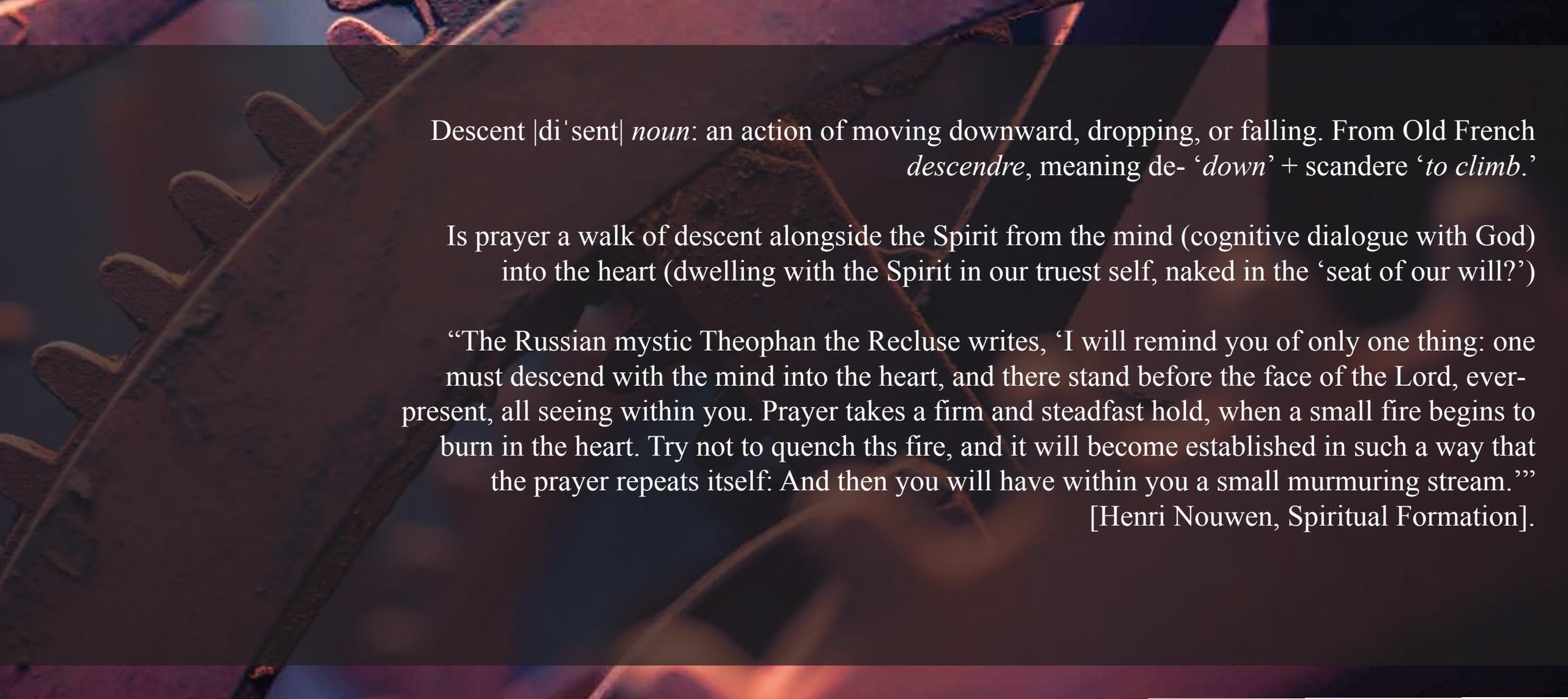


A close-up, low-angle shot of several interlocking metal gears. The gears are heavily rusted and show signs of wear. The lighting is dramatic, with a warm, orange-red glow from the right side, creating strong highlights and deep shadows. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the texture and mechanical details of the gears.

Ordinary time

THE WISDOM OF DESCENT

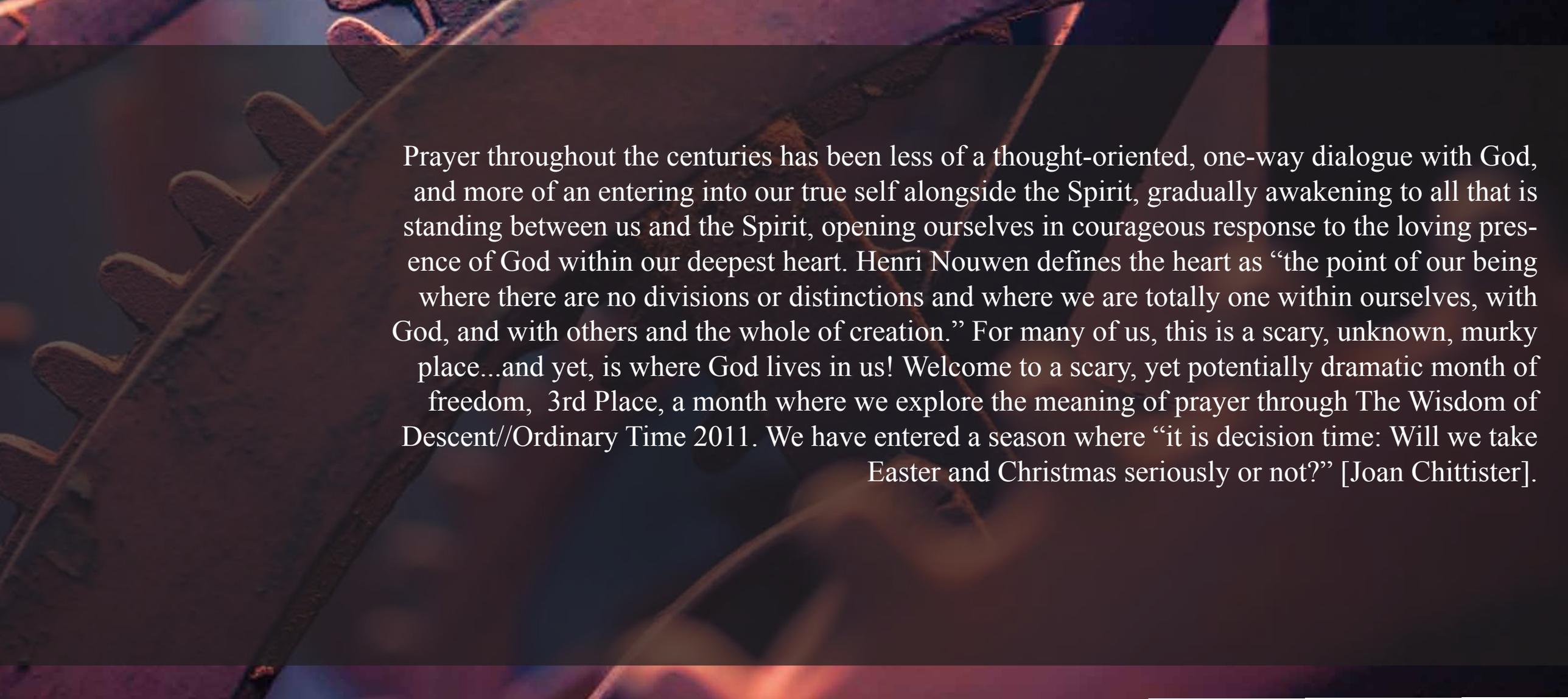


Descent |di'sent| *noun*: an action of moving downward, dropping, or falling. From Old French *descendre*, meaning de- 'down' + scandere 'to climb.'

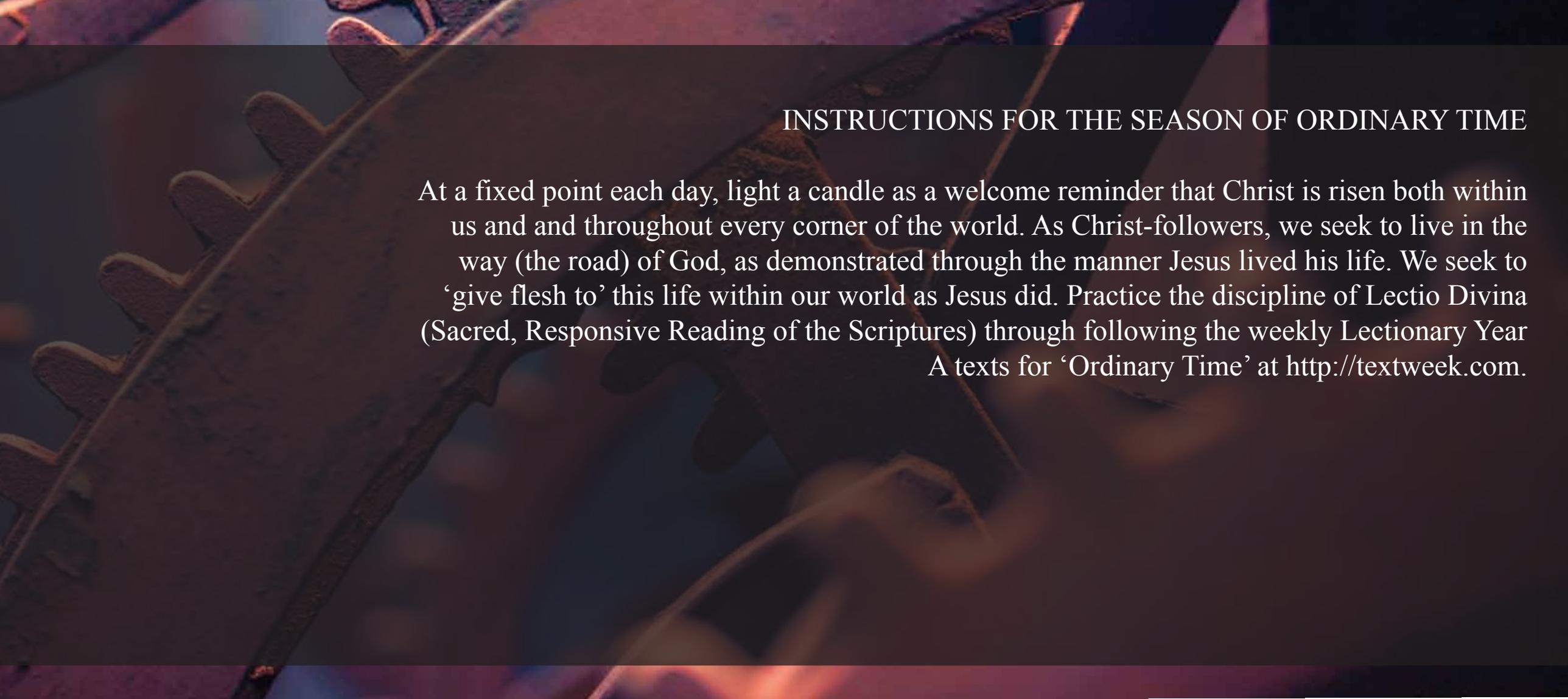
Is prayer a walk of descent alongside the Spirit from the mind (cognitive dialogue with God) into the heart (dwelling with the Spirit in our truest self, naked in the 'seat of our will?')

“The Russian mystic Theophan the Recluse writes, ‘I will remind you of only one thing: one must descend with the mind into the heart, and there stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all seeing within you. Prayer takes a firm and steadfast hold, when a small fire begins to burn in the heart. Try not to quench this fire, and it will become established in such a way that the prayer repeats itself: And then you will have within you a small murmuring stream.’”

[Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*].

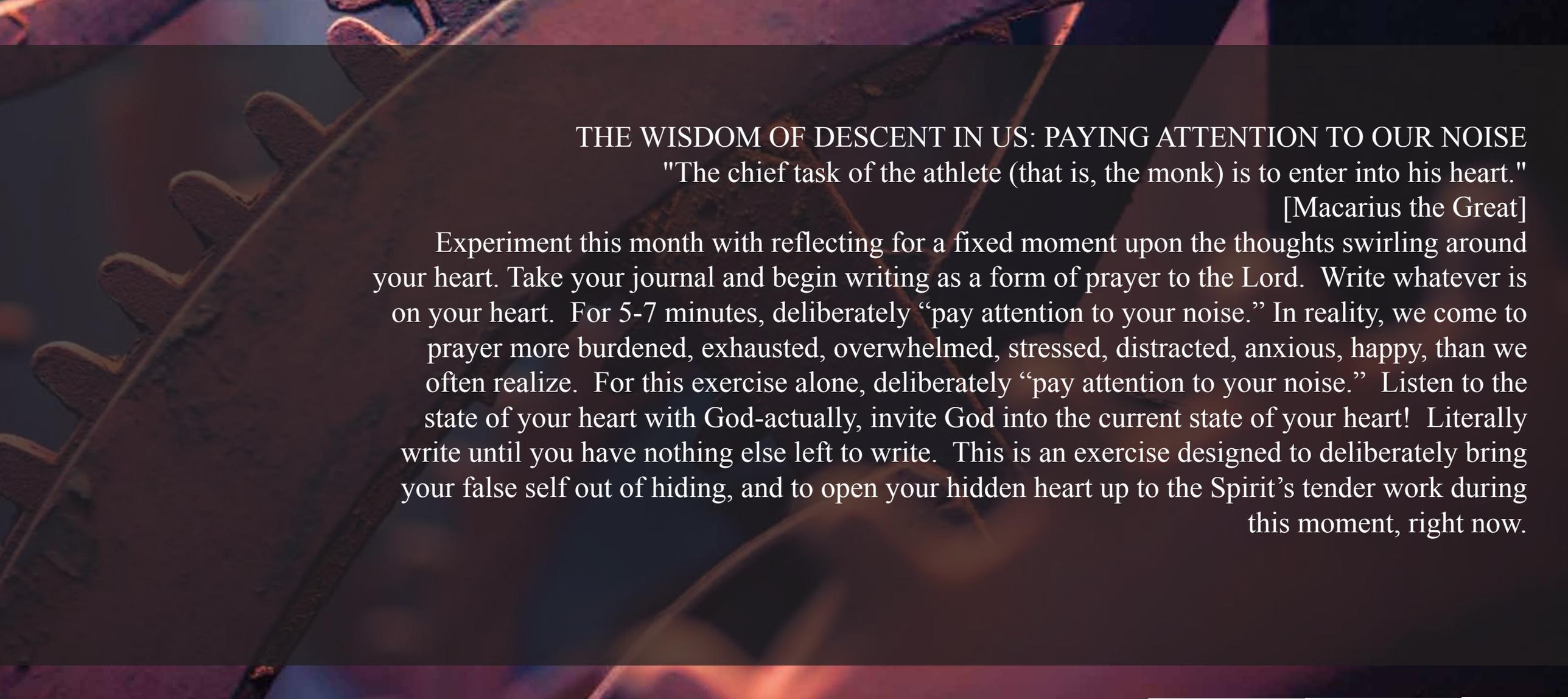


Prayer throughout the centuries has been less of a thought-oriented, one-way dialogue with God, and more of an entering into our true self alongside the Spirit, gradually awakening to all that is standing between us and the Spirit, opening ourselves in courageous response to the loving presence of God within our deepest heart. Henri Nouwen defines the heart as “the point of our being where there are no divisions or distinctions and where we are totally one within ourselves, with God, and with others and the whole of creation.” For many of us, this is a scary, unknown, murky place...and yet, is where God lives in us! Welcome to a scary, yet potentially dramatic month of freedom, 3rd Place, a month where we explore the meaning of prayer through The Wisdom of Descent//Ordinary Time 2011. We have entered a season where “it is decision time: Will we take Easter and Christmas seriously or not?” [Joan Chittister].



INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE SEASON OF ORDINARY TIME

At a fixed point each day, light a candle as a welcome reminder that Christ is risen both within us and throughout every corner of the world. As Christ-followers, we seek to live in the way (the road) of God, as demonstrated through the manner Jesus lived his life. We seek to ‘give flesh to’ this life within our world as Jesus did. Practice the discipline of Lectio Divina (Sacred, Responsive Reading of the Scriptures) through following the weekly Lectionary Year A texts for ‘Ordinary Time’ at <http://textweek.com>.

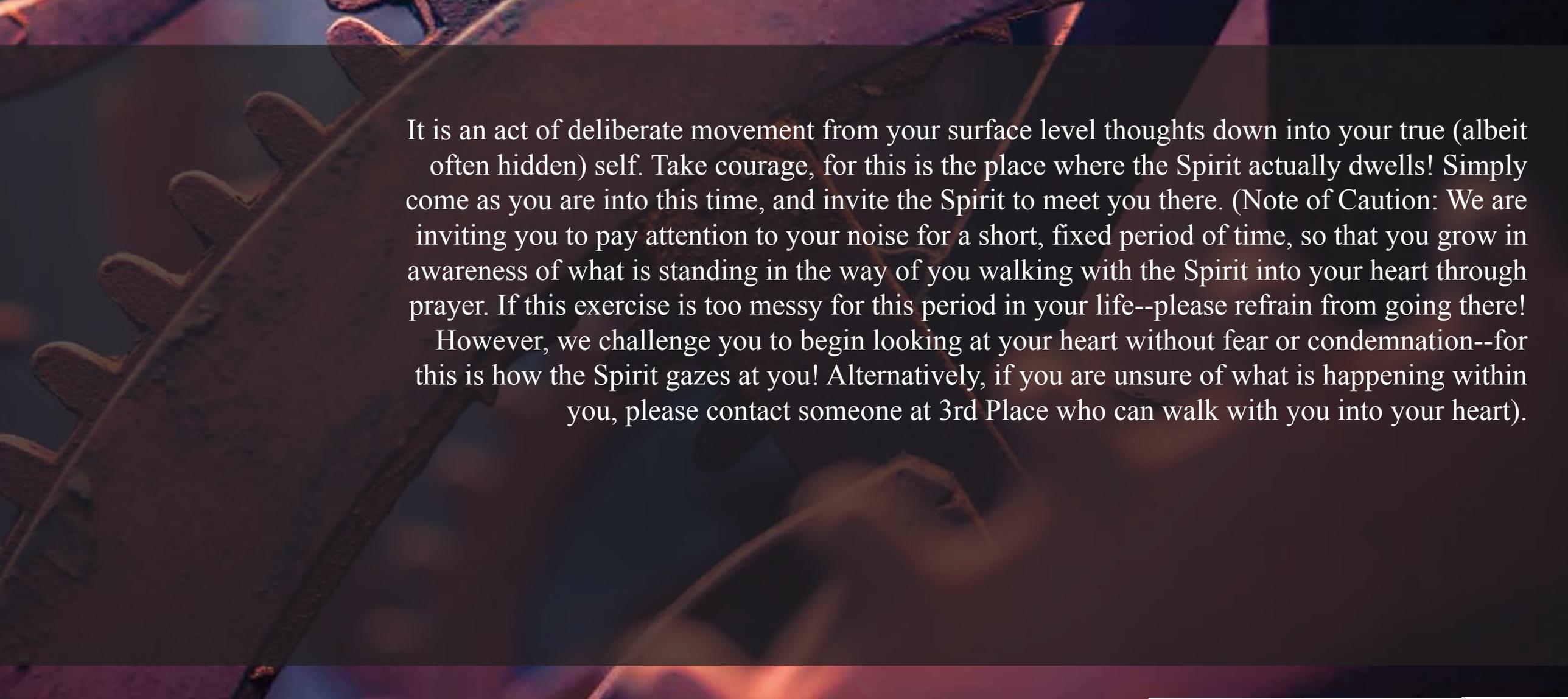


THE WISDOM OF DESCENT IN US: PAYING ATTENTION TO OUR NOISE

"The chief task of the athlete (that is, the monk) is to enter into his heart."

[Macarius the Great]

Experiment this month with reflecting for a fixed moment upon the thoughts swirling around your heart. Take your journal and begin writing as a form of prayer to the Lord. Write whatever is on your heart. For 5-7 minutes, deliberately “pay attention to your noise.” In reality, we come to prayer more burdened, exhausted, overwhelmed, stressed, distracted, anxious, happy, than we often realize. For this exercise alone, deliberately “pay attention to your noise.” Listen to the state of your heart with God-actually, invite God into the current state of your heart! Literally write until you have nothing else left to write. This is an exercise designed to deliberately bring your false self out of hiding, and to open your hidden heart up to the Spirit’s tender work during this moment, right now.



It is an act of deliberate movement from your surface level thoughts down into your true (albeit often hidden) self. Take courage, for this is the place where the Spirit actually dwells! Simply come as you are into this time, and invite the Spirit to meet you there. (Note of Caution: We are inviting you to pay attention to your noise for a short, fixed period of time, so that you grow in awareness of what is standing in the way of you walking with the Spirit into your heart through prayer. If this exercise is too messy for this period in your life--please refrain from going there!

However, we challenge you to begin looking at your heart without fear or condemnation--for this is how the Spirit gazes at you! Alternatively, if you are unsure of what is happening within you, please contact someone at 3rd Place who can walk with you into your heart).

TRAINING NAKED: AN EXPERIMENT IN HONESTY WITH GOD, SELF, + OTHERS

"Prayer moves theology of the head to words expressed by the heart." [Henri Nouwen]

Experiment this month with a simple, yet scary exercise in training naked with Jesus (see Tom Smith's July podcasts for explanation of this ancient Olympic athletic competition). As appropriately as possible given your relational connection and the social situation, answer honestly how you are doing when someone asks. Extend your honest inquiry as to how a person truly is doing when you offer greetings in person or over the phone. Ask the Spirit to bring to mind someone long forgotten or overlooked--a family member, friend, work colleague, or simply someone you interact with at the store or in your local coffeeshop--and reignite a friendship that begins with you simply listening to their story, without judgment, 'fixing,' or advice. Practice walking with someone into their heart through listening...and you will likely find that you are entering into your true heart with God as well!