

SPIRITUALITY OF THE EMOTIONS

A Series by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D.

(Note to readers: This is not a finished book. It is an incomplete working manual for use in groups. Feel free to duplicate it for any use you have. I will be delighted to get your insights on these topics and also to correspond with you, not about your whole life story and problems, but about specific ways you are trying to implement the ideas in this program in your own life. Write to me at rondachervin@gmail.com).

SESSION ONE: Introduction about Emotions and Spirituality

Let us begin with prayer: Dear Father God, You have created us with minds to know, wills to choose, and hearts to feel. You wish our hearts to be full of peace, trust, hope, joy and love. Liberate us with Your saving grace from the uncontrolled anger, anxiety, despair, disappointment and bitterness that keep us from being Your faithful disciples.

The most important reason I am working on a program on spirituality of the emotions is the response to sessions based on my book *Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace*. Every week I get e-mails from grateful participants and readers. They appreciate an approach that combines Christian spirituality with psychological insights.

You should know that I have had 70 years of struggle with strong negative emotions, especially anger. As we proceed I will tell you more about these battles and the ways God has helped me to improve.

It is important that you know that even though I have a Ph.D. in philosophy and an M.A. in Religious Studies I have no degrees in psychology or counseling. I am not qualified to give advice on how to deal with huge problems and decisions in your life. I highly recommend seeing a Christian counselor and/or spiritual director about such matters. I believe that these sessions will be valuable for everyone who comes but more in the way of insight and spiritual help rather than in depth therapy.

Definitions? Webster's defines emotion as a state of feeling; a conscious ...reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed to a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body. The Encyclopedia Britannica web-site adds joy and sadness to anger and fear as examples.

The term spirituality can be widely defined as “the way to God,” or more specifically, for Christians, as an individual’s obedience to the Holy Spirit in the quest for union with God.

In my program, Spirituality of the Emotions, I will take you through a typical day in your life tracking such emotions as anxiety vs. trust; indifference vs. friendliness; irritation vs. acceptance; uncontrolled anger vs. peace; boredom and annoyance vs. serving with love; despair vs. hope.

Coming to even the first of these sessions shows that you have a desire to change. Dietrich Von Hildebrand, one of the greatest Christian philosophers and spiritual writers of the 20th century, considered that no one could become more holy without a readiness to change. As St. Paul told us, we need to beg the Holy Spirit for greater “love, joy, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22) To be transformed, we need to struggle with negative emotions such as uncontrolled anger or trustless anxiety and despair. In His love for us and for those around us, God wants to give us the grace (supernatural love energy) to become more peaceful, and joyful. And this, as all the saints prove, can happen even while we endure the small and large crosses of life.

A key factor in our growth will be getting away from irrational passions into the emotional responses that are due to the specific realities we encounter. For example, fear of a disabled person vs. desire to help; or instead of feeling annoyed about a glitch in preparing a perfect meal, we need to be more grateful that we have any food to cook at all. Easy to see in such a case but more difficult when it comes to minimizing the basic flaws of those around us in favor of gratitude for their virtues.

Each session will include examples from everyday life, a teaching, a plan devised by you for incorporating insights into your life in your daily life, prayers, and questions for sharing in a group at the next meeting. You will end up with a chart of our own of your proven methods of dealing better with negative emotions with the help of grace.

RESPONSE - (form a circle with no more than four in each group)

- Tell about emotions you struggle with present or past.
- In battling with negative emotions what means have you found helpful such as talking to friends, seeking professional counsel, spiritual directors, prayer. Other?
- What led you to try these sessions?
- Write down the names of each member of the group and promise to pray for each one.
- During the week after the first session keep a list of negative emotions of any kind, even if not mentioned so far in our program. Write them down as they come up even if they last only a short time.

List of topics for further sessions: moods, anxiety, first encounters; irritation and acceptance; conflicts, blahs – downs; despair and hope.

Closing Prayer

Session 2 Moods

- Prayer: Dear Father God, You have created us with minds to know, wills to choose, and hearts to feel. You wish our hearts to be full of peace, trust, hope, joy and love. Liberate us with Your saving grace from the anger, anxiety, despair, disappointment and bitterness that keep us from being Your faithful disciples.

I am not a psychologist or a counselor. For serious problems and decisions you need to go to a counselor and/or spiritual director. This is for insight and spiritual inspiration.

- Sharing of last week's notes on the exercises about negative emotions in daily life or any new thoughts or questions.

Teaching on Moods

Definition: feeling, state of mind, a prevailing disposition, a distinctive atmosphere or context especially related to the arts (as in mood music?)

Additionally, I would add that moods are: changeable, fluctuating, as in "free floating anxiety" vs. a chronic emotion such as anger or despair. We call someone moody if we surmise they fluctuate too quickly, usually on the bad side. An incentive to trying to be less moody is that people are a little afraid of moody people sensing we are unpredictable.

Good moods can sometimes be a special grace wafting one above drudgery feelings. Bad feelings can sometimes come from the devil trying to sink our ship.

Relation to physical realities such as illness, weather, medication, also to temperament – generally melancholics are more moody, I would say.

relation to anticipations good or bad – hard to be in a bad mood if you just won the lottery – bad mood when anticipating something unpleasant or burdensome.

Good moods when extreme such as elation can be followed by a fall at the slightest negative that bursts the bubble – it is not good to have frothy feeling that everything will go well for the rest of my life, etc. Try not to get too high, I have been advised “down, Fido.”

Bad moods can be like quicksand leading to unobjective thoughts about reality in general, ones own personality, bad predictions for one’s personal future.

The basic problem with moods – not related to objectivity. Emotions, as per Session One should be a response to objective realities as in grief if someone died; joy at the birth of a new baby, love as a response to other’s neediness or delight in their virtues or pleasant personality traits. With moods we largely forget what is objectively worthy of joy or hope or peace such as in trust in God, or try to submerge what is sad or evil and just ride a state as if it were permanent.

Relation to self-centered concern as always to be having a good day, so feel in a bad mood because I can’t control life or manipulate others to make my day better? Do we want our moods to color our whole day?

Clare Ten Eyck, a Catholic psychotherapist recommends getting into feeling of the bad mood and bringing it to Jesus. Don’t tough it out, but cry out of the depths. When possible, sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

Therefore need to do spiritual warfare especially against bad moods: discern what is objective and what is subjective as against in cynicism, self-disgust, hopelessness.

Need to work on a conscious attitude of grateful joy for the good things in my life and prayer to find ways to lighten the load or to repent of my part in negativity – especially that built up by years of sometimes sinful non-forgiveness, etc.

In sessions after our six are completed we will do a lot on anxiety. Here I want to make some general remarks you can ponder about anxiety that comes and goes as a sort of mood:

Dr. Abraham Low of Recovery, Inc. for Mental Health says that fear comes from a sense of danger. As soon as you realize that there is no danger or only a small possibility, fear abates. Method: Not a 911! Take a secure thought such as “some grey days become better later on or “even though things aren’t going so great they could get better.” Always move around when anxious rather than sitting and brooding.

A pundit remarked, "Don't let your worries get the best of you, remember, Moses started out as a basket case."

Talk to the person who is making you anxious vs. brooding over it.

I think that all my life it worked to be a worry wart a the superficial way as in working up alternate plans for every anticipated glitch, but now in old age I want to trust more.

Praying in depth helps with anxiety.

Jesus once said in my heart: "Ronda, you need never be worried a single day in your life again if you only trusted in Me."

Sharing of examples by participants of moodiness and/or anxiety.

Scriptures and Quotations:

"God indeed is my Savior. I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the Lord." (Isaiah 12:2)

"Neither death, nor life... nor things present, nor things to come, nor anything else in al creation...Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, Our Lord, " (Romans 8:37-39)

"God Our Father, hear our morning prayer and let the radiance of your love scatter the gloom of our hearts." (Tuesday, Week 1 Morning Prayer)

"Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18)

F) Plan for the week: For all: track your initial mood when arising or at other times including depression or elation, anxiety or trusting hope. Do spiritual warfare against negative moods. In silence, participants make an individual plan for spiritual warfare in the area of the week including useful thoughts such as it's not a 911, personal prayers, traditional prayers and Christian services, and talking to friends or mentors, or, some suggest, leaving the presence of others until your mood is under control. Write down names of your group and pray for each of them this week especially for anything specific any member of the group wants prayers for.

G) Closing prayer about the week's theme

SESSION 3. Friendliness vs. Indifference: first encounters of the day with family, school mates, workers, Church associates.

Let us begin with prayer: Dear Father God, You have created us with minds to know, wills to choose, and hearts to feel. You wish our hearts to be full of peace, trust, hope, joy and love. Liberate us with Your saving grace from the uncontrolled anger, anxiety, despair, disappointment and bitterness that keeps us from being Your faithful disciples.

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Sharing of last week's notes on the exercises about moods, anxiety, and spirituality in daily life.

Teaching on Friendliness vs. Indifference

Even those of us who pride ourselves on being friendly may often allow ourselves to fall into an indifferent or even surly way of greeting those we see first in our daily lives.

The contrast between newlyweds greeting each other and that of older married couples is proverbial. Delighted joy vs. a grunt, wordless absence of any greeting, or a reminder of a chore to be done.

We are called as Christians to love one another as Christ loved us. Can you imagine Jesus, Mary or Joseph greeting each other for the first time of the day with indifference?

Of course, those who consider themselves "morning persons" are better at showing love or respect first thing than those who feel only half alive until after breakfast or the first pause between classes at school or at the coffee break at work.

And we can try to get around confronting ourselves on first greetings by making fun of those whose opening morning words seem chipper but automatic or foolishly silly. To habitually grouchy AM persons, a cheery hello can seem almost like an affront.

I believe that if we wish to develop a spirituality of the emotions we need to look carefully at such seemingly minor matters as our greeting. In the Psalms it describes a country as terribly pagan because "The passersby say not 'God Bless You.'"

Von Hildebrand, the great Catholic writer, used to teach his disciples: “never pass a person you love without showing it in some way.” A touch, a smile, a real ‘how are you?’ – something to come against the feeling of routine and drudgery that many people bring to a new day. In the case of less personal first encounters such as co-workers in a large company or cashiers, or other students passing you in the cafeteria who you only know by sight, etc., the love you would be expressing by polite greetings would not be intimate but could still be Christian in the sense of love of neighbor – your neighbor being whoever is near.

Once I noticed that a check-out woman never smiled or exchanged any comments with the long line of people going through her counter. I decided to try smiling at her and always saying hello. It took a month, but finally she did respond. A friend reported the same result in the case of another customer service person.

Maybe you know you need to change concerning emotions on first encounters, but feel it is artificial to pump up what seems like unreal friendliness to strangers or to relatives and friends you are on the outs with. An incentive might be considering how it makes you feel when every day you have to be in the company of an unfriendly, glum, or disgruntled person. For myself, I know that such people make me feel alternately used, unappreciated, unloved or even worthless.

Participants Share Examples

Scriptures and Quotations

“A remedy for indifference and preoccupation is to say a short prayer just before you encounter any person that God bless that person and your interchanges.”

In silence participants make an individual plan for spiritual warfare in the area of first encounters during the week including personal prayers, traditional prayers and Christian services, and talking to friends or mentors.

G) Closing prayer about the week’s theme: Dear Jesus, reportedly you won disciples sometimes with no more than a sentence indicating your knowledge of them and care for them. Help us to spread Your love in small ways by a genuine smile or other greeting.

Session 4: Irritation vs. Acceptance

Prayer: Dear Father God, You have created us with minds to know, wills to choose, and hearts to feel. You wish our hearts to be full of peace, trust, hope, joy and love. Liberate us with Your saving grace from the uncontrolled anger, anxiety, despair, disappointment and bitterness that keeps us from being Your faithful disciples.

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Sharing of last week's notes on the exercises about first encounters, friendliness vs. indifference.

Teaching on Irritation vs. Acceptance: morning frustrations at home, in the car, at work, school, shopping, ministries, etc.

A large part of my book *Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace* (order from Simon Peter Press 1-800-558-5452) is devoted to the problem of irritable anger caused day by day because of the frustrations of daily life.

In a world marred by original sin filled with broken and sinful people how could we expect things to run smoothly. Ignoring this truth, we wish instead that we could be the heroines or heroes of the drama of life. Everyone else should be secondary or walk-on characters who would do everything to bring about Hollywood endings for success in our personal goals.

With this expectation we become outraged at drivers who cut us off or slow us down, at machines that fail us when we are in a hurry, at spouses who seem to have an agenda opposite to ours frustrating our plans, etc., etc. etc.

In next weeks session we will deal with anger just and unjust concerning major issues, but this week we want to work on irritability about minor matters. Here are a few insights from psychologists and Christian teachers about irritability vs. acceptance.

In the 1940's, Dr. Abraham Low, psychiatrist and forerunner of cognitive therapy, developed a self-help group program called Recovery, Inc. for dealing with anger, anxiety, and depression in the 1950's. I learned about the groups when I was in my late 50's and have benefited greatly. Following are some of the most helpful ideas in this program about irritability and acceptance:

“Not a 911.” Low claims that most irritable people blow up ordinary difficulties of daily life into big melodramas. The usual day can be rather boring, but, as some examples will show, the day can become more exciting if you yell curses through a closed window at the bad drivers on the road as if every discourteous driver is a villain deserving of hell! Or, muttering about the short life span of modern kitchen devices changes a dull occurrence into a condemnation of all the manufacturing companies in the world! Heh! A sarcastic comment to a school mate, family member, co-worker, for neglecting a small chore changes plain annoyance into a mini-victory of wit.

Recovery, Inc. members recommend that when daily annoyances occur we need to come up with an amusing phrase such as “It’s not a 911,” or “Expect frustrations every five minutes, you won’t be disappointed.”

A similar “tool” is “self-induced expectations lead to self-induced frustrations.” In other words, if you nurture overly optimistic hopes for the smoothness of the day’s agenda you are more likely to be upset by roadblocks.

Averageness: we are urged to accept the fact that average people in an average family, school, work place, or Church, will be only so so in meeting our wishes for perfection. And we will often fail in meeting the expectations of others, for example, their wish that we would make less of a big deal about trivial matters.

This does not mean that we should have no hopes for others or ourselves and wallow in mediocrity or worse. It is good and right to try to improve things when that is feasible. However, in many cases changing things would entail an entire renovation of society or personality. We might work slowly to achieve our goals but we cannot expect that just wanting things to be different , cursing others, or nasty remarks will change the world into paradise.

From a spiritual standpoint, we have to accept the fact once and for all that total happiness is only in heaven. On earth, no matter how hard we try to arrange things for smooth success, there will be frustrations. But these little crosses have great spiritual value if we bring them to Jesus and offer them to him. Here is the way many Christians often pray about annoyances: Jesus, in heaven you had perfect happiness. You chose to come down to earth to suffer for our sins. You endured all the petty frustrations we do. I would like to complain and mutter, or make sarcastic remarks when daily life is so irksome, but I will “take up my little cross and follow you,” to join in bringing down graces on the world for (names of people who need special favors.)

If this way of praying seems strange to you, tell us about your own way of bringing the little crosses of your life to Jesus.

Share examples of participants

Scriptures and Quotations: (to be added)

In silence, participants make an individual plan for spiritual warfare in the area of irritation vs. acceptance, including personal prayers, traditional prayers and Christian services, and talking to friends or mentors. Take down the names of the people in your group, if you have not already done so, and promise to pray for them by name throughout the next week, especially for specific requests involving this theme.

Closing prayer about the week's theme

Session 5: Anger vs. Peace in Conflicts

Let us begin with prayer: Dear Father God, You have created us with minds to know, wills to choose, and hearts to feel. You wish our hearts to be full of peace, trust, hope, joy and love. Liberate us with Your saving grace from the anger, anxiety, despair, disappointment and bitterness that keeps us from being Your faithful disciples.

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Sharing of last weeks spiritual exercises involving irritation and acceptance during frustrations.

Teaching on Anger vs. Peace in Conflicts

Last session we talked about frustrations of daily life. In this one we want to begin to deal with more major conflicts, especially on-going ones. For most of us, by noon we have met with some chronic conflict. Let's take a professor who reads old lecture notes in class but then gives huge assignments from a book he or she rarely goes over in class. Or, let's take dealing with a fellow employee who shirks, leaving more work for you.

In both examples, there is an injustice experienced often, not just by yourself, but by others as well. It is unhealthy to just suppress feelings of anger and fake that all is well. If there is any possibility of change to bring about justice you should try.

Often, however, you cannot bring about change because, say, the professor really thinks the reading is easy or the shirker is the friend or relative of the manager.

What, then? Our feelings of anger are not wrong in themselves. But they usually escalate to become toxic and sinful because disproportionate, harsh, unforgiving, or vengeful.

Here is Dr. Low's analysis: when we are unable to get a real victory over a person who is thwarting our goals, we try to a SYMBOLIC VICTORY. For example, we make sarcastic remarks to our friends about the one who is so stubbornly recalcitrant. We save up instance of the unjust person's acts to gossip about with our friends. This is rightly called PUTTING SOMEONE DOWN. We like doing it because it makes us feel not weak and under the thumb of the unjust adversary, but instead above that person since we are

judging them from the height of our own superiority. We may indulge fantasies about how one day that person will suffer for hurting us. Or we might take revenge by always coming late to class or losing necessary papers the shirker could need.

Pride is usually behind over-reacting anger. We like to feel that we are smart, efficient, and successful in our endeavors. We hate being in a [position of having to beg for what is only just. When others treat us badly, it stings our pride. They are in the power position and we have to accept unpleasant conditions.

Trying, in the midst of conflicts, to come to peace requires spiritual warfare. Over and over again, and sometimes only after many hours of struggle, we have to accept the fact that life is hard and only God knows how much we are suffering at the hands of others. We have to place before our imaginations the injustices Jesus suffered and remember how He forgave His enemies. In prayer we must ask Jesus to help us to be merciful to those who stand in our way. We need to set our sights on heaven instead of churning over our hurts.

You might try asking Jesus how He sees each person you in conflict with. Compassion, care, concern, will to heal?

Scriptures and Quotations:

“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” (Isaiah 6:5)

St. Augustine commenting on David’s encounter with Nathan the prophet who denounced David for adultery and murder leading to David’s stunning repentance:

“Let us never assume that if we live good lives we will be without sin; our lives should be praised only when we continue to beg for pardon. But men are hopeless creatures, and the less they concentrate on their own sins, the more interested they become in the sins of others. They seek to criticize, not to correct. Unable to excuse themselves, they are ready to accuse others...Your heart must be crushed...For a clean heart to be created, the unclean one must be crushed” (Office of Readings, 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

In a novel by Gertrud Von Le Fort, *The Pope from the Ghetto*, the hero is incensed by the injustices going on in society and in the Church. A holy bishop gives him this advice: “If you are looking for justice you will find it in hell. In heaven is mercy, and on earth there is the cross.”

Participants give their examples of chronic conflict

In silence, participants make an individual plan for spiritual warfare in the area of irritation vs. acceptance, including personal prayers, traditional prayers and Christian services, and talking to friends or mentors. Take down the names of the people in your group, if you have not already done so, and promise to pray for them by name throughout the next week.

6. August 1- Boredom and Annoyance vs. Zealous Loving Service:

Let us begin with prayer: Dear Father God, You have created us with minds to know, wills to choose, and hearts to feel. You wish our hearts to be full of peace, trust, hope, joy and love. Liberate us with Your saving grace from the anger, anxiety, despair, disappointment and bitterness that keeps us from being Your faithful disciples.

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Sharing of last weeks spiritual exercises involving anger and conflict.

Teaching:

I suffer with what could be called the 1:30 PM syndrome. It usually follows my after lunch nap. As I lie half awake I get this feeling that everything I do with my life is absurd and meaningless. I think of my plans for work or for visits with others and it all seem worthless, distasteful. The tiniest glitches in washing up and preparing a snack I find intolerably annoying. I feel too blah to even register irritation or anger about such frustrations.

Then, what do you know? Five minutes after guzzling down tea or coffee, I find fine, raring to go, and eager to pursue my goals.

However, about 4 P.M., I get tired again. Not as bad as at 1:30 PM but sort of blah, lack luster - and this persists until a surge of energy while eating dinner, unless....

Here's the point. If I happen to have scheduled in a late afternoon swim, I don't have that blah feeling. Instead I feel fresh, and even exhilarated and eager to see family or friends or get in a little more work before dinner.

I never bothered to analyze this syndrome much until working on Spirituality of the Emotions through the day as I am doing now for this series. What strikes me most is that if a cup of coffee or a swim can change boredom, annoyance, or down blah feelings to good feelings, emotions have a lot more to do with the body than I imagine. Dr. Abraham Low insists that moving your muscles in any form is an antidote to low feelings as well as anxiety.

And, since we are called to zealous loving service as Christians, we need to come against feelings of lethargy so that we don't end up wasting most of afternoon. Is it really God's will to do paid work in the afternoon in a sloppy manner, possibly faking work but really playing computer games? Is it good to doze off during afternoon classes at college? Or, is it okay to shirk necessary chores at home in favor of interactive web games? All excused because "I feel so yucky, I need distraction?" Is a Christian to be half-hearted in his or her work?

Let's see what one of many alternate Christian scenarios might be. I notice after lunch that I feel dull, dispirited, bored and cranky. I turn to the Lord and pray:

"Dear God, you want me to serve you this afternoon in a productive or otherwise fruitful way. Please revive me by special grace or through the instrumentality of something that will pep me up, whether it be food, drink, exercise, medicine, or whatever would help me get out of this downer state.

" I offer to You whatever is annoying or just uninteresting about my afternoon duties, in gratitude for the good goals my activities involve, or for the sake of special grace for someone I love, or as a penance for the sins of my past. I look forward to coming back to you in prayer as evening falls that I might know your approval for my sacrifices."

Of course, sometimes those down feelings are symptoms of a way of life that needs not acceptance but change. A university student might need to avoid afternoon classes if possible in favor of sporting activities and night classes. A person whose work is always dull and unchallenging might need to look into alternate employment opportunities. A housewife might decide to accomplish chores as fast as possible in the early afternoon to have more time for recreation before making dinner.

Another aspect of afternoon down-feelings could be your temperament. Zealous service is much more appealing to choleric (raring to go) types than to phlegmatic (laid back) ones. But just as activist people desperately need to take time to relax and to pray quietly; so more relaxed people, even when they don't feel pushed by natural energies, need to pray for the grace to do whatever contributes to the common good in a quietly efficient manner.

Many times playing Christian music can lift one out of those dull, lethargic feelings.

Your examples:

Scriptures and Other Quotations:

"Near restful waters He leads me, to revive my drooping spirit." (Psalm 23, 2-3)

O, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping thy statutes!" (Psalm 118: 5)

**"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11:28)**

"Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you." (1 Peter 5)

"In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

"I run the race so as to win....()I have fought the good fight. I have run the race to the finish, I have kept the faith." (2 Titus 4:7)

Examples of Participants

In silence participants make an individual plan for spiritual warfare in the area of irritation vs. acceptance, including personal prayers, traditional prayers and Christian services, and talking to friends or mentors. Take down the names of the people in your group, if you have not already done so, and promise to pray for them by name throughout the next week.

Closing prayer: Jesus: Every moment of your days on earth was given to prayer and working for the Kingdom of Love. You know how tired, discouraged and low we can sometimes become. Send the Holy Spirit to rouse us to accomplish the goals You want us to achieve no matter what the setbacks.

Session 7: Disappointment and Despair vs. Grateful Joy and Hope:

Let us begin with prayer: Dear Father God, You have created us with minds to know, wills to choose, and hearts to feel. You wish our hearts to be full of peace, trust, hope, joy and love. Liberate us with Your saving grace from the uncontrolled anger, anxiety, despair, disappointment and bitterness that keeps us from being Your faithful disciples.

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Sharing of results of last weeks spiritual exercises coming against afternoon boredom and annoyance in favor of zealous loving service.

Teaching: Feelings in the evening and at night about your life alone or with family or friends.

One of the most famous quotations from Thoreau is “most men lead lives of quiet desperation.” Bitter, indeed. For awhile, Thoreau sought liberation from the bitterness of life in solitude at Walden Pond.

In youth many of us take delight in fantasies of perfect cars, perfect friends, perfect careers, perfect spouses, perfect houses, myself, a perfect saint. Since there is no perfection except in heaven, such fantasies have to end in some degree of disappointment. When the daydream is replaced by the nightmare, normal disappointment can easily become full-blown despair.

Different but even more painful is the grief we feel for the losses in our lives. In spite of faith in eternal life, the death of loved ones leaves a hole in the heart that no one else can fill.

In the twilight of the evening and the darkness of midnight, with less to distract us, the choice can become more poignant: despair or hope. My godfather, a philosopher, Balduin Schwarz, used to say that if you add up all the reasons to despair and all the reasons to hope it is only Jesus, crucified and resurrected who can tip the balance to hope.

St. Ambrose wrote: (Office of Readings p. 866-867): “Let your door stand open to receive him, unlock your soul to him, offer him a welcome in your mind, and then you will see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the joy of grace. Throw wide the gate of your heart, stand before the sun of everlasting light that shines on every man. This true light shines on all, but if anyone closes his window he will deprive himself of eternal light. If you shut

the door of your mind, you shut out Christ. Though he can enter, he does not want to force his way in rudely, or compel us to admit him against our will...His light is received by those who long for the splendor of perpetual light that night can never destroy. the sun of our daily experience is succeeded by the darkness of night, but the sun of holiness never sets."

On our way home from a day of school or work, as dinner time approaches, we can lift our minds to God in thanksgiving or all the gifts of the day. Then in the night before sleep or at times of waking if we feel dark despair overwhelming us, we need to cry out from the depths of our hearts to our Savior. Our hope cannot be in earthly good fortune for that comes and goes but must be anchored in faith in an eternity of love in the kingdom of God.

Surely, God allows the very things in our life that seem to push us toward despair as a way to draw us into His sacred heart. Immersed in the love of God we let go of anger at not having gotten our way, we let go of our sadness that the bad seems to have won out in our lives and in the world and that good has not triumphed. Only God can make it come out right in the end.

Always helpful at times where despair is tempting is giving your heart just as it is to Jesus. An old prayer being revived at this time is to Our Lady of Knots - not Knock, the apparition site in Ireland, but Knots as in snarls. On the novena card is an image of Mary unraveling knotted skeins of wool. We ask her to unravel those knots that come in areas of our lives where we feel stuck. She helps us see the good and forgive the bad.

A helpful antidote to despair in relationships is planning little deeds of love, especially for those who upset us.

My husband, afflicted with disabling, frightening asthma most of our married life, used to play beautiful classical music, often sacred music every evening. It gave him hope.

Your examples:

Scripture and other Quotations:

I will wipe away all your tears. (Revelations 7:17)

Love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

"But rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4: 13)

Forgiveness "Merciless is the judgment on the man who has not shown mercy. But mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2: 12-17?)

"Eyes will close, but you, unsleeping, watch by our side; death may come: in Love's safekeeping, still we abide. God of love, all evil quelling, sin forgiving, fear dispelling, stay with us, our hearts indwelling, this eventide." (Hymn for Compline - Night Prayer of the Church on Mondays)

"Let nothing disturb you, nothing affright you; all things are passing, God never changes; patient endurance attains to all things; who God possesses in nothing is wanting; alone God suffices." St. Teresa of Avila.

"Charity means pardoning the unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all!"
Chesterton

"Dreams are only nightmares with lipstick." Toni Morrison

"Thou shalt love thy crooked neighbor with thy crooked heart." Auden

"If the devil can't make you bad, he will try to make you sad." Mother Mary Paula, see a Gentle Witness Canticle May/June 2007, p. 21

Follow up:

Before working on a Chart for follow up, here are a few general suggestions:

Recommended Books from Dr. Ronda: Check on her web under Titles: Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace; and under e-books: Healing of Rejection; Weeping with Jesus: Grieving with the Lord

C.S. Lewis, The Great Divorce, A Grief Observed; and all his novels.

Group and Individual: Recovery, Inc.(go to that web. If there are no groups near you write an e-mail to them asking about telephone meetings or our Own Spirituality of Emotions Group (each session will have your examples shared and new teachings and praying together)

- e-mailing Ronda with examples from everyday life
rondachervin@gmail.com

Closing Prayer:

SPIRITUALITY OF EMOTIONS DAILY CHART

“Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, solid in your faith.” 1 Peter 5: 8-9

These pages have suggestions for you to consider when planning your program for the future. While pondering the suggestions on these sheets keep on your table the sheet entitled MY PLAN FOR SPIRITUALITY OF THE EMOTIONS and fill it in gradually here and at home with your own plans:

When negative emotions arise what do I need to try? Ponder these suggestions. Check ones you think could improve your emotional life.

Prayer:

Talk to Jesus, offer things up

Our Father

Rosary

In depth praying for divine help

Mass more often when possible

Sacrament of Reconciliation - more frequent than in the past?

Adoration,

Liturgy of the Hours

Scripture Reading, personalized such as adding in your name to each passage as in “Jane, be of good cheer.....”

Repeated word or phrase such as Jesus or JMJ, Peace, tongues, praise prayer.

A Scripture that helps you repeated all through the day.

Spiritual Reading

Physical Helps:

Food - better or more or less

Longer sleep, nap?

Exercise - move your muscles!

Vitamins

Medicine

Emotional Helps from Family, Friends, or Mentors

Talking to someone about your problem

Using Recovery, Inc. Tools:

Not a 911,

Expect frustrations every 5 minutes, you won't be disappointed,

**Expect the average,
Peace over power, don't try for symbolic victory.
Will to bear discomfort to meet your goals.
Move muscles vs. brooding
Humor is your best friend.**

**Cultivate positive emotions especially love, gratitude, and forgiveness,
humor.**

**Beauty - place yourself where you can enjoy the beauty of
nature, music, art, literature, worthwhile recreation**

**Examination of Conscience: throughout the day check out whether
negative emotions prevail, moods dominate, first encounters are loving,
frustrations are accepted if they cannot be avoided, conflicts are struggled with
so that peace is the last word in your own heart if not in that of others; was my
service in my work zealous and loving? Did I end the day with
disappointment and despair or with gratitude and hope?**

MY PLAN FOR SPIRITUALITY OF THE EMOTIONS

Prayer On Arising:

Helps I will seek daily when possible and especially when negative emotions are taking over.

Prayers:

Physical Helps:

Emotional Helps:

Beauty:

Examination of Conscience - enter here areas of specific importance to you as an individual.

Night prayer:

NOT FOR BOOKLET BUT SAVE ON HARD DRIVE:

Notes for Sessions after first 7:

Bruteau p. 66 fff. In prayer knowing self as loved by god vs. defensive self-image building and agry trying to get my own way because defining self as ones goals. Of course harder to chorleric because more goal oriented.

Check Full circle June 9-16, 2007 On despair and Hope