Putting God at the Center of Your Life
Kitty Cleveland

Hi, friends, I'm Kitty Cleveland, and so glad to be back with you here at Pray More Novenas for yet another retreat together. I am so excited about the topics that we have prepared for you these next few weeks. Today, I'm going to be talking about keeping Christ at the center of your life. We'll also be talking about how to find joy and peace in the Lord, no matter our circumstances, a timely topic, I think. Third, we will be talking about letting go of control, surrendering to the Lord, which is ultimately trusting in Him, and how do we grow in our trust? And finally, we'll be talking about recovering from life's disappointments and how to continue to carry our daily crosses with faith, with hope, with love, and even with joy and a sense of humor.

God at the Center of our Lives

So, to begin today, we're going to be talking about putting God at the center of our lives. How do we do that? So, when I was in college many years ago at Tulane University, my mom sent me this little card, and I still have it all of these years later. I hope it's not backwards for you, but it says, "Put God in the center and everything will come together. Put God in the center and everything will come together," with a circa 1978, 1980 graphics. And if you look closely, you can see all of the push pin marks that I have from the different bulletin boards of all the different houses I've had. I put this on my bulletin board every time we move to remind me to put God at the center of my life.

I remember years ago going to spiritual direction and I was just a mess. And the first question she asked me was, "How is your prayer life?" Hmm. Friends, if things are crazy for you right now and you don't have peace, I'm going to ask you the same question. How is your prayer life? That is how we put God at the center of our lives, then everything else can come together. Then we can have peace. But first thing's first. In the book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" by Stephen Covey, one of the first things, the rules for highly effective people is to put first thing's first, and God needs to be, must be the center of our lives, or we won't have peace. St. Augustine said the same thing, right? How did he put it? I'm blanking. But essentially, we have a God-sized hole, and unless God fills that at the center of our being, unless He is first above everything, God first, then others, then self. That is proper order, and then we can have peace.

But so easily we get our priorities inverted. We allow our busyness to take us away from our prayer life. I remember hearing that, and I know it was somebody very wise, and I think a Saint who said it, but that when, for most of us, we need an hour of prayer a day, unless we're really busy, and then we need two. I don't know about you, but very often, the first thing I allow to let go when I'm really busy is my prayer life. But it is one of those, ooh, that was a little confirmation from God. I don't know if you heard that thunder. Got it, Boss. Is to put those first things first, that time with God. I think that's what I was saying. I don't know, I was a little startled by the thunder.
The First Step to Put God at the Center

So, putting God at the center. And there are so many books that we can use to do that, but we can start out with, before we even get out of bed, to make a morning offering to the Lord. And I love praying the "Our Father," because we ask Him in that prayer to give us this day our daily bread, which is the grace for the day. We must fill up with the grace for the day. And so, I like to pray the "Our Father" before my feet even hit the floor, and then to go into a morning prayer time.

Now, some of you maybe join me for the rosary every, I try to get up between five and 5:15 every morning after I was invited by God on August 15th of 2020 to get up really early and to lead a live Rosary Novena online at six o'clock in the morning, Central Time, every day for 54 days. It seemed absolutely impossible. But on August 15th of 2022, it will be our second anniversary of my teenage daughter and I leading the live Rosary every morning at 6:00 AM, every weekday morning. And so, praying the Rosary in the morning is such a beautiful way to get your day started. And how many of us, we want to pray the Rosary every day, but then we get to the end of the day and we get into bed and we still haven't done it, and we start our creed, and before we finished the creed we're asleep. Now, I know some of us pass that on to our guardian angel, but I want to challenge you to start your morning with the Rosary, early, and to make of your body a living sacrifice.

A Sacrifice of Praise

Sister Clare Crockett, who is this beautiful nun from Ireland who died in her early 30s just a few years ago in an earthquake in Ecuador, there's a beautiful quote from her where she basically says that this getting up at five o'clock in the morning, which was not her nature, nor is it mine, it costs her dearly, but that she knew that God was going to do something great with her sacrifice, and that she was making it a sacrifice of praise. So if we have that attitude towards our prayer life to make it a sacrifice of praise, to put a little skin in the game, something that costs us something at the beginning of the day, maybe it's sleep, maybe you don't put sugar or milk and cream in your coffee, just some little way to strengthen your will and to start the day with the Lord, to put Him at the center of your life.

Praying throughout the Day

And then secondly, I like to check in, again, we start at 6:00 AM with the Angelus, we pray our Rosary, Then I usually go to Mass. And, if at all possible, I keep a daily holy hour at our Adoration Chapel. And then it's like whatever the day throws at me, I'm ready, because I am with the Lord and I have filled up with the sacraments and reminded myself who I am, Whose I am, and what my mission is, and where I'm headed. And then at noon, I like to check in again with an Angelus, and then at three o'clock the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and then in the evening at six, another Angelus, six noon and six were invited to pray The Angelus, and such a beautiful reminder of our mother, always with us. And then the grace before meals, of course, and then evening prayers, and a final examination of conscience and night prayers.

There's a book here. I'm just going to plug it because he's a great guy and it's just such a terrific book, called "Introduction to the Spiritual Life" by Dr. Brant Pitre. I'm getting ready to do a
retreat with him, so he's just on my mind. And it's just the very basics, walking the path of prayer with Jesus. But Brant is one amongst many. There are so many fantastic books on the prayer life.

I would encourage you to make at least a one hour commitment of adoration a week, make that your special date with the Lord, bring your journal, talk to Him, praise Him, ask Him questions, and listen for His answers, and maybe journal what you think He might be saying to you. And you can share that with a trusted friend or a spiritual director. But putting God in the center is the key to having peace, and to giving Him the commitment of time.

**Nothing is Lost with God**

My spiritual director said to me, "You give Jesus time, He gives you eternity." And, friends, now is the time, not tomorrow. Now is the time to get to know the Lord, to fall in love with Him, and to store up treasure in heaven, to make of your bodies a living sacrifice, to make of your prayer life something that honors and glorifies God, and it is storing up treasure in heaven.

One time I was in adoration, and I'm going to close with this last story. And I had this beautiful vision of the throne room of God. And what I sensed the Father saying to me was that nothing is lost with Him. None of the prayer, none of the sacrifices, none of that is lost with God.

And I'm a Cantor, I have been for many years, and I could hear, I don't even know how to describe it, all of the times that I have sung praise to God reverberating all at the same time in harmony. Humanly, I can't do that of course, but nothing of your sacrifice, nothing of your love for God is wasted or lost. And in heaven, on the other side of the veil, we will be able to understand it.

And, friends, not only for yourselves, but for other people as well, to intercede for them for those who aren't praying, who don't know the Lord. And very often, we all have friends and family members who are far away from God and our words fall on deaf ears, but God is not deaf to your prayers and to your supplications, or to your sacrifices made in secret. They are so powerful.

And, friends, your suffering united to the cross of Jesus is like spiritual gold purchasing souls, purchasing graces for those souls. So, just a little reminder, put God in the center and everything else will come together.

**Closing Prayer**

Let's close with a prayer. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, You are the center of my life. Forgive me, Lord Jesus, when I put myself or idols at the center and not You. Mother Mary, wrap your mantle around me and bring me back to Jesus. Use your Rosary like a tether to bring me back home to the Lord, to remind me every morning who I am, Whose I am, and the destiny that Jesus Himself has purchased for me. And I ask You for the gift of peace, not only for myself, but for all those whom I love. Amen. In the name Of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hope to see you next time, friends, God bless you.