



Of Seeds and Flowers



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William R. Pfeiffer – Director

Mary's Field, Ltd. - PO Box 99 - Hebron, CT 06248 - 860.530.1253 - support@marysfieldltd.com - [Facebook.com/MarysField](https://www.facebook.com/MarysField)

The Four "S's" - A 2016 Survival Kit

I shared this message in former newsletters. It contains the kind of truth and wisdom that we all need to read and pray about on a regular basis.

Nothing is ever repeated. This message, although it is the same, should be read and appreciated at a deeper level because you have grown and are at a deeper place in your spiritual life. Nothing is ever repeated.

In 2016 more people will die of busyness than from cancer. We all struggle to live a more simple life style in an intensely high-tech, competitive, money driven, "bigger and faster is better", world.

We all need a survival kit. And not just a survival kit but a way of regaining our center, our hearts, our peace, our lives. I suggest four actions that can rescue us from spiritual pain and disaster. Each involves a decision and a discipline.



1. In the 1ST, the DECISION is to re-order one's private world, and the DISCIPLINE is simplicity.

SIMPLICITY - Everything around us works against reordering and

simplifying our lives. Our lives are cluttered. "God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves complicated." Ecc. 7:29 More, more, more! Enough is never enough. Size is never sufficient. Quotas are never enough. Acquire!

Not only do we acquire but we KEEP, we ACCUMULATE. And we don't simply compete, we are driven to WIN; always win. Not only do we want more, but we get stuck spending more time MAINTAINING those things. In some way everything you own, owns you. Even if you win the rat race, you end up still being a rat. To survive we need to SIMPLIFY.



2. The 2ND DECISION is to be still and the DISCIPLINE is silence.

SILENCE - If simplicity is difficult, silence is more so. It is an almost insurmountable challenge to find silence, to MAKE silence in this world of restlessness, noise, words, relentless activity. Noise siphons our energy, dulls our senses and numbs our inner life. Think of our poor children who are constantly "connected". NOISE,

NOISE, NOISE.

God says, "Be still and know that I am God". Ps. 46:10. ~and other translations of the same verse. "Cease striving and know that I am God." "Let be and be still, and know, recognizing and understand that I am God."

"Give in" he cries, "admit that I am God." –not you!

"Stop fighting," he shouts, "and know that I am God." We are being commanded to stop, slow down, let go, and make time for Him. We are to be still, quiet, listening and waiting before Him. We need to learn how to "waste time" with God. He deserves it. We, at the very center of our being, need it. Silence is indispensable if we hope to add depth to our spiritual life.

The health of a marriage can be judged by the amount of quiet time that spouses spend together. The intimacy of our relationship with God can be determined by the hours of silence we spend with Him.

"Study to be quiet," writes St. James. God does not speak to the hurried, worried mind. To survive in the year 2016, SILENCE must be in your tool kit.

3. The 3RD DECISION that we need to manage our lives today is to cultivate serenity and the DISCIPLINE that provides for serenity is solitude.

SOLITUDE - Henri Nouwen calls solitude "the furnace of

transformation". "An oasis of the soul where we see ourselves, others and especially our God in new ways. It is the place where much of the clutter and clatter is identified and eliminated thanks to the heat of the "furnace". Nouwen says further, "In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding; no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract me, just ME - naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken, nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, my distractions. And if I have the will to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies jump about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree. Anger and greed and pride and lust and envy and laziness show their ugly faces... The task is to persevere in solitude until my seductive visitors get tired of pounding at my door and leave me alone."

This all seems too severe, too radical. Who needs this kind of self-analysis? But truly, unless you persevere in solitude the superficial "show", the inner

dysfunction will go on. Tough stuff!



4. The 4TH DICISION is to trust the Lord completely and the DISCIPLINE is surrender.

SURRENDER - In Proverbs we read, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

- Surrender? Get serious!
- Surrender your rights. "Are you kidding? I'll sue!"
- Surrender your future. "No way. I've got a plan."
- Surrender your will. "Not me. I give in to no one!"
- Surrender your dreams. "Never. I've worked too hard!"
- Surrender to your mate. "Not me. I'm my own person!"
- Surrender your finances. "Hold on. Money is security

and I'm planning to retire.

Surrender is not a comfortable word in most people's vocabulary. Sad, because it is the key that unlocks the vault of God's best and deepest treasures. Dante, the great poet, wisely wrote, "In His will is our peace." And Augustine, "We have been made for you, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Everything, everyone I need, God knows about in detail. He is able to supply, to guide, to sustain, to change, to correct, all at the perfect time. God not only orders our STEPS but our STOPS as well. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."

Surrender. Give up. Give in. Give Him total control and you will find true control in your life.

The four "S's". Simplicity, silence, solitude and surrender are the basis for a vibrant spiritual life in an age of busyness.

(The above ideas and some of the words are taken from a wonderful little book by Charles Swindoll entitled, **Intimacy With The Almighty.**)



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"One of the great reliefs in life is to discover ones mediocrity."

- Oliver Wendell Holmes



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"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away." - Thoreau

Vision and Reality

Ah, the Wholeness and Holiness of the Desert!

On December 20th, my wife, Cindy, suggested that I take a month off. Her words were: "Go into the "desert" or the "woods", as you prefer, and find your heart at a deeper level; find more silence and time to pray, especially Centering Prayer; no news or reading but the books I am giving you, namely, St. Therese of Lisieux and the Bible; let them feed your soul." Such wisdom! What a gift and blessing Cindy is for me. I did this, even in the midst of many essential family duties, and it was a rich experience. I have grown. Cindy, often in the course of our marriage would say -while raising 6 children- "Before you cut the grass etc., go upstairs and pray for an hour.

It is good to go into the desert. You can't pretend in the desert. It is just you and the silence. You learn many truths about yourself and the world around you. The Spirit speaks and the silence and contemplation allow you to hear. Transformed people, transform people. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."

The "desert" quiet was shattered on January 15th when my wife, Cindy, suffered a serious stroke and the call to love at a deeper level became an intimate part of the retreat. Thank God, everything and everyone was present to effect a true medical miracle with all of the most advanced medical procedures. When the ambulance driver told me on the way to the hospital that the ambulance engine was actually running because they were having an EMT class conducted by one of the "Life Star Helicopter" crew members, and that the "Life Star EMT" was in the ambulance as we were going to the hospital, I knew that the Lord was in control; and I KNEW that all would be fine, not knowing how. Now, we have some months of rehab to complete Cindy's recovery. Please your thoughts and prayers! God is good!

Thank you for your understanding and patience (No January copy "Of Seeds and Flowers") and a special thank you to my son Bob for filling in the gap in our facebook without me even requesting it. And a special thanks to my four sons, Bill, John, Bob and Matt, Bill's wife, Kelly (an APRN and Cindy's physician, a true God-send!), Anne Marie, my daughter and her calls from Spain and my 2 beautiful granddaughters, ALL for their wisdom, support and presence when we needed it most. NOTHING like family! Dishes, meals, laundry, shopping, cleaning, LOVE!

All of the flowers of all the tomorrows
are in the seeds of today.
Plant with wisdom and love!



I FORGOT

A little boy came to confess his sins to the priest. In the course of his confession he said to the priest, "Father, I saw Jesus". The priest said, "Well, I don't really think so; you probably just imagined it".

The boy came to confession about a month later and again declared, "I saw Jesus." The boy kept insisting he saw Jesus so the priest said to him, "The next time you see Jesus I want you to ask Him what sins **I confessed in my** last confession. Then come back and tell me what He said. "

The boy returned in a month and said he again saw Jesus. The priest asked, "Did you ask Him is He remembered my sins and what did He say?" The boy answered, "Jesus said, "**I forgot.**"

Jesus **forgives and forgets!!!** –not like us.



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Speaking Softly, Happy Valentine's Day!

"Over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection." - Colossians 3:14

Some years ago, a psychologist named Carl Rogers offered a revolutionizing thought to counselors. He said that everybody really has the same problem. We do, however, have different symptoms. Whatever the symptoms are, the real problem is always the same, according to Rogers. We do not understand, accept and love ourselves. This problem may squirt out in one symptom or another, but the problem remains radically the same ... And so



Rogers suggests that instead of focusing on the symptom, we must simply accept people wherever they are. What we have to be saying to others in our lives is this: "I accept you. I understand you. I care about you." If we can extend acceptance like this, we will all individually grow in self-understanding and self-acceptance.

Think about your husbands and wives, your children, your parents, your friends. In a sense, we hold the destiny of those we love in our hands. If we accept and love them, they will be empowered to accept and love themselves. We are like a mirror standing in front of them, saying: "Look! You're beautiful. You're really okay. Of course, you have problems, and I'm not denying that. What I'm trying to say is that you are okay. I accept you wherever you are. I care about you." According to the Rogerian concept, when people are empowered by others to understand, accept and love themselves, the symptomatic problems (whatever they are) will miraculously disappear! This is not something to be debated. It has to be put to work in our lives.

"A human being is a part of the whole that we call the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest-a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. This illusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for only the few people nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living beings and all of nature." - *Albert Einstein*

