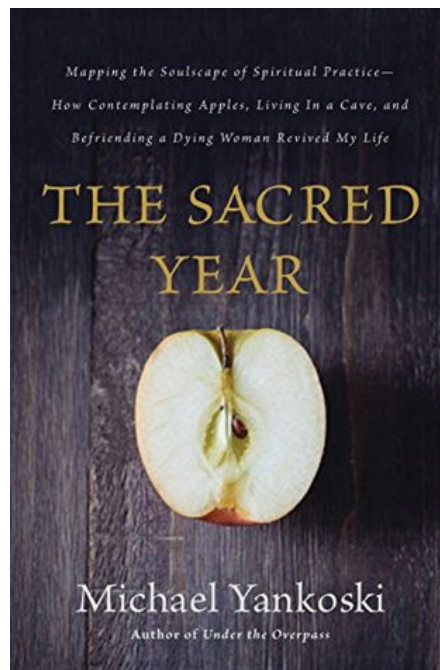




The Sacred Year: Mapping the Soulscape of Spiritual Practice -- How Contemplating Apples, Living in a Cave and Befriending a Dying Woman Revived My Life

Michael Yankoski

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Frustrated

and disillusioned with his life as a Christian motivational speaker, Michael Yankoski was determined to stop merely talking about living a life of faith and start experiencing it. The result was a year of focused engagement with spiritual practices--both ancient and modern--that fundamentally reshaped and revived his life.

By

contemplating apples for an hour before tasting them (attentiveness), eating on just \$2.00 a day (simplicity), or writing letters of thanks (gratitude), Michael discovered a whole new vitality and depth through the intentional life.

Guided by the voice of Father Solomon--a local monk--Yankoski's Sacred Year slowly transforms his life. Both entertaining and profound, his story will resonate with those who wish to deepen their own committed faith as well as those who are searching--perhaps for the first time--for their own authentic encounter with the Divine.

The Sacred Year: Mapping the Soulscape of Spiritual Practice -- How Contemplating Apples, Living in a Cave and Befriending a Dying Woman Revived My Life Details

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Michael Yankoski

From Reader Review The Sacred Year: Mapping the Soulscape of Spiritual Practice -- How Contemplating Apples, Living in a Cave and Befriending a Dying Woman Revived My Life for online ebook

Jo says

I found this book to be an honest, modern and inspiring take on the spiritual practices/disciplines. The author uses a great combination of personal life stories and experiences and practical tips as well as reasoning behind the practices to give a great understanding of what they are, why you need them, and how to do them well. I found much to learn and be inspired by, and will be trying to use them to deepen and enrich my own faith.

Jana Bromley says

Many parts were beautiful and thought-provoking, but some parts made me wonder if this guy was off his rocker. The bread recipe is atrocious. I'm glad I read it.

Nicole says

This book was best read chapter by chapter, slowly. The concepts were simple yet profound if you actually put them into play. Slightly out of the box and I liked that.

Virginia Garrett says

What happens if you spend your days telling others how to have lasting life in Jesus and you become frustrated and disillusioned with your very life? What if you travel and speak to Christians, motivating them to do more with their walk with Christ and you realize you're all talk and no walk?

Well if you're Michael Yankoski you write a book about it. You take a year to teach yourself how to stop talking about living a life after death and you start experiencing it. You learn how to take spiritual practices and make them a reality. You spend one year in focused engagement with the very spiritual practices you have been touting.

This book has changed the way I think about many things. It has given me ideas, things to implement in my own life. I've read about Michael's journey through:

The practice of attentiveness.

If you're anything like me, and I'm betting you are, because I'm like you. My world goes a million miles an hour. I feel like I spend too much time trying to play catch up. I can't focus on any one thing because it all hits me so fast. I'm constantly taking rabbit trails, shouting SQUIRREL! every few steps. I've thought myself the poster child for ADHD. I've been convinced I have it. After reading this book, I'm not so sure anymore. I think it's just life. And we're all affected and infected.

The practice of simplicity.

Not just downsizing, although that plays a part to be sure. But being simple in all areas. Keeping a simple house is good. Getting rid of things you haven't used in six months or a year, is good. But what about getting rid of some thoughts, behaviors, actions, habits, and grudges? Can we live a more simple life from the inside out?

The practice of still, silent solitude.

Oh yeah. In today's world that is nearly impossible. Years ago Bissell vacuum cleaners had a slogan, Life is Messy. Life is messy. But life is also noisy. So noisy and yet we constantly seek to fill it with more noise. We have the tv or radio on for "background noise". Why? Are we so afraid to be alone with our thoughts and our God? Yesterday I reacquainted myself with Neil Diamond's song, Beautiful Noise. I pondered what it meant. It doesn't seem finished, it seems as if he is singing about a noise but doesn't tell us what the beautiful noise is. I'm convinced today, it's life. Life is noisy. But God speaks to us through a still, small voice. Not a shout. What if we took the time to be still enough, quiet enough in the noisiness of life to listen? What if we turned off the tv, the radio, the cd, the phones and just listened?

The practice of Sabbath

I am not going to lie. This one probably has the biggest impact on my life. I loved every chapter. Every practice. In the margins on many I have scribbled, DO THIS!!!!, but there was something about this chapter. This practice that hit me between the eyes with a fatal blow. I have implemented this practice and I am so happy I did. I know you're thinking, "If only I had time to spend a whole day doing whatever I want in total self-indulgent." Please hear me say, you do. You in fact have 6 days to spend indulging your every wish and whim. Creating a Sabbath is not about self-indulgence or laziness. It's about asking God how He wants you spend your day with Him. And doing what He says. Some of the things He has told me to do are laundry, dishes, create.

The practice of gratitude.

It is the season where we all start thinking about how thankful we are. Facebook will soon explode with people posting what they are thankful for. 30 days of Thanksgiving. Gratitude is being thankful. But it is so much more than that. Gratitude is an attitude of the heart. An attitude that says "I honor you because you have changed me." "I'm grateful for all you have done for me. For who You have made me." It's more than simply saying "Thank you."

The practice of pursuing justice.

This one is tricky. It seems the more we unearth about the injustices of the world, the more we realize we are living unjust lives. Injustice affects every area, every aspect of our life today. I am still pondering this one. But it had a great impact on me.

There are more chapters, if you want to know the other practices, you'll have to get the book.

I received a free copy of this book, The Sacred Year by Michael Yankoski for the purpose of review. All opinions are my own.

Steve says

Publishers description:

Frustrated and disillusioned with his life as a Christian motivational speaker, Michael Yankoski was determined to stop merely talking about living a life of faith and start experiencing it. The result was a year dedicated to engaging in spiritual practices, both ancient and modern, in a life-altering process that continues to this day. Whether contemplating an apple for an hour before tasting it (attentiveness), eating on \$2.00 a day (simplicity) or writing simple letters of thanks (gratitude), Michael discovered a whole new depth through the intentional life.

My Grade: B+ Started off strong and kept its momentum until the last couple chapters which got a bit too preachy. I found it pretty amazing that someone who had spent a good part of his life as a "professional Christian" was unaware of some of the basic spiritual practices that have been a part of Christianity for centuries. Interesting to see his reaction to them and how they each affected him. Worth reading even if it did end on a weaker note.

Lori S. says

Loved every word in this week-and not using the word "love" lightly here. I will return to this book again and again and consider it transforming. I can't wait to create my own Sacred Year as part of my life-long spiritual journey.

Julius McCarter says

Michael Yankoski's Sacred Year in the spiritual life book of 2014! This is the book every Christian absolutely must read -- especially if you're looking to deepen your life in Christ.

Developed around a framework of "divine practices", Yankoski weaves a story of anecdotes about ancient yet absolutely vital practices that contain some of the most practical spiritual wisdom I've read in a long while. Make no doubt about it, reading the book is hearing his story, but his story ultimately unfolds lessons about what life in and with God must be for Christians. In that way, The Sacred Year is a parable of the Christian life.

What I most loved about this book was Yankoski's ability to challenge my own spiritual life with honesty and humility. For example, The Sacred Year in a number of places has challenged my growing discontentment with our world's busy-ness. As a minister, I find myself pushing the boundaries of what it means to be fully available at work and at home -- some people find this astonishing because I am doing "God's work". But Yankoski's book asks us if doing more actually makes us more blessed, if we're not confusing what we do with who we are.

From simple tasks like baking bread to the ancient discipline of lectio divina, The Sacred Year has been a challenge for me in all the best ways. Because it asks me to look again at my sacred calling and slow down.

Having already read this book for a review, I must admit: I'd buy it myself. But I'll also certainly recommend it to anyone who wants this spiritual challenge. The Sacred Year is the book on the spiritual life for 2014. And for probably years to come. In fact, I'm certain it's to be a modern Christian classic.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through the BookLook Bloggers book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have

expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Tara says

First of all, do I recommend this book? Absolutely.

I have been intrigued by the monastic life for as long as I can remember so a Protestant who tried to live according to many of those sacred principles was right up my ally. His thoughts on community, love, and silence all resonated with me and encouraged me to again carve out my own practical ways to live that life. Admittedly, at times it seemed as though he thought he found "the answer"--the right way to do it, which rubbed me the wrong way a bit (as Lewis says, "things never happen the same way twice"). But overall, I appreciated his perspective.

Katie Krombein says

Overall, I liked this book, even though it was hard for me to pick up and read without falling asleep (mind you, our life is busy). It was a fine overview of basic church disciplines. I liked his end chapters more than his earlier ones, and agreed heartily with the practice of pursuing justice chapter, especially. In reflecting, I think the most helpful parts of book for me were other people's quotes that he repeated, although he has helpful observations on some of those quotes. Since I use goodreads as my notes, here are some that moved me:

42) St Ignatius of Loyola's Daily Examen: "You begin with gratitude, then move into a petition to God for clarity, crescendo with a minute by minute, hour by hour review of the days events, descend into confession for the wrongs committed, and wrap things up with express hope of living well in the time that is to come.

111) Pastor friend Monica: "Floundering in meaninglessness is not the goal of the contemplation of death. The point is to keep pressing into it, keep cultivating a deepening perspective on your own finitude until you move through and beyond meaninglessness into a place of humble joy. Humble joy, expectant gratitude, active hope and patient waiting. That is the point. That is the ecosystem you're trying to cultivate. That is where you'll echo Jesus' prayer, even in the face of death, 'Thy will be done.'"

124) Frederick Buechner: "To confess your sins to God is not to tell him anything he doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the bridge."

158) "Meaning is found not in scavenging or skimming, not from an increasingly 'objective' distance but instead by diving into the depth of the thing, by Selah-ing, by diminishing the distance to intimacy, by increasing attentiveness and allowing the Holy to shape and form us rather than keeping it at a calculated distance. ...And this is what Eugene Peterson is on about in 'Eat this Book.' ...Peterson draws from deep within the Christian tradition and suggests that we must learn not to read our holy texts, but instead to feast on them--to savor them....This kind of reading 'enters our souls as food enters our stomachs, spreads through our blood, and becomes holiness and love and wisdom.'"

221) Father Solomon: "That's what the spiritual life is all about – training us to intentionally watch and wait for all the ways God is at work in the world, all the ways God is at work in us, to bring us all into – as Jesus says – the fullness of life"

231) his grandma serves him up food. 'Grandma, what's that?'
'It's gratitude. Served up hot and fresh. The very best kind.'

233) Annie Dillard: "'how we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.' Could it be that learning to cultivate gratitude now – today, in fact – might actually move me toward what could be called a grateful life?"

259) Thomas Merton: "If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed – but hate these things in yourself, not in another."

294) Litany from a booklet he and his wife wrote: "Lord Jesus, we cry out to you now because our world and our own community and even we ourselves are still caught up in this same terrible lie of violence. We are still actors and bystanders in a world that does not cherish life, that regularly leads the innocent to their deaths.All: O Lord, you who know the violence that is in our world and in our hearts. Have mercy upon us, and show us the way of love. For we long to be a people of peace."

295-297) LOVE how they shredded regrets/sins/failures that they read and used for compost in a garden to grow wheat and make bread that they used for communion.

Also, it ends with a great appendix of recommended reading

Pamela (Lavish Bookshelf) says

I have read Michael Yankoski's book *Under the Overpass* and I gave it 4 stars in my review. I liked that book for the very reason that he was attempting to understand a difficult subject by looking at it from the inside. In short, he lived with the homeless for a year, which is something I would never do, so I was interested in what he had to say on the subject.

On the contrary, this book is really just overindulgent "how can I be a good Christian that is not a hypocrite" thinking. Yankoski spends a year following whims of deep thoughts.

Which isn't to say that this book is terrible. It is a good book that is very well written. Yankoski raises many good points about living intentionally and being present in the moment. *The Sacred Year* challenges readers to slow down and think about God's purpose in everything.

Disclosure: I was given a complimentary copy of this book for the purpose of a review however I was under no obligation to provide a positive review.

Kathleen (Kat) Smith says

How could staring at an apple for over an hour help you to change your focus? How could digging a grave help give you a deeper understanding of what our own mortality means? How long could you sit in a room in utter silence until you had to do something or engage in another activity? How can you learn to appreciate all that life has to offer when you can't seem to find hope and happiness anymore?

I found some amazing insights into one man's spiritual walk, Michael Yankoski during one year he entitled

in his book, *The Sacred Year*. In meeting with a man known as Father Solomon, he engaged Michael to take his own spiritual journey to find deeper nourishment, deeper encouragement, and deeper hope in a book that follows, through the ups and downs of one honest questioner's year of spiritual practice. There are simply so many amazing things that my poor copy of this book is more dog-eared than not. From outstanding quotes that open each chapter to the insights Michael discovered in so many profound ways, causes the reader to stop and pause at their own life, and realize how much we are truly missing. From learning to appreciate a great meal simply by fasting for 24 hours gives you a greater sense of the food you are eating. A good meal is never more appreciated than when you have gone without food for a few days. How too often we simply give up appreciating the abundance of food and flavors we have available to us simply by walking into a grocery store.

How when challenged to learn how to reclaim items that too often we simply discard not because we can't use them any longer but because we don't want them anymore. "We humans throw away such an astonishing amount of stuff every year, especially in the developed world. Resources are scarce, clean air and water and land are precious, and perhaps one of the ways of protecting what remains includes reclaiming what we might throw away, like lumber scraps, clothing or furniture. If we truly don't want them, and they are perfectly good, why not consider donating them instead? Michael actually spent time dumpster diving to see just what we so often throw away that still has value left in it.

How learning what is really important instead of the stronger overtaking the weaker, building something bigger, better and bolder, when you consider what is the point of it all anyway? "Is everything we build just destined to become rubble in another's ambition? For all the power and wealth here, for all the cultural influence and clout these culture-makers possess with their red carpets and private jets, they will all - we will all - one day be six feet under." (pg 111). He gains an insight into his own mortality digging a grave by hand. "The fact that I'm going to be down there someday. That we're all going to be down there someday. And the whole world will just keep on going about its business above us, like we were never even here."(pg 114).

He uncovers how God views us all not as a harsh judge looking for the moment to wipe us off the planet but in discovering through a close friend who is dying of cancer, how God views sin in our life like as a father views cancer taking the life of his daughter. The father hates cancer with an absolute, burning passion. So sin is like cancer, eating us alive, diminishing what we're made to be. It's a cancer of the mind, a cancer of the heart, a cancer of the soul. And it has spread out like a tumor throughout our whole selves. And, like the Bible says, "the wages of sin," are like the effects of untreated cancer, "is death." "And God like the father of the child with cancer, hates sin, hates the cancer that is eating us alive. He loves us and so he hates whatever it is that is killing us. He doesn't hate us, though, He loves us. He loves us and hates cancer, hates cancer because He loves us. God desires for us to live, to flourish, to thrive. That is why He made us. That is why God keeps us in existence from moment to moment." (pg 131).

I received *The Sacred Year* by Michael Yankoski compliments of Thomas Nelson Publishers and Litfuse Publicity for my honest review. I did not receive any monetary compensation for a favorable review and the opinions expressed here are strictly my own unless otherwise notated. There is simply so much to be gleaned from Michael's book and in his own year long search for something more than simply making it through this life doing the best we can with what God has given us. For those of you looking for a little bit more insight as the world grows at an exponential rate leaving us as debris in its wake, you just might uncover a true diamond in the rough tucked between the covers of this book.. I easily give this one a 4.5 out of 5 stars and can't wait to begin my own journey!

Julie Davis says

Father Solomon spoke again, and the shaking of my foundation continued. "The God who called you into existence *ex nihilo*—out of nothing—is the same God who holds you in existence this moment and every moment. Were he to withdraw his hand, you would vanish without memory. All things would. No, you can't *make* God love you. You can't make God *like* you. But nor do you need to; he already does. Never forget that is *why* he made you—because he *wants* you to exist. He wants you to *live life in all its fullness*."

Now this is interesting. What happens when a Protestant motivational speaker realizes he is in perpetual inner turmoil, goes to a monastery to rest for a week, and takes a monk's advice to explore spiritual practices for a more authentic encounter with God? Is there a way to live intentionally that shapes us so we can better catch God's wind in our sails and "allow Him to move us?"

Catholicism has a long tradition of various disciplines designed to help believers do this. Not every Catholic practices such disciplines. It just depends on the person. Yankoski's dive into different spiritual practices is a bit more extreme than the average Catholic, I'd say, because he's meeting every few weeks with a spiritual director and their conversations lead him from one discipline into another.

This is interesting to me both as a Catholic and as someone who too often skirts the shallow end of the pool. Which is probably why the Patheos book club began soliciting Catholics to read this book.

Right from the beginning this book is compelling. I'm more or less familiar with most of the practices that Yankoski engages with. Some are part of me, like *lectio divina*, and keeping the Sabbath. Others I dance around, trying and leaving, then returning to again occasionally. Yet others I have sampled and found not to be helpful.

Every chapter in the book had at least one moment that made me more aware. I've practiced keeping the Sabbath for several years now. And so while I was nodding my head at some of Yankoski's realizations on that topic, he also had some wonderful moments like this one which opened my eyes.

One thing this Sacred Year is beginning to show me is how each of these spiritual practices can work like an antidote to some of the more poisonous aspects of our culture today. They are refreshing and life giving, whereas so often the habits and methods I've developed in my frenzied, stressed-out life are deadly poisons. The spiritual practices work like balm on wounds, healing even if painful at first.

Thus silence counteracts noise. And contemplation counteracts commodification.

Might Sabbath counteract the idol of the self-made man?

No wonder I mocked Sabbath at first: idols always die hard.

I have to say there are some practices that I had a hard time accepting that the author was coming to completely unawares, such as being aware of how our lives often affect those who are less fortunate (think Chinese children working in shoe factories sort of situations). That is, after all, one of the cries of conscience of our secular society, to be aware of how privilege comes at such a cost. However, perhaps it had never occurred to him to connect it with faith somehow. However, even these chapters had moments that were valuable for me.

This book is inspirational for any Christian who struggles with how to be "in the world" and yet not "of the world." That is a line that both Catholic and Protestant struggle with. If we read enough history, we know that it is also something that not only modern people have struggled with. Michael Yankoski discovered that turning to these spiritual traditions eases the way to help us "live life in all its fullness" ... and he shares that

discovery with us.

I really enjoyed this book and will be rereading it.

Note: I wish they'd have included an appendix briefly explaining how to do some of the traditional practices (like the Examen).

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The review copy was provided by the Patheos Book Club. Publishers pay for Patheos to feature their books. My review is my own based solely on the book's merits.

Caroline (GettinLine) says

I enjoyed listening to this on audible. it had some interesting points.

Sharon says

perfect read to explore and set intentions for the new year

Marilyn says

The Sacred Year was written in three parts: Depth With Self, Depth With God, and Depth With Others. Most of us, I believe, just stay on the surface of things and are afraid to plunge into the depths for fear of what we might find or what we might be asked to do. Somehow, we find our hypermodern, hyperindividualistic, hyperfrenetic world more comfortable. I encourage you to take this beautifully written book, and let it guide you to a new place. You won't be sorry.
