

The Sacred Art of Prayer



A spiritual journey of the heart

DAY FOUR
On Conversion of Life: Our Core Values

**DAY FOUR: CONVERSION OF LIFE
“RECLAIMING OUR CORE VALUES”**

OBJECTIVE:

- To frame the understanding of human nature using the theological works of Julian of Norwich
- To identify and develop a deeper comprehension of our own core values
- To develop my own rule of life

SESSION DEVELOPMENT:

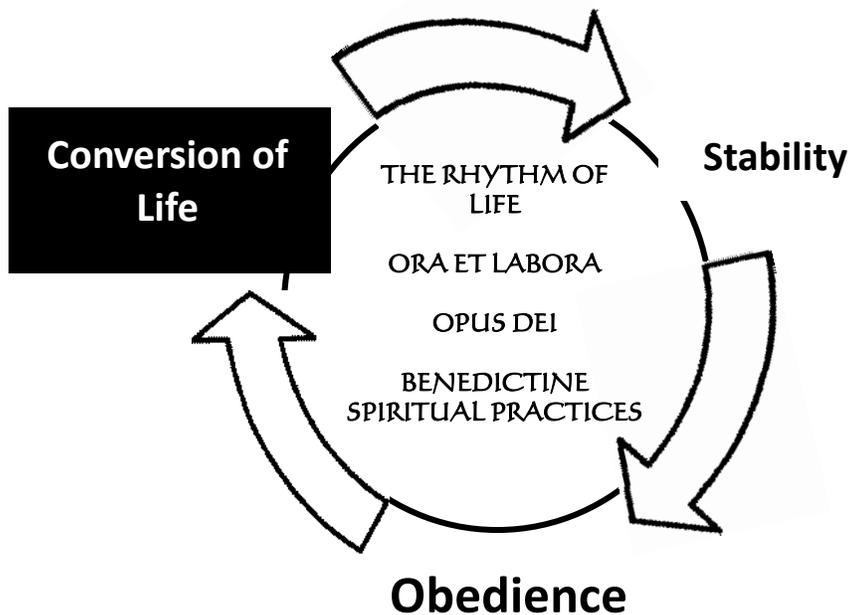
1. Prayers & Bible Reading
2. Brief summary of past sessions
 - Thought on discernment
 - Walking the neighborhood
 - Conversations with strangers –if any-
3. Julian of Norwich
4. Becoming Ourselves Again: Reclaiming our Core Values
5. Core Values: An Exercise in Self-Discovery
6. Next steps

OPENING PRAYERS:

BRIEF SUMMARY OF PAST SESSIONS:

- Thought on discernment
- Walking the neighborhood
- Conversations with strangers –if any-

BENEDICTINE CYCLE:



JULIAN OF NORWICH: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

Julian of Norwich was an English anchoress who is regarded as one of the most important Christian mystics. Her writings indicate she was probably born around 1342 and died around 1416. She may have been from a privileged family that lived in Norwich, or nearby.

Plague epidemics were rampant during the 14th century. She was 30 and living at home, when Julian suffered from a severe illness. According to some scholars, Julian may have become an anchoress —a woman who has set herself apart for God and lives isolated in a cell- as a way to quarantine her or herself from the rest of the population.

Like her contemporaries of 1373, she is Roman Catholic and believes that the last rites give special sanctifying grace and strengthen a sick person bodily and spiritually at death. Recognizing her need for a deeper love of Christ, she has appealed to God for three things:

- a stronger understanding of Christ's passion
- a sickness unto death while still young, allowing her to experience all that a body and soul experience in death (including attack by devils and administration of the last rites) but without actual death—so that she might learn to live more mindful of God
- three “wounds:” absolute contrition, kind compassion, and steadfast longing toward God.

It seems her unusual prayer is being answered. Julian has indeed become deathly ill. Everyone around her despairs of her life. She also believes she is dying. The last rites are administered to her. Then a wonderful thing happens: Julian experiences what a future generation might describe as a near-death experience. At the crisis of her sickness, one afternoon, she receives fifteen “showings,” or revelations. She reports that heaven opens to her, she beholds Christ in his glory, and she sees the meaning and power of his sufferings. She also sees Christ's mother, Mary, exalted and beloved. This is important because the church's theological teachings those days moved around the concepts of sin and punishment.

Thus, whilst apparently on her deathbed, she had a series of intense visions of Jesus Christ, which ended by the time she recovered from her illness on May 13, 1373. Julian wrote about her visions immediately after they had happened, in a version of the Revelations of Divine Love. It is believed to be the earliest surviving book written in the English language by a woman.

In her thirteenth showing, Julian receives a comforting answer to a question that has long troubled her:

“In my folly, before this time I often wondered why, by the great foreseeing wisdom of God, the onset of sin was not prevented: for then, I thought, all should have been well. This impulse [of thought] was much to be avoided, but nevertheless I mourned and sorrowed because of it, without reason and discretion.

“But Jesus, who in this vision informed me of all that is needed by me, answered with these words and said: ‘It was necessary that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.’

“These words were said most tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any who shall be saved.”

In this she recognizes the compassion she had prayed for. She is impressed with her need to be joyful in all circumstances, however adverse, and for no particular reason, except this: that all things will ultimately be put right by Christ. She comes to such a sense of the awfulness of sin that she reckons the pains of hell are to be chosen in preference to it. Indeed, to one who recognizes the horror of sin, sin itself is hell. “And to me was shown no harder hell than sin. For a kind soul has no hell but sin.” The following night Julian will receive a final, sixteenth showing while she sleeps. In it Satan and his hosts assail her, but God gives her grace, and she fixes her eyes on the crucified Christ and trusts that because of his suffering and victory over sin he can protect her, and he delivers her from the demonic jeers and mutterings.

Indeed, Julian of Norwich lived in a time of turmoil, but her theology was optimistic and spoke of God's love in terms of joy and compassion, as opposed to law and duty. For her, suffering was not a punishment that God inflicted, as was the common understanding. She believed that God loved everyone and wanted to save them all. Popular theology, magnified by current events that included the Black Death and a series of peasant revolts, asserted that God punished the wicked. So, Julian suggested a more merciful theology, which some say leaned towards universal salvation. She believed

that behind the reality of hell is a greater mystery of God's love.

Her theology was unique in three aspects:

- her view of sin;
- her belief that God is all-loving and without wrath;
- and her view of Christ as mother. According to Julian, God is both our mother and our father. This idea was also developed by Francis of Assisi in the 13th century.

Julian believed that sin was necessary because it brings someone to self-knowledge, which leads to acceptance of the role of God in their life. She taught that humans sin because they are ignorant or naive, and not because they are evil –which was the most common argument given by the mediaeval church to explain sin and human nature. Julian believed that in order to learn, we must fail, and in order to fail, we must sin.

However, the pain caused by sin is an earthly reminder of the pain of the passion of Christ. As people suffer as Christ did, they will become closer to Him by their experiences. Julian saw no wrath in God. She believed wrath existed in humans, but that God forgives us for this. She wrote, “For I saw no wrath except on man's side, and He forgives that in us, for wrath is nothing else but a perversity and an opposition to peace and to love”. Julian believed that it was inaccurate to speak of God's granting forgiveness for sins; for her it was more about confession –recognition, taking responsibility- and repentance. Thus, being sinful is not the issue; the issue is not taking responsibility for our own sin. Julian wrote that God sees us as perfect and waits for the day when humans' souls mature, so that evil and sin will no longer hinder us.

She recovers to live thirty-three years longer. Soon after her recovery, Julian records a short account of her revelations. Twenty years after her visions, having meditated long upon them, she will add additional thoughts as to their meaning. Both the short and the long accounts will be widely disseminated in manuscript form and, after the invention of the printing press, will be published in many editions. Centuries later, Christians will still read her Showings with interest and wonder to what extent Julian of Norwich actually penetrated the mysteries of the unseen world.

The 20th-century poet T.S. Eliot incorporated the saying that "...All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well", as well as Julian's "the ground of our beseeking" from the 14th Revelation, into "Little Gidding", the fourth of his Four Quartets poems:

**Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeking.**

BECOMING OURSELVES AGAIN: RECLAIMING OUR CORE VALUES

*“For you formed my inmost being.
You knit me together in my mother’s womb.”
—Psalm 139:13*

**When we get in touch with what truly matters to us,
we discover what makes us most alive.
When we find that which rests at our core and gives us life,
we rediscover the value God intended in us and for us.**

This five-part reflection on Core Values was prepared by CREDO faculty member Brian C. Taylor. He is the longtime rector of an Episcopal parish in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and author of several books on spirituality.

Read each of the chapters slowly. Take time to reflect on the questions that follow, noting your responses in the space provided.

Contents

Passion and Principles: *Core values can provide direction and purpose throughout our lives.*

Environment and Values: *Values are formed and reformed through our environments, our relationships, and the choices we make.*

Shadow and Conflicting Values: *As we strive to identify and live lives that reflect our values, we are sometimes driven by unacknowledged values or multiple values that are exercised in tension with one another.*

Discerning and Daring to Live Our Deepest Values: *A model for discerning those things that matter to us most, so that we might be expressions of them in our lives.*

Grand Dreams: *Reclaiming our core values can sometimes lead to the realization of our biggest dreams.*

1. Passion and Principles:

Why do individuals, businesses, tribes, religious groups, political parties, and nations behave the way they do? What is it that brings consistency to a person’s behavior over time, or a shared commitment to whole groups of people? More personally, what is it that motivates us in how we live our daily lives, and how can we become more faithful and authentic in that life?

Core values are those basic beliefs or organizing principles that give our lives meaning and shape our relationship to the world around us. They direct us when we face a decision. They guide our ethics and fuel our passion for life. Unexamined, some strongly held values can also keep us stuck in unhealthy or self-limiting patterns and behaviors.

For people of faith, our primary shared core values are informed by God’s will, or Revealed Truth, or the Word: this is what God offers—through scripture, theological and ethical teachings of the church, and the lives of the faithful. God’s “values” guide and govern our lives: compassion for the vulnerable, forgiveness for the repentant, justice and dignity for all, purification of our hearts and actions, and

responsible stewardship of God’s gifts. We are accountable to these divine core values as they shape our lives.

We are made in God’s image, and so we carry God’s own core values as part of our being. By discovering what they are, how we stray from them, and how we can return, we become what we are created to be. As we consciously align our lives with God’s will, we are most truly ourselves.

“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord.” —Jeremiah 31:33-34a

For Christians, living into our core values always has to do with the person of Jesus Christ, for he is the Word, the expression of God’s will for human-kind. Christ stands before us, beckoning us to inhabit the core values embodied in his life and teachings. We live out this common calling in as many diverse ways as there are Christians, for we all have different gifts. But the many manifestations of our individual calls are but dimensions of the one person of Christ. In him is our unity. At important transition points, we feel our call renewed, and we look towards Christ again, taking up new challenges and opportunities for further growth into his life.

There are also secondary values that are more of human making. Some of these are of our own choosing. Others are inherited. These secondary values can lie at the very root of who we believe ourselves to be. For instance, one man might have grown up with the belief that he is basically alone in this world, and therefore has to deal with his problems all on his own. In this case, he holds essential the value of self-reliance. Another person may have had the experience of being surrounded by attentive and loving adults, and so throughout her life, she expresses her value of being in relationship, in community.

As we rely on our primary core values and these secondary values over a period of many years, they become the organizing principles and provide the passion for how we live, day in and day out. A woman may value self-expression, and so she becomes an artist. Much of her life is defined by this value, for it drives her daily schedule, how she will spend money, what she does on vacation, and who many of her friends will be. Self-expression is not only part of her identity; it becomes the organizing principle for how she chooses to live.

Participants are encouraged to reflect on their values—both primary and secondary—and whether those values, in fact, serve as the organizing principles for how they actually live, day to day. We all get “off track” now and then; it can be helpful to remember what is most important to us, and how we want to live our lives. This kind of honest reflection can be the beginning of a genuine transformation.

Reflection Questions

- What are some core beliefs I had growing up?
- What are my deepest values today? Are they, in fact, the organizing principles of how I live my life?
- In what ways are my deepest values congruent or incongruent with my calling as a follower of Christ?

2. Environment and Values

Our core and secondary values come from a variety of sources. We arise out of and journey through a vast network of influences, shaping us every step of our way. We are raised in a particular nation, with its own values born out of history. Our personal ethnic and racial heritage informs the way we view life. We are shaped by our family background, friendships, and communities, and the national, cultural, economic, and neighborhood settings of our life.

Another deep set of influences can be religious. If we grew up in a particular faith tradition, it imparted values to us. We may have assumed or rejected parts of this tradition, but it had its influence nonetheless. The same can be said for other spiritual influences along the way. Our faith is born out of complex sources and continues to be molded in a lifelong pilgrimage.

We perceive and respond to all these environmental influences in very personal ways. This becomes obvious when we look at siblings who grew up in a very similar setting. One becomes a people-pleaser, another, a rebel. Similarly, one first-born, female, Hispanic-American Episcopalian, who is from an Anglo-Catholic urban parish and poor neighborhood, is going to end up with some core values that are different from another person who shares the very same background. We are, each of us, unique—a non-recurring possibility!

"We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another."

—Romans 12:5

Part of our individuality comes from being graced with the gift of personal conscience and the capacity to choose. The power to exercise independent choice is very difficult for some, and yet it is always possible. Our faith tradition tells us this. In scripture, we are assured that we have the free will to choose how we live our lives. God invites and asks for response from not only nations and communities, but from individuals: prophets, kings, a rich man, a fisherman from Galilee, a young virgin from Nazareth. And these individuals have the freedom and the responsibility to choose which values truly align with God's calling—and live accordingly.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." —Romans 12:2

Reflection Questions:

- What people or groups have had the most influence on my values, and what values did I incorporate from them into my own life?
- What values did I have to unlearn or change?
- How have I purposefully decided to take on new values, and how do I sustain them?

3. Shadow and Conflicting Values

Shadow Values

What one could call shadow values are those guiding principles by which we live, but about which we are relatively unconscious. Without awareness, shadow values can motivate us in ways that end up being unhealthy or harmful. Two examples from church life make this dynamic obvious to most of us who have worked in this environment.

One person makes decisions at every turn that will result in the greatest number of people being happy

and feeling supported. He says he is called to serve other people, to love them as God loves, without condition, without reserve. Everyone loves him, but he becomes burned out, a hollow shell, distant from his family and unable to make decisions that might displease someone. Layered over what he assumes is his core value of loving others, he begins to detect his shadow value: to be loved by everyone.

Another person may treasure the prophetic role, speaking out fearlessly on issues of justice. In preaching, community organizing, and public witness, she speaks strongly on behalf of those without a voice. The fact that her congregation is shrinking is only evidence that she is doing the right thing, for prophets are always without honor. She believes she is motivated by God's demand for justice. But layered over her principles, she may also hold a strong value to be right, to win, to justify herself. In the process, people are trampled upon, nuances are lost, and communities are polarized.

"I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind."
—Romans 7:22-23

Shadow values are often expressed in socially acceptable behavior, and are rewarded and thereby reinforced. There will always be supporters of those who appear to be loving or prophetic. Nothing wrong with that, right? But when these behaviors are motivated by a

self-serving or otherwise unhealthy perception of one's core values, they inevitably cause harm to everyone concerned.

It's not a question of whether we have shadow values that drive us. We all do. It is a question of whether we bring these shadow values to awareness. When we do so—whether through therapy or spiritual direction or by the honest feedback of others in our family or community—we can lessen their impact on our life and ministry.

Conflicting Values

Another potential source of difficulty with values is when two or more worthy values appear to conflict with one another. Most of us in communities of faith hold as a value the call to simplicity of life. We know that the pursuit of material possessions, frantic activity, and too many responsibilities can create stress and distraction. We can gain the world and lose our souls. So we seek a greater simplicity and focus.

And yet it is natural and good for humans to be engaged with others, with useful activities. Life is rich, and given to us by our abundant Creator to be enjoyed and developed. We are co-creators with God and within community. When we are too concerned with simplicity and remaining "grounded," we can become isolated, dull, uninvolved. So two worthy values—simplicity and engagement with life—can be in conflict.

People talk a lot about finding balance, as if we could find that "sweet spot" between just enough simplicity and not too much engagement, between enough self-care and not too much self-giving. But perhaps it isn't about finding that single sweet spot. Perhaps our task instead is to learn to live in a creative tension between two complementary (rather than opposing) values.

It's fine that sometimes our strongly held values are in conflict with one another and create friction. That's what keeps us alive. And as we cultivate self-awareness, we discover how to live with creative and life-giving tension between them just as we continue to search for what lies at our very core.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."
—Ecclesiastes 3:1

Reflection Questions

- What motivating shadow values have I become aware of over time?
- How might I still be partially driven by any of them?
- How does it help for me to be aware of my shadow values?
- What values do I hold that seem to conflict with one another, and why are these conflicting values important to me?
- How do I sort through that tension?

4. Discerning and Daring to Live Our Deepest Values

Here we present a model of learning and growing that has been helpful for many who are reflecting on their life and vocation. The acronym for this model is IDPT, which stands for Identity, Discernment, Practice, and Transformation. It is a cyclical process:

- Identity—our sense of where we come from, who we have been, and who we are now. However, we are never a fixed “thing,” and there are times when we feel nudged forward, and we itch for change or greater authenticity. This leads us to
- Discernment—the act of being in a questioning, seeking mode, identifying issues at play, and listening for the Spirit’s call forward. Part of this listening requires
- Practice—praying in new forms or building new behavioral habits, for instance. Practice may also extend after our discernment, for when we sense a direction forward, we often take on new or intensified practices that will clarify and deepen our new direction. Finally,
- Transformation—what God does, through this whole process. By God’s grace we become new people and claim our new identity, which starts us all over again.

Within this spiritual cycle of transformation can come the rediscovery and reclaiming of our core values. Through discernment, we look within and ask ourselves, what have we always cared about, more than anything else? In our life and vocation, which is that quality of being and activity that makes us feel most authentic, what have we given our heart to? We take the time to examine our secondary, shadow, and conflicting values, and their effects on how we live our lives. We discern through reading, prayer, and journaling. But mostly, we wait for that which God would have us hear.

“I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.” —Psalm 130:5-6

It is practically impossible to do this spiritual work without some form of community. We need friends, family, fellow pilgrims on the journey in order to get to clarity. We need people to discern with us, to whom we can express our dissatisfaction, our dreams, our fear of change. Others

give us a reality check; they tell us things we hadn’t thought of; they mirror back to us what they hear and see in us. And when we have doubts, they give us encouragement and support to be our most authentic self.

In our daily lives, however, this kind of support is not always readily available. Added to this is the fact that many clergy and lay employees of the church are isolated. Something about the culture of church work seems to encourage whatever tendencies we might already have to go it alone. Clergy and lay staff are hesitant to open themselves vulnerably to their professional peers or their bishop, and doing so with parishioners can be tricky. So they keep their problems to themselves, always presenting a positive and certain persona of faith, direction, and leadership.

"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." —John 15:11

Only in a safe, confidential environment of people who care about us can some kinds of questions be raised and shared. However one finds this environment—with a trusted colleague groups, a spiritual director, one's spouse or partner or close friends—it is essential to spiritual work.

Reflection Questions

- Where am I currently in the cycle of discovering identity, discernment, practice, or transformation?
- With whom do I share these matters? If no one, how might I intentionally seek someone to share with?
- When have I risked a leap of faith for greater authenticity? What was the result?
- What sort of leap might I be invited to take now?

5. Grand Dreams

For some, a return to core values can be as subtle as re-setting the rudder while sailing. One might return to regular exercise after a period of neglect, or shift from one form of prayer to another. For others, transformation can involve much more. And so you are invited to consider the possibility that, as you reflect on your values, you might discover that one or more of them are begging to find new expression in a dramatic and emotionally compelling way. Let us call it "My Grand Dream."

My Grand Dream is a goal that has several key characteristics. It is:

- Authentic—anchored in a person's core values as an expression of one's deepest longing or strongest commitments;
- Relational—requiring discernment, planning, and collaboration within a community;
- Visionary—a long-term project, and while progress is measurable, the completion of the goal is not a sure thing;
- Timeless—part of one's legacy and will likely outlive its creator.

Examples of Grand Dreams include:

- hiking the Appalachian Trail;
- building a national network of ministries for women who are abused;
- developing a new kind of parish community that is centered around the basics of Christian worship and praxis, but embodying this tradition in new forms that are vital and compelling in today's world;
- becoming expert in Spanish, chess, or French cooking.

Whether or not such a dream lies waiting within your heart, you are encouraged to rediscover your core values, and to consider how you might freshly express them. After all, our most basic values not only tell us where we have come from and who we are today, they also hold our vision of what we are called to become tomorrow.

It is hoped that in this process, we will find congruence with our core values and those of Christ, with those values we affirm for ourselves and God's revealed will, between My Grand Dream and God's Grand Dream. And as we find our way forward into our envisioned future, we will know ourselves to be in the process of redemption, where we are being brought to our fulfillment, according to God's

purposes, along with the rest of creation.

Through redemption, we come to understand in our own life and vocation what is prayed at every ordination in our church—“that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

—p. 308, Book of Common Prayer

Reflection Questions

- Have I had some recurrent Grand Dream that is waiting for me to muster up the courage and respond?
- If so, what is it?
- In what ways is this Grand Dream a reflection of my core values?

Conclusion

When we set about discerning our values, we are on a journey to drill to the very core of who God made each of us to be. Inevitably, this asks us to pierce through a hard shell of some secondary, conflicting, and shadow values that make us human, yet hide us from our authentic selves.

On this journey, we sort through those secondary values that are inherited from many different influences, and those that we have taken on by choice. We try to distinguish between once-unconscious shadow values that we may desire to grow beyond, and those healthier values that will make more of us as we live into them. We acknowledge that there is a dynamic tension inherent in our values as we live and dance among them. And we find that grand dreams may resurface that have been buried for many years.

Along this journey, we also discover that this search is less about taking on something new and more about discovering something old, perhaps primordial ... something knit deep within us by God.

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” —John 10:10

CORE VALUES: AN EXERCISE IN SELF-DISCOVERY

1. What are three of the most meaningful compliments you have ever received?
 - -
 - -
 - -
2. What is one thing you do un-self-consciously?
3. What is one thing that will make you weep if you can't do it or be it?
4. What is one thing that you have done or been that you never want to do or be again?

Conversation: (3 minutes each)

Discernment Exercise	Votes	Priorities
Write down ten words or phrases that identify what you perceive your values to be.		
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.
9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.

My Core Values
1.
2.
3.
4.
6.

My Rule of Life

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.