

## Give Me a Word

A monk once came to Basil of Caesarea and said, “Speak a word, Father”; and Basil replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” and the monk went away at once. Twenty years later he came back and said, “Father, I have struggled to keep your word; now speak another word to me”; and he said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”; and the monk returned in obedience to his cell to keep that also.

—*Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Benedicta Ward*

*Spiritual writer Christine Valters Paintner suggests we might adopt the desert practice of asking for a “word”:*

Repeated often in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers ... this tradition of asking for a word was a way of seeking something on which to ponder for many days, weeks, months, sometimes even a whole lifetime. The word was often a short phrase to nourish and challenge the receiver. The word was meant to be wrestled with and slowly grown into....

This story demonstrates how a word could be worked on for years at a time. The word being sought was not a theological explanation or counseling. It was part of a relationship that had developed between elder and novice and the assumption was that this word, when received by the disciple, would be life-giving....

As you work through the wisdom of the desert fathers and mothers, consider releasing your thinking mind and enter into a space of receiving. Imagine yourself in the story and ask for your own life-giving word. The word might be an insight from the text. It might come in that time of stillness or it might arrive later in the day in the form of a line of poetry, wisdom offered from an unexpected source, a dream symbol, or an image you stumble upon that seizes your imagination.

I often ask for a word as I take my daily walks. I listen for what the trees and pigeons might have to offer me. When I receive a word, often it is confirmed through synchronicities that continue to appear to me. The purpose of the word is to simply hold it in your heart, turning it over and over, pondering, but not analyzing it. Give it space within you to speak.

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One of my words is “Now” — helps me shed concern from the past and anxiety for the future to dwell/abide with God ... maybe share yours next week?