

Empty Tea Cups



BY NANCY COPELAND-PAYTON

A student visits a spiritual master. They sit together and the student begins to talk. And talk and talk. Two empty cups sit on the table for tea. The master slowly pours amber liquid into the student's cup. When the cup is full, the master continues to pour as tea brims the cup and flows onto the table. "Stop!" shouts the student, "The cup is full and cannot take anymore." The master pauses and gently sets down the teapot. "So it is with you. How can you receive anything when you are already full to overflowing with other things?"

What fills us? What fills our lives?

An unflinching look at our calendar or daily planner is a telling record of where we center our lives. What really fills us is revealed by how we spend the minutes and hours of each day.

If we are mindful, this exterior structure for our lives can gift us with time and space to listen for God's voice. We can choose to consistently set aside time from daily tasks to re-center upon God. Prayer, scripture, sacred reading and silence can then begin to fill us. Such consecrated time teaches us to be hollow vessels which are empty enough to receive the Spirit's guidance. If we are unused to hearing Christ in prayer



Taking Tea, Don Bishop

and scripture and quiet—how will we ever discern his presence amidst life's cacophony of voices and tasks?

An honest look at our calendars usually shows that we need to simplify our lives. We make this choice daily. We regularly need to clean house, throw open the windows of our schedules and let a Spirit-filled wind blow through. Our eyes then open to see the unnecessary clutter in our lives. Simplifying our lives clears empty space in each day so that we may listen for sacred voice.

Living simply brings what is most important in my life into sharp focus. When I empty my closet of everything I don't need, there is clarity about the clothes I do need. They are

visible and politely hang with space between them. As I clear my daily schedule and allow the chaff to be blown away, the remaining sparseness provides clarity about what is important. I gradually learn to empty myself of interior things such as my agenda, my need to control and my over-busyness. Emptied, I can finally listen to and sense the sacred in my life.

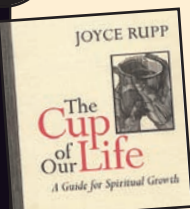
God's presence in scripture and God's presence as revealed in creation become more vibrant. Christ's presence in others becomes discernable and changes how I respond to them. I am aware of the Spirit's call upon my life through my passions and deep yearnings. I'm no longer distracted by a myriad of other human-made demands. My hearing is no longer deafened by noise or by voices that lure me away from the God-center of life. I can hear the still, small whisper of the Spirit.

If we choose, we can live life as an emptied cup. We can wait and listen to be filled with the sacred.

Nancy Copeland-Payton is a retreat leader, spiritual director and author of the book *The Losses of Our Lives: The Sacred Gifts of Renewal in Everyday Loss* (Woodstock, Vt.: Skylight Paths, 2009).



Resources



The Cup of Our Life: A Guide for Spiritual Growth
By Joyce Rupp
Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 1997

Joyce Rupp explores how the cups we use every day, when examined prayerfully, can draw us closer to God. The prayers and questions will help connect the reader with God's plan for each of us.