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Here I am again, in a room at the local retreat house with a comfortable chair and a lovely pastoral view. As I settle in the chair with my overflowing bag of books and a cup of coffee, I set my cellphone to vibrate and am ready to begin my prayer day.

After a few minutes of letting the silence settle in after rushing around to get here, I start writing in my journal with another entry addressed to God, as "You," talking about all that's been happening in me and around me lately. I mention with gratitude being able to be here again for a day and ask blessings for the many people in my life who need God's help and presence, as well as people in other parts of the world for whom I want to pray.

I've been doing this about once a month for so many years that I've lost track. I think I began when our sons, now in their 40s, were preschoolers, but I used to spend time like this even before that, stopping by the river or at a park nearby. It's a time for me to put the world and the rest of my busy life on hold to spend it with God. For many years, I would go to a local house of prayer, but as that has become less available, I go elsewhere, wherever I can find some quiet and separation.

As an extrovert, working with people in many different contexts, whether in teaching, counseling or spiritual direction, I found early on that I needed some time to just *be*, when the world gets put on hold for a day.

I usually bring along far more than I can possibly read, knowing that I will use only some of it. I choose a mix of Scripture, usually the readings of the day, classic spiritual texts and more contemporary authors who can help me reflect on my spiritual life.

The most important book is my journal. I tell people that it isn't *what* I write as much as *that* I write; it helps this extrovert go inside and begin to reflect, in a way that I think may be easier and more natural for introverts.

There are usually times in the course of a day when I fall asleep, having pushed myself lately further than I should. But I like to think of those times as the prayer of napping, letting go of the world and letting God be in charge for a while. I'll often take a walk, depending on the weather. Invariably, I come back to the rest of my life more refreshed, with a renewed sense of how God is right before me and therefore so easy for me to miss.

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Sometimes when I least expect it, there will be a "gem" that jumps out at me: a phrase or word that stops me and helps me see more deeply with my soul what was right before me.

Like reading Franciscan Fr. [Richard Rohr](#), who writes about the connection between self-love and being able to love others, loving your neighbor as yourself. [In his words](#) , "Insofar as an appropriate degree of self-love is received, held, enjoyed, trusted, and participated in, this is the same degree to which love can be given away to the rest of the world."

He then observes that without that full flow of love in and out we have many "constipated" believers. His vivid image of the way love is shared stopped me in my tracks and helped me understand myself and others that I work with.

Another time, I was reading my favorite Scripture passage, about the disciples on the road to Emmaus at the end of Luke's Gospel. I was struck with the way Jesus gently admonishes them when they haven't understood who he is and the need for him to die. He calls them "slow of heart," and that struck home with how often that's true of me: I *am* slow of heart, not that "tuned in" to what I need to be caring about and doing as a result of that caring.

In the midst of the pandemic, getting the time away is more challenging. In the past, I haven't had much luck with trying to be at home or out on our covered porch for a day; there are too many distractions and too much that I want to get done around the house. But because I need to stay here now, and with a quieter pace to these days, it doesn't seem as hard as it once was.

These days of prayer sustain me through the tough times that we all have: deaths in my family, dealing with our son's mental illness, and listening to when it's time to change jobs or retire. These times of solitude help re-center me when my worries and busyness distract me.

And now, please excuse me. I have a prayer day waiting for me.

[Kathy Finley is the author of eight books, including *The Liturgy of Motherhood: Moments of Grace* and *Savoring God: Praying with All Our Senses*.]

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