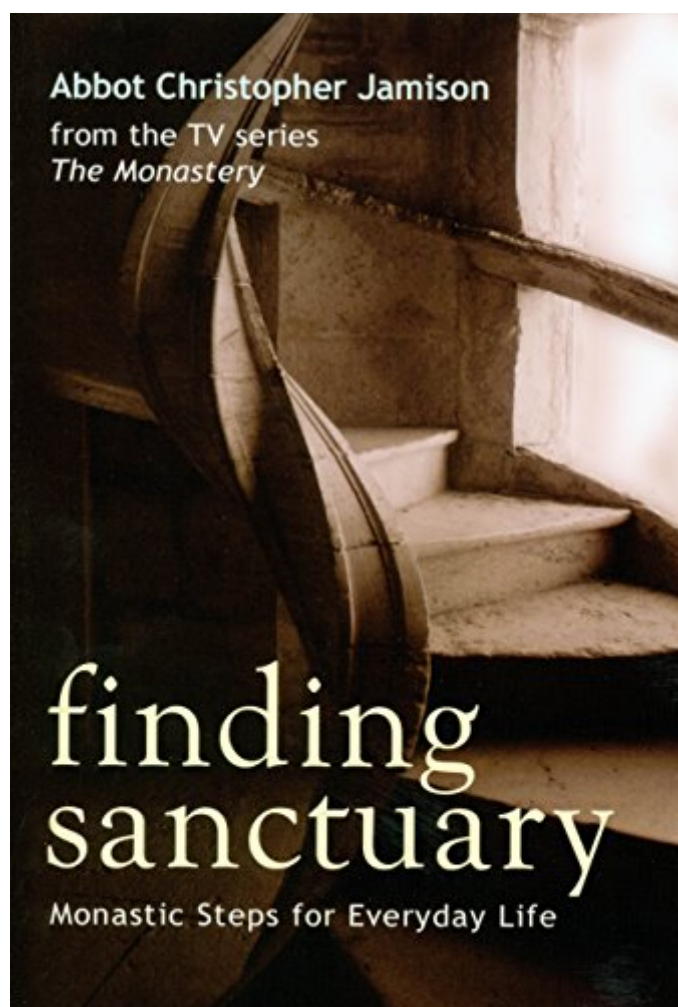


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Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps For Everyday Life



Synopsis

In Finding Sanctuary Abbot Christopher Jamison, host of the BBC television series The Monastery, suggests the teachings of St. Benedict are a tool for everyday life for those who are religious and for those simply searching for spiritual guidance. The Monastery involved five non-monks living the monastic life for forty days while TV cameras tracked their progress. The sight of monks responding thoughtfully and helpfully to ordinary people's struggles was a surprise to millions of viewers who had presumed that monks were out of touch. "St. Benedict wrote his Rule for monastic living 500 years ago when he was abbot of Monte Cassino, the monastery that sits atop an inspiring Mountain to the East of Rome. The name, "The Rule of St. Benedict," often misleads people into thinking that Benedict wrote "a book of rules." In fact, he wrote insights for Christian living with practical suggestions for daily practice. The insights still guide people today and many of the rules have been adapted to local conditions as Benedict requested. In every generation monastics integrate modern realities and the wisdom of the Rule in a new fusion. That fusion is the spiritual energy enabling monasteries to be places of sanctuary today as they have been for centuries. And that sanctuary can be recreated in the hearts of people of God's will. This book explains how St. Benedict's wisdom can be applied to busy modern lives, and how sanctuary, peace, and insight can be achieved by people living inside and outside of monasteries.

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Customer Reviews

I'm on my second time through this delightful and enlightening book on Benedictine spirituality. I can honestly say that this book has had a profound influence on my life. As a result, I purchased all the books recommended by the author, Abbot Christopher Jamison. Because of the author's deep understanding of the Benedictine monastic life and spiritual life itself, I am starting to find sanctuary in my own life. I only wish I could thank him directly. I feel like the book has started me on an incredible journey.

There are two similar books. The other is called "Finding Happiness" by the same author. This title sounds "deeper", but my opinion is that if you have already read and are interested in the Benedictine way, and can't afford both books, get the other one. This is the simpler one, although the title seems more serious. This is great for those just starting to get interested in it. If you want more, go to the other one. That is my advice, and I bought both of them.

Jamison, Christopher, Finding Sanctuary: monastic steps for everyday life (Collegeville, Minnesota; Liturgical Press, 2006) My interest in books on Christian communal life arises from the thrust of Christianity's best critics, who say the religion is a palliative for the poor, the weak, the suffering, the sick, and the dying. What is there for the rest of us, except to help in taking care of the these wretched of the earth? Christian communities are part of the answer, but not the whole answer. St. Paul could not have carried out his missions without the help of wealthy patrons: Romans 16:23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. Finding this book was another success of serendipity for me. I recall selecting it as a result of it's popping up among those titles .com was promoting based on my earlier selections. It seemed like a reasonable follow-up to my reading The Rule of St. Benedict, but it was a TV show tie-in, so I didn't expect much. I discovered it was a perfect fit between St. Benedict and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life Together. Benedict described the what. Bonhoeffer described the why (at least from a theological point of view), and Abbot Jamison of the Benedictine monastery at Worth, England, describes the how, and some of the 'why' from a more practical point of view. I was also

surprised, and not at all disappointed that the book spend virtually no time describing the lives of the five lay visitors to the Abby, the primary subject of the TV series. The only role of the visitors in the book is to provide a few snippets of illustration here and there throughout the text and to contrast their overly busy life with the life of the monastery. In 'Where to Begin?', Abbot Jamison explains the meaning of 'sanctuary' as 'a sacred space' and 'a place of refuge'. Vacations can provide refuge from an overly busy life, but they cannot provide the sense of the sacred. The 'refuge' aspect gives the game away. It is an alternative to modern life, and possibly less practical than the walled monasteries in 6th century Europe, which protected its residents from brigands and preserved Christian culture through the 'Dark Ages'. But Jamison does offer a relevance which is remarkably similar to Bonhoeffer's 'Whoever cannot be alone should beware of community. Whoever cannot stand being in community should beware of being alone'. Jamison says 'You cannot mistreat people one moment and then find sanctuary the next. Finding the sacred space begins with the recognition of the sacred in your daily living.' These are insightful, but they leave me with the sense that both 'doctors' of the church seem unwilling to welcome people with spiritual pathologies into their house. In fact, virtue is the door to the sanctuary. One cannot fully enter the holy place without rejecting anger, deceit, and shallowness. To be sure, the good monks will not bar a contentious person from the door, but they will be expected to 'heal thyself'. Most people may find it far easier to leave behind their consumerism than to cure an antagonistic disposition. But the good Abbot depicts the experience behind the door to be like one of those magical cinematic doors opening onto a magic garden or the infinity of space. The author spends most of his time on the seven architectural elements of the Benedictine life. The first is silence, or, at the very least, the absence of noise, the carpeting for the monastery. Noise makes the world less lonely. But when the world's noise is removed, we discover that we have our own internal noisemakers which generate a constant stream of busy thoughts. I'm always impressed by the many scriptural warnings against sins of the tongue. So Benedict promotes the virtue of being taciturn. A reservation with this is the stricture against saying things 'just for a laugh'. There is much truth in this, but I fear zealous enforcers can use the rule to squelch humor, and that would be a crime. The rule of silence gives one the time to deal with their demons. My question here is for those who are compelled to expose their own demons by exorcizing them onto paper and the bright light of day. St. Teresa of Avila, Hildegard of Bingen, and St. John of the Cross certainly seemed to take that route. Was that a violation of the rule to be taciturn? The second architectural element is contemplation, including prayer and meditation. Here is one area where St. Benedict himself offers little concrete guidance about 'how'. Christian meditation is generally centered around reverential reading of the scriptures. Abbot

Jamison steps into the breach to relate practical techniques to the theology of prayer. One major difference between everyday life and monastic life is that in the latter, one is praying constantly, to remind us that God is constantly in our midst. The third architectural element is obedience. I'm certain most adults are inclined to resist this notion. It is based on deferring your wishes and acting on the wishes of others. The way in which this increases freedom may be explained by poetry. The artificial rules of meter and rhyme force the poet to greater efforts of creativity than you find in prose, even great narrative fiction. Discipline forces us to listen better in order to better serve others. The fourth element is humility. To remove the sense of 'powerlessness', we must be clear that it is not apathy or the passive behavior of timid people. It is also not the same as humiliation, resulting in shame or misery. Benedict makes special mention of the humility required of artisans. They are to avoid taking undue pride in their work. Ample anecdotal evidence exists to show that humility, the ability to please others, is a superb recipe for success in business, where ambition is channeled into the success of the enterprise rather than of oneself. The fifth element is community, which I believe is the keystone of Christian life both in and out of the monastery. There is no scriptural basis for 'personal' salvation. All sense of being a Christian is to be part of the body of Christ, where serving others is the same as service to the Lord. This is why I sense that the early hermit monks were an aberration, almost to the point of being a heresy. This is so important that St. Benedict even had a chapter on the pathologies of living together, arising out of anger and conflict. The greatest poisons to living together were murmuring and grumbling (denying the law of *conversatio morum*). The sixth element is spirituality. Here is where we strike gold. Abbott Jamison points out that some time in the past 200 years, spirituality got separated from religion, and was seen as a thing unto itself, weakening the value of religion in the eyes of many. Join this with the fact that many religious charitable and healing functions formerly 'owned' by the church were taken over by civil authorities, and you can see the commonwealth of religion split into three, each less compelling than the whole. I may disagree with Jamison in identifying William James' book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as the culprit. I suspect James was documenting a split which began at least 100 years earlier, with the advent of European romanticism. I'm always amused when the tune to Beethoven's 9th symphony choral movement is used in a Christian hymn, since Schiller's original poem, the lyrics of the fourth movement, was drinking song in honor of nature and a Greek pantheon. Spirituality without the other six elements seems 'broken'. The last element is hope, and the act of dying with grace and honor. Jamison suggests that like 'big charity', this is another function which has been preempted by the world of secular medicine, from the religious community. In today's world, it seems like only the most tightly connected ethnic communities, such as the Jews, the Irish,

and the Italians keep the urgency of death alive as a motive for maintaining a good life. The Irish are especially legendary for their prayers for death. This book closes the gap between Christianity's great reverence for the weak, the sick, the lonely, and the troubled and those who are expected to help these less fortunate. It may not yet answer the question of balms for the spiritually diseased, but it offers God as the ultimate sanctuary, of which the monastery is an earthly shadow.

I can sum the value of this book up in one sentence: "I could hand this book to anyone (atheist, agnostic, non-denominational Christian, Catholic theologian...) and be absolutely *certain* they would come away with a deep respect for, even conversion to, Catholicism." Abbot Jamison presents the depth and the simplicity of Christian spirituality with an eye to the present culture. He begins this book by stating that he is writing for those who have no background in Christianity. However, this book would give even the most seasoned theologian something to engage prayerfully. This book presents Christian spirituality through the rules of St. Benedict...if I lost you at the word "rules", please keep reading. After stating a rule as an introduction to each section, he succinctly expounds upon the idea using solid reason (in plain-English) to expound and help those of today's modern world understand the importance of religion. Personally his most helpful chapters are on silence: how to handle silence and how to get rid of distractions. I am going to stock-pile this book and give it out to everyone I can! This book is absolutely worth the money!!! My only advice: read slowly, read it in prayer and read each section twice!

This is a gentle, truly encouraging book - for anyone. In addition to the clear explanation of tenets of living with integrity (no matter what your work is), it includes interesting historical tidbits about monks and monasteries, great suggestions for further reading, and "behind the scenes" info about the BBC special on Worth Abbey (by the same name as the book). I learned a lot and am a better person for having read this book - my criteria for 5 stars.

Jamison invites you as reader, step by step, into the Benedictine approach to the spiritual life. This book is written by a monk, but it is written for non-monastics, and even for people not interested or involved in Christianity. Spirituality is about our life in the spirit, our love for others, and how we daily connect our lives with God and other people. Jamison is an excellent guide along the steps into a more intentional spiritual way of life. You need not ever to have gone on a retreat to a monastery to find this book a great help and refreshment for your soul. Anyone who has ever been on retreat to a monastery will feel and know deeply what Jamison is talking about and find this book a sweet

refresher for those days of quiet renewal and spiritual refreshment within the cloister. For another practical guide to the spiritual life based upon Benedictine spirituality, this one for busy parents, look into *The Busy Family's Guide to Spirituality: Practical Lessons for Modern Living From the Monastic Tradition*

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