



The Story of the Three Bowls

I heard a story about three bowls.

The first bowl is inverted, upside down, so that nothing can go into it. Anything poured into this bowl spills off.

The second bowl is right-side up, but stained and cracked and filled with debris. Anything put into this bowl gets polluted by the residue or leaks out through the cracks.

The third bowl is clean. Without cracks or holes, this bowl represents a state of mind ready to receive and hold whatever is poured into it.

Sometimes I am that first bowl, so busy being "productive" that I don't notice when the very thing I want presents itself. Sometimes, I am the second bowl, with such a fierce judging voice that focuses on what's not working that I'm unable to see or appreciate all the things that are going well.

And sometimes, wonderful times, I am the third bowl, able to be present and absorbed in what I am doing, whatever it is." ***Sue Bender from Every Day Sacred***

Reflect on the image of the first bowl, “inverted, upside down, so that nothing can go into it”. When have you inverted your bowl in an individual relationship, in community, in your work?

What purpose does the inverted bowl serve for you?

How do others perceive you when your bowl is inverted?

When has your bowl been inverted to God/ Jesus/ the Holy Spirit?

How do you generally “feel” when your bowl is inverted?

Who/ what in your life can put your bowl upright?

List two goals relating to the inverted bowl:

Reflect on the image of the second bowl, “right-side up, but stained and cracked and filled with debris. Anything put into this bowl gets polluted by the residue or leaks out through the cracks.” What has caused your bowl to become stained or cracked? What is the debris of your bowl?

What limits does the second bowl put on your life?

How do others perceive you when your bowl is polluted, stained, and cracked?

How do you react to the polluted, stained, and cracked aspects of yourself?

How easily do you let God see your polluted, stained, and cracked bowl?
Why or why not?

How do you generally “feel” when your bowl is full of debris?

Who/ what in your life can help you empty the debris?

List two goals relating to the stained, cracked, debris-filled bowl:

Reflect on the image of the third bowl, “able to be present and absorbed in what I am doing, whatever it is.” What gives you the strength to be an empty bowl?

What freedoms do you gain from living in the moment?

What vulnerabilities are involved with being an empty bowl?

How do you normally perceive emptiness in yourself? How do you react to it?

Who in our tradition provide great examples of being an empty vessel?

How do you generally “feel” when your bowl is open?

Who/ what in your life can help you become more open?

List two goals relating to the open, empty bowl: