



Phileena Heuertz, author of *Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life* (Revised Edition)

“When I read her words, I know that she knows some things, deep in her bones, in her cells.”

For nearly twenty years Phileena Heuertz 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.

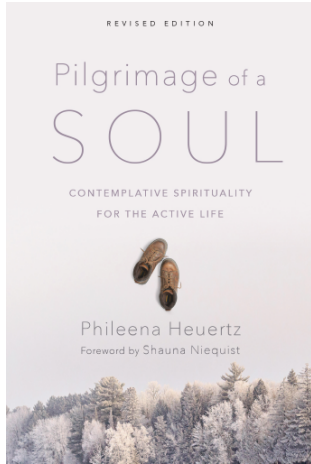
But you can only go so far for so long before you find the limits of yourself. And for Heuertz that moment arrived, mercifully, around the same time as a sabbatical to mark her twelfth year of service with an international organization working with some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

Heuertz knows that activists often see contemplation as a luxury, the sort of thing necessarily set aside in the quest to see the world set aright. But in *Pilgrimage of a Soul* she shows that contemplation is essential for a life of sustained commitment to the justice and righteousness of God as well as to the fully human life that the Holy Spirit beckons each of us to.

In the foreword to this revised edition of *Pilgrimage of a Soul*, Shauna Niequist introduces us to Heuertz and the ways in which the contemplative life changed her thinking. Niequist writes:

In the last several years of my life, God has used spiritual practices like centering prayer, silence, solitude and Sabbath to enrich and, in many ways, rebuild my interior spiritual landscape. Essentially, for many years my central spiritual practice was *doing*—working, writing, pushing, performing. The way I experienced my spirituality was through my own effort. Even now as I write that, I can see the myriad problems with that way of living, and I experienced them acutely: exhaustion, isolation, numbness, profound inability to connect with God when I wasn’t wearing myself out in his name.

On the path back to connection, to prayer as relationship, to a spiritual life that felt more like *life*, I met Phileena. She taught me about centering prayer, invited me to practice it—awkward and difficult as it is when one begins. She invited a small gathering of us to place our feet solidly on the ground, to fill our chests roundly with breath, to gently bring our minds back to prayer again, again, again. And then later that night we gathered with other friends in my home—people on the couch and on stools around the kitchen island, little groupings here and there, telling stories,



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sharing experiences. I'd imagine we ate bread and cheese and blueberry crisp, and I'd imagine there was both red wine and sparkling water — on Sunday nights, those are the usual suspects.

What I do remember from that night is that Phileena sat at the center of a small circle, feet tucked under her, answering questions with a quiet voice and generous spirit. We were a group of learners, and she was a guide. We were Christians just tiptoeing into a more contemplative way of faith, and she'd walked further along this pilgrimage. And it was apparent. And it was inspiring.

Phileena lives and writes and speaks and leads with a marriage of groundedness and lightness that draws people toward her; it draws me toward her. When I'm with her, and when I read her words, I know that she knows some things, deep in her bones, in her cells. She has listened and walked and prayed and struggled through into a new way of living, and when you're with her, you want to do the same.

I'm thankful for this book, for this journey, for this invitation. There are so many of us who are still just starting out on this contemplative pilgrimage, and I'm so profoundly thankful for this wise and honest guide.

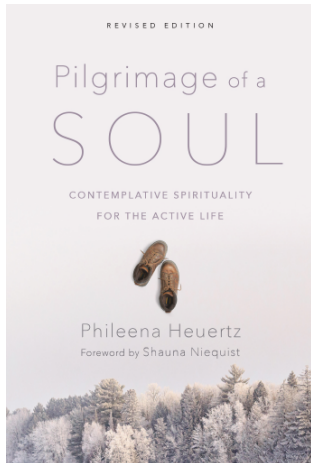
Heuertz is also a founding partner of [Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism](#) and a spiritual director, yoga instructor, public speaker, retreat guide, and author. She is passionate about spirituality and making the world a better place and has led contemplative retreats for a number of faith 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. Heuertz was also named an "Outstanding Alumni" by Asbury University and one of *Outreach* magazine's "30 Emerging Influencers Reshaping Leadership."

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Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life

Many of you who are reading this book are probably persons of faith. You may feel as if you've been on the spiritual journey for quite a long time. But the spiritual journey is subtly different from our faith conversion. According to Father Thomas Keating – a Cistercian monk – at the time of conversion we orient our lives by the question, “What can I do for God?” Seems appropriate, right? But when we begin the spiritual journey our life is dramatically altered toward the question, “What can God do for me?” This isn't a narcissistic, exploitative question toward a disempowered God. It's the exact opposite. This is the central question of a humble person who has awakened to their true self and to the awe-inspiring adoration of an extraordinary God.

One of the things we desperately need God to do for us is to transform us from what we are today into what God intends us to be. In a world where leaders of nations are making war and preparing to defend their sovereignty by proliferating nuclear bombs, where religious fundamentalists kill innocents under the guise of righteousness, and where the average American citizen contributes daily to the destruction of our ecosphere, it is clear that we are a people in need of transformation. All of us are subject to self-deception. We commit evil and call it good. We commit violence and call it social justice.

Like the blind man Bartimaeus, when we awaken to the reality of our desperate condition we can hear Jesus asking us, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:46-52). If we surrender and cry out, “Jesus, have mercy on me!” we have begun the spiritual journey.

Whether or not we've realized it in the depths of our being yet, we are people who need to ask what God can do for us. *You* are a person who needs to ask God, “What can you do for me?” The spiritual journey invites us into the process of radical transformation, and nothing prepares us as adequately for transformation as Christian contemplation.

The Christian contemplative tradition navigates our path toward a posture of receptivity to the One who can save us from our chaos and destruction – whether that is on a small, personal and social scale or on the grand landscape of global politics. All we have to do is submit to the process. That's it. Submit. Surrender. Dare to approach God with humble adoration. But since the beginning of time, it seems that surrender is the most difficult of postures for humanity. We much prefer self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. In our attempt to “fix” ourselves, we prefer to order, direct and define our own spirituality. In contrast, contemplative spirituality carves the posture of surrender into the fabric of our being, making us most receptive to the transformation that we cannot obtain for ourselves.

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This book illuminates how I stumbled into the Christian contemplative tradition and how contemplative prayer facilitated and supported a personal awakening. In these pages I attempt to map this part of my spiritual journey against the metaphor of pilgrimage, drawing narrative from an actual pilgrimage I made in Spain. Through the vulnerability of the unfolding story, this book attempts to illuminate contemplative spirituality for the active life. The “active life” is the life all of us live. We are made to work, play and be in relationship – all very concrete ways of active living. The active life is the life fully engaged and interacting with the world. . . .

Rather than dichotomize the active life from the contemplative life – as if it were adequate to choose to live one way or another – the abundant life brings balance or union to the active and contemplative dimensions of life. If we consider the wheel as a symbol for life, contemplation will be found in the centermost axis and the active life extends out in the spokes, as all the while the wheel is turning, progressing forward. But without the center axis, the spokes lose their anchor and are unable to support the forward motion of the wheel. Without the spokes, the center axis is deemed irrelevant. When we are least connected to our contemplative center, our life is most tense and chaotic. When rooted in contemplative spirituality, the active life reflects greater peace, purpose and effectiveness.

– Excerpt taken from the introduction