



## Rooted in Resilience: Embracing the Fullness of Spiritual Formation Across Sacred Histories

The stories of enslaved Africans in the United States reveal a powerful testament to the resilience of sacred space; where external circumstances could not sever the internal connection with God. Despite relentless hardships, many found creative ways to nurture their spirituality, often at great personal risk, embodying practices that sustained their souls and reinforced their faith.

In secluded natural areas, known as **“hush harbors,”** enslaved individuals would gather to pray, sing, and share faith. Shielded by the woods or ravines, they would **soften their voices or place wet quilts or blankets** around them to muffle the sound—these moments of “stealing away to Jesus” were quiet acts of resilience and devotion, reflecting an unbreakable bond with the Divine even in captivity.

For many, these practices extended beyond gatherings. They would **pray in silence**, wear small crosses, or **carry symbols of faith** throughout the day, **creating a sacred rhythm that upheld them amid suffering.** These small acts of devotion became lifelines, strengthening them spiritually and building a sense of community in struggle.

In their ingenuity, enslaved Africans even used large iron **pots or cisterns as makeshift sanctuaries.** Placing these vessels upside down or with the mouth toward the ground, they would speak or sing into them, muffling the sound so it would not carry and risk retribution. Here, they poured out their deepest prayers and hopes, protected by this symbol of resilience.

These sacred practices in struggle, whether whispered in a hush harbor or spoken into a pot, show an unyielding commitment to faith, courage, and spiritual endurance. This legacy reminds us of a sacred defiance, where the power of sacred space holds firm, even in the face of unimaginable oppression and circumstances.

Often the spiritual formation framework in the U.S. draw heavily from from Ignatian practices and other European Christian disciplines. However, the fullness of spiritual formation emerges when we draw from a broader, more diverse history of spirituality. Enriching this framework by integrating traditions

from the spiritual resilience and creativity seen in African American history, for example, the mystical practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, brings a depth that more fully honors the varied ways people have encountered God across cultures and generations.

This history of spirituality reveals how sacred pauses and disciplines took root in places of hardship and resistance, where people found God in hidden, communal acts of worship and personal resilience. Embracing this fuller history creates a more inclusive, authentic framework for spiritual formation; one that celebrates God's work in all communities and affirms that sacred spaces and pauses have long been forged in diverse ways, across generations.

## **Mini Hush Harbor Practices for Today**

### **1) Hush Harbor**

Seek a peaceful place in nature or a private room. Pray or sing softly, reflecting on God's presence and drawing inspiration from the resilience of those who gathered in sacred, hidden spaces to find strength and community (Matthew 6:6)

### **2) Cistern of Prayer**

Engage in a safe quieting practice, such as speaking into a pillow or covering yourself with a blanket. Pour out your innermost prayers and fears in this quiet sanctuary, symbolizing God's presence surrounding and hearing you (Psalm 62:8).

### **3) Sacred Blanket**

Wrap yourself in a blanket or shawl and take slow, deep breaths. Reflect on God as your shield and comfort, surrounding you with love and peace. Consider how you can provide care and support to others facing hardships, inspired by the ways communities have upheld one another in faith (Psalm 91:1-2).

### **4) Bathing in Nature**

Spend time in a natural space, such as a park or a quiet garden. Immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, and scents around you. Allow the natural world to remind you of God's abiding presence and the sacred refuge found in all creation and the sanctuaries it has provided (Genesis 2:8).

These guides honor sacred resilience and affirm that God meets us in every pause, every hidden sanctuary, and every act of faith, past and present.