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# THE OASIS

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## Essentials

BY REV. CHUCK MIZE

"You want to have your cake and eat it too!" If my parents say that to me once, they said it a thousand times. This aphorism of exasperation with my childish expectations is five hundred years old! It's apparently obvious to the most casual observer that nothing can be both kept and consumed. But that doesn't stop us from trying! Here's the paradox: the more we have of this world, the more difficult it is for us discern the difference between our wants and our needs, our necessities and our luxuries.

Nearly thirty years ago, a Pizza Hut TV ad perfectly illustrated this discernment deficit of our affluenza. The ad starred Jerry Jones, the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, and star athlete Deion Sanders. Here's the dialogue.

Jerry: So, what's it gonna be, Deion? Football or baseball?

Deion: Both! Jerry: Offense or defense? Deion: Both!

Yep, Deion wanted to have his cake and eat it, too...and he did! But few of us can be Deion. A symptom of immaturity is not being able or wanting to choose.

Socrates teaches us that the unexamined life is not worth living. The examined life...reflective self-awareness...requires us to determine our essentials. It means clearing out the clutter, cutting to the bone, and distilling the essence of our needs by boiling away the vapors of our desires. Distilling the essence of our physical needs leaves us with food, water, shelter, safety, and clothing. But distilling the essence of our emotional and spiritual needs is far more difficult. What are the essentials for our hearts and souls? These essentials aren't commodities. They can't be bought, built, stockpiled, or held in our hands. They are the intangible essence of meaning, purpose, dignity, friendship, community, respect, trust, selflessness and, most of all, love. These essentials are not expedient or efficient. Some might judge them extravagant. But they are the essence that humanizes us...the health and well-being of our spirits. [continued p2]

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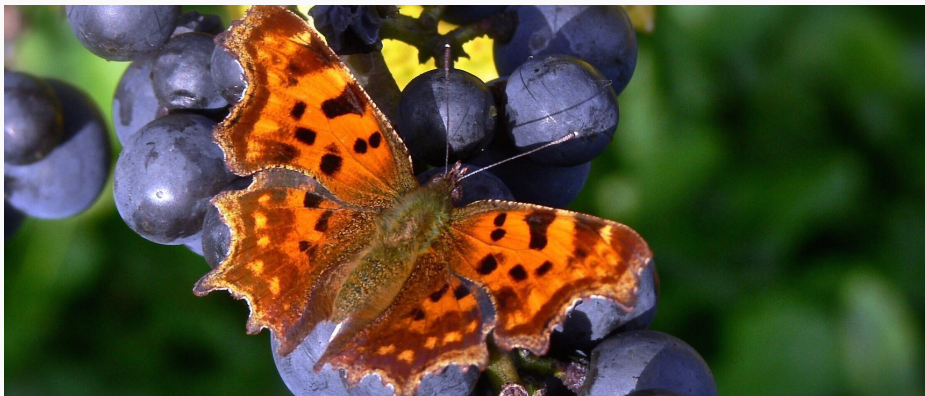
## Essentials cont.

'The Gospel of Luke tells the story of a visit Jesus paid on two sisters named Martha and Mary. When Jesus arrived at their house, Martha scurried around frantically, tidying up for company and whipping up an impressive feast for their guest. But Mary simply sat down at Jesus' feet so she could hang on every word of His parables and teachings. Martha was disgusted with her do-nothing sister, and she let Jesus know exactly how she felt. In response, Jesus told her this:

Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

Jesus didn't care if the house was clean or not. And He certainly hadn't dropped in for a gourmet meal! What He wanted was the honest sincerity of a caring friendship. For Jesus, nothing was more important than a relationship with Mary and Martha. Sister Martha used her busyness to shield herself from the vulnerability of a relationship with her Lord. But sister Mary invested herself completely in her relationship with Jesus. For Jesus, the intimacy of an unfettered relationship with Mary, and Martha, and each of us, is essential.

I invite you to spend some time reflecting on your essentials...the physical, emotional and spiritual necessities that you require for a full and faithful life. Let the refining fire of God's righteousness clear out the clutter, cut to the bone, and distill the essence of our needs as it boils away the vapors of our desires. Name your essentials. Cultivate them. And, through discernment that comes through fervent prayer, may you be overwhelmed by how generously God provide for your essentials, every day!



## A Blessing....

There is a kindness that dwells deep down in things; it presides everywhere, often in the places we least expect. The world can be harsh and negative, but if we remain generous and patient, kindness inevitably reveals itself. Something deep in the human soul seems to depend on the presence of kindness; something instinctive in us expects it, and once we sense it we are able to trust and open ourselves.

John O'Donohue, "To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings" (Convergent Books, 2008)

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

GALATIANS 5:22B-23







## The Sower's Generosity

I started worrying about what kind of ground I was on with God. I started worrying about how many birds were in my field, how many rocks, how many thorns. I started worrying about how I could clean them all up, how I could turn myself into a well-tilled, well-weeded, well-fertilized field for the sowing of God's word. I started worrying about how the odds were three to one against me—those are the odds in the parable, after all—and I began thinking about how I could beat the odds . . . by cleaning up my act.

That is my usual response to this parable. I hear it as a challenge to be different, as a call to improve my life, so that if the same parable were ever told about me it would have a happier ending, with all of the seed falling on rich, fertile soil. But there is something wrong with that reading of the parable, because if that is what it is about, then it should be called the parable of the different kinds of ground.

Instead, it has been known for centuries as the parable of the Sower, which means there is a chance, just a chance, that we have got it all backwards. We hear the story and think it is a story about us, but what if we are wrong? What if it is not about us at all but about the sower? What if it is not about our own successes and failures and birds and rocks and thorns but about the extravagance of a sower who does not seem to be fazed by such concerns, who flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon, who feeds the birds, whistles at the rocks, picks his way through the thorns, shouts hallelujah at the good soil and just keeps on sowing, confident that there is enough seed to go around, that there is plenty, and that when the harvest comes at last it will fill every barn in the neighborhood to the rafters?

If this is really the parable of the Sower and not the parable of the different kinds of ground, then it begins to sound quite new. The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our maker, the prolific sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad, who is not cautious or judgmental or even very practical, but who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his truth.

Excerpt from Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 25–26.

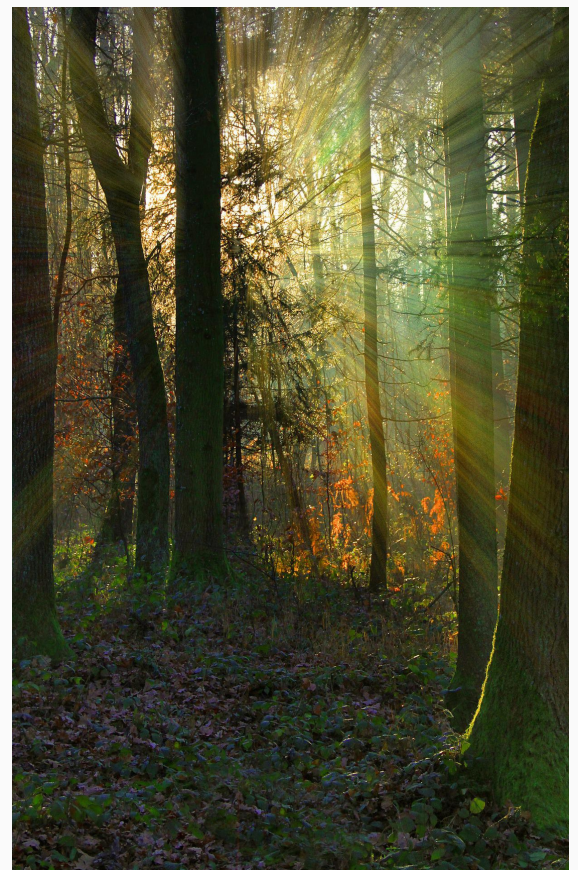
## Reading Suggestions

### CHILDREN'S BOOKS:

"Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible" by Elizabeth Caldwell and Carol Wehrheim, editors  
 "It's Personal: Five Questions You Should Answer to Give Every Kid Hope" by Virginia Ward, Reggie Joiner & Kristen Ivy  
 "Love is Kind" by Laura Sassi, illustrated by Lison Chaperon  
 "Maybe: A Story About the Endless Potential in All of Us" by Kobi Yamada

### ADULT BOOKS:

"The Seeds of Heaven" - Barbara Brown Taylor  
 "Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness" - Christopher J.H. Wright  
 "The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life" - Adam Hamilton  
 "To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings" - John O'Donohue  
 "Sabbath" - Wayne Muller







## Wild Geese

By Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver, "Dreamwork" (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986)



## If Only for Once

By Rainer Maria Rilke

If only for once it were still.  
If the not quite right and the why this  
could be muted, and the neighbor's laughter,  
and the static my senses make --  
if all of it didn't keep me from coming awake --

Then in one vast thousandfold thought  
I could think you up to where thinking ends.

I could possess you,  
even for the brevity of a smile,  
to offer you  
to all that lives,  
in gladness

Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Book of Hours: Love Poems to God" I.7, Translated by Anita Barrows & Joanna Macy, (Riverhead Books 2005)



"I would love to  
live like a river  
flows, carried  
by the surprise  
of its own  
unfolding."

- John O'Donohue