



Prison Class

A Small Group Process for Developing the Practice of Everyday Spirituality

About This Model: This model encourages people to focus on their personal responses to the alphabet of qualities in the DVD series and then find a way to practice them between gatherings. It also includes some recommended language for introducing the DVDs, the approach in the series, a definition of spirituality, and an understanding of practice.

This model was developed for use in the Purposeful Living Units Serve (P.L.U.S.) faith- and character-based living units in Indiana state correctional institutions. The model was developed by Mary Ann Brussat with suggestions from Chaplain Stephen Hall of the Indiana Department of Corrections and Rosemary Cunningham of New York, who participated for two years with the Brussats in a small practice group using the series.

Read an article about response to the DVDs in the PLUS program here:
www.SpiritualityandPractice.com/SpiritualLiteracy/AlphabetinAction.pdf

Goal of Group: The goal of this program, which uses the DVD series based on the book by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, is to develop the practice of spirituality in everyday life. Therefore, it is not merely informational (in the head), but inspirational (heart) and transformational (practical living).

About the DVDs: Each 30-minute program is devoted to one “quality” of the spiritual life; there are 26 in all, organized as an alphabet. Each episode includes 12 - 16 short “readings” that illustrate that quality.

The title sequence explains that these “qualities open us to the presence of the spiritual within all aspects of existence.” Each quality is like a lens – attention, gratitude, reverence, mystery, etc. – that we can use to discover the sacred in everyday life or to read the world for signs of Spirit. This is what it means to practice spiritual literacy.

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Session One:

1. Open your session by going around the circle and yourselves. You might share why you have joined this group, your spiritual path, or your primary spiritual practice. Discuss any ground rules for your group.

2. Briefly introduce the DVD series.

You can use the general description on the back of the DVD case and/or read the text of the title sequence, which is reprinted on the front of the pamphlet with the scene selections.

3. Watch a 30-minute episode. Pay attention to your senses, thoughts, and feelings as you watch.

4. Have a 5 - 10 minute quiet time for journaling, prayer, or meditation. Use this to reflect upon what you have just seen and to come up with at least one phrase or image that “spoke” to you in the episode and to also consider why you connected with it.

5. As a full group, or in groups of 2 - 3, make a list of the phrases or images that stood out in the episode. Share the various reasons why you connected with a particular segment.

For example, a story might remind you of a teaching from your spiritual tradition – “That’s similar to what we do at our church.” It might remind you of someone you love or admire – “My grandmother was like that.” It might be about something you do or would like to do – “I never thought of washing the dishes as a spiritual activity.”

6. Look at your list of phrases and images and see if any consensus is obvious.

Briefly share personal experiences with this quality in your everyday life, in the past or presently: “My experience with . . . is . . . “ or “I felt . . . when . . . “

You may also want to talk about what you thought the quality was about before you watched the video and what you think it is about after seeing the video.

The group facilitator may want to make these points during this discussion:

- *Many of us are not used to the idea that spirituality is not something you believe but is something you do. You may be tempted to talk about your intellectual understanding of a quality rather than your experience of it. Try to focus on concrete examples of how this quality appears in your daily life.*

- *Different experiences and religious traditions are represented on the DVD – and some of the authors quoted would describe themselves as spiritual but not religious – yet they all emphasize the importance of the spiritual quality.*

- *In the first session, you might also mention that spirituality is often defined as the common ground among religions. In the book *Spiritual Literacy*, the Brussats say the world’s religions are like the fingers of a hand, each distinct with different rituals, revered teachers, and sacred texts; yet if you trace them to their source, the palm of the*

hand, they all come together in their depths. Another way of putting this is to say that spirituality is like an underground river and the religions are the different wells tapping into it.

7. Come up with a “practicing spirituality plan” for this quality. As you think about the spiritual quality focused on today, what is one way you can practice that quality during the time before our next meeting?

It’s best if you all come up with your own practices, but a facilitator may want to give at least one suggestion in the beginning sessions.

For example, for Attention: Take one activity you regularly do, such as washing dishes or cleaning your room, and do it with full attention. Don’t talk, watch TV, or any other task at the same time.

For Beauty: In the DVD beauty is defined as “God’s handwriting.” At the end of each day, make a list of three beautiful things you have noticed. Try to include unusual beauties, like the red onion, the ant, or the child helping another, in your list.

For Compassion: When you watch, hear, or read the news, allow yourself to feel deeply for someone or something who is suffering somewhere else in the world.

Session Two and Subsequent Sessions:

1. Begin by checking in with each other to see how your “practicing spirituality plan” went since you were last together. Go around the circle and each cover these points:

- Did you follow through with the practice plan you proposed at our last session? What did you do?
- What was that experience like? Rewarding? Frustrating? Mixed?
- What did you learn about yourself from practicing this quality?

2. Without criticizing or judging each other’s experiences, see if you can as a group come up with some ideas for enhancing your practice experiences.

For example, some people may want to have a spiritual companion with whom they check in every day. Others may use a journal to keep track of what they are doing. Some may need to choose a practice they can do at a specific time of day so they don’t forget.

3. View the next video and repeat steps 4 - 7 from Session One, including making a new “practicing spirituality plan.”

Repeat this process for the remainder of the sessions.

Process prepared by Mary Ann Brussat with contributions from Stephen Hall and Rosemary Cunningham.