and outreach and service, schools and families can help young people learn about God, grow in relationship with God, and respond to the needs of others. 16 pages, stitched, \$27.00 for a packet of 30 booklets.

## And for Your Planning

As you look at next year's calendar, consider one of our seasonal one-day retreats or formation in-services for the faculty and staff members at your school. *Fresh Streams of Living Water* is a retreat that celebrates and fosters faith community in your Catholic school. We also offer themed retreats for Advent, midwinter, and Lent. All the retreats offered by Saint Mary's Press feature a balance of presentation, group processing, personal reflection, community building, and prayer. Retreats are offered either from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. or from 8 a.m. to noon, with the afternoon set aside for small-group consultation.

To order any of the books on this page, or to learn more about our retreats, write to Saint Mary's Press, Orders Department, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1318; phone 800-533-8095; fax 800-344-9225; or visit our Web site, [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org).

## resource reviews **Editor's Picks**

Resources for nurturing our own prayer life abound. In this issue editors at Saint Mary's Press share some of their favorite resources.

### **Tom Zanzig**—*author, trainer, and consultant*

I read a lot of books on spirituality, but for my personal prayer, reflection, and edification, I find myself again and again going back to two gems: *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983), collected excerpts from the works of Abraham Joshua Heschel, and *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim: A Personal Manual for Prayer and Ritual* (Leavenworth, KS: Forest of Peace Books, 1989), by Edward M. Hayes. Both books stretch my mind, gladden my heart, and touch my soul.

Order *I Asked for Wonder* for \$16.95 from Crossroad Publishing, 481 Eighth Avenue, Suite 1550, New York, NY 10001; phone 800-707-0670; fax 212-868-2171. Order *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim* for \$16.95 from Forest of Peace Publishing, 251 Muncie Road, Leavenworth, KS 66048; phone 800-659-3227; fax 800-726-9033.

### **Barbara Murray**—*editor of parish-based resources*

*Living Faith: Daily Catholic Devotions*, (Fenton, MO: Creative Communications for the Parish), edited by James E. Adams, is a pocket-size devotional that appeals to me for a variety of reasons. I can tuck it away in a purse, a backpack, or even a passport. It contains references to the Scripture readings for each day of the week. A variety of authors contribute to the reflections, offering a variety of viewpoints. I often find the reflection to be just what I need that day. Each issue contains three months, at a very reasonable cost.

Order a one-year subscription for \$7.50 or a single copy for \$2.25 from Creative Communications for the Parish, 1564 Fencorp Drive, Fenton, MO 63026-2942; phone 800-325-9414; fax 636-305-9333.

### **Eileen Daily**—*textbook editor*

Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP, is a certified yoga teacher who practices what he preaches. In *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), he looks at the popular practices of yoga and meditation and discusses the role they can have in Christian prayer practice. He is articulate in his consideration of the Christian theological place that these practices can fill. Among other things, he demonstrates a yoga series that can be done along with praying the Lord's Prayer. For those uncertain about how to integrate these practices into a Catholic prayer practice, Father Ryan has marked a trail that is clear and acceptable.

Order this book for \$14.95 from Paulist Press, 997 Macarthur Boulevard, Mahwah, NJ 07430; phone 800-218-1903; fax 800-836-3161.

### **Christine Navarro**—*teaching manual editor*

*Sacred Space* is a wonderful online resource provided by the Irish Jesuits. The Web site enables you to move through a daily prayer experience of ten minutes or so in several stages. First, the site provides a way to become attentive to the presence of God. In the next frame, words gently appear that invite you to consider your freedom and lack of freedom. Next, you are asked to consider your current state of being. The subsequent frame provides a Scripture passage and an invitation to listen to the way that God is speaking to you. Some questions then appear that prompt you to contemplate your response in Jesus' presence. The experience concludes with a short prayer. The site provides helpful prayer guides for you if you feel uncertain about a step or if you are simply stuck. The site also features posters about Sacred Space in case you want to encourage your students to try the experience.

Find Sacred Space at [www.jesuit.ie/prayer/](http://www.jesuit.ie/prayer/).

### Lorraine Kilmartin—*editor in chief*

Whenever my prayer life gets a little too predictable, I turn to *The Way We Pray: Prayer Practices from Around the World* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 2001), by Maggie Oman Shannon, and it never fails to wake up my creative energies! This book is a very accessible collection of fifty spiritual practices aimed to integrate body-mind-spirit in prayer. Each little chapter is designed to whet your appetite with a little background on each practice and two or three “suggestions for beginning the exploration.” Browse through this book, and if you’re like me, you’ll find yourself getting excited about creating an altar, praying with mandalas, or designing your own tea ceremony. What’s more, you’ll start dreaming up other prayer forms you’d like to explore—I was inspired to help my prayer group create medicine bags after reading the description of amulets.

Order this book for \$15.95 from Red Wheel/Weiser and Conari Press, P.O. Box 612, York Beach, ME, 03910-0612; phone 800-423-7087; fax 877-337-3309; e-mail [orders@redwheelweiser.com](mailto:orders@redwheelweiser.com); Web site [www.conari.com](http://www.conari.com).

“The duty you have . . .  
of learning how to touch  
hearts should make you  
apply yourselves especially  
to prayer . . .”

—Saint John Baptist de La Salle,  
patron saint of teachers

(“Practicing Spiritual Wellness” continued from page 3)

when you serve, blessing results and the blessing is reciprocal.

**Participating in blessing through delight.** The whole creation is put together to delight every sense. On the sixth day, God stepped back and saw that it was very good. Fresh cut grass smells good. Water crashing across rocks and sand soothes and excites. My granddaughter’s two-year-old body tucked next to my rib is perfect peace.

I’m noticing that when I recognize, announce, and praise the beauty and delightfulness of the creation, I come into right relationship with it. I’m learning to be silent, to listen, to see, and to respond in ways that sometimes feel almost mystical to me, and I’m noticing that mutual blessing results.

**Participating in blessing through gratefulness.** No other story in the Bible has helped me see more clearly the providence of God than the story of Creation. There is no question in my mind that life is created and sustained by the power of God. Across the years I have had the practice of writing down what I am grateful for. The list is long and often surprises me. To nourish my spirit, I need to say thank you hundreds of times a day. Thank you to God for life. Thank you to students and maples and robins and parents and enemies and colleagues and dirt and oceans and spiders and air. The fierce tenderness of life is sharp and sweet, . . . and I am grateful. Blessing goes out, and blessing is returned through service, through delight, through gratefulness.

*Finish, rest and bless:* I invite you to reflect on these three words, to come to your own experience and understanding, and to practice their holy rhythm as you feed your own spirit and tend your own journey toward being a *textperson* . . . for as Rabbi Heschel reminds us, you are the text the pupils read, the text they will never forget.

**Pamela Johnson** is the former director of the Faith-Building Experiences workshop and retreat department of Saint Mary’s Press and is now an editor at The Pilgrim Press. She and her husband live at Still Point Farm, in Winona, Minnesota, where together they raise fifty-two varieties of cut flowers and welcome sojourners into their home.

