

Praise for *Seeking Wisdom*

‘In *Seeking Wisdom*, the prolific Julia Cameron continues her work as a masterful guide ... both grounded and innovative, this book casts writing as praying on the page to everything larger than us. Bring your whole self to the journey of this book and you will touch the eternal link between creativity and spirituality. This book will help you come alive. It will help you play your instrument and sing your song’ Mark Nepo, author of *The Book of Soul* and *Finding Inner Courage*

‘Julia Cameron’s new book, *Seeking Wisdom*, carries on the author’s tradition of magically changing lives, hearts, habits and attitudes. ... A master of her craft of giving to others what her inner guides have taught her, I promise you will come away from reading her new book, as I did, with renewed creative zest and energy, as well as insight into your own spiritual possibilities as a creative person. Get this book ... it holds magical wisdom and genuine truth’ Judy Collins, singer, songwriter and author

Praise for Julia Cameron and *The Artist’s Way*

‘Julia Cameron invented the way people renovate the creative soul’ *The New York Times*

‘Cameron wants you to have a serious think about what you really want from your life’ *The Times*

‘Cameron is simply encouraging her readers to be a bit more open, more patient and kinder to themselves’ *New Yorker*

‘*Morning Pages* has become a household name, a shorthand for unlocking your creative potential’ *Vogue*

‘Without *The Artist’s Way*, there would have been no *Eat, Pray, Love*’ Elizabeth Gilbert

'I absolutely love *The Artist's Way*. ... It's a really good starting point to discover what lights you up' Emma Gannon

'Any of you who are interested in creativity or even just discovering your deeper psychic self should get *The Artist's Way*' Russell Brand

'I found my way to writing through an artist workbook called *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. ... Being introduced to that book, over twenty years ago, really changed my life. I still do [the morning pages] every day; it gets everything out, right at the top of the day. All the anxiety, all the fear, all the mess – it comes out, and then it cracks open and leads you to wherever it is that you're supposed to be inside your creativity. I never wrote until I started *The Artist's Way*, so I would say: Start there' Billy Porter

'It's a great tool for any type of creative person. I've given away so many copies' Tayari Jones

'*The Artist's Way* is not exclusively about writing – it is about discovering and developing the artist within, whether a painter, poet, screenwriter or musician – but it is a lot about writing. If you have always wanted to pursue a creative dream, have always wanted to play and create with words or paints, this book will gently get you started and help you learn all kinds of paying-attention techniques; and that, after all, is what being an artist is all about. It's about learning to pay attention' Anne Lamott

'This is a book that addresses a delicate and complex subject. For those who will use it, it is a valuable tool to get in touch with their own creativity' Martin Scorsese

‘I picked this book up for the first time when I was twenty-one years old. It completely changed my life. I did it again ten years ago and the impact was again life-altering. Something in my soul was stirring me to come back to it. So ... here we go ... I’m excited to meet myself on this path again’ Kerry Washington

‘If you’d like to learn more about getting into the creative mode, I highly recommend *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron’ John Cleese

‘A classic that never loses its power’ Amanda de Cadenet

‘*The Artist’s Way* is great ... the moment I did that, that’s when [the music] started to flow’ Ed O’Brien

‘This book has been revolutionary in my creative life. It’s a must-read for every artist’ Ito Aghayere

ALSO BY JULIA CAMERON

BOOKS IN THE ARTIST'S WAY SERIES

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The Artist's Way for Parents
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Walking in This World

Finding Water

The Complete Artist's Way

The Artist's Way Workbook

The Artist's Way Every Day

The Artist's Way Morning Pages Journal

The Artist's Date Book
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*Inspirations: Meditations from The Artist's
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*Supplies: A Troubleshooting Guide for
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*The Writer's Life: Insights from The Right
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The Artist's Way at Work (with Mark
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Money Drunk, Money Sober
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The Right to Write

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God Is No Laughing Matter

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This Earth

(also an album with Tim Wheater)

FEATURE FILM

God's Will (as writer-director)

SEEKING WISDOM

The Spiritual Path to
Creative Connection

A SIX-WEEK ARTIST'S WAY PROGRAM

JULIA CAMERON



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To Domenica,
whose prayers light my life

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INTRODUCTION

“Prayer is talking to God,” so the adage goes. That’s simple enough, and yet for many people, prayer is a difficult subject. “How do I talk to God?” they ask. “God” and “prayer” can be loaded words, often associated with an organized religion that we may or may not have broken from. There are as many definitions of God—and prayer—as there are people to define it. In writing this book, which spanned a cold and snowy New Mexico winter, I wrote, and I prayed—and I talked to my friends and colleagues about prayer.

At the core of our relationship to God is our understanding of God. In the six weeks that follow, we will begin by examining the “God concept” we were raised with. We will explore the possibility that we can convene with a god of our understanding—and then we will experiment with talking to this Higher Power, however we choose to define it.

“Speak to God in your own words,” a sage advised me four decades ago, as I was struggling in early sobriety. I was raised Catholic, and had spoken of using a formal prayer and saying it on my knees. The advice to be more

Why must people kneel down to pray?

—L. M. MONTGOMERY,
ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

colloquial found me praying more intimately, and not on my knees.

“Dear God, I’m miserable,” I prayed. “I’m depressed, angry, and out of sorts. Please help me.” I experienced relief at being so plainspoken. I was speaking as an intimate—even as a lover might speak. I found myself feeling assured God had heard my prayer. I was speaking in my own words, speaking with honesty. I found I presumed God’s listening ear. This was, for me, a flier into a prayer that *worked*. No longer content with formal prayers, I began to pray with greater confidence. After all, I was now candidly “talking” to God.

I cannot convey to you the relief I felt, knowing that I was being authentic. Where before I had prayed begrudgingly, “Thy will be done,” dreading the worst, I now began to sense God as truly benevolent. As I trusted to God the secrets of my heart, I sensed that God was accepting all of me. No longer tailoring my prayers to please a distant God, I prayed now with greater ease. As I spoke of all of me, I experienced faith. As I trusted, God felt to me to be trustworthy. Praying with candor, I felt God to be welcoming. As I mustered my courage to speak of difficult things, I felt my difficulties diminish. My newly intimate God took a hand in my affairs. As I prayed for guidance, I was guided. A step at a time, I found myself led.

MY OWN STORY

It was 4 a.m. on a Wednesday morning. I woke with a start and reached for the bedside bottle to drink myself back to sleep. Oh, no! The bottle was empty. I had no alcohol to put me back to sleep and without a drink I would lie there, sleepless. I squinted my eyes shut, willing sleep to come, and with sleep, oblivion. For five days I had been drinking around the clock, unable or unwilling to fight the craving for another drink. Without a drink,

my consciousness was painful. My husband had left me four days earlier, exclaiming in disgust, “This isn’t going to work, Julia.”

The “this” was my drinking. He hated my drinking and I hated sobriety. He thought I was an alcoholic and I tried not to drink. I watched him cross the living room, cross the patio, cross the lawn. I watched him climb into his sports car and zoom away from the curb. I watched his car disappear down the roadway.

“This time you’ve really lost him,” my inner voice announced. And then, “You need a drink.” I drained the last of a bottle of scotch and phoned the liquor store for more.

“Could you bring me some J&B, some Jose Cuervo, some Stolichnaya?” I asked, careful not to slur. Within fifteen minutes the liquor store fulfilled my request. I thanked the delivery man, tipped him, and poured myself a drink. Had that look on his face been pity? I gulped the drink, not wanting to think about what the man saw: a drunken woman, slurring her thank-yous and pouring herself a drink before he closed the door.

By now it was late morning, early for a normal drinker, late for me. My infant daughter was napping in her crib. My housekeeper viewed me with concern. I took the drink and the drink took another drink. It would go on like this for the better part of a week, until I woke that Wednesday morning to an empty bottle and the chilling realization that the liquor store wouldn’t open for hours.

“What can I do?” my brain drummed frantically. “What can I do?”

The answer came to me: call a friend on the East coast. It was later there. Hands shaking, I dialed a number: my friend Claudia. She answered, still sleeping, on the second ring.

“Claudia,” I blurted. “What am I going to do?” I thought I was talking about my husband leaving. Claudia

The inner voice is something which cannot be described in words. The time when I learnt to recognize this voice was, I may say, the time when I started praying regularly.

—MAHATMA GANDHI

thought something else. The child of an alcoholic father, she knew about desperate, booze-fueled phone calls.

“I’ll call you back,” she said, and the phone went dead.

“Oh, my God,” I thought frantically, “I’ve even lost Claudia.” Claudia, who had always been so understanding. Claudia, who—

The phone rang. I jumped to answer it. “Claudia?” I asked, eager to hear my friend’s warm voice, to be assured we were still friends.

“Julia,” a cool voice said. “Here is a number for you to call. I think you need to talk to another alcoholic.”

“Claudia!” I exclaimed, offended. “You don’t really think I’m an alcoholic?!”

“Well . . .” Claudia said, and that was all.

“All right. I’ll call,” I told her belligerently.

That was forty-two years ago. As Claudia intuited, I was at my bottom, ready to admit my alcoholism. I needed to talk to another alcoholic. The number she had given me was for a woman named Susan. Susan was an alcoholic.

“I’m an alcoholic and a screenwriter,” I told this stranger, desperate to hold on to some prestige.

Susan understood.

“I’m going to call a friend of mine named Edie. She’ll want to come talk to you. Can you keep from taking a drink until she gets there?”

“Yes,” I said. And so I was launched into sobriety.

I’ve often thought about the chain of events that fateful day. I *happened* to call Claudia, who *happened* to have a number for Susan. And so, I *happened* to get sober. The chain of events was miraculous. Did I need further proof of a merciful God? When I was ready to surrender, a Higher Power caught me by the hand. This Higher Power was compassionate, merciful. I was saved, rescued, yanked back from the brink. Over time I’ve come to see—and believe—in a god of mercy. How else to explain my fate?

ON JANUARY 25, 1978, I was advised that if I wanted to stay sober, I should pray. I wanted to stay sober, there was no mistaking that, but *pray*? I'd had sixteen years of Catholic education and I often joked that it was the greased slide to atheism. Prayer was something Catholics did, and something that I did without. I was rebellious; agnostic if not atheist.

"But surely you must believe in *something*!" I was told.

Cornered, I confessed, "Well, I do believe in something. I believe in a line from Dylan Thomas: 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.'" Creative energy was what I believed in—*all* that I believed in.

"Great," I was told. One woman announced, "I pray to sunspots." Another chimed in, "I pray to Mick Jagger." Clearly my line from Dylan Thomas fit right in. I could believe in anything.

"As long as it isn't yourself," I was told.

And so, wanting desperately to stay sober, I tried prayer—what I thought of as "secular prayer." I talked to the Universe.

"It's very straightforward," I was counseled. "The day will come when you will have no defense against the first drink. Your defense must come from a Higher Power."

Surely, I thought, enough self-knowledge would be a defense. I knew I was an alcoholic and I knew I couldn't drink.

"Not good enough," I was told. "If you really are an alcoholic, you will have a curious mental blank spot. You will be unable to recall to mind with sufficient clarity the consequences of taking the first drink."

Experienced for a decade with blackout drinking, times when my memory was simply erased, I was ready to believe in "a curious mental blank spot." I thought of it as a sober blackout, and the prospect of its striking me—from out of the blue—terrified me. I could avoid blackouts by not drinking, but how could I avoid "a curious

mental blank spot?” It could strike me stone-cold sober. There had to be some defense, some help, some rescue.

“The answer is simple,” I was told.

“Simple?”

“Prayer.”

“Prayer? I hate prayer. I’m bad at it.”

“Pray anyhow.”

“But—” I rebelled at the thought.

“But nothing. Ask Him in the morning to give you another day of sobriety. At night, thank Him.”

“I suppose I have to get on my knees?” I was sarcastic.

“I do.”

Terrified of drinking again, I tried to be open-minded about prayer. While I didn’t get on my knees, I did send up telegrams to God.

“Please give me sobriety,” and “Thank you for my sobriety today,” I managed to mumble. My feeble efforts were rewarded. No curious mental blank spots attacked me. A day at a time, a prayer at a time, I was granted immunity from drinking. Praying daily as instructed, I was struck sober as promised. After years of blackout drinking, this was miraculous.

Sober, I upped the ante. “If it’s a choice between sobriety and creativity, I don’t know that I choose sobriety,” I protested.

“But there is no choice,” I was told. “Without sobriety, there will be no creativity.”

Still, I was frightened. To me, drinking and writing went together like, well, scotch and soda. But I had to admit something good was afoot. Praying as directed, my tangled drinker’s life began to straighten out.

“Try letting the Higher Power write through you,” I was directed.

“What if it doesn’t want to?” I asked. But I tried it. Like my life, my prose straightened out. I went from a tortured writer’s life to a life in which I wrote with in-

If God has given us life, He is capable of any other thing.

—LAILAH GIFTY AKITA

creased ease and joy. I was rewarded with a flow of ideas and words. Freed from my ego's demand that it be brilliant, my writing became straightforward. Increasingly honest, it became more powerful. Words followed words with grace. I went from writing articles to writing entire books. When I prayed for guidance about what to write next, I was led well and carefully, topic to topic. Over time, I amassed a body of work.

As days became months, became years, I came to trust my "Higher Power." Prayer became more natural—a conversation with a supportive Higher Power, not merely a necessity. My rebellious nature was tamed. My writer's—and my drinker's—prayers were answered. I've been sober and productive ever since.

THE ARTIST'S WAY

An early gift of my sobriety was an unexpected calling to teach. "Build with me and do with me what you will," I was told to pray by my newly acquired sober friends. I prayed, but I was afraid to pray, fearing what God might make of me. I wanted to stay a writer. "Help others," I was told, "and God will help you." And so I reached out to another blocked writer. Helping him to write, I myself wrote, and more freely.

I knew that I could help artists become unblocked—and I thought I was helping just a few people, those artists in my inner circle who were struggling to be productive and open as they worked. These early lessons became my book *The Artist's Way*, which, at the time of this writing, has unblocked five million people around the globe. The creative force—my Higher Power—was working through me. It works through me still.

I have been teaching creative unblocking ever since—four decades now. And one of the core concepts of my teaching is that creativity and spirituality are inextricably

linked. Creativity is a path to spirituality—and spirituality is a path to creativity. As we deepen our creativity, we deepen our spirituality. As we deepen our spirituality, we deepen our creativity.

This belief grew out of getting sober—and having to believe in *something*. Desperate, and pushed to define what I believed in, I settled on my line from Dylan Thomas. As I relied on this Higher Power—“the force that through the green fuse drives the flower”—it became clear to me that God was the great artist. When we say “creator,” it is a literal term for artist—and so I began to believe that if I pursued my artistry, I would be drawn closer to God. If I pursued knowing the creator, I would have more freedom to create. As I allowed the creator to create through me, it became clear to me that I was in fact a co-creator. By forging a new relationship with the Higher Power, I unblocked myself creatively. At the time, it was an unexpected gift of surrendering to living a sober life. It would become the root of my life’s work, and a gift I would go on to share with many, many others.

Praying to God in my own words, praying regularly, I came to a different experience of the world. No longer a hostile and forbidding place, it became, instead, benevolent. No longer dreading the future, I came to look forward to it. I prayed, “Thy will be done,” coming to trust that God’s will was gentle rather than harsh, happy rather than sad, welcoming rather than forbidding.

A word at a time, prayer was leading me to optimism. As I spoke of my secrets, of my dreams and hopes, I heard, “You will be prospered”—and I came to believe it. It was as if when I took a step toward God, God took a step toward me. We drew closer, ever closer, and our proximity bred faith. When I risked disclosure toward God, God disclosed himself to me. I sensed God’s presence, and God’s nature—all loving. Where previously I believed in

*For myself I am an
optimist—it does not seem
to be much use to be
anything else.*

—WINSTON S.
CHURCHILL

an authoritarian God, I found my God concept altering. I began to sense a God of wonder. Gazing at a full moon, I heard myself breathe, “I love you,” addressing God—the moon’s maker. I found God in beauty, and beauty was all around me. The willow tree, the maple, the blue spruce—I saw God in nature. The deer, the fox, the bear—his creatures were varied and miraculous. Spotting a raccoon, I marveled at its antic grace. The hawk, the dove, the raven—my spirit took wings as well. I began to pray from gratitude. “Thank you, God, for the sunset. Thank you, God, for the evening star.” Addressing God with gratitude, I had a sense of the miraculous. I felt grace. My mood lifted. There was so much to be grateful for—my health, my home, my friends. I could list dozens of reasons to be grateful. My hair, my skin, my limbs. I was grateful to be alive and breathing, grateful to be at prayer.

I found myself feeling a sense of the presence of God. The more I prayed, the stronger the presence felt. I thought of the Carmelite nuns who spend their entire day at prayer. It is often remarked that nuns seem happy, and I began to have a sense of why. I began to sense that conscious contact could yield many things—a sense of well-being chief among them. Mystics report a sense of ecstasy. Humbler than mystics, regular practitioners of prayer report a sense of satisfaction with their lives as they unfold. Pausing throughout their day to say “thy will be done,” they feel the comfort of aligning their lives with God’s will for them. Happiness is the result.

My teaching taught me that this was not only true for me, but that it was true for other people as well. We are all creative. We can all call on help from the great creator, and we can all connect to the creator by practicing our creativity. I have often noted that creativity is God’s gift

to us—and using our creativity is our gift back to God. Using our creativity is a valid and powerful path to God, and as we explore and deepen our creativity, we explore and deepen our relationship with a Higher Power—whether we call that God, the force, or sunspots.

As YOU BEGIN your own journey into talking to God, I ask you to experiment with open-mindedness. If the word “God” is uncomfortable for you, do not let that be a block to greater support and connection. After all, a line from Dylan Thomas worked for me. Sunspots worked for my friend. Mick Jagger worked for another. Many of my students have successfully replaced the word “God” with the phrase “Good Orderly Direction.” For the purposes of this book, I will use the word “God.” Do not let semantics scare you off. We will work on defining a God that works for you, and we will explore the creative art of prayer: a completely individual endeavor.

THE BASIC TOOLS

The basic tools of a creative recovery—those that I, and many others, have used for decades now—have proven to guide me, and my students, without fail. If you have worked with my tools before, you will be familiar with some of them. If you have not, welcome to what I consider “the greased slide to creative unblocking”—a spiritual path to deeper creativity and deeper connection to the divine. Using these tools, you will see positive change in your life. Using these tools, you will feel a sense of empowerment—and an increased connection with a Higher Power. All of us can talk to God. All of us can practice our creativity as a spiritual path. These tools are tried and true. I encourage you to experiment with them for yourself.

MORNING PAGES: THE BEDROCK TOOL OF A CREATIVE RECOVERY

Morning Pages, the bedrock tool of a creative recovery, have been used by actors, lawyers, writers, directors, bankers . . . no matter one's profession, or whether a person is a "declared" artist or not, people of all stripes have used this tool to expand their creativity, organize their businesses, sort out their personal lives, and yes, talk to God. Morning Pages bring clarity, direction, and productivity to every area of our lives.

So what are Morning Pages? They are three pages of longhand writing about anything. Yes—they must be done in the morning. Morning Pages lay out a track for the day ahead, while "evening" pages reflect on a day that has passed—and that you are now powerless to change. Yes—they really can be about *anything*. They may jump topic to topic to topic. They may be petty, boring, and repetitive. *I'm awake and I'm tired. I'm annoyed about how Sue tried to tell me how to plan my day yesterday. I don't need her plan. I need to follow my own intuition. I need more coffee. I should get my dog groomed. . . .*

Frequently disjointed and seemingly pointless, Morning Pages serve as a kind of "brain drain" that allows you to release the worries, fears, and distractions standing between you and your day. Another way to think of them is like windshield wipers on a car: they clear a path to a day ahead. I have had students tell me many times that Morning Pages allow them to "happen to their day"—instead of having their day happen to them. Morning Pages make us authentic. Morning Pages move us into action. When we begin each day with a practice of honesty, we tend to be more honest in our lives.

Morning Pages are not meant to be high art. They are not meant to be "writing." For writers, it can be tempting to write them well. Don't. Morning Pages are to be

Writing is prayer.

—FRANZ KAFKA

shared with no one—I have had students burn, shred, and hide them—the pages are completely private, for your eyes only. I have often described them as “a room of one’s own”—that elusive wish that Virginia Wolfe saw as so valuable, and that many of us do not have. Morning Pages are a private place to vent, think, and dream. They are a receptacle for whatever stands between you and your day. Don’t worry about forgetting the insights they bring up—like a tough-love friend, the pages are likely to bring issues up again and again until you have resolved those issues in your life.

I am often asked if it is okay to have coffee before the pages. My answer is that I would never stand between someone and their morning coffee. Most people have coffee as they write. I often brew a pot the night before, and have cold coffee each morning. If this sounds too fanatical, make your coffee in the morning—just don’t spend forty-five minutes brewing the perfect cup. It is important to get to the pages as quickly as possible after waking. Bernice Hill, a Jungian analyst and author, told me of Jung’s belief that we have forty-five minutes after waking before our defenses are in place. These first forty-five minutes are the best time to do Morning Pages.

Another common question comes from those with a meditation practice. Which comes first, MPs or meditation? I say Morning Pages. Morning Pages propel us into action. They lay out in front of us what we are wondering and worrying about. Meditation runs the risk of allowing the “cloud thoughts” to pass us by—and remain un-acted upon. Practitioners tell me that when they meditate after doing Morning Pages, their insights are clearer and they come away both more serene and more proactive. Morning Pages set the stage for productive meditation: the clarity gained from writing allows for clarity in the communion with the divine.

When I teach a live course and open the room up to Q&A, it is astounding—to me and to the class—how often the answer to a question is “Do Morning Pages.” When we are seeking, they lead us. When we are grieving, they soothe us. When we are angry, they listen. When we are anxious, they help us focus. When we are confused, they help us sort. Our priorities float to the surface. Morning Pages push us into action. Try doing Morning Pages. They will lead you to the guidance you seek.

◀ **TRY THIS** ▶

For the duration of this course, and hopefully much longer, set your alarm for thirty minutes early. Write three pages—that’s three single sides of eight and a half by eleven-inch paper, not six pages!—about anything and everything that pops into your head. Don’t judge them. There is no wrong way to do Morning Pages. Just keep your hand moving across the page. At the end of three pages, stop. The pages will change you.

ARTIST DATES: THE PLAY OF IDEAS

The second tool in a creative recovery is something that I call the Artist Date. The Artist Date is a once-a-week, solo adventure that you take just for fun. Think of it as “assigned play.” It is during Artist Dates that I often experience synchronicity—the phenomenon of uncanny good luck or coincidence—and feel a sense of connection to God. My students report that Artist Dates bring them inspiration, joy, and peace. They find themselves befriending themselves. It is a truly empowering experience to treat yourself to pure, whimsical fun.

The Artist Date has two parts: “artist” and “date.” Our inner artist is a youngster, and the adventure should be something that delights you. Think mystery over mastery, play over virtue. A trip to a children’s bookstore, an afternoon at the beach, an outing to a new restaurant, a concert or a play or a movie that’s outside your usual scope—anything that sounds fun and frivolous to you will do the trick.

One of my favorite Artist Dates is to visit a pet store with a large bunny named George. The owner allows me to visit George, and my time communing with him brings me a sense of expansion and delight. Do not underestimate how satisfying a simple adventure can feel. The date need not be expensive; often our inner artist, like an inner child, craves time more than money. The act of taking a conscious break with no agenda except for pure delight may feel radical in our culture of constantly being “on.” It is. As artists, we are rewarded greatly for taking time out to be festive.

The second part—“date”—informs how you plan this event. Schedule it ahead of time, and allow yourself to look forward to it. This date need only be an hour or two per week for the rewards to be immense.

I often think of Morning Pages and Artist Dates as a two-way radio kit. With the Morning Pages, you are “sending”—*This is what I like, this is what I don’t like, this is what I want more of, this is what I want less of.* With the Artist Date you are flipping the dial over to “receive.” You are going out into the world on an adventure just for fun and for you—and you can expect to receive guidance, inspiration, and a sense of gentle companionship.

I have had many students report that they felt a sense of a benevolent Higher Power on their Artist Dates—and it is no wonder. When we take this seemingly frivolous adventure, we tap into something larger than ourselves.

The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth, dwelling deeply in the present moment and feeling truly alive.

—THICH NHAT HANH

The very act of taking our inner artist on a date triggers synchronicity in our lives. We find ourselves in the right place at the same time. We find what we need for a project exactly when and where we weren't looking for it. We stumble upon help and "lucky breaks." Our synchronicity increases manyfold when we take the time out for our Artist Dates. I have heard tell from many, many students that what appeared on the surface to be wasted time turned out to be a shortcut to ideas, solutions, and a sense of well-being.

"It's hard to get myself out the door," a student of mine reports, "but I get such a bang for my buck on my Artist Dates. It never fails. I always come back more enlightened—and more lighthearted. The dates make me a better, more inspired, and more productive artist. And yes—when I am taking regular Artist Dates, my luck definitely increases."

When I teach a large group of students, it is easy to get them on board with doing the "work" of Morning Pages. It is harder to get them to try the "play" of Artist Dates. I invite you to resist your resistance, and do them anyway.

◀ TRY THIS ▶

Once weekly, take yourself on an Artist Date. Choose an adventure that sounds fun to you, plan it ahead of time, and protect it like you would any important appointment. Make a promise to your inner artist—and keep it. Allow your inner artist to lead you. Allow yourself to listen to their wishes and demands. This solo adventure in pure fun and play will bring surprising insights. Be open to what your artist wants to share with you—and to what you may learn.

(cont'd)

Fill in the following:

It would be fun to . . .

The list you have just completed above is a great resource for potential Artist Dates.

WALKS: A STEP INTO EMPOWERMENT

The third tool of a creative recovery, and one that is as old as the practice of prayer, is walking. For centuries, spiritual seekers have walked—on quests, on pilgrimages, through labyrinths. Artists have long had a practice of walking. Walking stretches not only your legs, but your mind and spirit as well. Writer Brenda Ueland famously said, “I have found that a five- or six-mile walk helps. And you must do it alone and every day.” A five- or six-mile walk certainly does help. But if you don’t have the time or stamina, a shorter walk can still provide great insight.

Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.

—THICH NHAT HANH

Twice weekly, you will take a solo, twenty-minute walk. That means no cell phone, no dog, no headphones, no friends. We are creating the opportunity for you to commune with your own thoughts—and your own creator. Walking has long been a connector to the divine. Silent walking has been used by practitioners on all spiritual paths—and the word “path” is significant here. Walking has long been used as a way to talk to God.

I sometimes walk out with a question, and when I do, I find I return with an answer. I sometimes walk, and just listen. I sometimes walk and talk to God, airing my grievances and expressing my gratitude. There isn't a wrong way to take a walk. Simply lace up your shoes and walk for twenty minutes. Allow yourself to connect to the world around you—and the creator who created it.

◀ **TRY THIS** ▶

Twice a week, take yourself alone on a twenty-minute walk. You may walk out with a question, or you may not. Insights will bubble up as you walk. Notice the great creator's hand in the world around you. You are likely to feel a little closer to this creator at the end of your walk than you did at the beginning.

**WRITING OUT GUIDANCE:
LISTENING TO THE DIVINE**

The fourth tool is a tool I began using intuitively, and have come to consciously depend on in my daily life: writing out guidance. When I got sober, and brought a new kind of prayer into my life, I craved some record of the guidance I was receiving. I began to pray on the page. “Please guide me about X,” I would pray, listening then for a response, and then writing out what I “heard.”

Prayer began to be a dialogue, not a monologue. It was a conversation with me talking to God, and God talking back to me. As I experimented with this practice, I found that what I “heard” back would prove itself to be gentle, accurate, and useful. This is one of the main ways I talk to God to this day.

Outside my windows, the mountains loom high, their peaks snowy. At twilight they glow rainbow-hued, reflecting the setting sun. Today the snowy peaks are apricot. The western sky is vivid rouge. “What shall I write about?” I pose the question to the mountains. “Write about guidance,” I hear back. And so I will write about guidance, a Q & A process by which I lead my life.

“What should I do about X?” I ask, and I listen for a response. Pen in hand, pen to the page, I “hear” a reply. I jot down what I hear. Very often, the answers are simple, simpler than I would have thought. For example, I asked for guidance about my ex-husband. Forty years after our divorce, I felt I still loved him and that bothered me. Shouldn’t I be over him by now?

“What about still loving X,” I wrote. “What should I do?”

“Just love him,” I heard back, simple advice that untangled my heart.

“But shouldn’t I be over him? I’m ashamed that I still love him,” I asked further.

“Love is eternal,” the guidance came back. One more time, simple advice. Put simply, “Drop the rock. You love who you love. No need for shame. No need to get ‘over’ love.”

My relief at receiving this guidance was palpable. What to me had been a complicated issue was revealed to be simple. I was directed to follow my heart and when I did, my complications dropped away. Guidance was good on affairs of the heart, I concluded, relieved. But what of more secular matters?

I had promised a book to my beloved publisher who had left “our” press after twenty-seven years. “I’ll follow you to your new press,” I told him. But our old press had a right to see the book first. I hoped—even expected—that they would reject it. Instead, they loved it. They offered me a hefty advance. What to do? On the one hand I had my promise and on the other I had all that money. Conflicted, I took to the page for guidance.

“What should I do?” I asked.

“Keep your promise,” I was told.

“But the money?” I asked.

“Keep your promise,” I was told again.

“The money?” I protested.

“Keep your promise,” the guidance insisted again.

Reminding myself that guidance had a track record of being right, I decided to keep my promise—money be damned. I turned down the offer from my old press and followed my heart to the new. Would my publisher like the book? I sent him the book and waited on pins and needles for his reaction.

Five long days afterward, his answer came: “I love it.”

So now I had a new book deal with an old friend. I reflected that he had always been a muse for me. Our relationship would continue to grow. At our new press, I had a future. At our old press I had a past—and no muse, no matter how much money was offered. The more I mulled on the advice guidance had offered me, the wiser and better it seemed: simple, direct, ethical—“Keep your promise.”

On matters large and small, secular or romantic, guidance proved itself reliable over and over again. I asked for help about my writing and was told, “Write about X”—and a topic would be suggested. Like the mountains outside my windows, guidance was always there.

“You are led carefully and well,” I was repeatedly assured. Upon reflection, I thought simply, “This is true.”

I still use this practice daily. I will refer to myself as

Any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be made into a burden.

—CORRIE TEN BOOM

LJ—“Little Julie”—and then pose a question. I will listen back for the answer, and then write the response. For example:

LJ: What do they need to know about talking to God?

A: That everyone has a direct line to the Great Creator.

I have learned to listen to my guidance almost constantly, and over many years of taking this guidance, I have come to trust it completely. I may not always believe it in the moment—my human mind may say, “But—?” or “What if—?”—but it has always proven itself to be steady and useful. What we “hear” back will often be surprisingly simple and straightforward. Allow yourself to experiment with this tool whenever you have a question. A sense of support and companionship is likely to be the result.

Prayer is an education.

—FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

“But Julia,” I am sometimes asked, “What if it’s just your imagination that your prayers are answered?”

I reply, “If it’s just my imagination, it’s still good, and my imagination is far wiser than I have thought.”

As I developed this practice for myself, I was interested by what I was hearing, and so, praying for guidance to a wise God, I listened carefully. I found my guidance to be warm and reassuring. “There is no error in your path,” I was told. “You are led carefully and well.” Thus reassured, I found myself able to take risks. When first challenged to risk, I caught myself thinking, “I can’t do that.” When further prayer led to further reassurance, I thought, “Well, maybe I could try that.” And then, “I think I will.” My prayers after that were prayers of gratitude. I had risked, and the risk had paid off.

Praying on the page, for “What shall I do next?” I “heard”: “You will be writing radiant songs.” I was dubious at best. I had been raised as the non-musical one in a hugely musical family. “I’m forty-five years old. If I were

the least bit musical I would know it,” my thinking ran. But the guidance persisted.

“You will be writing radiant songs.”

Two weeks later, seated on a rock by a Rocky Mountain stream, I heard my first song. It was indeed radiant.

As I became accustomed to praying on the page, I became accustomed to guidance giving me a peek ahead. I perhaps didn’t know what lay ahead, but guidance did. “Much goodness lies ahead for you,” I was told. And, tutored by prayer and optimism, I came to believe it.

◀ **TRY THIS** ▶

Once a day, and more often if you wish, take to the page with whatever is on your mind. Write out a question—any question that you have—listen, and write out what comes back. You may wish to do this right after finishing Morning Pages. You may wish to do as I do—creating your own version of “LJ” for “Little Julie.” The point is to be willing to ask, and then be open to receiving. The answers that you hear may surprise you.