

A life centered on God

Constance U. Battle. May 2002. CSJ



Constance U. Battle, M.D., of Potomac, Maryland, was a plenary session speaker at the December 15–17, 2001, conference on Spirituality & Healing in Medicine, sponsored by the Harvard Medical School and the Mind/Body Medical Institute of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. She's a professor of pediatrics at The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Washington, D.C., where she has taught for several years a course on how to interview and examine patients. Using this model as a metaphor for how to assess one's own spiritual life, Dr. Battle shared how she searches for a meaningful relationship with God. The following are excerpts from her talk, which focused on "Taking your spiritual 'vital signs' and formulating a personal, current 'care plan' for your spiritual life's journey."

A spiritual life is a life in which all that we do comes from the center, where we are anchored in God: a life soaked through and through by a sense of His reality and claim, and self-given to the great movement of His will....

"One of the prerequisites to live an authentic spiritual life is to align ourselves with God. We align ourselves with God and His aims when we: (1) Choose God wholeheartedly for who He is; (2) Make a covenant, a solemn and deep-seated promise to pursue the relationship with God with constancy and commitment; (3) Ask myself, in everything we do, however large or small, In doing this, am I becoming the kind of person I want to be, no exceptions?... We can develop a plan for a spiritual life orientation by aligning ourselves with God and by cultivating the presence of God.

"Some of the ways we align ourselves with the Almighty: (1) Write in your heart and mind: Whenever you make a decision, whenever you act, you are never just doing, you are always becoming; (2) Make the fundamental decision of your life to adhere to God actively, wholeheartedly, with your whole being; (3) Acknowledge setbacks, frustrations, and start again/realign."

"We cultivate the presence of God [in part] by (1) Using proven disciplines steadily and consistently; (2) Solitude, silence, Sabbath practices; (3) Prayer.

Dr. Battle makes entries in her journal every day—both by date and by topic. She said she'd never think of not keeping her evening appointment with God. She told the joke about how the devil would keep us from growing spiritually: First, tell them there's no God. Next, tell them there's no hell. Finally, and most important, tell them there's no hurry. She recommends that you get to know, rather than hide from, yourself. Think about what makes you laugh. Bring to light what's worrying you, what's making you feel uneasy. Then decide what needs attention today and what can be worked on later—and make sure your chronological age has not exceeded your spiritual maturity! She said the solitude and silence often necessary for this kind of self-examination can be painful to endure but aren't so bad once you've done it for a while.