

# House at Rest

## The House at Rest

By Jessica Powers

*On a dark night*

*Kindled in love with yearnings*

*Oh, happy chance!*

*I went forth unobserved,*

*My house being now at rest.*

*-Saint John of the Cross*

How does one hush one's house,  
each proud possessive wall, each sighing rafter,  
the rooms made restless with remembered laughter  
or wounding echoes, the permissive doors,  
the stairs that vacillate from up to down,  
windows that bring in color and event from countryside or town,  
oppressive ceilings and complaining floors?

The house must first of all accept the night.

Let it erase the walls and their display,  
impoverish the rooms till they are filled  
with humble silences; let clocks be stilled  
and all the selfish urgencies of day.

Midnight is not the time to greet a guest,  
Caution the doors against both foes and friends,  
and try to make the windows understand  
their unimportance when the daylight ends.

Persuade the stairs to patience, and deny  
the passages their aimless to and fro.

Virtue it is that puts a house at rest.  
How well repaid that tenant is, how blest  
who, when the call is heard,  
is free to take his kindled heart and go.

## TAKE A TOUR OF THE BUILDING YOU ARE IN...

As you pass each cabin imagine what their rooms have contained over their years of use— joy and sorrow, activity and rest, wrestling and peace, wisdom and ignorance, wealth and poverty—emptiness and fullness.

## SETTLE YOURSELF INTO PRAYER.

Come to prayer gently. This is one of the great benefits of being on retreat, we can give up our haste for a few hours and bask in the spaciousness of time spent in the presence of God. So enter slowly and gently prepare to pray. After you have strolled around find a suitable place free from distraction. Assume a comfortable posture, breath deeply and adjust (in body, mind and heart) to the silence, the spaciousness and the stillness.

Use Jessica Powers poem to take a prayerful tour through the house of your life—as it is today and as it has been over the last few weeks.

Slowly and prayerfully think through the images of the poem. . . Pray through the images of your house, taking the poets admonition, and praying that God would allow your house to be at rest during the next hours of retreat. Give over to God the important preoccupations that you have brought with you.

ξ What are the “possessive walls,” “sighing rafters”, “the rooms made restless,” . . . etc. of your life?

ξ What makes it difficult for you to release the anxieties, responsibilities, and uncertainties of each day and accept the night? Is it hard for your house to accept the night? Talk to the Lord about these things.

ξ The poet is not advocating inaction, or irresponsibility, but action that is a *response* to a *call*. Such responsiveness requires persistent, open, quiet listening to God. How is your discipline of listening to God—in the scriptures, in the events of your daily life—in quiet and solitude?

ξ Spend some time listening now.

“Hushing is a noble art. It is that grace and discipline by which we quiet the soul and draw it beyond the multiplicity of events and the immediacy of a thousand voices into a center, a still point, where the one thing necessary is found: peace—that peace willed by God, the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

*Robert Morneau*

*Gracious God, teach us to hush our houses so that we might live deeply. Send your Spirit to still the incessant voices and events that plague our fatigued souls. Hush our houses. Grant us the order and peace only you can give.*

## PRAYERFULLY LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF JESUS: MATTHEW 6.25-34

Additional Resources for Spiritual Formation and Prayer can be found at:

If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to Him than birds... instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design like it?... If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think He'll attend to you, take pride in you, and do His best for you?

What I'm trying to get you to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way He works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provision. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

--The Message, Eugene Peterson

**READ SLOWLY AND PRAYERFULLY PSALM 131 THREE TIMES—STOPPING EACH TIME TO HEAR GOD'S WORD TO YOU IN THIS PSALM.**

**CLOSE WITH THESE PRAYERS FROM THE COMPLINE SERVICE IN THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.**

Even though it is day, these prayers are a good reminder that even in the daylight, there is the darkness of things that are beyond our control, things that we must give over to God's hands.

*Be our light in the darkness, O Lord, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, sleep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.*

*O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live: Watch over those, both night and day, who work while others sleep, and grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## Breath Deeply, Surrender, Rest

Additional Resources for Spiritual Formation and Prayer can be found at:

## READINGS ON SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

LIFEWITHOUTSPACEMAKESNOSENSE

LIFE WITHOUT SPACE MAKESNOSENSE

LIFE WITHOUT SPACE MAKES NO SENSE

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly faces. I give long, hostile speeches to my enemies and dream lustful dreams in which I am wealthy, influential, and very attractive—or poor, ugly, and in need of immediate consolation. Thus I try again to run from the dark abyss of my nothingness and restore my false self in all its *vainglory*.

Are, however, not completely alone, Christ is with us.

We enter into solitude first of all to meet our Lord and to be with him and him alone. Our primary task in solitude, therefore, is not to pay undue attention-to-the many faces which assail us, but to keep, the eyes of our mind and heart on him who is our divine savior. Only in the context of grace can we face our sin; only in the place of healing do we dare to show our wounds; only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature. As we come to realize that it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us, that he is our true self, we can slowly let our compulsions melt away and begin to experience the freedom of the children of God. And then we can look back with a smile and realize that we aren't even angry or greedy more.

Solitude is thus the place of purification and transformation, the place of the great struggle and the great encounter. Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. It is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image and. frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the, world. Solitude is the place of our salvation. Hence, it is the place where we want to lead all who are seeking the light in this dark world. St. Anthony spent twenty years in isolation. When he left it he took his solitude with him and shared it with all who came to him. Those who saw him described him as balanced, gentle, and caring. He had become so Christ-like, so radiant with God's love, that his entire being was ministry.

Silence is an indispensable discipline in the spiritual life. Ever since James described the tongue as a "whole wicked world in itself" and silence as putting a bit into the horse's mouth (James 3:3, 6) Christians have tried to practice silence as the way to self-control. Clearly silence is a discipline needed in many different situations: in teaching and learning, in preaching and worship, in visiting and counseling. Silence is a very concrete, practical, and useful discipline in all our ministerial tasks. It can be seen as a portable cell taken with *us from the solitary* place into the midst of our ministry. Silence is solitude practiced in action.

--From *The Way of the Heart*

by Henri Nouwen

### *The "Sifting Silence"*

*You may be someone who finds silence quite natural. You may enjoy being on your own. But not everyone finds it so easy to get into, and for others of you it may be quite a struggle. If that is the case, don't give up - you are not a failure!*

Additional Resources for Spiritual Formation and Prayer can be found at:

*If you are spending time alone and in silence for the first time, it is important to realize that the kind of experience I have just described is not unusual or wrong. If our activity and business has been a way of avoiding deeper questions and concerns, then we may feel, for a while at least, as if we are standing in the path of a dam that has burst. We are often so cluttered inside with the accumulations of years of hopes and fears, plans and ideas, light and darkness - that the Holy Spirit has to first of all clear a space. In the Quaker tradition the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is described as a 'sifting silence'. It is disturbing to experience it, but this clearing work is deeply loving. Just because we feel in turmoil it does not mean, that God is too! The neglect of our inner world may mean that a lot of suppressed energy is locked up within us. Its strength and vigor can be alarming when we meet it for the first time.*

-- From *The Center of Quiet*  
by David Runcorn

The desert fathers (a protest movement in the 4<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> century AD against the "worldliness" in the Church) spoke of busyness as "moral Laziness." Busyness can also be an addictive drug, which is why its victims are increasingly referred to as 'workaholics.' Busyness acts to repress our inner fears and personal anxieties, as we scramble to achieve an enviable image to display to others. We become outward people, obsessed with how we appear, rather than inward people, reflecting on the meaning of our lives.

Busyness also seems to be a determination not to "miss out on life." Behind much of the rat-race of modern life is the unexamined assumption that what I do determines who I am. In this way, we define ourselves by what we do rather than by any quality of what we are inside. It is typical in a party for one strange to approach another with the question "What do you do?" Perhaps we wouldn't have a clue how to respond to the deeper question, 'Who are you?'

Since prayer belongs to the relational side of human life (to who "I am" rather to "what I do"), it is inevitable that prayer will have a very low priority, at the very best for people who live busy lives.

--From *The Transforming Friendship*  
by James Houston

*The desert initiates us into the life of the spirit by helping us to discover who we most deeply are. To follow Christ means that we must let go of excessive attachments to passing pleasures and possessions, to ploys of autonomous power, to tangible goods as if they were ultimate. Christ asks us to abandon our idols, whatever they may be, and to love Him with our entire being.*

*"Pray to thy Father which is in secret." God is a God who hides Himself to the carnal eye. As long as in our worship of God we are chiefly occupied with our own thoughts and exercises, we shall not meet Him who is a spirit, the unseen One. But to the man who withdraws himself from all that is of world and man, and prepares to wait upon God alone, the Father will reveal Himself As he forsakes and gives up and shuts out the world, and the life of the world, and surrenders himself to be led of Christ into the secret of God's presence, the light of the Father's love will rise upon him. The secrecy of the inner chamber and the closed door, the entire separation from all around us, is an image of, and so a help to that inner spiritual sanctuary, the secret of God's tabernacle, within the veil, where our spirit truly comes into contact with the Invisible One.*

-From *With Christ in the School of Prayer*  
by Andrew Murray

Solitude is the place where the whole of our personality and being, seen and unseen, is drawn together in the transforming presence of God's love. But more than that the silence of solitude is the silence of eternity. We are drawn into the mystery of something much bigger than ourselves. It places us, with all that he has made, in the eternity of God's cosmic love and presence. It is there that life is renewed, restored and given its true perspective.

-- From *The Center of Quiet*  
by David Runcorn

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### *True and false silence*

Silence will always feel attractive in a noisy and complex world. As we go on to explore the place of silence in Christian life and prayer it is important to recognize that some other forms of meditation and prayer appeal to the instinct to escape. Sometimes Christian prayer falls into the same trap. It is possible to manufacture all sorts of psychic and spiritual states of stillness and peace. They work like a drug, artificially damping down the demands and stress of the world outside. That is not the prayer and solitude that Jesus teaches us. Just because we feel quiet and close to God, doesn't mean that we actually are. Christian peace and prayer is not the absence of something (stress, pain, conflict etc.), but the presence of Someone with us in the midst of it all. In fact Christian prayer is drawing our lives more closely to the way of the cross. It is all about following the way of Christ.

It is therefore sad to find Christians who are resisting their intuitive desire to seek prayer in solitude because they feel it is selfish and escapist. Clearly, when the Holy Spirit guides our journey in prayer, it will be anything but an escape.

-- From *The Center of Quiet*  
by David Runcorn