



# DESERT FATHERS & MOTHERS

## Teaching by Cynthia Bourgeault

Recorded March 8-14, 2014  
Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson Arizona  
12 CD set (approx. 15 hours)

*As this is a LIVE recording you may notice some audio variability and background noise.*

Be prepared to discover in this set of teachings the original desert fathers and mothers in a whole new way – as Christian disciples and sages. Cynthia begins by exploring how the desert is a perfect setting both physically and metaphorically for the spiritual seeker. You are invited to recognize your own personal desert and to work within its constrictions as you walk your individual path toward the divine. Cynthia quickly dispels the common misconceptions about the early desert fathers and mothers as rejecting the body and engaging in self-harming practices. Instead, the desert tradition is revealed as a model for present-day wisdom schools. The early Christian desert dwellers are seen as being dedicated to becoming transformed humans in the way of Christ – balancing asceticism and temperance, solitude and community, right dominion and humility, equanimity and passion, vigilance and nonattachment. Their practices and teachings serve as a guide today for bridging the material realm and the intense realm of deep prayer and for participating in the unfolding of a new humanity.

References for this recorded teaching:

### Texts directly used during the teaching sessions:

Athanasius: *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*. Robert C. Gregg (trans.)

Ward, Benedicta: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*.

### Texts mentioned during the discussions

Bourgeault, Cynthia: "The Unified Solitude of the Desert" *Parabola Magazine* (This article was handed out at the retreat.)

Lane, Belden C.: *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*

Lusseyran, Jacques: *And There Was Light*

Mayers, Gregory: *Listening to the Desert: Secrets of Spiritual Maturity from the Desert Fathers and Mothers*

Merton, Thomas: *The Wisdom of the Desert*

Singh, Kathleen D: *The Grace in Dying*

Swan, Laura: *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women*

Sviri, Sara: *The Taste of Hidden Things*

Tomberg, Valentin [published anonymously]: *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*

Welwood, John: *Toward a Psychology of Awakening*

We hope you find this an enriching and beneficial teaching series. For other live recordings of the teaching of Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault please visit our website at [www.contemplative.org](http://www.contemplative.org) or email [admin@contemplative.org](mailto:admin@contemplative.org) for a current listing.

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## Disc & Track Titles

### Disc 1 Getting to Know the Desert (1:15:00)

Track 1 – The desert as metaphor and reality (7:37)  
Track 2 – How and why the desert movement began (7:57)  
Track 3 – What the desert fathers and mothers practiced (6:14)  
Track 4 – The desert movement as the first wisdom school (3:57)  
Track 5 – Review of some core texts (5:26)  
Track 6 – The desert as any “cell” under liminal conditions (3:18)  
Track 7 – Identifying your desert and living the desert sayings (2:41)  
Track 8 – Binding together the alone and the collective (7:35)  
Track 9 – The next axial model (2:49)  
Track 10 – Christianity during the time of Anthony and Athanasius (6:28)  
Track 11 – How to understand early biographies (4:25)  
Track 12 – Anthony’s conversion (5:26)  
Track 13 – The importance of maintaining lineages (2:58)  
Track 14 – Anthony’s desert initiation and balancing responsibilities (5:12)  
Track 15 – Learning through collective sharing and being a humble apprentice (2:58)

### Disc 2 The Life of Anthony (1:17:18)

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Life of Anthony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, by Athanasius, translation by Robert C. Gregg, Paulist Press, 1980.

Track 1 – Anthony’s struggle with the demons – Phase 1 (6:30)  
Track 2 – Anthony’s struggle with the demons – Phase 2 (3:34)  
Track 3 – Views about the demonic (8:52)  
Track 4 – Practical advice if faced with a toxic situation (3:58)  
Track 5 – A journey of tempering (1:29)  
Track 6 – Neurotic vs. salvific suffering (2:39)  
Track 7 – Opportunities for 21<sup>st</sup> century spiritual work (2:42)  
Track 8 – Saying a simple exorcism in the face of evil (2:35)  
Track 9 – Anthony emerges as the initiated human (5:16)  
Track 10 – Phase 3 of Anthony’s life: balancing service and solitude (3:49)  
Track 11 – Comparing Anthony and St. Francis (3:46)  
Track 12 – Anthony’s teaching on virtue (4:37)  
Track 13 – Where the east and west spiritual teachings meet (3:08)  
Track 14 – Anthony’s teachings on spiritual powers (7:01)  
Track 15 – Anthony’s teachings on the discernment of spirits (8:24)  
Track 16 – Anthony’s ministry and inner mountain (6:05)  
Track 17 – Anthony’s death (2:53)

### Disc 3 Teachings of Anthony (1:14:43)

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Track 1 – Integrity and humility as the mark of true spiritual teachers (6:01)  
Track 2 – Understanding accidie (existential restlessness) (7:13)  
Track 3 – How to correct accidie (6:02)  
Track 4 – Accidie vs. personal depression (4:36)  
Track 5 – Working with being and awareness and the ego (3:49)  
Track 6 – Working with attention (8:08)  
Track 7 – The egoic self-spectator vs. inner witness (6:23)  
Track 8 – Being present to God according to your faith’s teachings (3:44)  
Track 9 – The idea of a personal God (4:46)  
Track 10 – The importance of stability (2:58)  
Track 11 – Anthony logion 9: Defining scandalous (7:55)  
Track 12 – Anthony logion 12: A teaching on visions (9:29)  
Track 13 – Purity of heart as a visionary tool (3:39)

### Disc 4 The Goal of Asceticism (1:16:16)

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Track 1 – When and how to speak truth to power (7:04)  
Track 2 – Thoughts about asceticism and temptation (7:41)  
Track 3 – Learning through visceral experiencing (8:33)  
Track 4 – Introduction to asceticism (3:04)

Track 5 – Vigilance as key to asceticism (5:42)  
Track 6 – The traps and purpose of asceticism (4:44)  
Track 7 – Accounting for the inconsistencies in the desert teachings (4:33)  
Track 8 – Misdirected beliefs regarding mortifying the body (7:12)  
Track 9 – Anthony logion 33: Contrasted readings (3:05)  
Track 10 – Anthony logion 33: Soul joy vs. feeding the pain/pleasure system (10:40)  
Track 11 – Thoughts on how to gain wisdom (4:47)  
Track 12 – Asceticism as tempering our conditioned systems (4:47)  
Track 13 – Comparing vigilance and witnessing presence (4:24)

### Disc 5 The Practice and Fruit of Asceticism (1:18:01)

Track 1 – The role of discomfort (9:03)  
Track 2 – The function of fasting (5:42)  
Track 3 – Anthony on the three movements of the body (4:06)  
Track 4 – Vainglory as a balancing test for asceticism (8:38)  
Track 5 – Compassion or how to be your brother’s keeper (6:34)  
Track 6 – Discerning without judging and acting without separating (5:54)  
Track 7 – Understanding self-love (2:18)  
Track 8 – A summary of asceticism as a path of transformation (5:08)  
Track 9 – Asceticism as a manifestation of transformation (5:23)  
Track 10 – Matching the asceticism practice to the individual (4:00)  
Track 11 – The Welcoming Prayer as a spiritual practice (5:30)  
Track 12 – The Welcoming Prayer Step 1 (6:24)  
Track 13 – The Welcoming Prayer Steps 2 and 3 (5:40)  
Track 14 – The Welcoming Prayer litany (3:41)

### Disc 6 Selected Desert Teachings (1:17:05)

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Track 1 – Correlating the Welcoming Prayer with the desert teachings (4:43)  
Track 2 – Tips for remembering to use the Welcoming Prayer (4:31)  
Track 3 – Physical awareness serving conscious transformation (4:08)  
Track 4 – Trusting what calls us back to awakening (4:54)  
Track 5 – The meeting of grace and works (5:19)  
Track 6 – Balancing inner and outer work (5:53)  
Track 7 – Arsenius logion 28: A reading (3:15)  
Track 8 – Arsenius logion 28: An interpretation of logion 28 and attitudes towards women (8:39)  
Track 9 – Matoes logion 13: Hermit life vs. life in community (4:11)  
Track 10 – Some thoughts on silence (5:27)  
Track 11 – Approaches for considering the demonic in today’s culture (9:33)  
Track 12 – Group work as a fusion of a new evolutionary whole (6:59)  
Track 13 – Syncretica logion 13: Hating the sickness and not the sick person (2:18)  
Track 14 – Agathon logion 2: Defining and working with conscience (7:09)

### Disc 7 Selected Desert Teachings (cont.) (1:18:27)

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Track 1 – The homing function of the unseeing “I/eye” (5:05)  
Track 2 – Ammonas logion 9: An unresolved teaching (6:09)  
Track 3 – Poemen logion 18: Dealing with jealousy (4:44)  
Track 4 – Links between desert logia and energy fields (4:01)  
Track 5 – The work of discernment and training one’s instincts (7:05)  
Track 6 – Ammonas logion 12: Discernment, judgment and moralism (9:10)  
Track 7 – Group reflections on discernment (3:14)  
Track 8 – Questions about spiritual directors (6:35)  
Track 9 – The “cell” as a voluntary constraint for spiritual growth (6:58)  
Track 10 – Knowing when it is time to go into the “cell” (2:58)  
Track 11 – Passing through accidie to a new perceptual field (4:43)  
Track 12 – Gregory Myer’s existential look at the “cell” teaching (5:05)  
Track 13 – Consent as key to voluntary constraint (3:57)  
Track 14 – How to get to the unconditional yes (6:01)  
Track 15 – An exercise for sitting in your “cell” (2:43)

### Disc 8 Nonattachment and Prayer (1:19:06)

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Track 1 – Introduction to nonattachment (4:49)  
Track 2 – Nonattachment as the neurological precondition for non-dual vision (5:39)  
Track 3 – The connection between consent, trust and faith (2:51)

Track 4 – Nonattaching to small self and gaining equanimity (7:27)  
 Track 5 – The difference between equanimity and indifference (5:00)  
 Track 6 – Desert understanding of emotions, feelings, passions and thought (7:08)  
 Track 7 – The nonattachment path to answering “Who am I?” (9:20)  
 Track 8 – The role of the ego once the real “I” is known (4:03)  
 Track 9 – Introduction to the desert practice of prayer (6:04)  
 Track 10 – The use of scripture by the desert fathers and mothers (5:42)  
 Track 11 – Mindfulness in prayer (2:58)  
 Track 12 – Standing to pray (2:42)  
 Track 13 – The stirring of accidie and the role of physical grounding (3:41)  
 Track 14 – Evagrius logia 7 and 3: Singing the psalms as prayer (6:35)  
 Track 15 – Syncretica logia 25 and 27: The lectio divina roots of desert prayer and living (4:57)

**Disc 9 Prayer (cont.) and Intensity in Deep Prayer (1:19:30)**

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Track 1 – Types of desert prayer (2:47)  
 Track 2 – Macarius logion 19: Simple heart prayer vs. mantric praying (9:12)  
 Track 3 – The basis of Centering Prayer (2:15)  
 Track 4 – The implicit Christic presence in the desert experience (4:47)  
 Track 5 – Macarius logion 25: The life cycle of spiritual movements (5:11)  
 Track 6 – Anthony logion 10: Resting in the intensity of deep prayer (3:56)  
 Track 7 – Thomas Merton on the fruit of deep prayer (7:50)  
 Track 8 – Introduction to the deep intensity realm (4:47)  
 Track 9 – Joseph logion 7: Comparing two orders of being in the spiritual journey (6:43)  
 Track 10 – The quality of clairvoyance (4:32)  
 Track 11 – Anthony logion 14: Humility, conscience and clairvoyance (6:36)  
 Track 12 – Arsenius logion 42: The quality of radiance and its physical reality (7:53)  
 Track 13 – Macarius logion 2 & Syncretica logion 9: Bearing radiance with ease and rest (7:52)  
 Track 14 – Holding the quality of dominion to allow engendering (5:09)

**Disc 10 Intensity in Deep Prayer (cont.) & The Desert Mothers (1:18:47)**

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975, except as otherwise noted.

Track 1 – Grace as God’s hand at work in creation (2:10)  
 Track 2 – Anthony logia 30 & 36: Right dominion, faith and aligning with the deeper realm (6:38)  
 Track 3 – The qualities of solidarity, heart transmission and nurturing (4:23)  
 Track 4 – Recognizing spiritual nurturers (7:29)  
 Track 5 – Comparing the deeper realm with traditional views of heaven and hell (6:26)  
 Track 6 – Describing the deeper realm and the interpenetration of the realms (7:38)  
 Track 7 – The higher realm, the mystical body of Christ and the next evolutionary level (6:13)  
 Track 8 – The Christian path toward the mystical body of Christ and a new humanity (6:10)  
 Track 9 – The relational field with Jesus as one path toward the primordial realm (3:40)  
 Track 10 – Introduction to the desert mothers (3:06)  
 Track 11 – Matrona and Sarah from Swan’s *The Forgotten Desert Mothers* (2:59)  
 Track 12 – Sarah logia 4, 9 & 3: Emergence of the fully human being (5:27)  
 Track 13 – The life and teachings of Syncretica (2:36)  
 Track 14 – Syncretica logion 1: The beginning battles in the spiritual journey (1:38)  
 Track 15 – Syncretica logion 2: Temperance as an interior attitude supporting staying present (5:35)  
 Track 16 – Balancing community and solitude and the challenges to temperance (2:43)  
 Track 17 – Comparing equanimity and temperance (1:23)  
 Track 18 – Syncretica logion 5: Wise temperance (2:33)

**Disc 11 The Desert Mothers (cont.) & Sharing Personal Experiences (1:12:00)**

Note: All references to logia and page numbers are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translation by Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Publications, 1975.

Track 1 – Syncretica logion 6: Not abandoning one’s chosen spiritual path (4:57)  
 Track 2 – When to go through or back away from a crisis point (4:33)  
 Track 3 – The Mary of Egypt story: The way to Christ wisdom (10:43)  
 Track 4 – Syncretica logion 12: Interior consistency and enacting what one learns (3:45)  
 Track 5 – Syncretica logia 14 & 22: A reading (1:38)  
 Track 6 – Syncretica logion 23: The effects of our inconsistencies (3:13)  
 Track 7 – Syncretica logion 15: Balanced asceticism (2:39)  
 Track 8 – Syncretica logia 16 & 17: On obedience and pride (2:20)  
 Track 9 – Syncretica logion 19: Being solitary wherever you are (0:56)  
 Track 10 – Syncretica logion 20: Voluntary remembrance of our transgressions (0:48)  
 Track 11 – Syncretica logia 25 & 26: Our responsibility to return to awareness (2:36)  
 Track 12 – Evagrius logia 1 & 4: Being a discerning reader of the desert sayings (4:47)  
 Track 13 – Creating a “cell” and doubting self-expression (2:02)  
 Track 14 – Evaluating your “cell” (0:53)  
 Track 15 – The power of conscious attention for deep mystical inquiry (5:33)  
 Track 16 – Obedience and gaining new levels of attention (6:29)  
 Track 17 – Trusting the interior self and noticing its tendency to analyze (4:02)  
 Track 18 – Confronting our fears (3:05)  
 Track 19 – Unconscious damage to our “cell” and guilt vs. remorse of being (2:42)  
 Track 20 – Being held by the environment (2:45)  
 Track 21 – Getting past our preconceptions (2:04)

**Disc 12 Taking Your Learnings Home & Final Sharing (1:00:19)**

Track 1 – Three great desert traditions: Hiddenness, integrity and solidarity (2:20)  
 Track 2 – On hiddenness (7:08)  
 Track 3 – Integrity: Means match the ends (3:28)  
 Track 4 – Solidarity in imaginal space (7:10)  
 Track 5 – Taking your learnings home: Choose to accept or change your constrictions (2:52)  
 Track 6 – Taking your learnings home: Practice non-doing (3:21)  
 Track 7 – Taking your learnings home: Face your accidie (3:24)  
 Track 8 – Taking your learnings home: Arrange your spiritual practices for staying present and endure the gap between seeing and doing (4:11)  
 Track 9 – Taking your learnings home: Recognize when you need to re-align to your true north (2:04)  
 Track 10 – Cynthia’s journey (1:31)  
 Track 11 – Rumi’s poem “Checkmate” (0:57)  
 Track 12 – All practices from the heart answer the yearning toward the divine (3:20)  
 Track 13 – Doing the spiritual journey within motherhood (6:17)  
 Track 14 – The gift of knowing your are on the path (1:18)  
 Track 15 – Spiritual practices energizing the emerging evolution (3:02)  
 Track 16 – The desert tradition in relation to Holy Week (7:56)