



Using a “Walking Stick” to Quiet Your Mind

Have you ever become a victim of your own negative thinking? Or been bullied by your emotions, worries, or stresses of life? We’ve all been there. We often relive our past mistakes, experiencing the pain and frustration all over again, or we project into the future, agonizing over what might happen. In our book “After the Diagnosis...a Guide for Living” we talk about this in Chapter 8, aptly titled “The Prison of Self.” Truly, we’re often our own worst enemies, allowing our self-absorption to rob us of the precious time and energy God has given us. In this article, we’ll share a simple but profound tool to help bring you back to the present moment, to, as Fr. Tom likes to say, “Calm the barking dogs,” and help to open your heart and mind to the presence of God within and to those around you who you just can’t see or appreciate when you’re stuck in this “Prison of Self.”

A Little Background - The Ancient Art of Mantra

In the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, using a sacred word or utterance has been central to bringing practitioners in touch with God. But did you realize that this is also an ancient part of Christian tradition? The Gospel of John begins with these powerful words: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Clearly, there’s a fundamental connection between Sacred Word and the Almighty. In fact, the Desert Fathers and Mothers “prayed unceasingly” by repeating a

snippet of Sacred Scripture as a pure form of prayer. Later, in the 14th century, the unnamed author of the classic Christian book “The Cloud of Unknowing” advocated for focusing on “one little word” as a means of emptying oneself and becoming more



aware of God’s presence within. Much of this rich Christian tradition had been lost in the West until Fr. Thomas Keating brought the practice to the forefront through what he termed “Centering Prayer.” We describe the practice in greater detail in “After the Diagnosis...a Guide for Living” in Chapter 17. Here, we’ll show you how to use the Sacred Word as a tool you can carry with you throughout the day, and employ whenever you need to “shoo the barking dogs away.”

Steps for Using Your “Walking Stick”

1.) Select a "Sacred Word" or phrase, the shorter the better. It might be "Jesus" or "Abba" - anything that you relate to a loving God or that has some personal relevance. (Mine is: "O Sacred Heart")

2.) Remember that worry, reliving the past, or projecting into the future is all rooted in the need to control. This is a function of our EGO-selves and of a culture that tells us we can control our destiny, which is largely untrue. When we feel the EGO trying to control the uncontrollable we begin to worry, talk to ourselves, and become self-absorbed.

3.) Now that you have this AWARENESS, set an INTENTION to use your Sacred Word (Walking Stick) whenever you feel the inner egoic voices bullying you.

4.) When you experience this inner turmoil, silently or quietly say your Sacred Word (or walking stick), with the intention of quieting the EGO and calling forth the SPIRIT SELF. At first you may need to repeat it many times before your EGO begins to let go. That's okay. Just repeat your Sacred Word, using this "walking stick" to redirect you to the light and away from the darkness.

5.) Call upon your "walking stick" whenever you feel anxious, when you get emotionally stuck, or when someone provokes you. Repeating your Sacred Word will provide you the time and grace to choose the most loving and life-giving response rather than the usual unhealthy knee-jerk reaction. Another suggestion - I often use my walking stick as I fall

asleep at night, my last intention of the day to be one with my God.

6.) Actively cultivate this practice. Write your Sacred Word as a reminder on post-its, stick one on your bathroom mirror, another on the dashboard of your car, still another on your computer screen. In time your Sacred Word will be as much a part of you as the air you breathe.

- Barbara Mariconda

Recommended Resources

After the Diagnosis...A Guide for Living, by Thomas F. Lynch and Barbara Mariconda, Chapters 3, 8, 17

The Mantram Handbook, by Eknath Easwaran

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