

## EXCERPT



### **Mindful Silence** *The Heart of Christian Contemplation*

Available November 13, 2018 | \$20, 176 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-4649-8

*Our fast-paced lives are filled with distractions, frequently leaving us disillusioned and dissatisfied—with ourselves, with others, and even with God. Spiritual practices that used to sustain us fall short when life circumstances bring us to the limits of ourselves. After many years of leading an international humanitarian organization, Phileena Heuertz experienced the deconstruction of her identity, worldview, and faith. Centering prayer, a Christian expression of mindfulness, was a crucial remedy for her fragmented condition, offering a more peace-filled and purposeful life.*

## Dying

Little did I know that waking up was going to be followed by the invitation to die. Perhaps if I had known that, I would have resisted or refused to awaken. Of course, I'm not talking about a physical death, but rather a *spiritual* death. Waking up was followed by an invitation to let go of who I thought I was. Remember, the contemplative tradition has one main objective: the deconstruction of the self.

So, if you're curious about where the contemplative path leads, I'll cut to the chase: death. Death to your short-sighted self-will. Death to your self-serving ego. Death to your limited sense of self.

This may come in the form of a dramatic culmination or in many small deaths over time. Death is one of the seven stages in our pilgrimage of soul, but it's not the final stage. Along the way there are usually a series of many minor deaths. These small deaths support the other stages that I outline in *Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life*. The other phases—awakening, longing, darkness, transformation, intimacy, and union—are preludes to death and at the same time the fruit of dying. Like a labyrinth, we cycle in and out of these stages in the journey home to our true self.

Contemplative spirituality is an invitation to wake up and die so you can truly live. Contemplative prayer is for courageous, devoted seekers. It facilitates personal transformation for a world in need of healing love. Contemplative spirituality supports the way of following Jesus, which necessitates dying to self or emptying self to make room for the all-consuming presence of God (Philippians 2). But we are reluctant to choose this road less travelled. It's easier to walk through life asleep.

Sleepwalking takes the form of deeply embedded unconscious illusions about self, God, and others. These distortions orient us toward psychological, behavioral, and spiritual attachments, compulsions, and addictions, which over time lead to general unhappiness. This is what Christian tradition calls imperfection, sickness, or sin.

Our addictions may not take the form of chemical cravings (though it can turn into that) but at the core reside in our compulsions to be identified with what we have, what we do, and what others say about us. We are enslaved to our unconscious impulses and do everything we can to satiate our inner discontent: nonstop scrolling through social media, which only magnifies our unhappiness; unnecessary shopping in the hopes that more stuff will make us feel better; overeating or drinking to drown and dull the inner ache. We have any number of escape routes from pain, but the path of transformation is learning how to be *with* the pain so new life can emerge in and through us. Contemplative spirituality teaches us how to do that.

Trying to satisfy our desire for power and control, affection and esteem, and security and survival, we grow more and more dissatisfied with our self, God, and others. Father Thomas refers to these desires as "programs for happiness." He says that these three programs for happiness emerge from very basic biological needs. It is a natural part of our human

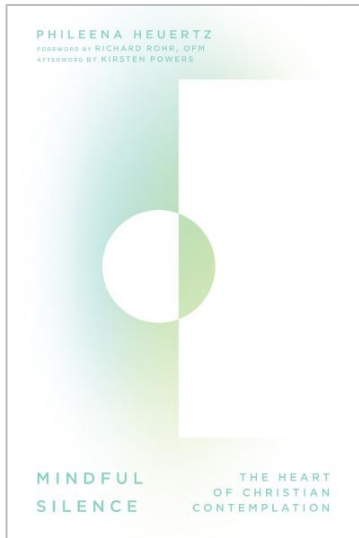


**Alisse Wissman**, print publicity  
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or [awissman@ivpress.com](mailto:awissman@ivpress.com)

**Krista Clayton**, broadcast and online publicity  
800.846.4587 ext. 4013 or [kclayton@ivpress.com](mailto:kclayton@ivpress.com)

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development to seek a degree of power and control, affection and esteem, and security and survival. The problem is that, in time, we over identify with one by way of compensating for that basic need that may have gone largely unmet in our childhood. Then our need turns into an unconscious *compulsion*. We crave its gratification, unable to be happy or content when life fails to deliver the amount of power, affection, or security we desire. Our personality forms around this attachment. An overly emotional reaction to life exposes our vulnerable condition.

Have you ever reacted emotionally to a situation or a relationship and later wondered why you responded so strongly? As we grow in self-awareness, we often realize that some of our reactions to present circumstances are actually in response to past events that are buried in our unconscious. The current situation provides a trigger for the unresolved pain. When we recognize the agony surfacing, we are experiencing grace. This is an invitation to greater healing and wholeness. Contemplative spirituality helps us wake up to this dynamic at play in our unconscious.

At a young age, we fell asleep to our interior anguish. That sense of being utterly alone, separated from others, and unlovable was too painful to acknowledge. In order to cope, we unconsciously built up fortifications to protect this most vulnerable self. In essence, this formed our personality.

Personality comes from the Greek word *persona*, which means “mask.” Our personality is not our true self. But because we think it’s too risky to expose our inner pain, we create a mask and we hide. We think our mask, our personality, will be more lovable. But you can see the dilemma. Our mask enslaves us, keeps us in hiding. We are not free. Instead we grow increasingly alienated over time from authentic connection with others. A tragedy for sure, given we all want to belong.

In our attempts to self-protect and be happy, we end up yearning for that which cannot ultimately satisfy. Sure, it might dull the inner ache briefly. Compulsive scrolling through social media might momentarily help us feel less lonely, for example. But once the digital stupor wears off, our inner unconscious misery begs again to be filled. It’s like drinking a glass of saltwater when you’re thirsty. At first it satiates, but then it leaves you sick. Eventually we learn what kind of nourishment really satisfies. The cycle of torment and emptiness continues until, by grace, we awaken (become conscious) to the inner void.

After my visit to Sierra Leone jolted me awake, I found myself in a season of inner excavation. The surface layer of pain—associated with the victimization of young boys forced to become vicious soldiers and young girls enslaved as domestic and sexual servants—uncovered secondary pain. I had come up short with answers and solutions to such desperate human need, which revealed the next layer of my aching heart. Layer upon layer of self-awareness ultimately revealed a wound in my psyche. The shape of my wound? A young girl who didn’t know she was loved just as she is. I soon came to realize that I had constructed my life in such a way that I wouldn’t have to face that primordial pain.

Now, the shape of *your* wound may be different, corresponding to a different program for happiness: a young boy who doesn’t feel safe, or a young girl plagued with the fear of having no control. My pain related to the need for affection and esteem. So, at a young age I unconsciously found a way to dull the misery. I found a coping mechanism. If I could just be

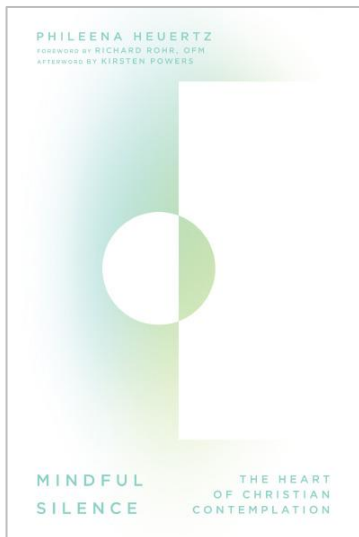


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and do for others, maybe they would find me worth loving. And so, my life unfolded in large part around my compulsion for approval. I made decisions and lived in such a way that others would think and speak well of me. Thus, I would achieve a degree of affection and esteem. Waking up was devastating, because it forced me to come face-to-face with the pain of feeling unloved.

When we become an astute observer and do our inner work, we can identify the shape of the wound that traps us in a cycle of suffering. The more self-aware we are, the more liberated we become so that, when life wounds us and we experience pain, the suffering has less power over us; it dominates our consciousness less. I like how Father Thomas puts it: we know we're making progress in the spiritual journey when the things that used to drive us up the wall now drive us only halfway up the wall.

In fact, becoming wise spiritual pilgrims allows us to hold our pain, rather than our pain holding and trapping us. Yes, life is painful, but it's also the source of so much joy. And you can't have the joy without the pain. It's the experience of pain that forms our inner well to contain joy. Contemplative spirituality gives us the tools to both embrace our pain and dig our well.

Initially, contemplative spirituality helps us stop sleepwalking. And once awakened, we learn to die to the lies we've lived for so long that keep us in a cycle of unrelenting suffering. Those lies manufactured an entire sense of self, our identity—and it's that self, the false self, that has to die so the true self can be resurrected from its sleep.

For me, this meant dying to the lie that I am who others need me to be. Once I awakened to the realization that I identified with this lie, over time, through contemplation and by grace, I was able to die to that identity. From the dying, a freer Phileena emerged, one who is less controlled by the approval of others. I am now able to be truer to my voice, my needs, my desires, and my dreams, regardless of what others think about me. And in the space of that freedom, I'm able to be of greater service to those around me.

Who are you? What external forces shape *your* identity? In what ways do you feel trapped inside a self that's not the truest you? When you observe your life, what do you see and hear?

—Taken from chapter one, "Sleepwalking"



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*"Phileena's Mindful Silence is a beautiful field guide for sustainable social action through contemplation. A timely book that offers practical tools and powerful insights for a generation grasping for methods of self-care."*

George Mekhail, executive director, Church Clarity

## Spiritual director, public speaker, author

**Phileena Heuertz** is the author of *Pilgrimage of a Soul* and a founding partner of Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism. For nearly twenty years she and her husband, Chris, codirected an international nonprofit in more than seventy countries, building community among victims of human trafficking, survivors of HIV and AIDS, abandoned children, and child soldiers and war brides.

Spiritual director, yoga instructor, public speaker, retreat guide, and author, Phileena is passionate about spirituality and making the world a better place. She has led contemplative retreats for a number of faith communities, including Word Made Flesh, World Vision International, and Compassion International. In addition, she is sought after as a speaker at universities, seminaries, and conferences such as Q, Catalyst, Urbana, and the Center for Action and Contemplation. Phileena was also named an Outstanding Alumni by Asbury University and one of *Outreach* magazine's 30 Emerging Influencers Reshaping Leadership.

Follow Phileena on Twitter: @phileena

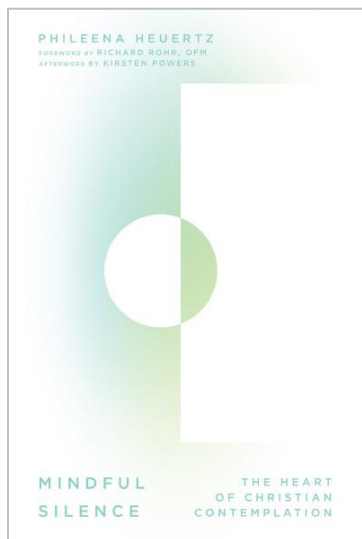


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## “Like Water and Sunlight for the Soul”

“In a world marked by busyness and burnout, *Mindful Silence* offers us both an exit strategy and an invitation. Phileena Heuertz has written a must-read for anyone desiring to live a more mindful, meaningful life. Read this book and learn from one of the great spiritual guides of our time.”

—**Jonathan Merritt**, author of *Learning to Speak God from Scratch*, contributing writer for the *Atlantic*

“Phileena writes here with such simple clarity—and easy readability—because she knows she does not need to prove, convict, or defend anything. *Mindful Silence* contains not just her wisdom but the spiritual wisdom of the ages that is again standing the test of time and showing itself in the fruits of *incarnational holiness*. It is the great tradition of action and contemplation again showing itself.”

—From the foreword by **Richard Rohr**

“I’m honored to have Phileena as a teacher, and thrilled you discovered this book. If you apply the practices she teaches, you will learn how to stay engaged and involved in changing the world without descending into despondency or burning out. The contemplative tradition truly is a game changer. Once you start practicing, you will be shocked by how something so simple can have such a profound effect on your life.”

—From the afterword by **Kirsten Powers**

“Phileena’s thoughtful words and practices are like water and sunlight for the soul. As I strive to find mindful silence in my own life, this gift of a book will be my trusted guide.”

—**Ryan O’Neal**, producer of *Sleeping At Last*

“I can’t think of a single person who wouldn’t be helped by Phileena Heuertz’s *Mindful Silence*. But people like me—who write, speak, and preach for a living—will find special gifts here because the deepest currents of awakening and discovery only begin to flow in us through the intentional, practiced silence of the contemplative way.”

—**Brian D. McLaren**, author of *The Great Spiritual Migration*

“Phileena Heuertz brings together the wisdom of Christian mystics past and present with her own sage vision of contemplative spirituality. *Mindful Silence* penetrates the heart and mind, pointing us to return to the wellspring of life found in the still small voice that emerges when we engage solitude, silence, and stillness long enough to hear it. Phileena reminds us that to do justice in Jesus’ name, we must actually be still. She taps into her own experiences on the frontlines



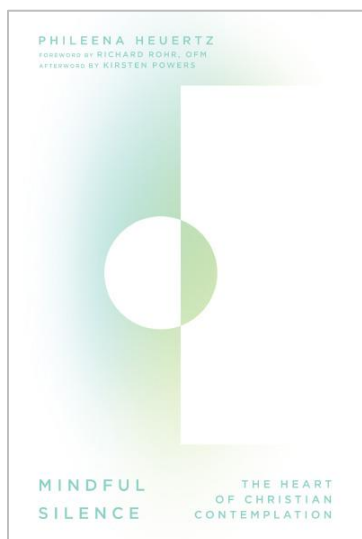
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of religious nonprofits to illustrate how our zeal for justice for the oppressed must be tethered to a contemplative spiritual practice, rooted in the life that is truly life, Jesus himself. *Mindful Silence* is sure to become a classic of our time."

—**Larycia Hawkins**, Woodrow Wilson Department of Politics, University of Virginia

"In this modern world our attention is being demanded, pulled in every direction. 'Sleepwalking,' as Phileena so eloquently defines it, is a way of life. In our culture, our sense of wonder of the natural world has been replaced by technological advancements, solitary contemplation by social media, and discernment by distractions. To break out of these habitual patterns takes self-realization and the deep desire to take a step back from this monotonous life and focus on actually living it. This is not an ambiguous feel-good self-help book to find God, but suggests practical, real, hands-on ways in which we can encounter our Maker. From contemplative and centering prayer, to practices of solitude and implementing the Enneagram, this book will entice you to be more than a reader but also a doer of its words. If life 'to the full' (John 10:10) is what you desire in your own journey, then this book will serve as the ideal road map to your destination."

—**Stephen Christian**, vocalist for Anberlin, worship pastor at Calvary Albuquerque

"In reading Phileena's wonderful book on mindful silence, I am reminded of Thomas Merton's words: 'To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence.' We live in a society where we celebrate the violence of too much work, media, music, food, drink, and merriment. Phileena's insights sound the clarion call for the church to offer less, not more, and to offer contemplation instead of altercation. Phileena has given us a practical resource to cultivate healthy, mature faith. I'm thankful for her presence and voice found in these pages."

—**Gideon Tsang**, Vox Veniae

"Phileena has provided an extraordinary service to Christians today who desire to become more deeply aware and spiritually mature in their daily walk. By providing the history and context of daily meditation and prayer practice cultivated in the first two thousand years of Christianity, she has filled a vast gap linking practicing the presence of the living God to this great lineage. She then makes this very practice come alive in its eternal power—'yesterday, today, and forever.' Furthermore, Phileena very generously reveals her vulnerabilities and discoveries of the power of daily mindful contemplation within her own life. She walks the talk, and in so doing she provides a vision for how we might encounter a profound deepening within our lives too. This is a vital and necessary book, and one that I will keep beside me in my daily practice from now on."

—**Bobette Buster**, professor of storytelling, Northeastern University, Boston, author of *Do Story: How to Tell Your Story so the World Listens*



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