

*Guided Journal for  
Union Congregational Church  
Sabbatical Summer, 2022*

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO: \_\_\_\_\_



*Artwork by Pastor Bob Marrone*

*Welcome,*

and thank you for making time to connect more deeply with yourself, your church, and with God. As part of Pastor Bob Marrone's sabbatical, your Union Congregational Church family invites you to spend time each day this summer to reflect on your faith and life, explore your priorities and your resources for resilience, and examine ways you can give back to your church community.

This journal is for you and you alone. The meditations and activities within have been prepared to help you journey through the summer during Bob's sabbatical, with your fellow Christians. You can come back to these pages and reflections, or complete the journal any time throughout the year, as you have time and energy to do so. Each day's entry should take between five and fifteen minutes to complete, depending on your involvement in the activities.

We will mirror Bob's path of recreation, silence and rest, and seeking God on the mountaintop while our pastor is on break. This work can be as private or communal as you decide.

We invite you to take photos or videos throughout the summer to share with others, especially as you join the activities we are hosting or which are listed in the journal.

Please take a walk of faith and fun with us! You are welcome in this place.



Your journal pages are organized to mimic the holistic way our faith shows up in our lives: through mind, heart, and body. As is commonly said, "The sum of the whole is greater than its parts." Meaning, while we can think or meditate, believe or pray, and act or be an example to others...true faith consists of all these things working in tandem. Each day in your journal there will be sections in which you: THINK (mind), PRAY (heart), and DO (body). Consider which of these aspects of faith is easiest for you, as you complete the following pages.

We encourage you to follow the outlined topics, but also invite you to interact with God as your life unfolds; if you are interested in a certain section, start there.

**God will meet you where you are, AS YOU ARE, no matter what. God is big enough to hold us all in deep, abiding love, with all our ups and downs, strengths and weaknesses, through every day of life.**

p.s. A note about links. On the YouTube songs and videos, you can go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search for the name of the song and the artist. The actual links are provided simply for when you can't find the resource right away.

*Let us begin!*

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## *SECTION 1: Re-Creation, A Love Story*



*Artwork by Pastor Bob Marrone*

## CREATION – The Beginning (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* <sup>2</sup> *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

<sup>3</sup> *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.* <sup>4</sup> *God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.* <sup>5</sup> *God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night."* *And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.*

<sup>6</sup> *And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."* <sup>7</sup> *So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.* <sup>8</sup> *God called the vault "sky."* *And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.*

<sup>9</sup> *And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear."* *And it was so.* <sup>10</sup> *God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas."* *And God saw that it was good.*

<sup>11</sup> *Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds."* *And it was so.* <sup>12</sup> *The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.* <sup>13</sup> *And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.*

<sup>14</sup> *And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years,"* <sup>15</sup> *and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth."* *And it was so.* <sup>16</sup> *God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.* <sup>17</sup> *God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth,* <sup>18</sup> *to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.* <sup>19</sup> *And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.*

<sup>20</sup> *And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky."* <sup>21</sup> *So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in*

*it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.* <sup>22</sup> *God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."* <sup>23</sup> *And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.*

<sup>24</sup> *And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind."* *And it was so.* <sup>25</sup> *God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.*

<sup>26</sup> *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

<sup>27</sup> *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

<sup>28</sup> *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

<sup>29</sup> *Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."* <sup>30</sup> *And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food."* *And it was so.*

<sup>31</sup> *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.*

*2* <sup>1</sup> *Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.*

<sup>2</sup> *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.* <sup>3</sup> *Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

*Week 1*

*Assess Where I Am and  
Get Ready for the Journey*



## Make Room

Week 1 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*I find space for what I treasure  
I make time for what I want  
I choose my priorities  
And Jesus, you're my number One.*

*So, I will make room for you  
I will prepare for two  
So you don't feel that you  
Can't live here,  
Please live in me.*

-- Jonathan McReynolds, *Make Room*

**Meditation:** As we begin this summer journey, today is a good day to review your priorities. Take a moment to think about how you spend your time and your money. This will begin to tell you where your priorities lie. Write them down, without judgment, simply noticing where you give time and space for certain aspects of your life.

Do you drink coffee every single day? Maybe you scroll Facebook at night or Amazon shop to de-stress? Is there someone that you will stop everything for, when they need a hug or to talk? Consider your habits and your “no matter what” items, like exercising every morning, reading before sleep, or calling mom. Your priorities appear as you actively notice them. Brainstorm them below; then, if desired, number them.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

As you notice where you spend your resources, you may detect something using up energy that needs to go, freeing up time and space for something you value. Ex: You decided your children are most important to you. If you always make time to clean the house but your child wants more time with you, could you combine these two needs, or could you outsource the cleaning? Can someone else take your place?

Listen to the song *Make Room* 🎵 [5:38] by Jonathan McReynolds here: <https://youtu.be/SiycqP-kCKE>.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 6:32-34

<sup>32</sup> *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* <sup>33</sup> *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* <sup>34</sup> *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

**Today's Action:** Is your relationship with God on your priorities list? Consider whether you want to give God a little more of your attention. How will you make time and space to do this?

## The Heart of God

Week 1 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** The heart of God is welcoming. Safe. A place of pure love. The Bible compares God to a loving father\*, a counselor, a friend in times of need, and a good shepherd who leaves his flock to search for the one sheep that is missing. Jesus says, “Come to me, all ye who are weary...and I will give you rest.”

[\*While the Word of God was written down primarily by patriarchal men, it is clear from scripture that God embodies both the male and female characteristics manifested in humanity. We are all made in God’s image. If you understand God as she/her/Mother, that also makes perfect sense to the heart of God, which is spirit, not male or female, but encompassing all genders and non-genders.]

The beauty of worshipping a God who is always “knocking at the door of your heart” is that no matter where you are, no matter how lonely or satisfied, God’s heart continually longs for communion with you. It is hard to imagine a friend who is literally there *at all times*, ready to help and listen, ready to save and strengthen us. But this is the faith we hold – that God is bigger than any love we can imagine, stronger than a parent’s love for his/her child, more constant and reliable than any friend, deeper and truer than the best lover we have known.

Today, spend some time connecting with the heart of God by embracing these words from Psalm 36:5-9.

<sup>5</sup>*Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the skies.*

<sup>6</sup>*Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,  
your justice like the great deep.  
You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.*

<sup>7</sup>*How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!  
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.*

<sup>8</sup>*They feast on the abundance of your house;  
you give them drink from your river of delights.*

<sup>9</sup>*For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light we see light.*

Listen to the song *Real Thing* 🎵 [11:08], by Maverick City Music here: <https://youtu.be/wcokc1sM-TU>.

**Prayer/Reflection:** What does it mean to me to have a constant source of love, always available?

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Matthew 11:27-29

<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

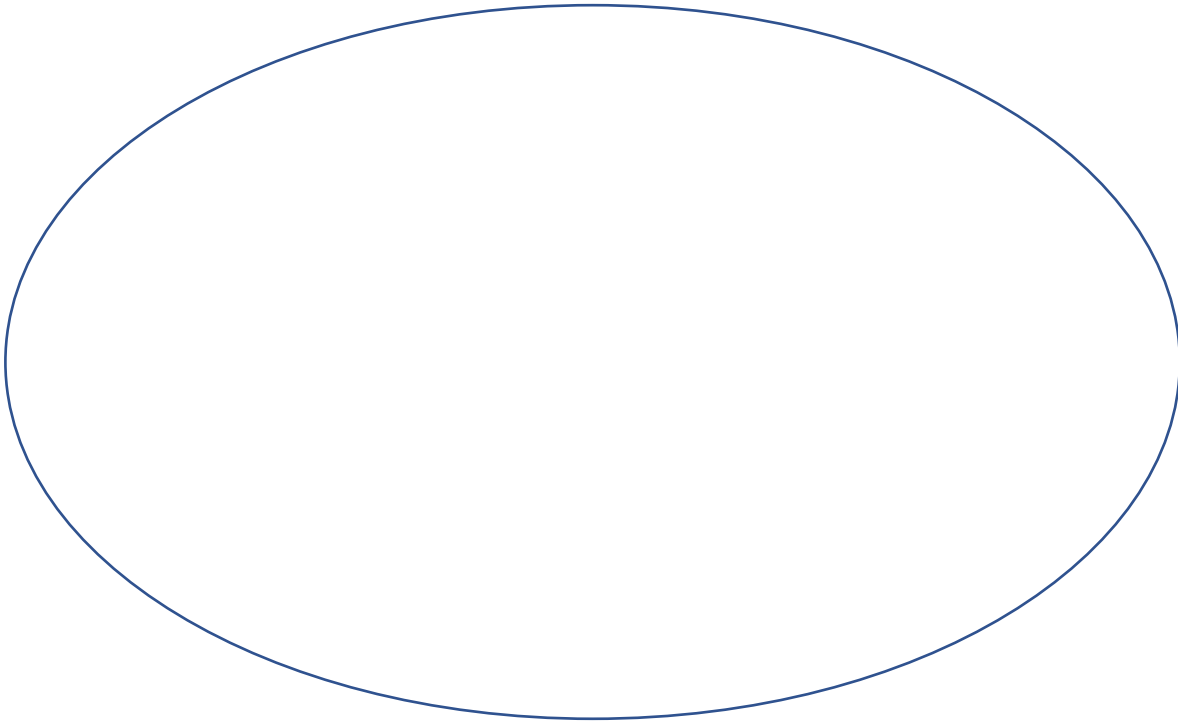
**Today’s Action:** Ask God to show you examples of his/her unfailing love, all throughout the day. Notice them and give thanks.

## How Full is My Plate

Week 1 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** It is time to do inventory of your life and your time; you cannot make extra time to communicate with and listen to God unless there is free time to give. So, take a look at your “plate,” figure out what is demanding time/attention/space in your life – whether you chose these responsibilities, or they were handed to you – and plan out room for God.

Using the plate below, write down everything that is your responsibility and needs your attention below.



If you wanted to find time to meet with God daily, is there any item above that you could either let go of or delegate to someone else? \_\_\_\_\_

[Cross it out and write in TIME WITH GOD.]

If you cannot remove anything, are there a few minutes (such as while driving) that you could set aside for silence, reflection, and prayer? \_\_\_\_\_

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Colossians 3:15-17

*<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

**Today's Action:** Look for time in the day where you could make time for this journal or your spirituality.

## Those Pesky Worries

Week 1 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** If writing down the responsibilities on your plate on day 3 sent you into a panic or anxiety tailspin...you are not alone. Take a moment to breathe. BREATHE IN for 4 counts, BREATHE OUT for 4. The good news is, God is aware of all your tasks, needs, and those troublesome worries that keep you awake at night (or have your stomach churning on the way to work). God knows about the phone call you dread, the problems you wish you could fix, and the people who are sucking the energy from your days.

If it helps, write down your worries below. Sometimes getting them out of your system takes the edge off.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Let us consider the loving depth of these words:

Luke 12:6-7, 22-26, 31-34

*<sup>6</sup>Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. <sup>7</sup>Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ...*

*<sup>22</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup>For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup>Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! <sup>25</sup>Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? <sup>26</sup>Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*

*<sup>31</sup>But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

*<sup>32</sup>"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup>Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

### Prayer/Reflection:

_____
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_____
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_____

**Today's Action:** There is a simple exercise you can use in prayer. Sit with eyes closed, palms out, facing down. "Lord, I lay down my fears and worries, my...." List them all out for your heavenly Father/Mother. Then turn your palms up, open-handed. "Please fill me with your love, faith in your ability to fix and heal these troubles, peace that passes understanding, and your...."

## Clean Out the Clutter

Week 1 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Before we start any trip, we need to clean the clutter and trash out of the car. If you carry a purse, think about how great it feels to clean the 20 pounds of nonsense out of there to get your pocketbook back to its correct weight! What do I need less of, in order to spend this summer thinking about and hearing from God? What is getting in my way? Thoughtfully consider how cleaning out the proverbial clutter can prepare your heart to have open communication with God.

I would like to let go of:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I would like to have less of this in my life:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I want to make room for:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Prayer/Reflection:**

_____
_____
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Listen to *How Great Thou Art* 🎵 [5:30], sung by Carrie Underwood: [https://youtu.be/Yf6C0L\\_7-CA](https://youtu.be/Yf6C0L_7-CA).

**Today's Action:** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Clean the junk out of your car, or one drawer, or your wallet. While you are purging, make this activity a meditation to God and ask that the "cleaning" can also occur in your heart and mind as you prepare to make room for your spiritual life to grow.

## Fixin' to Get Ready

Week 1 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** When I lived in Texas, everyone used to say, "I am fixin' to get ready." Which meant, I am giving it serious thought (but not actually doing it yet!) or fussing around the house straightening up cushions, making the bed, or finding clean clothes. It means, I am about to step into *really* getting ready. Then I will stop going in ten directions at once and FOCUS on what I am meant to be doing: packing and preparing for the trip.

What do you need to "pack" in order to get serious about your relationship with God? Maybe you have never considered having a personal, specific, and intimate relationship with your Creator. That is OK! But this summer offers you a journey – spiritually alongside your pastor, Bob Marrone – and you are cordially invited to attend this trip. You are encouraged to spend some quality time getting to know yourself, your church, and most importantly, your God.

Can you give your full attention? Take a deep breath. Consider what is junking up your mind and heart – the fears, worries, responsibilities, lists, and clutter. Many of those things *are* important, necessary, and cannot be disregarded. But they are not the *most* important. If you believe that God is the author of your soul and your days...what would it look like for you to make more space for experiencing that relationship?

**What do I need to pack so I can enjoy and learn from this special sabbatical journey?** Examples might include making time to journal or pray; or saying no to a few opportunities so I can say yes to family and worship. I might pack my attention, my INTENTION, an open heart, a mind open to learning, a body willing to move. I might discard my fear of interacting and pack courage to get together with church friends – yes, it might be uncomfortable, but maybe it will help my life move forward in a positive direction.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Prayer/Reflection:** *You want my attention, Lord? You got it. I'm Yours.*

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**Today's Action:** Write down on your calendar or type into your e-calendar when you will spend time on this work. Set a reminder alarm on your phone if that helps. Budget 15 minutes a day. That is enough to have a significant impact on your life. God can do great and beautiful things.



## Week One Reflections

Week 1 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** What have you learned this week? What would you like to learn?

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**Prayer/Reflection:**

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*I'll never be more loved than I am right now.*

– Lyrics from *Jireh/Worthy* 🎵 [13:08] by Elevation Worship here: <https://youtu.be/8tllFmO5zhs>.

**Today's Action:** Consider sharing some of your thoughts and reflections at church today. Use the space below, if desired, to do a sketch or drawing that reflects what you are thinking or feeling right now.



## *Week 2*

### *Play and Renewal*

Pastor Bob Marrone, in his application for the sabbatical, noted that, “Union Congregational Church is a close-knit community, and its members are good at caring for each other...[We] were challenged by the disruption, distance, isolation, and separation caused by the pandemic.” He says that the church continued worshipping, learned new technologies to do so, and reformed its ministries to reflect the changing needs of the moment.

“We found new ways to be connected, but we missed our big gatherings with lots of hugs.” Everyone is tired from the pandemic, needing a rest and recharge. This summer sabbatical offers that intentional recharge to your minister and to the members of this church, using fun activities as ways to bond with each other as well as getting outdoors and exploring God’s creation.

Pastor Bob says, “We could all use the time to heal, a shift in our focus to reflect on where we have been, and a chance to regather as a community.” God waits for you with open arms and says, “Yes, let’s do this!”

## Gardener's Corner

**Week 2 / Day 1: Date:**

**Meditation:** At the beginning of summer, the gardener is making the ground ready for planting. She is clearing away the debris and leaves from last winter, pulling weeds that stand in the way of growth, and turning over soil for freshness and to mix the nutrients back into the earth. As the gardener digs, she finds worms (good for oxygenating the soil!), deep-rooted weeds like dandelions and crabgrass (which tend to take over under the surface and choke out baby plants needing health and strength), and rocks that simply shouldn't be in there.

Once the soil is ready, the gardener makes his plans, plotting out sections for growing this and that, and deciding which plants work best together. He pokes tiny holes and plants seeds that will grow all summer and yield a harvest by September. He gets excited about the fresh salads he will be eating, the tomatoes he might can for sauce, the overload of zucchinis he will pass out at church, and the beautiful flowers in every shape and color that will grace the yard with beauty and refreshment for anyone who walks past.

What will our church “garden” look like this summer? Can we summon a bit of energy for pulling weeds and then enjoy the anticipation of planting and growth? What would YOU like to grow this summer?

"Many hands make light work." Let's garden together.

**Prayer/Reflection:**

[illegible]

**Today's Action:** If you like plants, go today to a local nursery or the grocery store and pick up something pretty that brings you joy. Put it somewhere you will see it often, whether in the ground, on your kitchen windowsill, or beside your office computer. Water and tend it. Plants need: light, good soil, and adequate water. And, I would add, they need love.

[If you are not a plant person, consider giving a bouquet of fresh flowers from the grocery store to someone who will gain cheer from it. Flowers are always the right choice.]

## Consider the Die-Hard Lilies

Week 2 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** There is one little mention of God caring for the lilies, and I feel like people have clung to this verse again and again, thinking of the lilies as these fragile plants, basically pretty weeds. Well let me tell you about the run-in I had with daylilies this week. First, we know they grow on their own with no tending, effortlessly and prolifically on roadsides, in ditches, and in fields. Tall spikes with orange, yellow, deep red flowers opening their hearts to the sun. Under the surface of the earth, they are forming vast networks of bulbs – tiny little things the size of a peanut – they are making community. These bulbs cling to each other, spread, and multiply (like, a lot).

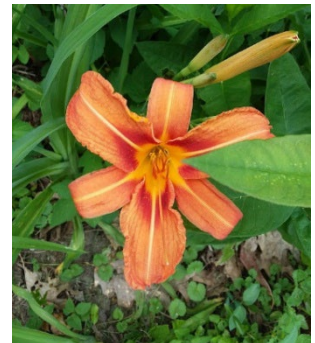
Mental health professionals have been talking about resilience, especially since the pandemic began. Resilience is the ability to bounce back after a shock or trauma, finding the will to keep living and the strength to fight through hard times; to not just survive but thrive. Last year I pulled out hundreds of lily bulbs from my garden and threw them on top of the compost...i.e., THE TRASH. This year they are growing heartily from the trash pile. After discovering lilies are poisonous to dogs, I tried to pull out those transplanted lilies – who were fully growing new flowers – to move them. I yanked and pulled with the entire force of my body, and bracing feet in the ground, pulled with 170 pounds of strength, leaning back... and N-o-t-h-i-n-g M-o-v-e-d. Those stinkers are strong and totally unwilling to die!

Lilies are not weaklings. They are tough, resilient little firecrackers who will grow basically anywhere (I finally got them out and slung them in the mud...where I have no doubt they will keep growing). So yes, be like the lilies. Let the strength and purpose of God burn like a fire in your heart, so that NOTHING can stop you. Storms? Bring 'em. Near death experience? Sure, why not? We will carry on. WE. WILL. SURVIVE.

Luke 12:22-31

*<sup>22</sup> And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? <sup>26</sup> If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is*

*thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. <sup>30</sup> For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. <sup>31</sup> But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*



### Prayer/Reflection:

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**Today's Action:** Choose a flower you love. Consider how its qualities relate to who you'd like to become.

My flower is: \_\_\_\_\_

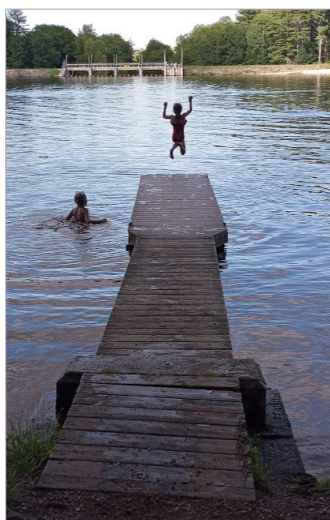
## Play Like a Child

Week 2 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Do you remember how to play? How to really let go of your inhibitions and adult rules and just have fun, throw your head back and laugh, and get silly? Remember how everybody screams when the seeker finds you in hide and seek? You know the feeling that makes a crowd collectively say, “Ooh” and “Ahh” at each firework on the Fourth of July? Wonder...that feeling is wonder. Do you remember what it is like to feel wonder-full?

This month we are focusing on play and rest for rejuvenation, to shake off some of the troubles from the past year, reset our bodies/minds/spirits, and get ready for some inner growth. We make room for relationships and community. We create space through lighthearted play, so next month we can think about deeper things such as: who am I, how do I relate to God, and who do I want to be for this church?

Think about the last time you danced or ran at top speed or put on a goofy face. The secrets to play are to pay attention, let yourself go, and “be here now,” meaning, put away everything grown-up that you have to do or be, and have some fun! Here are three pictures of my kids who are really good at play. They soak up the world and just enjoy themselves, despite their troubles.



**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

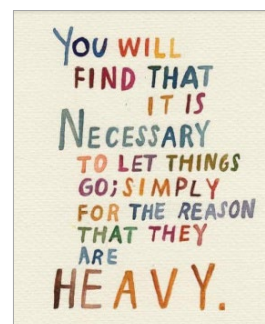
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Matthew 18:1-5

<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” <sup>2</sup> He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. <sup>3</sup> And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.



**Today's Action:** Start a game or tell a joke with someone you love. If by yourself, try the swings at a local playground or color a picture. You can also choose one of the fun church activities. It's not too late!

## Looking Back, for Revival

Week 2 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*I remember when I was young  
And Your voice, shouting loud my name  
And since that moment,  
I haven't heard it quite that way  
Well now that I'm older,  
Could You say it again?*

*I remember, I was afraid  
And, oh, the hand I felt lead the way  
And for the first time in my life, I felt safe  
Well, God, now that I'm older,  
Would You lead me again?*

*Oh, when the storm's out on the ocean  
And the violent wind gets to blowing  
Oh, take me back, back, all the way back  
Oh, take me back to my first love  
...*

*When it was all simple, and loving was easy  
When it was all simple, and trusting was easy  
...*

-- Maverick City Music, *Take Me Back*

**Meditation:** It is a good day to look back to the moments you first believed. Do you remember yours? Maybe you grew up in the church and never considered not following God. Or maybe you had a mountaintop experience that changed your course. Is today your first day and you are thinking, "I wonder what the fuss is all about with these Christians?"

Write about the memory of the first moments in which you really knew: this is important to me, God is real, and I want to make some changes. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Prayer/Reflection:** Lord Jesus, help us to remember the early passion we had for you, the desire to find you and know you better. Revive a flame in our hearts that will burn brightly with your love. Come and live in us, Lord, so those around us can find peace. Help us to know you and follow you. Amen.

Listen to *Take Me Back* 🎵 [9:28], by Maverick City Music here: <https://youtu.be/33yIPTvURfk>.

Matthew 7:7-8

<sup>7</sup> "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

**Today's Action:** Think about telling your story to others in the church – either at a Sunday share-out or simply in conversation with one person you trust. Your story is everything. No one can take that away.



## I Am Loved

Week 2 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*All that I am  
All that I have  
Is beautifully made by Your hands  
There are no questions  
There is no doubt  
That You look at me and feel proud*

*You're not embarrassed  
You're not ashamed  
You stand in wonder  
Of what You made  
I am loved, I am loved by You  
I am loved, I am loved by You  
I am loved, I am loved by You*

*Your love will not run empty  
Your love's a well that will never run dry  
Your love will not run empty  
Your love grows sweeter and sweeter with time*

*There is nothing better  
Than to be where You are  
Near to Your heart  
All that I want  
There is nothing better  
My strength in my song  
Here in Your arms, where I belong  
-- Maverick City Music, I Am Loved*

**Meditation:** The first time I heard this song, I heard the words as, "All that I am, all that I'm not..." which speaks to me. God made me in his/her image. There is nothing lacking. My strengths and weaknesses, my body, my voice, my heart, my expressions and understandings of the world are just right. This life is a journey; it is mine alone, laid out step by step by a loving Creator. The trials and difficulties are faced by me and my God in the slow, sweet time given. I do not believe this life is linear in time and space, but rather is circular; the lessons laid out for me may be different than yours, but with eyes and heart open, I will learn them one at a time, repeating the ones that are difficult to absorb.

Look to nature – so much of the earth is cyclical and circular. The seasons, the sky, the globe itself – begs to be traveled in patterns and spirals. Can we walk through life alongside each other, allowing God to work in us, in his/her own time, teaching and guiding us on individual paths that coincide at different points? Imagine friends walking a labyrinth maze, circling, going back and forth along paths, sometimes passing each other; ultimately, meeting in the middle for enlightenment.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to *I Am Loved* 🎵 [10:12], by Maverick City Music here: <https://youtu.be/MVL-yyGJuyM>.

Psalm 52:8-9

<sup>8</sup> *But I am like an olive tree  
flourishing in the house of God;  
I trust in God's unfailing love  
for ever and ever.*

<sup>9</sup> *For what you have done I will always  
praise you  
in the presence of your faithful people.  
And I will hope in your name,  
for your name is good.*

**Today's Action:** Think about laying aside some judgments toward others that you are holding onto. Give God your blessing to work in others the way he wants to. Ask God to show you his deep, unfailing love.

## Tools and Resources

Week 2 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** One of the ways we approach rejuvenation and restoration after a hard, emptying time, is to consider what “fills our bucket.” Imagine an empty vessel in which you could put all the things that restore you, bring you fulfilling joy, and grant you energy. The contents will be different for each person. Examples might be: time with family or friends, space and time alone, reading a book, taking a walk in nature, listening to music, seeing art and immersing in beauty, taking a nap, taking care of your body (massage, haircut, facial), making time to cook or write or run, exercise, being still, helping others, seeing the ocean, or hearing your mother’s voice. The hug of a child can fill you; time spent with your puppy may do the trick; or you may need a long rambling drive in the country with music blasting.

Take stock of your tools and resources. They might be supportive people around you, the church family, your relationship with God, hobbies and activities that fill you up, and larger resources available to help us all, like unemployment insurance, Medicaid, or some of the groups your church supports. Try not to fall into the Giving Trap: You are allowed to need resources too! **You are allowed to ASK FOR HELP.**

What makes you feel loved, helps you feel connected? What would help you to feel restored?

Tools that fill my bucket:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Resources that support me:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

My bucket level right now:



Where would I like it to be?



**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Listen to *Fill Me Up* 🎵 [5:56], sung by Casey J: <https://youtu.be/Inywc7hW14s>

**Today’s Action:** Consider ways I can fill the buckets of those I love (and think about what they might need):

_____	_____
_____	_____

## Community & Week Two Reflections

Week 2 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Meditation: Community

*Nothing among human things  
has such power to keep our gaze  
fixed ever more intensely upon God  
than friendship.*

--Simone Weil

*Honest friends are doorways to our souls, and  
loving friends are the grasses that soften the  
world. It is no mistake that the German root of  
the word "friendship" means, "place of high  
safety." This safety opens us to God. As Cicero  
said, "A friend is a second self." And as Sant  
Martin said, "My friends are the beings through  
whom God loves me."*

--Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening*

The pastor's time on retreat allows you extra time to strengthen your relationships: with family, friends, and other church members. Consider who you would like to spend more time with this summer:

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Is anything standing in your way, keeping you from nurturing your relationships? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Week Two Reflections:

What have you learned this week? What would you like to learn?

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### My Prayer:

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Listen to *A Little Bit of Love* 🎵 [2:44], by Weezer: <https://youtu.be/gQ6z5M3EaPM>.

**Today's Action:** Consider sharing some of your wisdom at church today. Someone will benefit from hearing from your heart.

## Week 3

### Soaking Up Nature

*"Nature is a mirror, inspiring and teaching us, deepening our sense of belonging in the world. Wherever you look, you can see that our patterns and the patterns of the natural world are the same. You can find this resonance in every form, from molecules to plants and animals and to planets.*

*...Look around you, and you will find connection and insight. Notice how your moods shift from one to another like the sky shifts from bright blue to turbulent grays. Your thoughts are like clouds, appearing, changing shape, passing through, and then disappearing without a trace. The rain cleanses the sky, just as an emotional release cleanses your mind. The sky itself is your eternal awareness, unchanging underneath all these permutations. Let it reflect back to you your own abiding perfection.*

*As you walk through the world, find your own metaphors for connectedness in nature. Flesh them out fully and follow them as they lead you through the mystery and intelligence of life."*

—DailyOm: We Are Like Nature

<https://www.dailyom.com/cgi-bin/display/articledisplay.cgi?aid=82950>

## Experiencing the Seasons

Week 3 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*When the Seasons Take Your Breath Away*

*Praise be to you, O God, for your created world and especially for the quartet of the seasons: winter's bright blue chill and death. Spring's new green and growth, summer's sweet ripeness and bright, and autumn's bittersweet hastening and gathering. Thank you for this amazing rhythm and its reminder that we live always before you and by your sustaining seasons.*

--Anthony B. Robinson, from *A Book of (Un)common Prayers*, The Stillspeaking Writers' Group

**Meditation:** The beautiful earth revolves in seasons and cycles that teach us the balancing act of birth and death. Rebirth is coded into our DNA, alongside the flora and fauna in nature; as a wise man once said, "nothing blooms all year." Death, destruction, and decay are natural parts of the cycle that lead to rebirth, renewal, and freshness. Can we accept the entire cycle? Can we embrace the dry spells along with the joyful awakening moments?

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**Prayer/Reflection:**

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Listen to *Breathe* 🎵 [7:59], Jonathan McReynolds/Chandler Moore: <https://youtu.be/mR-D3bvi-4E>.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

<sup>1</sup> *There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the  
heavens:*  
<sup>2</sup> *a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,*  
<sup>3</sup> *a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,*  
<sup>4</sup> *a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,*  
<sup>5</sup> *a time to scatter stones and a time to  
gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from  
embracing,*

<sup>6</sup> *a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,*  
<sup>7</sup> *a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,*  
<sup>8</sup> *a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.*

<sup>9</sup> *What do workers gain from their toil? <sup>10</sup> I have  
seen the burden God has laid on the human  
race. <sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its  
time. He has also set eternity in the human  
heart; yet no one can fathom what God has  
done from beginning to end.*

**Today's Action:** Spend some time outside. Pay attention. Deeply breathe. Give thanks.

## The Sea

Week 3 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** I took my friend Davy from NYC to a small rocky beach in New Hampshire. As we sat on the shore quietly, he turned to me with wide eyes and said, “*What* is that sound?? I’ve never heard it before!” Whoosh.....schiiiiishhhhhh....it was waves rolling back out to sea over tiny pebbles. Can you hear it?

The ocean gives many of us fond and visceral cell-memories. If I concentrate, I can smell the salty sea air and comforting stinky seaweed that hits you a mile away from the beach when you are still driving past tiny cedar-shake cottages. For me, the sea reminds me of vacant beach walks on grey misty days; sitting in the sand while the tide inches closer, trying to find answers to my life’s thorny questions; walking long skinny boardwalks past beach roses and swishing tall grass, and the thrill when you crest the hill, and the expanse of water and sky comes into view. I remember gathering blue, green, brown, white, and pink bits of sea glass, pummeled by ocean waves into something rare and beautiful.

I am sitting on a huge driftwood log, feeling safe. ~ Collecting seashells in the pouch of my t-shirt and getting the bottoms of my jeans wet because I can’t resist putting toes in the water. ~ On an island off the coast of southern Florida, I scoop handfuls of sand dollars from soft white sand. ~ I hear the gentle clang-clang of ropes and sails on the mast, while my friend sails us around Boston Bay during sunset. ~ I feel the salt drying on my skin after a long swim in large, buoyant waves in North Carolina. Hair is stringy and crusty, and I feel sleepy and hungry from hours in the sun and wind. ~ I hear the shrieking call of shore birds. ~ I remember climbing to the top of a tall rock stack, in the ocean, off the coast of southern Oregon, looking down (!) at black cormorants coasting past and then dive-bombing into the water for fish. Later that day I laid on the sand, face to the sky, and napped under the setting sun, nary a care in the world.

I had romance and breakups alongside the sea. ~ There were many days of solitude, walking and walking, listening to the sounds of the earth. ~ I float on my back on top of the waves under a hot August sky at Crane’s Beach in Ipswich. I feel held. [When the therapist says, “Remember a peaceful time,” this is mine.]

God is “Mother” at the sea. Sometimes her waves crash me so hard that I remember that my finite flash of humanness is fragile. “I see you, Mother; I respect you.” Sometimes she carries me, and I float, rocking peacefully on the waves where time seems to stand still. The ocean has a thousand gifts to offer us, not the least of which are wonder, amazement, and the ability to feel how small we really are in the big scheme. And sea life is abundant and mysterious; the further from shore you allow yourself, the more magic you discover, the more sky you can drink.

Every single day, every single moment, the water is moving, pulsing, shifting back and forth, against the land and back out to unseen depths. Waves are eternal, something constant we can depend on. The waves embody God’s presence and faithfulness. No matter what happens in your life, those waves are coming in and going out. Long after you are gone, they will continue. Is this holiness? Is this YHWH?

**Prayer/Reflection:** *May I be able to sense your presence, Lord, and feel you as clearly as I feel the ocean.*

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**Amazing and beautiful ocean films:** *My Octopus Teacher\**, *Whale Rider*, *The Secret of Roan Inish\**, *Life of Pi*, *The Red Turtle\** [view descriptions and trailers at [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)]. [\*kid-approved]

**Today’s Action:** If you can get yourself to the ocean this week, do it! Even one hour by the sea is a balm for a thousand wounds. If you cannot go, check out this stunning underwater video with calming music, *Rainbow Reef Relaxation* [11 hours!], by Nature Relaxation Films: <https://youtu.be/G52dUQLxPzg>.



## Reflections: Memories of the Sea

Week 3 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** What are your thoughts and memories of ocean visits? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to *Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)* 🎵 [4:31] by Hillsong United: <https://youtu.be/6GGFb6LcX3U>.

**Today's Action:** Consider sharing some of your thoughts and reflections with a friend from church. Use the space below, to do a sketch or drawing depicting what you are thinking or feeling.



## The Sun: Gettin' Vitamin D Therapy

Week 3 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** It was easy to find poems and songs about our beautiful fireball, star-of-stars, the Sun. Humans have been fascinated with its beauty, consistency, and power to affect all of nature – including keeping us alive and warm. THIS WAS A LONG DARK WINTER. And 2020 was no picnic either. ☺

One thing that kept my family going during the COVID isolation, fear, and anxiety was going outside – a safe place – and doing a lot of exploring and exercising. Some days I think going out to see that the sky was still there was literally enough to help me move forward. There was precious little we could count on in the last two years. Those of us who like to plan and strategize for the future had a *really* difficult time not being able to get control of a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g. Extroverts got terribly lonely. Introverts even grew tired of hanging out with themselves. I would be surprised if there was anyone who didn't at some point say, "God, are you even out there?? Are you watching all this nonsense?"

The truth is: God has been here the whole time.

The sun rose every day. The sun will rise tomorrow too, no matter who says what, no matter what changes or goes sideways. The sun will rise. And God will show up. The sun reminds us of his/her ever-present love and care. There is so much hope in this.

*I'll tell you how the Sun rose –  
A Ribbon at a time –  
The Steeples swam in Amethyst –  
The news, like Squirrels, ran –  
The Hills untied their Bonnets –  
The Bobolinks – begun –  
Then I said softly to myself –  
'That must have been the Sun!'  
-- Emily Dickinson*



*Why does this light force me back  
to my childhood? I wore a yellow  
summer dress, and the skirt  
made a perfect circle.*

*Turning and turning  
until it flared to the limit  
was irresistible . . . The grass and trees,  
my outstretched arms, and the skirt  
whirled in the ochre light  
of any early June evening.*

*And I knew then  
that I would live,  
and go on living: what sorrow it was;  
and still what sorrow ignites  
but does not consume  
my heart.*

-- Jane Kenyon (NH poet), "Evening Sun"

### Prayer/Reflection:

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Read *The Sun*, a poem by Mary Oliver, here: <https://www.naturemeuse.com/mary-oliver-poetry-4>.

Enjoy *Happier Than the Morning Sun* 🎵 [5:49], sung by Jon Gibson: <https://youtu.be/XUOX5agvXmw>.

Explore this article about vitamin D: <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/vitamin-d-myths-debunked>.

**Today's Action:** If you have been working or resting inside all day, do your mental health a favor and go out, see the sky, close your eyes and put your face to the sun for a minute. You will feel 100 times better! Remember your UVA/UVB sunscreen when playing outside this summer. We need you healthy.

## Summer: Walk Barefoot in the Grass

Week 3 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** *The Summer Day*, by Mary Oliver

*Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean-  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
With your one wild and precious life?*

**Reflection:**

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**Prayer:** *Dear God, help me to pay attention, kneel in the grass, and know how to be idle and blessed, to do something worthy of you with my precious life.*

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Listen to *Most Beautiful/So in Love* 🎵 [12:11], Maverick City Music: [https://youtu.be/oCAY\\_geDo-w](https://youtu.be/oCAY_geDo-w).

Enjoy *Blackbird* 🎵 [2:48], by Paul McCartney: <https://youtu.be/RDxfjUEBT9I>.

[Do you love guitar? Watch Sungha Yung, musical genius, play “Blackbird” on YouTube at age 6 and 22.]

**Today's Action:** Take a moment to walk barefoot in the grass, hug a tree, watch the ladybugs, or linger under some clouds. It is perfectly okay to be idle and blessed.

## The Mountains and Woods

Week 3 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Where can I look for help? I look to the mountains. I look to the Lord. The mountains and woods mean many sacred things to New Hampshire residents. What do they mean to you?

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**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Psalm 24:1-4

<sup>1</sup> *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it;*

<sup>2</sup> *for he founded it on the seas  
and established it on the waters.*

<sup>3</sup> *Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?  
Who may stand in his holy place?*

<sup>4</sup> *The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not trust in an idol  
or swear by a false god.*

If you are not able to get out to the mountains today, enjoy this walk [8:36] on the Great Brook Trail in New Hampshire with Jeff Kantorowski, YouTube channel Stravaig: <https://youtu.be/-G28aZGWYEg>. Search in YouTube: GREAT BROOK TRAIL STRAVAIG.

Take a virtual flight over the gorgeous mountains of Norway with 3+ hours of relaxing music and breathtaking scenes: <https://youtu.be/FIKjV36CBRs>. Search in YouTube: FLYING OVER NORWAY (4K UHD).

Listen to *I Will Look to the Hills*, by the Our Lady of Good Counsel High School alumni Gospel Choir: <https://youtu.be/56-KvJ8M214>.

**Today's Action:** Be still of heart, quiet in mind, and let your body be in motion. Time to explore.

**Meditation:** What do you do when, suddenly, your creative ideas, energy, problem-solving skills, or interest dries up? This week I had days where, out of nowhere, a wave of sad heaviness hit me and sat on my chest like an elephant. Have you ever felt knocked over by sudden emotions? Or did you receive the infamous call – a simple ringing phone that suddenly changed the course of your life?

Deserts and storms can be harsh, whether they are momentary or last for weeks or years. The unexpected events of life can pound us. Similarly, your relationships can suffer from a drought of love or passion. Marriages sometimes experience “The Decade,” a long stretch of miserable events or lack of connection that threatens to unravel the entire structure. Where is God in these times?

Psalm 18:1-6, 16-20, 28-29

<sup>1</sup> *I love you, LORD, my strength.*

<sup>2</sup> *The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my  
stronghold.*

<sup>3</sup> *I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,  
and I have been saved from my enemies.*

<sup>4</sup> *The cords of death entangled me;  
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.*

<sup>5</sup> *The cords of the grave coiled around me;  
the snares of death confronted me.*

<sup>6</sup> *In my distress I called to the LORD;  
I cried to my God for help.*

*From his temple he heard my voice;  
my cry came before him, into his ears....*

<sup>16</sup> *He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.*

<sup>17</sup> *He rescued me from my powerful enemy,  
from my foes, who were too strong for me.*

<sup>18</sup> *They confronted me in the day of my disaster,  
but the LORD was my support.*

<sup>19</sup> *He brought me out into a spacious place;  
he rescued me because he delighted in me.*

<sup>20</sup> *The LORD has dealt with me according to my  
righteousness;  
according to the cleanness of my hands he has  
rewarded me....*

<sup>28</sup> *You, LORD, keep my lamp burning;  
my God turns my darkness into light.*

<sup>29</sup> *With your help I can advance against a troop;  
with my God I can scale a wall.*

Strategies:

- 1) Turn your thoughts toward things eternal. What can you count on? What has God told you?
- 2) Focus on the steady beauty of the earth – a tree still standing, waves rolling in, the quiet forest with its wild creatures carrying on despite your suffering. Not *out of spite* but *in spite of*, alongside your pain, to balance the system. The universe operates in both yin and yang, creating balance, chaos and order always spinning together. With each death, a birth happens somewhere in the world. As leaves rot and erode beneath a tree, new life returns to the soil and a seed can grow. Did the sun rise today? Was the sky still there? The earth offers itself as a medicine to heal pain.
- 3) Put one foot in front of the other – do the work – until the feelings either return (if you feel numb) or until the tidal wave of feelings (which is too great) subsides. Do not rely on your emotions while in the desert or storm – they are not always steady or trustworthy. Turn toward God, who is solid.

**Prayer/Reflection:** Use the space provided to write about your latest (or current) deserts and storms. Don't be afraid to get in there. You may find that explaining your situation on paper takes the edge off.

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*Week 4*

*The Love that Marks Our Days*

## God Knows Me Deeply

Week 4 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Psalm 139:1-24 *For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.*

<sup>1</sup> You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of  
the earth.

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in  
your book  
before one of them came to be.

<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.

<sup>19</sup> If only you, God, would slay the wicked!  
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!

<sup>20</sup> They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.

<sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD,  
and abhor those who are in rebellion against  
you?

<sup>22</sup> I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.

<sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to *You Keep on Getting Better* 🎵 [10:34], Maverick City Music: <https://youtu.be/PMEGUx7MfCM>.

**Today's Action:** Look in the mirror. Say out loud: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well." Now say it again.

## Embracing God's Love

Week 4 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** When you least expect it, God shows up in big ways in your life. All you can do is let the relief flood over you and give thanks. *Thank you, Jesus, for taking care of me, for showing up for me, and for blessing me in a thousand ways.* If you have had rocky relationships or experienced the loss of a love you thought you could count on, it can be hard to accept and embrace the boundless love of God. Humans may have taught you that you don't deserve love; you aren't good enough.

What we know is that God's love exceeds all human love. God's love is the most precious gift. The desires of the father's heart toward his children are rich, deep, and profound. We cannot even begin to understand the full extent of God's desire to bless her children. God says to those who have been exiled, in Jeremiah 29:

*<sup>10</sup> This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity.<sup>[b]</sup> I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

Do you feel like you have been exiled, in your heart of hearts? Now is the time to seek the Lord with all your heart. You will be brought back from your captivity. Freedom awaits and is yours for the taking.

Psalm 139 – read these verses again!

<sup>1</sup> *O LORD, you have examined my heart  
and know everything about me.*

<sup>5</sup> *You go before me and follow me.  
You place your hand of blessing on my head.*

<sup>6</sup> *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too great for me to understand!*

<sup>16</sup> *You saw me before I was born.  
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.*

*Every moment was laid out  
before a single day had passed.*

<sup>17</sup> *How precious are your thoughts about me, O  
God.*

*They cannot be numbered!  
<sup>18</sup> I can't even count them;  
they outnumber the grains of sand!*

*And when I wake up,  
you are still with me!*

**Prayer/Reflection:**

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**Today's Action:** Read the verses on the next page and ask God to help you believe the words.

Psalm 103, A psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup> *Let all that I am praise the LORD;  
with my whole heart, I will praise his holy  
name.*  
<sup>2</sup> *Let all that I am praise the LORD;  
may I never forget the good things he does for  
me.*  
<sup>3</sup> *He forgives all my sins  
and heals all my diseases.*  
<sup>4</sup> *He redeems me from death  
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.*  
<sup>5</sup> *He fills my life with good things.  
My youth is renewed like the eagle's!*  
<sup>6</sup> *The LORD gives righteousness  
and justice to all who are treated unfairly.*  
<sup>7</sup> *He revealed his character to Moses  
and his deeds to the people of Israel.*  
<sup>8</sup> *The LORD is compassionate and merciful,  
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.*  
<sup>9</sup> *He will not constantly accuse us,  
nor remain angry forever.*  
<sup>10</sup> *He does not punish us for all our sins;  
he does not deal harshly with us, as we  
deserve.*  
<sup>11</sup> *For his unfailing love toward those who fear  
him  
is as great as the height of the heavens above  
the earth.*

<sup>12</sup> *He has removed our sins as far from us  
as the east is from the west.*  
<sup>13</sup> *The LORD is like a father to his children,  
tender and compassionate to those who fear  
him.*  
<sup>14</sup> *For he knows how weak we are;  
he remembers we are only dust.*  
<sup>15</sup> *Our days on earth are like grass;  
like wildflowers, we bloom and die.*  
<sup>16</sup> *The wind blows, and we are gone—  
as though we had never been here.*  
<sup>17</sup> *But the love of the LORD remains forever  
with those who fear him.*  
*His salvation extends to the children's children*  
<sup>18</sup> *of those who are faithful to his covenant,  
of those who obey his commandments!*  
<sup>19</sup> *The LORD has made the heavens his throne;  
from there he rules over everything.*  
<sup>20</sup> *Praise the LORD, you angels,  
you mighty ones who carry out his plans,  
listening for each of his commands.*  
<sup>21</sup> *Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels  
who serve him and do his will!*  
<sup>22</sup> *Praise the LORD, everything he has created,  
everything in all his kingdom.*  
*Let all that I am praise the LORD.*

Proverbs 10:22

<sup>22</sup> *The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.*

Philippians 4:19

<sup>19</sup> *And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*

I Peter 5:6-7

<sup>6</sup> *So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.* <sup>7</sup> *Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.*

## Great is God's Faithfulness

Week 4 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** God wants to meet with me. But I am so tired; I literally have nothing left to give. That is okay. Over and over in the Bible we see God meeting his/her children where they are, accepting their limitations, embracing their faults and failings. There is nothing you could do to separate yourself from the welcoming love of God. Jesus' death on the cross has paid for all your shortcomings; the debt is paid. You do NOT have to "clean up before the housekeeper arrives," so to speak. Invite God into the hot mess that you are. This is grace: Jesus has conquered death and sin; you are now considered ENOUGH.

*Great is Thy Faithfulness* 🎵

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be*

*Great is Thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

*Summer and winter, springtime and harvest  
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love*

*Great is Thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!*

*Great is Thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father*

*Source: LyricFind  
Songwriters: Christopher M. Rice / Traditional  
Great Is Thy Faithfulness lyrics © Warner Chappell  
Music, Inc  
Listen to the song [4:39] here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k1WhFtVp0o>*

### Prayer/Reflection:

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Lamentations 3:22-24

<sup>22</sup> Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. <sup>24</sup> I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

**Today's Action:** Allow God's comfort to really sink into your bones. Spend a few minutes in a quiet place or take a five-minute rest with your eyes closed. Ask God to help you accept his faithfulness.

## What Does It Mean that God is Love?

Week 4 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** I Corinthians 13:1-13

<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have **love**, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have **love**, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have **love**, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup>**Love** is patient, **love** is kind. **It** does not envy, **it** does not boast, **it** is not proud. <sup>5</sup>**It** does not dishonor others, **it** is not self-seeking, **it** is not easily angered, **it** keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>**Love** does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>**It** always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>8</sup>**Love** never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup>For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup>but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup>For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

<sup>13</sup>And now these three remain: faith, hope and **love**. But the greatest of these is **love**.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Action:** Read the passage above again. Every time it says "love" or "it" (referring to love), substitute the word, "God."

If God chooses to send this patient, merciful love to you through another human, will you accept it?

Write down your intention for accepting God's love: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Write down your intention for sharing this deep God-like love with someone else: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*"All doubt, despair, and fear become insignificant, once the intention of life becomes love." --Rumi*

## God Comforts, God Provides

Week 4 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Psalm 23:1-6, A psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup> *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

<sup>2</sup> *He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

<sup>3</sup> *he refreshes my soul.*

*He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.*

<sup>4</sup> *Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,*

*I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;*

*your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.*

<sup>5</sup> *You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.*

<sup>6</sup> *Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.*

Many sermons and songs have been written about this familiar psalm (sacred song) from King David in the Old Testament. Give it a fresh read, out loud if you want, and see what it says to you TODAY. Circle the parts that speak to you. Write what you learned.

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Enjoy this lullaby, *His Beloved* 🎵 [2:53], by Twila Paris: <https://youtu.be/SzArGC3SRfc>.  
[The album, "Bedtime Prayers," is highly recommended for baby shower gifts!]

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Action:** In order to thrive, sheep need: a safe pasture, fresh air and good grass, a clean shelter, healthy nutritious food, water, energy (protein, rest), and affection. As a nod to the shepherd imagery, choose one of those items to nurture yourself with today, beloved sheep.



## Meditation:

*Joy is of the soul. Happiness is of the moment.*

*Joy transcends. Happiness reacts.*

*Joy embraces peace and contentment, waiting to be discovered.*

*Joy runs deep and overflows, while happiness hugs hello.*

*Joy is a practice and a behavior. It's deliberate and intentional. Happiness comes and goes blithely along its way....joy is present inside everyone as an untapped reservoir of potential.*

-- Compassion.com

Philosophers love to talk about the difference between fleeting happiness and deep, abiding joy. I would posit, though, that there *are* moments of JOY that life hands you, in which you feel the sense of awe and wonder of being alive. Have you ever been in prayer or song and felt connected to the divine purpose? Or looked up at a starlit sky and glimpsed what it means to be part of the fabric of the universe? These are the 30,000-foot views, when you realize that in all the great vastness of the earth, ocean, and sky, down here in the tiny spot you call home, God is with you. It's mind-blowing. In the continuum of time and space, the Creator of all things can still remember how many hairs are on YOUR head!

I believe you can access a touch of joy – dip your toe in that big abiding river of the soul where joy lives – and sense God's majesty and a great delight in life itself. Circle any of these moments that give you a sense of joy, wonder, and amazement. Do they help you see that life is beautiful or make you want to rejoice?

HEARING A BEAUTIFUL SONG	GIGGLING BABY	THE COMFORT OF A WARM BATH	A HAWK SOARING
THE INDUSTRIOUS MOVEMENTS UPON AN ANT HILL	ROLLING DOWN CAR WINDOWS IN SPRING	CAMPFIRE SMELL	
HOT COFFEE MUG WARMING YOUR HANDS	THE WAY DIRT SMELLS AFTER RAIN	A GRANDCHILD RUNNING TO YOU	
CRYING AT BEAUTIFUL MILITARY REUNION VIDEOS	THE FEELING WHEN THAT BASKETBALL SWISHES THROUGH THE HOOP		
THE WAY A BOX OF PUPPIES OR KITTENS MAKES YOU FEEL	AIRPORT REUNIONS	FINALLY HEARING "I'M SORRY"	
SEEING A DOUBLE RAINBOW!	A DOWNPOUR ON A SWELTERING SUMMER DAY	RELIEF WHEN YOUR CHILD IS OK	

What are YOUR favorite memories of joy? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Prayer/Reflection: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

You might like this article from compassion.com on the difference between joy and happiness:  
[https://www.compassion.com/sponsor\\_a\\_child/difference-between-joy-and-happiness.htm](https://www.compassion.com/sponsor_a_child/difference-between-joy-and-happiness.htm)

**Today's Action:** Go out and scout for things that give you JOY. Look a little closer at a forest mushroom, take a longer sniff of the neighbor's flowers, smile wide at a passing car and see if the driver returns your smile. There is JOY waiting for you...go find it! If you can't go out, watch this video of a joyful walk up Sanborn Hill Road [6:46]: <https://youtu.be/A5mhfZYtoDI>. In YouTube: SANBORN HILL ROAD WALK.



## Gratefulness, Part I

Week 4 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Today's meditation is quoted from zenandspice.com, which offers a free printable journal and guidance on fostering a spirit of gratefulness and thanksgiving. PRINTABLE GRATITUDE JOURNAL: <http://zenandspice.com/printable-gratitude-journal-helpful-links/>.

*The power of gratitude can have huge effects on your life. I know that it has made me a more positive person, a more productive person, and a better achiever. I'm not perfect, but gratitude has made me better, a day at a time. There's no doubt in my mind that regular, simple acts of gratitude can change anyone's life, positively and immediately. Let's look at some ways you can incorporate gratitude into your life on a daily basis!*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Have a morning gratitude session.   | 4. Show gratitude when angry with someone. |
| 2. Keep a gratitude journal.           | 5. Be grateful for challenges.             |
| 3. Make a gratitude list on hard days. | 6. Look for what you do have.              |

*Every day, think as you wake up, today I am fortunate to be alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others; to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. I am going to have kind thoughts towards others, I am not going to get angry or think badly about others. I am going to benefit others as much as I can.*

– Dalai Lama

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

These prompts are from: <https://www.textmyjournal.com/gratitude-journal-prompts/>.

What smell are you grateful for today? \_\_\_\_\_

What food are you most grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What sound are you grateful for today? \_\_\_\_\_

What place are you most grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What season are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What song are you most grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What moment this week are you most grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What small thing that you use daily are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What friend/family member are you grateful for today? \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 13:15-16

<sup>15</sup> Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. <sup>16</sup> And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Listen to A Life That's Good 🎵 [3:13], Lennon & Maisy Stella: <https://youtu.be/SvrW9XkkCGk>.

**Today's Action:** Write a note to Pastor Bob Marrone, using the next page, about why you appreciate him or the church. Let him know how you are doing. We will share these at the reunion on September 11.

*To: Pastor Bob*

*From:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*I am grateful for you!*



## *SECTION 2: Deep Silence*



*Artwork by Pastor Bob Marrone*

*Week 5*

*Quieting*

*(quieting – verb. to make or become silent, calm, or still)*

## Getting Quiet

Week 5 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** There is so much noise; there are so many distractions, that it is almost impossible for us to concentrate or really listen anymore. How long will it be before a notification on your phone beeps? When is the last time you sat still in the car without driving, without the radio on, without talking? While you are reading this, what is your background noise – people talking, the dishwasher churning away, a dog barking, the news blaring? Challenge: Try to find a silent place (or at least a place with only the sounds of nature).

From dailym.com: <https://www.dailym.com/cgi-bin/display/articledisplay.cgi?aid=71170&aff=0>.

*There are the noises from the outside world that we cannot control, and there are the noises we allow into our lives. These noises, from seemingly innocuous sources like the television and radio, can actually help us avoid dealing with uncomfortable thoughts and emotions...*

*Noise as a distraction can affect us in many ways. It can help you stay numb to emotions that you don't want to feel, allow you to avoid dealing with problems, distract you from having to think, and make it easier for you to forget reality. Drowning out the thoughts and emotions you find uncomfortable or overwhelming can complicate your issues because it allows them to fester...In silence, it becomes easier to let your strongest feelings come forth, deal with them, and find new ways of resolving your problems. ...Free of the need for noise, you can accept your pain, anger, and frustration as they come up and turn them into opportunities to evolve.*

Marie Garvey, from the Facebook group *Crazy Busy Women in Balance*, says women, especially executive women, are trained to respond to all work emergencies immediately and with urgency because, “we believe that we have to prove ourselves every step of the way.” But she also says this is a cover-up because, “we're too scared to have quiet time. Because in the quiet comes the realities that we're too scared to face, and we don't know how to be quiet.” She goes on to say, “We treat everything as an emergency because it's so much easier to go, go, go, go than it is to slow down and be alone with our thoughts.” Then she asks something brilliant: “What if you had margin in your day?”

Pastor Bob created a margin – a time and space for himself to go away and get quiet. How can we possibly expect God to answer our questions, calls for help, and earnest prayers if we cannot figure out how to be quiet and LISTEN? This month, let us chip away at making a margin in the page of our days.

### Prayer/Reflection:

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Listen to *Quiet Mind* 🎵 [3:25], by Nawang Khechog, a Tibetan Buddhist and mindful musician: <https://youtu.be/Rs52wlka1MY>. There are about 20 seconds of silence at the beginning and end of the song. Use that time to rest and become still. It takes conscious practice to quiet the body and mind.

**Today's Action:** What would you do with a margin in your day? How will you become quiet today? Make an action plan for quiet time.

## God's Silence, My Stillness

Week 5 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Have you ever been ready for an answer or some guidance on which way to turn...and it seems like God is silent? "Here I am waiting, Lord..." White noise ensues. Is God not listening? Or is it not time yet for the answer to come? The truth is we will never understand the fullness of God's methods or wisdom. But we can have faith in the promises God made to hear our intercessions and to receive our cries and move our hearts when the time is right.

We have heard this mantra: "Be still. And know that I am God." Eric Owen Russell is a life coach and an ordained minister who has practiced extensively the art of becoming still. He believes that being still is the essence of coming into oneself, and connecting with that which is eternal, and divine. Look up his explanation of the power of stillness and learn how to actually calm the body and mind in order to become still, here: <https://www.ericowenrussell.com/stillness>.

Russell says, "It's being in the present that gives us the best chance to feel, emote, and sense (be in our body's felt experience). It's when we are in our felt experience that we are better able to learn from its wisdom and sensory genius. In other words, we're positioned for the best outcomes. Through Stillness Practice, we can be present and in position for what's best."

### Prayer/Reflection:

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Psalms 55:1-2, 16-19

<sup>1</sup> Listen to my prayer, O God,  
do not ignore my plea;

<sup>2</sup> hear me and answer me.

<sup>16</sup> As for me, I call to God,  
and the Lord saves me.

<sup>17</sup> Evening, morning and noon  
I cry out in distress,

and he hears my voice.

<sup>18</sup> He rescues me unharmed  
from the battle waged against me,  
even though many oppose me.

<sup>19</sup> God, who is enthroned from of old,  
who does not change—  
he will hear them and humble them,  
because they have no fear of God.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Listen to *Be Still My Soul* 🎵 [4:51] by Eclipse 6: <https://youtu.be/kqKVFD8Obc>.

Listen to the same song 🎵 [4:36] by Naturally7: [https://youtu.be/\\_6HSrcTvMqU](https://youtu.be/_6HSrcTvMqU) and be quieted by the beautiful scenery of Lucerne, Switzerland.

**Today's Action:** Today's action is no action. Practice becoming still (no movement, at rest) for 3 minutes. This is a combination of "Wait" and "Trust," and involves just BE-ing. Read Psalm 13:1-6 if you have time.

## Wait on You

Week 5 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

♪ *Bless the Lord, O my soul*  
*And all that is within me,*  
*Bless His holy name.*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul*  
*And all that is within me,*  
*Bless Her holy name.*

**Meditation:** It is normal for us to want to fix a problem; if you are an empath – a person with a deep ability to understand people’s emotions – you want to go beyond that and solve problems for others, too. We want to know the answers to the questions! We look ahead and want to decide which path to choose, which direction to go. All these strivings are built into our psyches and help propel us forward as a species. But many times, we ask God for direction, and we hear silence in return. It seems dark and we can’t find the light to turn on. What do you do in that case?

I think of all the things I do after my children go to sleep. I wash and refill water bottles, clear out backpacks, sign permission slips, do laundry so they can have their favorite hoodie or jeans tomorrow, find shoes and coats, make food and doctor appointments. We have *no idea* what God is doing “behind the scenes,” preparing our life so things fall into place for us. A loving parent constantly works for the child’s happiness, ease, and blessings in life. What would happen if we trusted God to care for us?

One thing we can always count on is that God is worthy of our praise. God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and wise beyond our understanding. If you’ve ever looked back and said, “Oh thank goodness *that* prayer didn’t come through,” you know what I mean. No, I wasn’t ready to have children at 23...but how could I know that back then? We can trust God and STOP STRIVING – just WAIT – and when you don’t know what direction to move in, just go forward, one step in front of the other until the way becomes clear. Or stop and wait right there until you hear God’s voice and know what to do. In the meantime, bless God with your thanks and praise. That will *never* be wasted time. Praising is always the right thing to do.

**Prayer/Reflection:** In what areas of my life do I need to stop striving, and simply wait on God’s wisdom? .

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I will praise you, Lord. \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Today’s Action:** Listen to *10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)* ♪ [4:34] here: <https://youtu.be/9SOp0k6C4bw>.



## More on Waiting

Week 5 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation/Prayer:** Isaiah 40:1-14, 21-22, 25-31

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her  
that her hard service has been completed,  
that her sin has been paid for,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling:  
"In the wilderness prepare  
the way for the LORD;  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,  
and all people will see it together.  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out."  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,  
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall,  
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.  
Surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall,  
but the word of our God endures forever."

<sup>9</sup> You who bring good news to Zion,  
go up on a high mountain.  
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,  
lift up your voice with a shout,  
lift it up, do not be afraid;  
say to the towns of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,  
and he rules with a mighty arm.  
See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him.

<sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.

<sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his  
hand,

or with the breadth of his hand marked off the  
heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,  
or weighed the mountains on the scales  
and the hills in a balance?

<sup>13</sup> Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD,  
or instruct the LORD as his counselor?

<sup>14</sup> Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,  
and who taught him the right way?  
Who was it that taught him knowledge,  
or showed him the path of understanding? ...

<sup>21</sup> Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood since the earth was  
founded?

<sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,  
and its people are like grasshoppers.  
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,  
and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ...

<sup>25</sup> "To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:  
Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one  
and calls forth each of them by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing.

<sup>27</sup> Why do you complain, Jacob?  
Why do you say, Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God"?

<sup>28</sup> Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

<sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

<sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

**Today's Action:** Listen to Do You Not Know, 🎵 Rob & Wendy Jacobson: <https://youtu.be/1W5DeACf0Uw>.



## Praise While You Wait

Week 5 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*I don't believe in fairy tales  
Guess I've outgrown them  
But that doesn't mean that I don't believe  
That there's something bigger than me*

*'Cause I've seen it, in a hospital room  
When the doctors said, "Sorry,  
There's nothing more we can do."  
Well it wasn't through.*

*I've never seen the pot of gold  
At the end of the rainbow*

*But I've got a promise I can hold  
In the middle of the struggle*

*God if you said it, you'll perform it  
May not be how I want you to  
But here's what I'll do:  
I'm gonna wait on you*

*I'm gonna wait on you!  
I've Tasted your goodness  
I've trusted your promise  
I'm gonna wait on you*

-- Maverick City Music, [Wait on You](#) 🎵

**Meditation:** This beautiful song goes on for 13 minutes. Maverick City Music records worship music, and they often break out in repetitive, almost meditative prayer and praise, worshipping God in the middle of their real-life struggles. If you have ever been to kirtan or heard Buddhist monks chanting, or taken part in Islamic or Gregorian chanting, you know the encompassing beauty of a long song to God, repeating fundamental truths and promises from God to us, and from us to God.

Humans can be slow to learn. Think of how many times a mother recounts, "Say thank you," or, "I love you honey." As a basketball coach, do you yell out, "Hands up, guard him!" once or a thousand times? A child finally takes off for the first time on his bike, and hears this trailing behind him, "Pedal, pedal, pedal!" Parenting magazines say you must put a vegetable before a child 14 times before she will successfully choose it to eat. We drill important truths into our kids' heads, so they remember these things long after we are gone. Statistically, adults must hear a message seven times from their boss before they believe it!

This song *Wait on You* reflects that, in moments of pain and confusion, we will choose to do two quiet but very productive things: WAIT and PRAISE. Why do we echo these promises to God? To fill our very cells with them, to burn them into our bones, our heart, our minds, so that the response of being still and praising (two overt acts of faith) becomes so intuitive, so involuntary, that worship during a storm becomes like breathing: our natural response.

**Prayer/Reflection:** *Lord, let us repeat your praises and your truths until we know them by heart.*

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Isaiah 40:27-31

<sup>27</sup>Why do you complain, Jacob?

Why do you say, Israel,

"My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God"?

<sup>28</sup>Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,

and his understanding no one can fathom.

<sup>29</sup>He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

<sup>30</sup>Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

<sup>31</sup>but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

**Today's Action:** Lose yourself in the whole song [13:38], *Wait on You*, here: [https://youtu.be/K3TYG7Q\\_fj4](https://youtu.be/K3TYG7Q_fj4).

**Meditation:** Prayer is simply a conversation with God. If you have never prayed, try this method for your first prayer – use the space below to write God a letter and let him/her know what is on your mind. We can pray by walking, thinking, singing, or talking – silently or out loud. We can write in a journal our requests and wonderings, or we can utter to the wind and let the spirit carry our deepest messages to God. You do not need an intercessor – someone to talk to God for you – but while we are speaking directly with God, Jesus also intercedes on our behalf [Romans 8:34]. This is intimate communication at its best. Be honest. Be yourself. You are enough and God will receive your prayers.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Philippians 4:4-8

*<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

Romans 8:31-39

*<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Today’s Action:** Try a prayer in a different format than you usually use. If you are a drive and pray gal, try a meditative walk. If you kneel beside your bed each night, try a dancing prayer. If you cannot find the words, just breathe. God hears all our utterings and groans.

## Resilience

Week 5 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**RESILIENCE**, noun [from Google's dictionary by Oxford Languages]

1. the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.
2. the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

**Meditation:** Since COVID-19 arrived, mental health professionals, school counselors, your physician, the news...everyone is talking about “resilience.” We have just been through a collective trauma of body/mind/spirit. Blindsided by a crisis we did not see coming, the entire world suddenly had to pivot – to find a new method of doing EVERYTHING. Plans out the window. Health in jeopardy. Worries and fears abounding – those which we never experienced the same way before.

Resilience is the ability to “weather the storm” or, like a deflated playground ball, the ability to get filled with air again and “bounce back.” The goal is to build up inner resources so that when similar trials come, you have more tools, experience, and flexibility from which to draw. Next time you will not fall as far down; next time you will bounce back faster. Resilience is not a static state of being but is a process of growth which involves really dissecting what we are about, what we need (essentially as humans), how we got here, and where we are headed. It is a path for building strength.

Resilience building cannot be done alone but requires creating a community of reserves and sharing methods to strengthen each other. As you know, we do not all hit crisis at the same time. We do not all interpret it, *or handle it*, the same way. We want to not just survive but actually THRIVE and become better as we struggle through the challenges.

Reflect on your journal pages from Week 1, Days 3 and 4. Then Week 2, Days 2, 6, and 7. We are already discussing and building resilience, gathering tools and resources, and preparing to better our communities.

My latest trial: \_\_\_\_\_

How well did I handle it? \_\_\_\_\_

What methods did I use to deal with the challenges? \_\_\_\_\_

What do I need, so I can build more personal resilience? \_\_\_\_\_

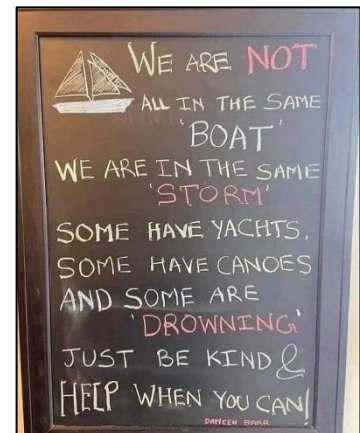


Image borrowed from internet

**Prayer/Reflection:** Lord Jesus, help us to continually become a better version of ourselves. Let us be more like you, and able to someday handle any storm that comes our way. Please calm today's raging seas, Lord. You can help us through anything. Amen.

**Today's Action:** Consider this quote (author unknown): "How can I make this obstacle the greatest thing that's ever happened to me?"

*Week 6*  
*Exploring Forgiveness*

## Dealing with Grief

Week 6 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** There is no way to touch the enormous topic of grief but to say, I see you. I feel it too.

Heavy, Mary Oliver

*That time  
I thought I could not  
go any closer to grief  
without dying*

*I went closer,  
and I did not die.  
Surely God  
had his hand in this,*

*as well as friends.  
Still, I was bent,  
and my laughter,  
as the poet said,*

*was nowhere to be found.  
Then said my friend Daniel,  
(brave even among lions),  
"It's not the weight you carry*

*but how you carry it –  
books, bricks, grief –*

*it's all in the way  
you embrace it, balance it, carry it*

*when you cannot, and would not,  
put it down."  
So I went practicing.  
Have you noticed?*

*Have you heard  
the laughter  
that comes, now and again,  
out of my startled mouth?*

*How I linger  
to admire, admire, admire  
the things of this world  
that are kind, and maybe*

*also troubled –  
roses in the wind,  
the sea geese on the steep waves,  
a love  
to which there is no reply?*

From dailyom.com: **Grief is Important**

*Change is something that happens each and every moment in our lives....Whenever we lose something or somebody we love, it is important for us to take time out for ourselves and truly feel the weight of what we are experiencing. Although it may seem that doing so will push us into a deeper state of sadness, truly giving ourselves permission to be with whatever arises actually creates space for us to begin the healing process. This is because the act of grieving is a natural process, allowing us to sort through the range of emotions that are present in our everyday existence...Once we consciously acknowledge that these emotions are present, however, we are more able to soothe the sorrow of the moment. In so doing, we become more open to our natural ability to heal ourselves.*

*Grieving doesn't have to be a process that keeps us rooted in our thoughts of fear and sadness. For the moment we might feel despondent, but by expressing and coping with our true feelings, we face the sadness head-on. When we allow ourselves to accept and deal with our loss fully, we will then be able to continue our life's journey with a much more positive and accepting outlook.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Dealing with Grief (continued)

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Think about what you have lost. This may include people important to you, but it may also be a job, a dream, a chance to do something, a place you loved living but have left, or the opportunity to speak with someone. Consider writing out your losses.

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Grieving includes the entire process of loss and renewal. Consider what you have gained. Not to take the place of someone lost, but *in addition to* your sadness, was there joy received? Was anything added to your life that was unexpected and turned out to be good?

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If these pages are difficult for you to process, come back on another day and try them again.

Recommended book: *As Much Time as it Takes: A Guide for the Bereaved, Their Family and Friends*, by Martin J. Keogh. If you are grieving, please join my *Life After a Death Support Group* on FB:

Listen to *I Will Carry You* 🎵 [3:24] by Ellie Holcomb: <https://youtu.be/TBGb5jG5v3Y>.

**Today's Action:** Over 1 million Americans died from COVID-19 since 2019. Grief surrounds us like a mantle and gets expressed in complicated, varied ways. Nobody is at their best. Be gentle. Carry someone. Or ask someone to carry you. If not now, seriously, when?

## Despairing

Week 6 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Wild Geese*, Mary Oliver

*You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.*

**Meditation:** In the darkness, we cannot find the light switch. Under crashing waves, we cannot see which way is up, and once we begin to panic, it becomes hard to remember to swim upward. There are moments when despair in this life becomes a crushing weight on the soul. In these moments, we need a real friend: one who can listen without judgment (or problem-solving), one who is compassionate and deeply loving.

**Prayer/Reflection:** *Lord Jesus, lead me to the person at the end of the rope. Let me be the light for them.*

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Listen to Ray LaMontagne's beautiful song, *Let it Be Me* 🎵 [4:10]: <https://youtu.be/5LWpw3CMCEg>.

**Today's Action:** Please reach out, right now, with a text, phone call, letter, or visit to the person who you know is hurting or struggling. Be the light. Tell him, "Swim toward the light, brother."

Everyone should put this number in their cell phone: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-8255. Live people are available to talk and help a hurting soul, 24 hours a day.

## So, You're Mad at God

Week 6 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** If you've never been mad at God, you will. There are a few things you need to know: 1. You are not alone. So many have yelled at God before you. I cannot tell you how many times I have cursed God, screamed at the top of my lungs to the sky saying, "I'm done with you!" 2. God can take it. Almighty God, who authored all of creation, (s)he who numbers the hairs on your head, (s)he who ordered your days from before you were conceived...God is bigger than your anger. God is greater and wiser than your short-sightedness. Do you think the Lord did not know that on this day you would call out in fury at the way the path was laid out before you? 3. God will NOT leave you (like it or not). God can take it. When you are ready to come back, God will be there waiting with open arms.

Have you been angry about something? It may be time to write that down:

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What else are you mad about? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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For 37 chapters (yikes!), Job complains about God and angrily endures platitudes by his religious friends. Then for five chapters, God responds. If you think *you* have complaints, I challenge you to read the entire book of Job. God does not turn away and nothing is taken from God's power by Job speaking his mind. At the end, Job and God reconcile, which is what God will want for you: a restored relationship with love.

*The Peace of Wild Things*, Wendell Berry

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives  
may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great  
heron feeds.*

*I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

**Today's Action:** I dare you to praise during this very difficult moment. Listen to *Raise a Hallelujah* 🎵 [7:50] by Bethel Music: <https://youtu.be/G2XtRuPfaAU>.



**Meditation:** I have tried to explain to my children many times that when you do something hurtful to another person, the relationship can suffer a break. It is not just saying, “I’m sorry” that heals a wound. We need to restore what is broken or replace what was lost. As humans, it is easy to focus on ourselves. Many times, we are encouraged to do just that: practice self-care, tend to your needs, handle your business. However, our self-sightedness results in a less than healthy relationship with God. Sometimes it feels like we are all bumbling through life, barely surviving our own worst mistakes. Additionally, we continuously break and repair things with other humans. It can get rather messy.

We are bound up by haunting memories of past hurts, moments we wish we could erase forever. Think about the toxic relationships you’ve left. Think about the person who keeps loving you even at your worst. We need to be sincerely forgiven for our mistakes so that we can move forward in spiritual freedom. So God, in infinite wisdom, solved the problem. Jesus Christ came to live as a human being, then died on the cross (carrying the heaviness of all our mistakes). And then the story gets nuts. Jesus then conquered death by rising from the dead. It is done! The debt is paid!

God offers every single one of us the opportunity of lasting forgiveness. ← **THIS** is grace – a gift we did not deserve. We could never earn God’s forgiveness for the top-to-bottom weight of human brokenness throughout history. Yet God’s love is so vast, so *thorough*, that He made a way through our shitstorm for us to be saved. This is a timeless offer from a loving God who is greater than time and space. The payment happened over two thousand years ago. But you can still use this coupon! And there are no exclusions. You can be spiritually free, in 2022. ← **THIS** is the miracle.

Today we will look to UCC *Worship Ways* to remember what we know about God’s grace-filled forgiveness. [liturgy from <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/easter-7c-may-29-2022/>]

**CONFESSION**

*Creating God,  
In selfishness and insecurity,  
We have traded your healing for our hatred,  
Your calling for our comfort,  
Your truth for our traditions,  
Your covenant for our conventions,  
Your faithfulness for our fragmentation,  
Your care and our convenience,  
Your solidarity for our self-righteousness,  
Your promise for our praise.*

*Forgive us, we pray.  
Speak to us again of your love,  
That we may know you,*

*And by knowing you,  
We may once again be made whole.  
Amen.*

**ASSURANCE**

*One: Beloved of God, hear the good news.  
God’s love never fails us.  
Even in our division and despair,  
God desires to be made known.*

*Many: We are forgiven. We are welcome. We  
are one.*

*All: Amen.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** *Thank you, Jesus, for your extreme sacrifice. Thank you for knowing how much I would need your debt-cancellation 2,022 years later. Thank you for saving me! I accept your boundless love.*

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**Today’s Action:** Listen to *Reckless Love* 🎵 [5:32], by Cory Asbury: <https://youtu.be/Sc6SSHuZvQE>.

## God is Over It

Week 6 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Meditation:

Go to a quiet place. Write down the worst things you have done, or the choices you wish you could erase.

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|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |

**Prayer/Reflection:** *Dear Jesus, help me to get over my failings and grave mistakes. Thank you for dying on the cross and rising from the dead to defeat the weight of my sins. Let me live a new life from this day forward. Help me to know better and do better. Help me to throw off any remaining weight of my bad decisions and live freely in your joy. Amen.*

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Ephesians 2:1-9

<sup>1</sup> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—** <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.

### Today's Action:

1. Rip this page out.
2. Now get a cup of water and a lighter and go outside.
3. Light this on fire. YES, ON FIRE. And use the water to extinguish it if needed.
4. Once you are sure the fire is out, throw whatever is left in the trash.

## God. Is. Over. It.

Jesus already paid for your 10 worst mistakes. Jesus paid for ALL your mistakes, even the ones you don't understand. God has already forgiven you. It is time for you to get over it and move on.

## You Are a New Creation

Week 6 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** You are a beautiful, new creation in Christ. So, to quote Mary Oliver, what is it you “plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” What could freedom from the past look like for you?

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2 Corinthians 12:9-10

*<sup>9</sup> But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

John 3:16-17

*<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

*<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Today’s Action:** Make a goal for this year – start something new. It could be something you have never done before or that you used to love and have let go by the wayside. Make a fresh start in some way.

## The Hard Part: Forgiving Others

Week 6 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Now comes the challenge. If I am made new, cannot my brother and sister also be made new? From Week 2, Day 5: Can you lay aside the judgments toward others that you hold onto? Will you let God work in others the way he/she wants to? We must be willing to forgive others for the pain they caused and the wrongs they have done. This is not easy; practice is required. I need help forgiving:

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_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Colossians 3:1-17

<sup>1</sup> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. <sup>11</sup> Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Yikes! That's a lot. But God will help you every step of the way to set down your burdens – as many times as you need reminding – so you can move forward. The goal is: forward motion.

**Prayer/Reflection:** Show me Your unfailing love and pour it through me to others.

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Listen to *Remorse* 🎵 [2:46] from the incredible film, *The Mission* – the scene where Rodrigo drags a huge bag of weaponry up the waterfall, as penance for his wrongdoing, and is finally freed from its weight: <https://youtu.be/-9aVLYhQe1Q>. Powerful video clip of this redemption [8:52]: <https://youtu.be/-9aVLYhQe1Q>.

**Today's Action:** Spend time today asking God to help you forgive the person on your list that's hardest.

*Week 7*  
*Inventory and Discovery*

## Exploring My Values

Week 7 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Today we will explore the core values that drive your motivations, actions, and dreams. Your values can also be seen in your frustration and challenge points. For example, if your value is RESPECT (showing it to others, earning/receiving it yourself), you will be very annoyed when you feel disrespected.

Our values are like a personal mission statement, influencing our decisions. Each person's values are slightly different. Jane might be passionate about limiting our impact on the environment; Isabel has compassion for struggling mothers; and Robert is drawn to politics because he values justice and equality.

The activity is borrowed from [brightmorning.com](http://brightmorning.com), and the amazing book, *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators*, by Elena Aguilar. Follow the "Process" instructions below.

### IDENTIFYING CORE VALUES

*These values apply to work and personal life. This is not an exhaustive list—you're welcome to add your own.*

Acceptance	Excellence	Justice	Sharing
Achievement	Excitement	Kindness	Solitude
Adventure	Expertise	Knowledge	Spirituality
Affection	Fame	Leadership	Success
Altruism	Fairness	Loyalty	Support
Ambition	Faith	Making a Difference	Team Work
Appreciation	Family	Meaningful Work	Time
Arts	Flexibility	Mindfulness	Tolerance
Authenticity	Focus	Nature	Togetherness
Authority	Forgiveness	Nurturing	Tradition
Autonomy	Freedom	Order	Travel
Balance	Friendship	Passion	Trust
Beauty	Fun	Peace	Truth
Belonging	Goals	Personal Growth	Unity
Caring	Gratitude	Perseverance	Variety
Celebration	Growth	Personal	Zest
Challenge	Happiness	Development	
Choice	Health	Pleasure	
Collaboration	Helping Others	Positive Attitude	
Commitment	High Expectations	Pride	
Community	Honesty	Productivity	
Communication	Hope	Recognition	
Compassion	Humility	Reflection	
Connection	Humor	Religion	
Contribution	Imagination	Respect	
Cooperation	Independence	Responsibility	
Creativity	Influence	Results	
Democracy	Initiative	Risk Taking	
Effectiveness	Integrity	Romance	
Efficiency	Intuition	Self Expression	
Equality	Interdependence	Self-Respect	
Equity	Joy	Service	

**Process:**

1. Circle your top ten values.
2. Narrow those down to five.
3. Narrow those down to three.

**Prayer/Reflection:** *Help me to understand what drives me, and to use these values to build my best life.*

**Today's Action:** Tell someone important to you what you found as your top three values. Consider how to put them to good use in your life. Which one will you work on first? \_\_\_\_\_

## Health Inventory

Week 7 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** In a union, there is a saying, “When one is injured, all are injured. When one is lifted up, all are lifted up.” You can think about the areas of your life this way as well. Your overall happiness and good health are comprised of many parts: medical health, state of mind (mental health), enjoyment of your life, feeling connected and not lonely, relationships with your family and friends, access to resources (such as job, financial security, personal support system). Failing health can also occur in many areas through stress, loss of income, boredom at work (not experiencing growth or feeling challenged mentally), or separation from loved ones. Today we will look at our lives closely to see where the blessings and the holes lie. We will find what needs attention and tending, with the goal of improving vitality in our lives.

I Corinthians 12:24-26

*<sup>24</sup>...But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, <sup>25</sup>so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** *What do you want to show me, Lord, about areas in my life that need some tending?*

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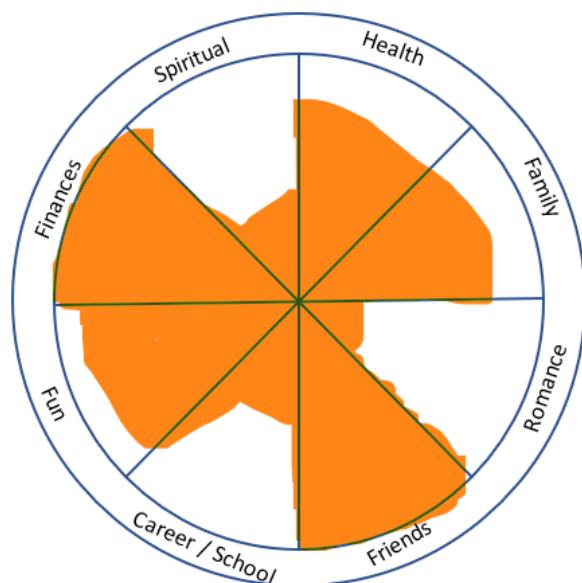
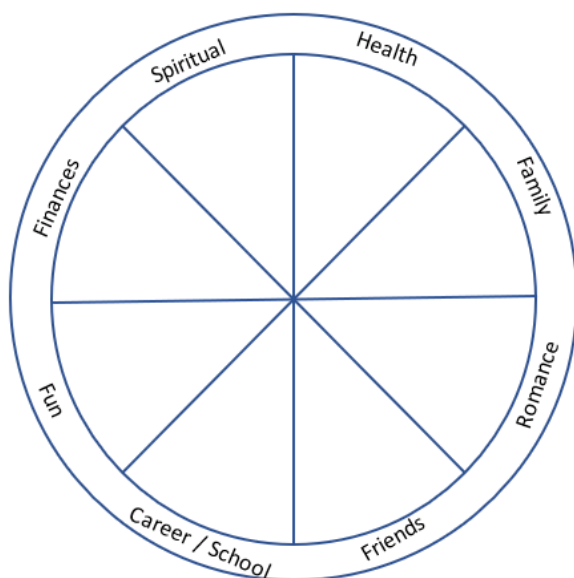
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**Today's Action:** [This activity was inspired by Jennifer Nash's article, “What Are Your Personal Values?” on *Harvard Business Review*: <https://hbr.org/2020/11/what-are-your-personal-values>.]

1. Draw a circle on a blank paper with eight sections. Label them with words that describe the important aspects of your life. A sample is below. 2. Starting at the center, color in how healthy or satisfied you feel in each area. 3. Write down any “limiting beliefs” or ideas about yourself that make it hard to do better in each area. Example: In “Health,” limiting beliefs might be, “I will never reach my goal weight,” or, “My arthritis keeps me from getting exercise.”

4. Draw a new circle with eight segments and the same labels. 5. Write in the things you could try, to improve this area of your life. Is it possible that some limiting beliefs simply are not true? 6. Put the **new** circle on the wall to encourage you to increase health in different areas of your life.



**Meditation:** This church is part of the greater United Church of Christ (UCC). From [ucc.org](http://ucc.org), the description of the church is this: “The United Church of Christ is an inclusive and diverse community of Christians connected by faith that calls us to build a just world for all. Our ministries advocate at a national and global level, but our roots are planted firmly in our local churches in communities like yours.”



### A Church of Extravagant Welcome, Seeking a Just and Peaceful World

For over 400 years, the United Church of Christ has been the church of firsts, weaving God's message of hope and extravagant welcome with action for justice and peace. We are a church where Jesus the healer meets Jesus the revolutionary, and where together, we grow a just and peaceful world.

Our history is filled with ways our faith and call for justice have effected change in our communities, and our response to the demands of our faith is woven into the history of our country.

#### Acts 2:42-47 The Fellowship of the [Early] Believers

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

#### Acts 17:24-28

<sup>24</sup> “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. <sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Today's Action:** What would you like your church to represent? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## The One Who Enters in Will Be Blessed

Week 7 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Living Psalm 118:1-2; 19-29—Creation Justice—Ritual of Palms, written by Maria Mankin; *Living Psalms Book* is created by UCC Witness & Worship Artists' Group. <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/>

*How many of us have paused  
at the gate, waited to be asked in,  
to be invited to join the celebration?*

*How many of us have stood, arms clasped,  
toes drawing little lines in the dirt,  
hoping for a glance, an unspoken  
acknowledgement that we too  
should step through and rejoice?*

*How many of us have watched  
with stars in our eyes  
the procession go past as we clung  
to the post, sat up in the tree,  
crouched by the path, a wave  
of palms passing us by?*

*How many of us are so deeply  
afraid of what is to come, of the death,  
the keening cries of grief, the emptiness  
of the cross, that we stand outside the circle*

*and allow the words of joyful praise  
to remain unuttered on our lips?*

*The one who enters in will be blessed.*

*The one who risks ebullience  
in the face of scorn will be blessed.*

*The one who dances wildly  
and warmly with neighbor  
and stranger alike will be blessed.*

*The one who meets the specters  
of the past with courage  
and refuses to yet be beaten by  
future pains will be blessed.*

*You are the one standing at the gate.  
Will you wait on the threshold  
of hope, or will you turn and grab  
hold of those behind you.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to *God is Good* 🎵 [3:21], by Jonathan McReynolds: <https://youtu.be/-f9uGdJYPeA>.

**Today's Action:** Sign up for one of the remaining activities the church has planned during the summer sabbatical. You will receive blessings from being with other believers.

## What Has God Done for Me Lately?

Week 7 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Meditation:

*If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.*  
Mary Oliver

God has blessed me in these ways:

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Psalm 100:3-5

<sup>3</sup> *Know that the Lord is God.*

*It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

<sup>4</sup> *Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.*

<sup>5</sup> *For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Prayer/Reflection: \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to *Good, Good Father* 🎵 [3:15], Chris Tomlin and Anthem Lights: <https://youtu.be/-NhHzTq5wQQ>.

**Today's Action:** Following the wisdom of the Swedish proverb, "Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half sorrow," send a text or make a call to a friend and let them know one good thing that is happening in your life. And if you need to offload, share a burden with them to halve its weight.

## What Have I Done for God?

Week 7 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** The question is, what do you *want* to do?

Micah 6:6-8

<sup>6</sup> *With what shall I come before the LORD  
and bow down before the exalted God?*

*Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?*

<sup>7</sup> *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?*

*Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

<sup>8</sup> *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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There is an interesting article giving advice on how to figure out what God wants you to do with your life, by Clarence L. Haynes, Jr. here: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/what-does-god-really-want-me-to-do-with-my-life.html>

Listen to *Lord, You are Good* 🎵 [8:00], by Todd Galberth: <https://youtu.be/mztyl7oIIRY>.

**Today's Action:** Consider the old, pushed aside dreams you have been dreaming since childhood. Was there something special you have always wanted to do? And could there be a way to do this for God's glory? Write it down or draw it below.

## Week Seven Reflections

Week 7 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** This might be a good day to go back through the work you have already done and see if one of the entries/topics needs additional thought or prayer.

What have you learned this week (or this summer)? What themes keep coming up for you?

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What would you like to learn?

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**Prayer/Reflection:**

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Isaiah 43:1

<sup>1</sup> *But now, this is what the LORD says—  
he who created you, Jacob,  
he who formed you, Israel:  
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*

**Today's Action:** Please be brave and share some of your thoughts at church today. Use the space below to plan out what you want to say.

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## *Week 8*

### *Hitting the Doldrums of Summer*

*(doldrum – noun. a state or period of inactivity, stagnation, or depression)*

## Large Expanse of Untouched Wilderness

**Week 8 / Day 1: Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** According to *USA Today* in 2014, in the United States, there are still over 750 protected and preserved areas of wide open wilderness – unhindered and unblemished by human hands. This equates to over 109 million acres. This calls to me: Adventure awaits!

Similarly, in our spiritual lives, there is so much uncharted territory. Have you ever asked God to show you something *completely new*? Today may be the day! If you need a little refresher, some genuine inspiration, head into nature, like Pastor Bob and Jodi. What could God show us that we have never seen before, something that would bring awe and a sense of childlike wonder? There's only one way to find out...

Meanwhile, as the heat of summer begins to melt our brains and energy, how is your prayer life? Does it resemble this picture? →

Animals, after they have been upset or suddenly shocked (by a loud noise or a threat to their safety), have this beautiful habit of shaking themselves fully to reset their bodies. Picture a dog coming out of the cold river.

We can literally shake our bodies back to a regulated state – or out of a serious case of the blahs. The trees are shaking at this time of year, letting the wind blow through them. My grandma used to say, “Go outside and let the wind blow the stink off you!” Let’s shake things up.



**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Listen to Robbie Seay Band's *Psalm 139 (You Have Searched & Known Me)* 🎵 [4:06]:  
<https://youtu.be/mS5rNjbO4Mo>

**Today's Action:** Shake up your routine by inserting something totally new into your schedule, whether it be an after-dinner walk, reading a bedtime story to your entire family, or taking a morning swim.

**Meditation:** There are days that knock your socks off and it is hard to know how to begin a prayer. I always think of the verse about the Holy Spirit groaning and muttering for us. Words are not needed. God knows your heart; (s)he knows what you need. Probably more than you do! The New Testament tells us to “pray without ceasing.” To pray continually without stopping, you would basically have to pray so much you did it involuntarily. Or you would have to turn an involuntary process – like breathing – into a prayer.

This is exactly what “om” does. From [masterclass.com](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-does-om-mean) [search WHAT DOES OM MEAN], “Om or aum (pronounced *ah-uu-mm*) is a sacred sound considered by many ancient philosophical texts to be the sound of the universe, encompassing all other sounds within it. In Sanskrit, om is called *Pranava*, which means to hum, and is considered an unlimited or eternal sound. Although the term is linked to Indian culture, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, om chanting is a spiritual practice that transcends culture and religion and is inclusive of all possible definitions and interpretations of God, or *Brahma*.” The sound – try it – is the essence of reverberation, of breath vibrating in your throat – and is considered a way to connect with the moment God created all the universe from nothing, with a holy breath.

In many religious and meditative traditions, people sit cross-legged, with straight back, open heart, and hands turned up in a “receiving” pose, and they chant “Om” like a mantra, to connect with the spirit of the divine. You might want to try it. God can always interpret our utterings and understand the deepest, most hidden desires of your heart.

Jeremiah 29:12-13 [The Lord speaking]

<sup>12</sup> *“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

Philippians 4:6-7

<sup>6</sup> *Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 8:26

<sup>26</sup> *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

<sup>16</sup> *Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to om chanting 🎵 in Youtube; search: OM CHANTING @417 HZ | REMOVES ALL NEGATIVE BLOCKS.

**Today’s Action:** Pastor Bob’s application for sabbatical says he will have given his phone to Jodi by this point in the summer, to take an electronics fast (removing distractions from God by eliminating something that pulls our attention). Is there something you want or need to fast from today?

**Meditation:** By mid-summer, the garden starts to look like a tangled mess of vegetables growing up trellises, flowers vining into the trees, pumpkins that are self-propelling across the lawn, bees and butterflies flitting about, and weeds...everywhere. If it has been hot, the earth turns to dust and the worms go deeper underground. If it has been wet all summer, the slugs come out and begin munching down lettuce and kale leaves and leaving their slime trails behind. Tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, and other friends fall prey to powdery mildew. Caterpillars eat holes into oak and apple tree leaves. All the DEET in the world cannot keep those relentless mosquitoes off your arms, or the black flies from careening right into your eyeballs (why??).

Is your garden a hot mess? Or are you meticulously tending everything, relishing the bounty of cherries, blueberries, beans, and plums? Does your yard look like a children's daycare, with toys left behind and bikes toppled in the grass? How many cars are rusting in your driveway? It's that time of year. We feel too hot to exercise yet too restless to lay around watching the third movie in a row.

What will you do with your day, to honor your being alive, and to keep the breath of life fresh?

Isaiah 61:10-11

<sup>10</sup> *I delight greatly in the LORD;*

*my soul rejoices in my God.*

*For he has clothed me with garments of salvation*

*and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,*

*as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,*

*and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

<sup>11</sup> *For as the soil makes the sprout come up*

*and a garden causes seeds to grow,*

*so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness*

*and praise spring up before all nations.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Luke 13:18-19

<sup>18</sup> *Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?" <sup>19</sup>It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."*

**Today's Action:** Set the timer for 15 minutes and clean up something – make it look new. It could be weeding one section of the garden, putting away the toys, or cleaning off the porch swing. Knowing this clean spot is waiting for you to come and relax will lift you up!



## Boredom

Week 8 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** From *A Book of (Un)common Prayers*, The Stillspeaking Writers' Group.

*When Chores Have Piled Up*, by Lillian Daniel

*Dear God, why can't laundry do itself?  
When you were creating the universe, couldn't you  
have arranged for the leaves to stay on the trees?  
It seems like I spend more time loading and  
unloading the dishwasher than I do sitting at the  
table.  
The dogs want to go out, the cats want to be fed . . .  
And the children want both those things and more.  
Will there be any time for me?  
The chores have piled up.  
The chores have piled up.  
The chores have piled up.  
But chores are not my life.  
They are just a piece of it.  
I will tackle them as I am able.  
One at a time.  
And I pray that will be good enough.  
Amen.*

There is a quite interesting, short [article](#) by Jonathan Lett in the *Longview News-Journal* called, "What is boredom?" about growing tired and disinterested within the Christian faith. [Google search: LONGVIEW NEWS WHAT IS BOREDOM] Lett says, "Let me be clear: I'm not saying that every moment of boredom is a deep spiritual sin. Some things can be quite boring and tedious, like making the bed or doing the dishes. Much of life is in fact ordinary and mundane. What really matters is how we engage the mundane. Our posture toward the monotonous and repetitive is often avoidance...We must develop a counter posture to boredom. The opposite of boredom is gratitude."

He says the problem hidden in boredom is two-fold: 1) the rejection of our calling in Christ, and 2) the rejection of God's goodness in creation. I encourage you to read the thought-provoking, not judgy, article.

I would add that the antidote, if all else fails, to boredom in Christianity is to get Mother Theresa with it and do the thing that *always* reinvigorates: help someone else. To do something kind for someone else cures about a thousand ills and is almost always the right answer (unless you need some good old-fashioned rest, which is also a good plan).

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to *Believe for It* 🎵 [8:21] by CeCe Winans: <https://youtu.be/fd24fpsF1Qw>.

**Today's Action:** Choose one: 1) Ask God what YOU are supposed to be doing; 2) Go outside and give thanks for what you see in nature; 3) Find a random act of kindness you can do today.

## Rest

Week 8 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Is it boredom or exhaustion? Is your bucket empty? We are quick to be hard on ourselves, thinking that more-faster-better is always the answer. It very well could be that you just need to slow down or even STOP for a minute. Take a side-step off the world for a moment and let the chaos keep on spinning without you, while you get some much-needed rest.

But God doesn't allow rest.

OK, that's ridiculous!

Mark 6:31

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said, "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile." He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat.

I feel this so hard. This weekend, I was rubbing my elbow from its aches and pains and my mother said, "Would going to the chiropractor help?" "I DON'T HAVE TIME TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!!" Um...The reality is, I haven't *made time* to rest or heal. We make time for what we want. I am not saying I (or you) have all the time in the world and have no ability to set priorities. You may be maxed to capacity – most of us are. But when something is really important, you find the time. Is your child *always* more important than you? Is the dog more important than you? Or your job? At some point, you need to choose YOU over the other stuff. Maybe not every time, but at least once!

*It's very important that we re-learn the art of resting and relaxing. Not only does it help prevent the onset of many illnesses that develop through chronic tension and worrying; it allows us to clear our minds, focus, and find creative solutions to problems.* --Thich Nhat Hanh

This is a good article by Avery Rimiller, college student, about needing (and finding) some rest: <https://justdisciple.com/bible-rest/>. It offers very practical and compassionate solutions, as well as an interesting take on worshipping within God-given deep rest.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to *Moon River* 🎵 [5:20] by Vince Guaraldi: [https://youtu.be/SdOfT\\_K8LI0](https://youtu.be/SdOfT_K8LI0).

**Today's Action:** Take a nap. Seriously. Sleep can reset your entire mood and ability to function. If you cannot nap, consider a nice long silent sit outside, letting yourself do NO work except looking and listening.

Matthew 11:28 [words of Jesus]

<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

**Meditation:** Engaging mindfulness means to actively practice paying attention to your breath and to what is happening in this present moment. What do I feel, hear, see, smell? What is going on in my body? Is my heart rate elevated, do joints ache, are there muscles freezing up and not moving fluidly as they should?

Spiritual meditation can be practiced while sitting still, in a settled state, and allowing the “monkey mind” to chatter until it becomes quiet. Buddhist meditation involves sitting silently without striving, possibly using a mantra such as, “Love is everything” or a focusing sound like, “Shhhh.” Enlightenment and spiritual understanding can come once the mind is quiet. Meditators practice watching their feelings and thoughts float by, arrive, and then dissipate. “There goes frustration; I won’t judge it; it just IS. Now it travels away.” Three important concepts: acceptance (non-judgment of feelings), patience (believing things will sort out), and letting go (I will not hold onto this thought; that causes suffering. I release it).

Mindful meditation can also be manifested in a walk, raking the yard, or doing dishes while paying attention to your breathing – inhale, exhale, repeat. Quiet, deep breathing offers so many health benefits.

### Breathing exercises to try:



**Star Breath:** Imagine a star with five points.  Imagine starting at one point, breathe in toward the center of the star, breathe out to the next point, and so forth. This will result in 5 calming breaths.

**Wave Breath:** Stand with legs shoulder width apart. Inhale: an ocean wave comes slowly across your body and onto shore. Exhale: the wave goes back to sea. Move from side to side if desired. Breathe for 3 waves.

**Hand Breath:** Taking one hand, trace up the thumb of the other hand while inhaling. Trace down the thumb on the exhale. Then up the pointer finger – inhale – and so forth. Five breaths.

**54321 Breath** (for those in active panic state): Name out loud 5 things you can see; name 4 things you can hear; 3 things you can touch; 2 things you can smell; 1 thing you can taste (take a drink of water). This simple exercise focuses a person through their panic by giving the mind something to do, not involving the cycling fears. In panic, you cannot have a reasonable thought or “calm down.” Access to the logical part of your brain is suspended. Having a task like this exercise can move you forward.

I am always amazed at trees, gently moving in the breeze, rooted firmly in the ground while storms, wind, falling rain and snow...everything hits them from all sides and they just silently and gently sway back and forth (not worrying, fretting, or rushing). If a limb breaks off, it breaks. They keep growing.

Sometimes in a tall-tree forest, you can hear creaking (remember the “utterings of the Holy Spirit”) as trees shift back and forth. A bamboo forest makes a similar knocking sound as the very tall trees sway. I love those sounds. One of my favorite “I am OK” exercises is to stand in the ocean, waist high to the water, and plant my feet down. I let the waves toss my upper body back and forth while keeping my feet rooted. Like a tree, I am mindful of my fragility, strength, and nature’s ability to change me. And I am OK.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen again: *Most Beautiful/So in Love* 🎵 [12:11], Maverick City Music: [https://youtu.be/oCAY\\_qeDo-w](https://youtu.be/oCAY_qeDo-w).

**Today’s Action:** Try one of the breathing exercises and see how you feel afterward.

## Gratefulness, Part 2

Week 8 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** This quote is from Sharni Quinn at *Follow the Sun* blog: [www.followthesun.co.za](http://www.followthesun.co.za).

*We are often looking forward. Looking at what we still need to get done before the year ends and looking at what we still need to achieve in our lives. The attitude of gratitude...is a wonderful way of putting things into perspective and giving us a moment to see what we have accomplished already. Take a moment to think of what you are grateful for and all that you have done this year. Reflecting on what we have already actualized and created gives one a great sense of peace and purpose and leaves one feeling proud and satisfied rather than feeling anxious for the future.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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These prompts are from: <https://www.textmyjournal.com/gratitude-journal-prompts/>.

What color are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What in nature are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What memory are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What taste are you grateful for today? \_\_\_\_\_

What holiday are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What abilities are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What about your body are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What small thing that happened today are you grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

What talent or skill do you have that you are grateful for? \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to On My Way 🎵 [4:00], Hayden Panettiere/Jonathan Jackson: <https://youtu.be/KVJQHV57aX4>.

**Today's Action:** Think about what Pastor Marrone means to you. Using the next page, write a thank you note to one of his children [Lindseigh, Giovanna, Ben, or Joe] about why you appreciate them loaning their dad and his time/energy to the church. Or write why you are grateful for the family.

*To:* \_\_\_\_\_

*From:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*I am grateful for your family!*



### *SECTION 3: Seeking God on the Mountaintop*



*Artwork by Pastor Bob Marrone*

## *Week 9*

### *Wisdom from Many Ancestors*

#### *A Prayer for the Family*

*God of all birthing, God of all living, God of all dying, hear our prayers this day.*

*We pray for our families, in all their complex and wondrous forms, for families of our origin and for those of our choosing.*

*We give thanks for those who have given us birth, for those who have nurtured us, and for those whose lives were invested in our care. Your love for us has been steadfast and sure, and lived out in those who have cultivated our abilities, enriched our minds, strengthened our bodies, and challenged our spirits.*

*We mourn those times when our families have not provided for us and for our children the safety, well-being, and love we needed. We recognize and confess those times when we have failed to be agents of your reconciling and renewing love and ask your forgiveness, as well as the forgiveness of those whose trust we have violated.*

*We celebrate the ever-present possibilities for your Church to be a Family of Blessing for your beloved children. We pray that as Church we might always be attentive to the ways in which we can be a community which is ever more inclusive, ever more nurturing, ever more stimulating, ever more relevant, and ever more healing for all your children. May we recommit ourselves daily to your Gospel call to serve those in need in our world as if they were our very own sisters and brothers, sons and daughters, and to advocate for them and their well-being in the halls of power as well as in our own sanctuaries. In the name of the One who came to us, loved us as his own, and gave to us new life, we pray.*

*Amen.*

Contributed by Reverend Allen V. Harris

[https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/general-synod/general-synod-resolutions-regarding-environmental-justice/children/children\\_prayer-for-the-family/](https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/general-synod/general-synod-resolutions-regarding-environmental-justice/children/children_prayer-for-the-family/)

**Meditation:** In many Native American cultures, it is believed that all rocks – and specifically the mountains – hold the expanse of the earth's wisdom, having witnessed everything that has happened up to this point, and having collected all the lessons that were taught. Imagine the striations you can see in rock when a road gets blasted through the mountainside. Imagine thousands of stories held in those colored stripes. There are many sites in New Hampshire considered sacred and holding great knowledge; two of these are Mt. Kearsarge and Mt. Washington.

Over centuries, many humans from all cultural backgrounds have tried to scale the world's tallest mountains, either to conquer their fears or challenge the limits of their human bodies, or to get as close as possible to "the heavens," and thus to God. Time in the mountains has an almost universally held appeal; in their presence, we can feel our smallness, our insignificance (in the great scheme of things), and we can sense the enormous majesty of the world. God's handiwork is evident as you look at the far-reaching hills and mountains of New Hampshire. Driving through The Notch on Route 93 for example, while in the valley, mountains rise up on either side, engulfing you in beauty during every season.

Skibasics.com put together a list of "Why the Mountains Make Us Feel Alive" (this list is paraphrased):

1. You can be on top of the world... "making us feel excitingly vulnerable and emphasizing how much of [the world] we have yet to explore."
2. You benefit from taking a pause, and the mountains help put things into perspective.
3. Overwhelming sense of freedom and simplicity (getting away from the daily grind).
4. A true source of adventure and the space to challenge yourself.
5. A deep breath of fresh air.
6. Health benefits – from escaping pollution to inviting activities like hiking, swimming, rock running, snowboarding, and skiing, all of which can improve your physical health.
7. Allowing you the chance to be surrounded by likeminded people who share your love of nature, escape, and adventure.

Even Jesus went to the mountain to pray (Mark 6:46). Are you ready to find your boots and get in the car?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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To read much more about some of our local mountains that have Native American significance, read an article called, "*The Wobanadenok*," at [indigenounh.com](http://indigenounh.com); search for: THE WOBANADENOK. You can also find good information from Mt. Kearsarge Indian Museum: <https://www.indianmuseum.org/about>.

**Today's Action:** Plan a summer hike – don't forget bug spray, sunscreen, a protein snack, and plenty of water! And charge your cell phone ahead of time. If you can't get out, take a *Hike to a Mystery Place* with Jeff Kantorowski of Stravaig on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hzXgACiZAK>.



## Ancestors

Week 9 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Ancestors are those to whom we are connected, who have gone before us and tread paths for us to follow. Do you believe that you are still connected to the ones who came generations before you in your lineage? Do you believe that the ancestors are accessible, guiding you at the crossroads of life?

I believe we are absolutely connected to the ancestors, whether or not we realize it. When we pay attention in History class and read about the humans before us: what they laid out, invented, understood, and screwed up...we are learning from our ancestors. Think of all the statues our societies make of war heroes, previous presidents, justice seekers, history makers, and town founders. They were here before us. They helped us get here. And they had families, relationships, messes and mistakes, joys, tears of despair, and moments of great, ringing laughter.

I live in a house built in 1875. For almost 150 years, babies had their diapers changed, parents yelled at each other and reconciled, children made forts, doll houses, obstacle courses, and soft beds for new dogs. In the back yard, previous chickens laid eggs, shed feathers, clucked at a leaf blowing by, and died – and were likely then served for dinner to the same children after mother said, “Clean up those blankets and put the chairs back!” Those families are my ancestors, filling the house fibers with memories, knowledge, love, and hope. When we walked into the house with the realtor, it felt inviting and welcoming; it felt like a happy house, so we bought it. We have also found three gravestones in the back yard...more ancestors.

Two thousand miles away in Indiana, my grandpa hand-wrote a note, found in the lake shed after he died: “When changing the screens on the cottage, do not stand in the wheelbarrow.” Wisdom of ancestors. 😊

Who are your ancestors and what have they left you? ←And, if they left you hurtful patterns and bad behavior, what would YOU like to leave as YOUR ancestral legacy? You don’t have to repeat their mistakes.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Today’s Action:** Write below what you wish to say to one of your ancestors. Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

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Recommended movie for kids 7+: *Brother Bear*. You may want to watch with them; there are scary parts.

🎵 *I Am Moana (Song of the Ancestors)* [2:42], from the movie *Moana*: <https://youtu.be/HEiSF8HpyDg>.

**Meditation:** During sabbatical, Pastor Bob and his wife Jodi will order their days guided by the Rule of St. Benedict. Bob is an Oblate of the Weston Priory. Their days will include prayer, sharing psalms, and studying The Rule every day. They consider this summer a pilgrimage into a deeper relationship with God. So, what is Benedictine practice?

Jodi Rittmueller, also a Benedictine Oblate, offers great insight, writings, songs, and mindful life inspiration on her website [tracyrittmueller.com](http://tracyrittmueller.com). The following information was gathered from her website. “As a Benedictine practice, obedience is intimately linked to being in right relationship, conversatio, humility, and listening. Benedictine obedience is ultimately directed not to other humans or to ourselves, but through the agency of others and the deepest yearnings of our own hearts, in love, to God.”

“Near the end of his life in 547 AD, Benedict of Nursia wrote a guide to living, in the company of other humans, the kind of good days that add up to a good life. The Rule of Benedict has resonated through more than 1400 years and today is followed around the world by thousands of monastics and oblates (people associated with monasteries who live and work outside the monastery). This “little rule for beginners” serves to develop a spirituality made up of practices, which Benedictines incorporate into their relationship with God and their interactions with the people with whom they live and work.”

Benedictine practices include all the things you know and love about Pastor Bob, Jodi, and this church, and many of the things we have discussed: awareness of God, being in right relationships, commitment to growth (conversatio), community, gratitude, hospitality, and humility. They also include listening to God’s word in Scripture (lectio divina), refined listening (“with the ear of the heart”), liturgical prayer, mindfulness, and moderation in all things. And finally, the practices involve obedience after listening to God, patience, peace, prayer, reverence for all creation, service to others, silence, stability of heart, stewardship of resources, work, and then beginning again (refocusing every four months on all those aspects of one’s life).

What better way to incorporate the values of the Benedictine life than a summer sabbatical with the ones you love? And in the meantime, Pastor Bob has left a thriving, compassionate community of believers who can grow alongside him from back at the church. Perfect! The reflections of your summer and his will be the closing of that growth circle, allowing him to begin again with his practice.

What do you think about all this?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos 🎵 [51:15]: <https://youtu.be/B3T8V-IM4Xk>.

**Today’s Action:** Choose one aspect of the Benedictine life to practice today.

**Meditation:** The Book of Psalms is a section of the *Bible* with 150 songs that provide a map for us to learn God's character, a history of things God has done, a model of words we can use to pray, and a clear portrayal that we can be intimately connected with God. There are no holds barred in the Psalms. You can express what you need to say to the Lord. Cry it out. Sing it. Pray it. Shout it!

There is a description of different types of psalms at [everypsalm.com](http://everypsalm.com). Visit the website; a married ministry couple has put the psalms to music; all are free to download! Below are excerpts from their category summaries. Does one category appeal to you?

- 1) **Psalms of Praise** – hymns...songs of pure praise to God...sung when our orientation and relationship with God is stable, calm, and untroubled. Examples: Psalms 9, 29, 48.
- 2) **Psalms of Lament** – songs and prayers given to God in times of pain...when our relationship with God is troubled - when we feel distant from him, hurting, or abandoned. [Each] begins in a generally negative place or position, each one turns back to God in trust and thanksgiving by its end (excluding Psalm 88)...cries of desperation, petitions for aid, or pleas for justice. Examples: Psalms 3, 6, and 31.
- 3) **Psalms of Thanksgiving** – celebrate God...share narratives of God's goodness and typically honor specific things that He has done...Examples: Psalms 16, 18, and 40.
- 4) **Psalms of Confidence** – describe the author's trust and faith in God, typically with a central image or theme...Examples: Psalms 11, 23, and 27.
- 5) **Psalms of Kingship** – present a king as the major focus...a humanly king, or God as the heavenly King of all creation. Examples: Psalms 2, 20, and 50.
- 6) **Psalms of Remembrance** – retell the history of God's presence in humanity, focusing on acts of salvation and redemption...turn our hearts toward gratitude as we remember God's grace in his specific actions, the miraculous, and major historical events. Examples: Psalms 78, 105, and 106.
- 7) **Psalms of Wisdom** – provide instruction...on how to live life and exist in relationship with God. Examples: Psalms 1, 49, and 119.

#### Psalm 16, of David

<sup>1</sup> *Keep me safe, my God,  
for in you I take refuge.*  
<sup>2</sup> *I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;  
apart from you I have no good thing."*  
<sup>3</sup> *I say of the holy people who are in the land,  
"They are the noble ones in whom is all my  
delight."*  
<sup>4</sup> *Those who run after other gods will  
suffer more and more.  
I will not pour out libations of blood to  
such gods  
or take up their names on my lips.*  
<sup>5</sup> *LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup;  
you make my lot secure.*  
<sup>6</sup> *The boundary lines have fallen for me in  
pleasant places;*

*surely I have a delightful inheritance.*  
<sup>7</sup> *I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;  
even at night my heart instructs me.*  
<sup>8</sup> *I keep my eyes always on the LORD.  
With him at my right hand, I will not be  
shaken.*  
<sup>9</sup> *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue  
rejoices;  
my body also will rest secure,*  
<sup>10</sup> *because you will not abandon me to the  
realm of the dead,  
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.*  
<sup>11</sup> *You make known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

**Prayer/Reflection/Today's Action:** Look at your *Bible* and choose a psalm that speaks to you. Or go to [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) and search keyword: BOOK OF PSALM. You can read them online. My Psalm: # \_\_\_\_\_

## Write Your Own Psalm

Week 9 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** There is a very good article called *How to Read the Psalms for All They're Worth*, by W. David O. Taylor, on [anglicancompass.com](http://anglicancompass.com). [Scroll down to the green section and type in the article title.] Today I encourage you to write one of your own. Look at yesterday's entry and find the psalm you chose. Write your own words, line by line, to echo your favorite psalm. See my example below.

### Original:

Psalm 24, Of David. A psalm.

<sup>1</sup> *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it;*

<sup>2</sup> *for he founded it on the seas  
and established it on the waters.*

<sup>3</sup> *Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?  
Who may stand in his holy place?*

<sup>4</sup> *The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not trust in an idol  
or swear by a false god.*

<sup>5</sup> *They will receive blessing from the LORD  
and vindication from God their Savior.*

<sup>6</sup> *Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek your face, God of Jacob.*

<sup>7</sup> *Lift up your heads, you gates;  
be lifted up, you ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.*

<sup>8</sup> *Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD strong and mighty,  
the LORD mighty in battle.*

<sup>9</sup> *Lift up your heads, you gates;  
lift them up, you ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.*

<sup>10</sup> *Who is he, this King of glory?  
The LORD Almighty—  
he is the King of glory.*

### My Psalm:

Psalm 1, Of Ally. A psalm.

New Hampshire is the LORD's, and everything in it,  
Hillsboro, and all who live in it;

For God moved the glaciers and the forests  
And helped people make this town 250 years ago.

Who is allowed to go to church?

Or who can worship in the woods or at the river?

The one who accepted God's grace and forgiveness,  
Because we all know we made mistakes  
And swore this morning in the driveway.

We would like to receive a blessing from the LORD  
And a little "That's my girl" from God our Savior.

This is the new generation seeking you,  
We seek your face, God of this millennium.

Turn on your Zoom;  
Bring down the A/V screen,  
So we can hear the glory of the Lord.

Who is this famous God?  
The LORD is resilient and tough,  
The LORD has got your back during a pandemic.

Turn on your camera and mic;  
Or go through the foyer doors,  
And let God come into this place.

Who is this famous God?  
The Lord of Strength –  
She is the righteous Queen!

**Prayer/Reflection:** Lord, help me to make the words of a Psalm relevant in 2022 and honest about my life.

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**Today's Action:** Try it! It's easier than you might think. You can lay the next page next to your *Bible* if it is helpful in matching up the lines.

[illegible]

**Meditation:** Psalm 63:1-8 – Lent 3C, from the *Living Psalm Book*, [ucc.org/worship-way/](http://ucc.org/worship-way/)

*A Psalm of Sengbe Pieh aka Joseph Cinqué his prayer from the boat right before the overtaking of the ship.*

*Ngewo-Ngewo\*, there is water everywhere.  
This ship holding me captive  
is surrounded by water I cannot touch or drink.  
We drift farther away from the land of the  
Mende.  
Where there was water enough all.  
Where the rivers whispered your name.  
Where I saw you in the faces of my people.*

*My soul thirsts for you,  
while my flesh faints from hunger and abuse.  
The stars declared your presence.  
The trees breathed your name.  
None of this I see from the belly of this ship  
where I am held captive in chains and filth  
by those whose souls are dry and weary.  
They say I do not know you.*

*I experienced you in the sacred places.  
You were the sanctuary I remember.*

*You kept me safe and sheltered me from harm.  
I saw your power in the wind, the thunder, the  
lighting.  
Now upon these rough seas as they roll  
I feel you in the swell of the waves.  
Even in captivity I praise you, because I feel you  
near.*

*Ngewo-Ngewo, God of the Mende, I seek you in  
this place.  
My soul is satisfied in you.  
Your Spirit invigorates me giving me the  
resistance I need.  
I lift up my hands and call on you for strength to  
deliver me.  
My lips praise you, I am satisfied as with a rich  
feast.  
I meditate on you into the quiet of the night.  
My soul clings to you knowing your right hand  
will vanquish my oppressors.*

**\*Notes:**

-Ngewo-Ngewo is the supreme god of the Mende people of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

-The *Living Psalm Book* is "Psalms in the form of words and art, reborn in the specific contexts of our world, privileging the voices of historically marginalized communities and those acting in solidarity with them." This psalm is for Amistad Sunday.

Where have you found God in unusual places? I think of the beautiful people who transform city trash lots into community gardens for all to use. God loved me through the face and hug of a homeless woman outside Market Basket; in the Korean neighbors who lived by us for a year and became our family; in the children's section at Target where my son – who is *extremely* picky about clothes – found five outfits this weekend. I received God's grace when I heard a friend playing the flute by the side of Genesee River years ago; and when the red-tailed hawk visited my garden, only 15 feet from me. I shared God's mercy by giving cast-off shoes, clothes, and half-used workbooks to the lady who runs a daycare and offered the chicken eggs to our neighborhood food pantry. God shows up at weird times. What do you remember?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Action:** Make a point today to take the "road less traveled" and look for signs of God's deep love.

**Meditation:** The best way for us to get new perspective is to go somewhere unusual, surround ourselves with beauty, and measure our troubles, worries, and questions against something bigger than us. You might appreciate an art museum, a garden center, or an artist friend's house. And the beauty that is parading ever before us, always available, is of course, the natural world.

### ***My help is in the mountain***

*My help is in the mountain  
Where I take myself to heal  
The earthly wounds  
That people give to me.  
I find a rock with sun on it  
And a stream where the water runs gentle  
And the trees which one by one  
give me company.  
So must I stay for a long time  
Until I have grown from the rock  
And the stream is running through me  
And I cannot tell myself from one tall tree.  
Then I know that nothing touches me  
Nor makes me run away.  
My help is in the mountain  
That I take away with me.  
--Nancy C. Wood*

### ***Earth cure me***

*Earth cure me. Earth receive my woe. Rock  
strengthen me. Rock receive my weakness. Rain  
wash my sadness away. Rain receive my doubt.  
Sun make sweet my song. Sun receive the anger  
from my heart.  
--Nancy C. Wood*

**Prayer/Reflection:** *May we find you, God, in the richness of beauty, which you have given for our enjoyment.* \_\_\_\_\_

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**Today's Action:** Spend a little time somewhere beautiful. See what happens to your mood.

### ***Longing***

*O foolish wisdom sought in books!  
O aimless fret of household tasks!  
O chains that bind the hand and mind—  
A fuller life my spirit asks!*

*For there the grand hills, summer-crowned,  
Slope greenly downward to the seas;  
One hour of rest upon their breast  
Were worth a year of days like these.*

*Their cool, soft green to ease the pain  
Of eyes that ache o'er printed words;  
This weary noise – the city's voice,  
Lulled in the sound of bees and birds.*

*For Eden's life within me stirs,  
And scorns the shackles that I wear;  
The man-life grand – pure soul, strong hand,  
The limb of steel, the heart of air!*

*And I could kiss, with longing wild,  
Earth's dear brown bosom, loved so much,  
A grass-blade fanned across my hand,  
Would thrill me like a lover's touch.*

*The trees would talk with me; the flowers  
Their hidden meanings each make known—  
The olden lore revived once more,  
When man's and nature's heart were one!*

*And as the pardoned pair might come  
Back to the garden God first framed,  
And hear Him call at even-fall,  
And answer, 'Here am I,' unshamed—*

*So I, from out these toils, wherein  
The Eden-faith grows stained and dim,  
Would walk, a child, through nature's wild,  
And hear His voice and answer Him.  
--Ina Coolbrith*

*Week 10*

*How Are We Connected?*



## Let the Church Body Spell You

Week 10 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** There are days, weeks, years even, when the trials and problems come at us like a landslide. The years dealing with COVID-19 were like that for many people. Whether dealing with new fears and anxieties, heightened germ awareness, constant worry about friends and family, political arguments with neighbors, or in many cases, grief over the thousands of people we lost to the virus...we are collectively worn out. You may have also experienced some of life's most stressful events: moving to a new home, losing a job (or changing careers), divorce, verbal or physical abuse, or deep isolation and loneliness. Sometimes it can feel like life is too much to bear.

Consider this: Your church family is all in one big boat, rowing together through the storms of this life. You are not alone, and likely no matter what you thought about or did to handle the pandemic, there is someone in the church who can understand what you are going through. Members of your church can at different times offer support and muscle to take over when you need a rest. Imagine you have been rowing and rowing for what seems like days, and a brother or sister in your faith says, "Why don't you rest a while, and I will take over rowing."

This is the church as Jesus left it to us. The church's job is to live alongside each other, to practice and share our faith, and to create a tight support network that holds up all the parts with the strength of many.

United Methodist Reverend Milford Griner discusses the meaning of church in "*What is the Purpose of the Church?*" This article is on [gainesville.com](http://gainesville.com) or Google: MILFORD GRINER PURPOSE OF CHURCH.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 18:12-14, 19-21 (words of Jesus)

<sup>12</sup> "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. <sup>14</sup> In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. ...

<sup>19</sup> "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

**Today's Action:** Consider whether you are connected with your church. Does it feel like a family to you? Is there something you could do to strengthen that connection?

Also reflect on: Am I the one tired of rowing or the one who's ready to step in and take someone's burden for a minute? Then decide: How will you ask for or offer help?

**Meditation:** Just when you think you are doing what God wants, something happens to throw a wrench in your plans. You can find yourself disappointed with circumstances, or with yourself and your responses to life. In the hardest times, we get disillusioned with others. Why do they act that way? Is God even paying attention? Why did that person whom I respected and looked up to disappoint me so heavily? And what am I supposed to do with this information?

You don't have to throw a rock very far to hit a person who has decided the church and its members are full of nonsense and acting like hypocrites. ← We hear that word all the time. In our current political climate, we see Christians acting in very unbecoming ways that do not remotely represent Jesus and his teachings. Some have turned Christianity into a very narrow and self-righteous definition. Many Christian attitudes really turn me off, and for those who have not found God personally, the entire machine is a giant turn off: the church can be judgmental, harsh, rigid, and bent on rejecting several groups of society.

Your church has decided to be inclusive – all are welcome. Do we know if this is felt in the community? The hope is that we are light in darkness, a raft in a sea of troubles, and a safe place to worship while the country is beating down its citizens. Are God's love and grace what people feel when they enter the doors?

Personally, can you separate the weakness, limitations, and mistakes of mankind from the overwhelming love and compassion that is God? Did *God* disappoint you? ← This is real. I remember a time I prayed with all my heart for a man to live through a debilitating illness; instead, he died, and that shook my faith. But the reality is, I am not God. I do not know God's divine plans for the people of this earth. I am a flawed human being with limited sight. Were my prayers fruitless or did they not contain enough faith (a common myth told to believers)? I would say no. My prayers were valid; God's choice was also valid.

These are the moments we go out to the majesty of nature to experience our finite smallness in the great scheme of things. These are the moments we say: "God, I don't know *what* you are doing, but I believe *you* know what you are doing. Hold onto me despite my lack of understanding. Be my compass, my guide."

Humans will forever be limited. God is limitless. Decide whom you want to place your faith in and move in that direction. Did the church fail you? Very possibly yes. Did God? I would say no. Cling directly to your Maker and let the rest fall by the wayside. [See Week 6 on Grief and Forgiveness to process the mess.]

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Psalm 146:2-6

<sup>1</sup> *I will praise the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.*  
<sup>3</sup> *Do not put your trust in princes,  
in human beings, who cannot save.*  
<sup>4</sup> *When their spirit departs, they return to the  
ground;  
on that very day their plans come to*

*nothing.*

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed are those whose help is the God of  
Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God.*

<sup>6</sup> *He is the Maker of heaven and earth,  
the sea, and everything in them—  
he remains faithful forever.*

**Today's Action:** Read Psalm 46. Use [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) if needed. Revisit *You Keep on Getting Better* 🎵 [10:34], Maverick City Music: <https://youtu.be/PMEGUx7MfCM>.



## Really Seeing Someone Is a Skill

Week 10 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** *"Really Seeing Someone Is a Skill,"* by Eric Owen Russell, Life Coach, at [ericowenrussell.com](http://ericowenrussell.com).

*"To have someone really see you and not their version of you. Isn't that what all of us want?"*

*"I get to 'see' the people I work with in my practice and it's a privilege. It's the privilege we can all have through our everyday interactions. Here's the framework I use to help someone be seen by me: Listen, Hear, See, and Experience.*

*"Listening (the physical act of raising the head, opening the ears, and paying attention), then; Hearing (the comprehension of what's being listened to), then; Seeing for yourself (asking 'show me'), then; Experiencing it (shared experience authenticates the others' self and experience).*

*"Among the positive benefits of being 'seen' are that you and how you're experiencing life are recognized and authenticated. Often after someone finally realizes that they've been seen, I hear 'wow, ok I knew I wasn't crazy!' And with that, substantive changes begin to happen that contribute to an increasing state of well-being: defenses drop (it's safe), the body physically relaxes (cortisol slows/stress stops), trust grows (connection builds), the conversation flows (openness and sharing), emotions settle (dopamine pumps)...*

*"All of us need to be seen. Seen not as we pretend to be, nor as we self protectively present ourselves to be, nor how the culture or society compel us to be. This is indeed a pressing need for our personal and collective well-being. It's one that can bring healing for us all, and something that all...can participate in."*

Who have you been having trouble seeing lately? Who is pressing your buttons and making it hard to understand or tolerate them? \_\_\_\_\_

What is frustrating you? \_\_\_\_\_

What would happen if you practiced Listen, Hear, See, and Experience with them?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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I Corinthians 13:12-13

<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Listen to *True Colors* 🎵 [3:40], Justin Timberlake/Anna Kendrick: <https://youtu.be/Bp9qOIKB0F4>.

**Today's Action:** Make time to speak with the person who is challenging you. Ask what is happening in their lives and truly listen. Try practicing all the four steps, to gain better understanding. Sorry about this but remember that the people who push our buttons *the most* tend to be most like us. Therefore, there is a weird and unique opportunity for you to be really close to that person.

## Recognizing the Value of Personhood

Week 10 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Excerpt from *“Humanity, Personhood, and Kindness,”* by Eric Russell at [ericowenrussell.com](http://ericowenrussell.com).

“To be known, to be heard, to have one’s unique identity recognized and seen as worthy. It was a universal human desire I thought, as true for nations and peoples as it was for individuals.”

--*A Promised Land* by President Barack Obama

*“Isn’t this a powerful statement? I love it! For me it speaks about what helps us stand strong - the sanctity of our humanity and personhood.*

*“This goes deeper than being a universal human desire. It’s a truth rooted in what causes us to feel secure and safe in ourselves: the validation of our humanity and personhood. This is what’s being affirmed about you and me when we’re known, heard, and have our unique identity recognized and seen as worthy...*

*“Apart from the gift of love, isn’t this the greatest and most powerful offering that we can give...*

*“[Add this to your goals]: to validate and affirm the humanity and personhood of others by simply being kind to them.*

*“Kindness is never what is done, it’s simply why it’s done. It says that one is worthy because they received it, and another is worthy because they gave it. It recognizes mutual personhood and in doing so declares our indisputable equality. Kindness given means someone and their humanity have been seen and affirmed. It confirms that we matter.*

*The power to give this gift is in all of us. That we do give it without limit or exclusion confirms the basic goodness within us.”*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*“Marking the anniversary of George Floyd’s death in custody, the United Reformed Church, UCC’s partner in the UK, has published a music resource with themes of racial justice and responses to COVID-19. New words are created for familiar hymn tunes.”* [from [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org), WORSHIP WAYS] This work is downloadable. The link to *Sunflowers and Thistles* is here: <https://urc.org.uk/sunflowers-and-thistles>

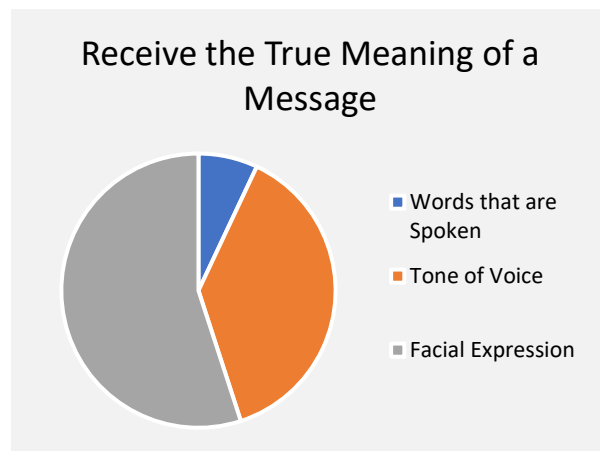
**Today’s Action:** Consider who is worthy of God’s love. Take a walking meditation on this question.

## On Listening

Week 10 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Active listening is one of the best skills we can learn to improve outcomes at school, work, and in our relationships. The most loving thing you can do for others is to become a better listener. Imagine where silence plays a role. Here are 7 tips (from [novoresume.com](http://novoresume.com)) to be a good active listener:

1. **Pay attention:** As we mentioned, being attentive is a key component of active listening. Besides avoiding distracting thoughts and external triggers (such as side conversations, phone notifications, etc.), you should also show that you're paying attention through your body language and verbal confirmations.
2. **Ask open-ended questions:** Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. By getting the speaker to elaborate, you can acquire more information (including their feelings and attitudes).
3. **Request clarification:** Clarification involves periodically asking questions to make sure you are understanding the speaker correctly. By doing so, they also get a chance to expand on certain points.
4. **Paraphrase:** Instead of offering your opinion, or steering the conversation in another direction, interact with the speaker by paraphrasing their points. Frequently paraphrasing helps the communication process by keeping the conversation on track. A way to do this is by using expressions like, "So what you're saying is that..." or, "What you mean by this is...?"
5. **Ask probing questions:** Just like open-ended questions, probing questions aim to get into the deep end of a topic. Additionally, they don't just help you understand better, but also aid the speaker to think more deeply about what they're saying.
6. **Summarize:** Providing the speaker with a summary of their main points is a way to repeat what has been said using your words. This is another great way to keep your assumptions, judgments, and beliefs from distorting the message.
7. **Be attuned to the speaker's feelings:** Learning how to be empathetic can be tough. However, it's not impossible. Try, for example, to notice non-verbal cues, ask people how they feel in addition to what they think, and try to understand the reasons behind someone's behavior. Empathy will soon become a habit!



[Leaderchat.org](http://Leaderchat.org) offers a lot of info about listening skills. Search under: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REALLY LISTEN? According to the article, 7% of a person's meaning comes from the actual words, 38% comes from tone of voice, and 55% of the meaning is seen in the facial expression!

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Today's Action:** Practice bearing witness to someone's story. Simply listen, without hurrying away. Notice their emotional expression, the words used, and their body language. What are they really saying?

## Meditation: Ephesians 4:1-32

<sup>1</sup>As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup>This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." <sup>9</sup>(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) <sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

<sup>17</sup>So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that

you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup>They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup>Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

<sup>20</sup>That, however, is not the way of life you learned <sup>21</sup>when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup>You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup>to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup>Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. <sup>26</sup>"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup>and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup>Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

<sup>29</sup>Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**Prayer/Reflection/Action:** Read Ephesians 4 above. What does this mean for me and for the church?

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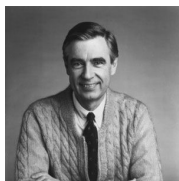
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*Week 11*  
*Ways We Interact*





*When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."*

— Mr. Fred Rogers [image borrowed from [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com)]

**Meditation:** One of the things Christians love to do is HELP. We are naturally filled with the impetus to solve problems, show empathy and compassion, and do good works for other humans. Jesus tells us to serve everyone, from “the least of these” to turning the other cheek for “your enemies.”

In fact, for some of us, it has become so easy to say, “Yes, I will help,” that it is painful to set healthy boundaries for ourselves and practice saying, “No.” When there is a need to fill, we jump to fill it; and this can actually hinder others from feeling the uncomfortable silence that pushes them to step up and volunteer. Imagine what would happen if we waited a beat to see if someone else wanted to exercise their helper muscle. There are *many* exhortations to be a helper in the Bible; here are just a few:

Philippians 2:4 - *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Proverbs 19:17 - *Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.*

Galatians 6:2 - *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Acts 20:35 - *In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Luke 6:38 - *Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*

Consider your natural desire to help others. How would you rate it on a scale of 1-5 (5 being ‘pressing desire to serve’)? Union Congregational Church provides many service opportunities. Have you found meaning in being involved? If not, would you join a group? Or is it time to let someone take your active spot? If yes, consider mentoring another member in the church to fill a role in which you have served.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to *Universal Love* 🎵 [6:44] by Nawang Khechog: <https://youtu.be/85YzIKq4MX0>. Album notes: *This is an eighth-century prayer of universal love and compassion that was chanted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and thousands of high lamas, hermits, monks, nuns, and lay people at His Holiness the Dalai Lama's temple, in Dharamsala, India. I was one of the fortunate participants of this very emotional and inspiring event. Here is the essence of that prayer:*

*May I become a servant when there is a need to serve others.*

*May I become a bridge and ship when there is a need for crossing.*

*May I become food, drink, medicine, doctor, and nurse, when there is famine and disease.*

*May I become the source of life, like the earth and other elements, and serve all those infinite beings until they go beyond conditions and suffering and find lasting freedom and happiness.*

**Today's Action:** Write out a way you can help: \_\_\_\_\_

## Protect the Flame

Week 11 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Brené Brown has a beautiful short clip from her HBO special, *Atlas of the Heart*, in which she talks about how your light – your soul, spirit, and individual beauty – is shining. You want to surround yourself with people who see your light, protect and celebrate it, and are not “candle blower outers.” Have ever been told, “You are just too much,” or “Can you tone it down a bit?” Those are the statements of candle blower outers. If the people in your life are not happy to have your light shine, it may be time to find some new friends. You can’t change your family members, but you can create family with friends who truly see you and stand by you no matter what.

May our church be absolutely full to bursting with those who praise and celebrate the light in each of us.

That light is Christ, manifested in your very personal, unique personhood, made by God’s deliberate design. You are just right. You are worthy, and you are shining brightly, my dear.

Who do I know in my life that has room for my light? [friends, family, teacher, neighbor, co-worker...]

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**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen on Facebook [0:58] to Brené Brown explaining the friends to seek: <https://fb.watch/dbfPjt73s/>.

Matthew 5:14-16 [words of Jesus]

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

**Today’s Action:** Be a light-celebrator. Today, find someone who is shining brightly, and let them know you see and appreciate their light.

## The Gift of a Mentor

Week 11 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** I am borrowing this information from Irv Richardson's mentoring work with teachers and school employees. Once, years ago, Irv said he was my mentor and I reacted poorly, saying, "You are not my mentor! We are equals!" But of course, he has been a mentor, and we can still be equals. Let's explore.

A mentor is someone who guides and encourages you through life. They offer support and wisdom, and they challenge you to grow, especially when you are afraid or stuck. They help you build your vision of what you want your life to become. A faith mentor can help you find the right path for yourself, cheer you along the path, and push you when your path is not headed where you said you wanted to go.

Mentorship requires a close knowledge of the other person; it is a coaching relationship and needs to be nurtured. This relationship is personal, specific, and requires both trust and openness. Great question asking and well-developed listening skills are deeply important – the mentor's goal is to support, not dictate or direct, the mentee's path of growth. Mentors have to believe that the mentee has the inner resources (though they are learning new skills to supplement) to build their own path. It will not be the mentor's path. It will be unique.

The mentee's job is to become and remain open-hearted; to listen well; to accept guidance and challenge; and to learn to trust. Is the mentee willing to be pushed out of their comfort zone? Are they willing to accept constructive feedback and positively reinforced criticism? Are they willing to rise up and assume ownership of their own path; willing to do the hard work of traveling that path? Relationship-building happens from both sides and is vital to strengthen the connection.

On your spiritual journey, you may have many mentors – some for brief periods of time. They teach you what they need to impart and then your life may move past them. This is OK. Who are the people who have swept the path, so to speak, ahead of you? Who gave guidance and encouragement? Who has stayed the course? Write below about your mentor(s) and their role(s) in your life. Also consider who you might be mentoring at this moment.

Phases of the early stages  
(of your faith journey or any project):

- Anticipation
- Survival
- Disillusionment
- Rejuvenation
- Reflection
- Anticipation

Through mentoring, you assist the mentee by:

- Encouraging reflection
- Providing theory/information/resources
- Modeling lessons; sharing your time
- Providing opportunities for practice
- Providing compassionate feedback
- Knowing when to step back and say, "You are on your way!"

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Today's Action:** Send a note, text, or call to one of your mentors and thank them for shepherding you.

*[Thank you, Irv.]*

**Meditation:** Excerpt from Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening*.

*“At heart, hospitality is a helping across a threshold.” – Ivan Illich*

*“[There are many] deep examples of spiritual hospitality, of helping kindred spirits further into their living. Truly, the most we can ask of others is for their guidance and comfort on the way – without imposition, design, or thought of reward. This is the hospitality of relationship: for family to help us manifest who we are in the world, for friends to bring us to thresholds of realness, for loved ones to encourage us to cross barriers of our own making into moments of full aliveness.*

*“This is the honest welcoming to table, without judgment of what we eat. Often the purpose of love is for others to guide us, without expectation or interference, as far as they can go, so that we might begin...*

*“[This is] one of our deepest callings of love – that special hospitality for the injured, the strong action of compassion that makes it possible for those in pain to heal themselves. It calls mysteriously and arduously for the clearing of confusion and the comfort of what is real. It is the way that we who have suffered can take our turn, lifting the head of whoever has fallen, bracing their exhausted neck to drink, knowing we can never drink for them.”*

In my opinion, the most important thing we can do as Christians is show the world wholehearted acceptance for every individual and open-arms inclusion for all humans. Christ’s gift of grace did not leave anyone out. There are no customer service hours. God’s phone is always on. **GOD IS LOVE.**

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Romans 15:1-9

<sup>1</sup> We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” <sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. <sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, <sup>6</sup> so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed <sup>9</sup> and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

Hebrews 13:1-2, 7-8

<sup>1</sup> Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. <sup>2</sup> Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it... <sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Listen to *There is Only One* 🎵 [4:13] by Twila Paris, a lullaby for us all: <https://youtu.be/Wu12fQtsfgg>.

**Today’s Action:** Take a hard look at who you’d rather exclude; there’s someone. Pray they will know God.

## Kindness and Compassion

Week 11 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** *Why I Wake Early*, by Mary Oliver

*Hello, sun in my face.  
Hello, you who make the morning  
and spread it over the fields  
and into the faces of the tulips  
and the nodding morning glories,  
and into the windows of, even, the  
miserable and crotchety—*

*best preacher that ever was,  
dear star, that just happens  
to be where you are in the universe  
to keep us from ever-darkness,  
to ease us with warm touching,  
to hold us in the great hands of light—  
good morning, good morning, good morning.*

*Watch, now, how I start the day  
in happiness, in kindness.*



Image borrowed from internet

Kindness embodies friendliness, generosity, and a gentle nature – qualities Jesus had. Kindness allows us to show affection and genuine concern for others, especially when they are hurting. Compassion is a deeper sense that we should help those who are needy or hurting. It encompasses mercy – a merciful attitude toward those in need. Compassion holds sympathy (feeling bad for someone's suffering) and empathy (being able to imagine and feel what the other person experiences). [[differencebetween.com](http://differencebetween.com)]

With both kindness and compassion, Christians can make a practical, positive difference in people's lives, from family to friends to the community. Love, in this instance, can be both a feeling and an action verb.

Job 2:11-13 – Let's witness a beautiful moment of compassion. Note what Job's friends DO: they CAME, they WEPT and FELT for him, and they STAYED (they sat without speaking) to BE WITH HIM while he hurt.

<sup>11</sup> Now when Job's three friends heard about all this adversity that had come upon him, they came, each one from his own place...and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him. <sup>12</sup> When they looked from a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe, and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky. <sup>13</sup> Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights, with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.

Psalm 23:5-6

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence  
of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup runs over.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
Forever.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Action:** Do a random act of kindness for someone today. "Kindness generates kindness."

## When Your Plans Get Blown

Week 11 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** And then there are those days when you have a great plan all mapped out...and then life happens. Everything slowly (or quickly) unravels, and you arrive at the end of the day wondering what on earth happened and how your plans got blown. It can be very frustrating. This reminds me of those days in fall when the red maple leaves are shining beautifully and during the night there is a rain or windstorm; in the morning, all the leaves are on the ground. Fall is over. What?

Sometimes your plans are rearranged by what I call, “Mr. Needypants.” Last night there was a storm with the tiniest bit of thunder and therefore the dog lost his mind with anxiety and needed FOUR HOURS of comforting – including him laying on top of me shaking. My “Mr. Needypants” sucked the air out of the room. Yours may be a surprise job from your boss, top priority. Or your brother needs to suddenly be picked up because his truck broke down. Your daughter is crying for no discernable reason. Or your son needs shoes...like, immediately. Trip to Target; plans out the window. Worst case: All those at same time.

If COVID taught us anything, it is to suspend plans, restart, or pivot – change directions on a dime so we can cope with whatever life has thrown. Does two years of experience make the pivoting any easier? Not for me. But we have slowly built resilience during this time, by default. This is when we say: I AM ONE HUMAN PERSON. I can show up, but I may not be able to meet *everyone’s* needs. I may not respond perfectly, kindly, or with grace. But gosh darn it, I showed up.

You may want to use this mantra we say in my house, to calm the anxiety of sudden changes:

I am safe.

I am loved.

I can make good decisions, because I am wise.

God is in control in these moments, even if you feel out of control or at wit’s end. Do not give up, lie in the fetal position, and wait for night to end. Just show up. Do your best. Even though the tree has lost all its leaves in an untimely fashion, it will keep growing. Nothing blooms all year. You’ve got this.

Proverbs 3:5-6

<sup>5</sup> *Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;*

<sup>6</sup> *in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

Lamentations 3:22-23

<sup>22</sup> *Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. <sup>23</sup>They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to *Willing Heart* 🎵 [3:05] by Lennon & Maisy: <https://youtu.be/cDVK78swqLU>.

**Today’s Action:** Show up. Do your best. You are enough. And God has hemmed you in with love.

## Taking Stock

Week 11 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 30:1-5, 11-12

<sup>1</sup> *I will exalt you, LORD,  
for you lifted me out of the depths  
and did not let my enemies gloat over me.*  
<sup>2</sup> *LORD my God, I called to you for help,  
and you healed me.*  
<sup>3</sup> *You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of  
the dead;  
you spared me from going down to the pit.*  
<sup>4</sup> *Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful  
people;  
praise his holy name.*

<sup>5</sup> *For his anger lasts only a moment,  
but his favor lasts a lifetime;  
weeping may stay for the night,  
but rejoicing comes in the morning...*

<sup>11</sup> *You turned my wailing into dancing;  
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me  
with joy,*  
<sup>12</sup> *that my heart may sing your praises and not  
be silent.*  
*LORD my God, I will praise you forever.*

**Meditation:** What good and mighty things has God done for this church, for the members of the congregation, and for the community through this church? Make a list! And if you are new to the church, ask someone next Sunday. Or write down the things in your own life that ring true.

What has God done?		
For this church [or for me]	For specific members [or for someone I know]	For the community [or for my family]

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 150:1-6

<sup>1</sup> *Praise the LORD.*  
*Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty heavens.*  
<sup>2</sup> *Praise him for his acts of power;  
praise him for his surpassing greatness.*  
<sup>3</sup> *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,  
praise him with the harp and lyre,*

<sup>4</sup> *praise him with timbrel and dancing,  
praise him with the strings and pipe,*  
<sup>5</sup> *praise him with the clash of cymbals,  
praise him with resounding cymbals.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.*  
*Praise the LORD.*

**Today's Action:** Take a minute this week to call up someone from church (or someone in your family who has faith) and ask them to tell you what God has done for them.

*Week 12*  
*What Are We Supposed*  
*To Be Doing Here?*



## The Be-Attitudes

Week 12 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** This week, we are going to start taking all this strength and knowledge that we have gained and leave the proverbial mirror. Let's look outward, toward the church. I encourage you to ruminate on what gifts you have uncovered and how those might be put to good use for others.

OK, breathe. If that caused a cold trickle of sweat down your forehead...dial it back and just consider how you can take a more active role in serving your family (or leading at your workplace). Push a *little* out of your comfort zone and whatever is that next layer, focus there.

Before Jesus left his time on earth in human form, he gave his followers some guidance on how to proceed. He typically told stories that often confused the disciples. But this time, he spoke clearly about attitudes.

Matthew 5:1-13

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them.

### The Beatitudes

He said:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Prayer/Reflection: Take one verse above, a "Blessed are..." statement and pray it for yourself today.

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Listen to *The Giving* 🎵 [3:18] by Michael W. Smith: <https://youtu.be/AXAqVIT65fE>.

**Today's Action:** How could you demonstrate this attitude today? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Spiritual Gifts

Week 12 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** What is one thing that you do really well? Think about something that you excel in, as it comes easily to you, but it is hard for everyone else. Are you an amazing plumber? Does mechanical work make sense to your brain? Is it easy to teach, to cut hair, or design robotics, or write novels? Do you love to drive? Do you really enjoy public speaking [while reading *public speaking* made several pass out]? Can you talk on the phone all day long and not be drained? Is it easy for you to play on the floor with your children? Each of these things is very hard for a lot of us.

When you find your “thing,” it’s safe to assume that is your special talent. You may want to structure your life a little more to nurture that talent with time and energy. Write down things that come easily to you:

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What is a job you always wanted to try? \_\_\_\_\_

What do people say you are really good at doing? \_\_\_\_\_

You could interpret the following passages to mean literal spiritual gifts bestowed or interpret them to mean that God gives us each what is right for us. I think the through-message is that we are all one church body, and all parts are important to make the whole function. At <http://www.christianity.com>; search: WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS (article by Danielle Bernock) for more.

1 Corinthians 12:4-12

<sup>4</sup> *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. <sup>5</sup> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.*

<sup>7</sup> *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

<sup>12</sup> *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.*

Romans 12:3-13

<sup>3</sup> *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup> For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup> Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. <sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; <sup>11</sup> not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup> contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*

**Prayer/Reflection/Action:** Next time someone compliments something you did, write it down. Pray that your best talent becomes clear to you and those around you.

## The Fruit of the Spirit

Week 12 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** This year I am growing plum trees, a blueberry bush, and strawberries. Like all plants, fruit plants need the basics: sun, water, and decent soil (good growing conditions). Generally, the more water, the sweeter the fruit. Fruit plants develop their leaves, then blossoms (to attract the bees), then the blossoms fall off and the fruit grows.

Some fruit plants need to be cross-pollinated between two or more plants, like my two plum trees. The tree on the left was covered with gorgeous white blossoms last week; it was lush. The one on the right had barely any leaves and only a few blossoms; it was sparse. Did the right tree attract enough pollinators to land and bring pollen to the other tree? I am doubtful. If both trees were lush and covered in flitting bees, we would have had 400 plums!

The fruit game is a long game in gardening (it requires patience, attention, and hope). Fruit trees and bushes often need special pruning – each plant is different, and they can be fussy. The experience of growing fruit begs to be turned into analogies, especially since the Bible talks about “the fruit of the spirit.”

Galatians 5:13-16, 19-26

<sup>13</sup> You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup> For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup> If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... <sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup> BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, FORBEARANCE [PATIENCE], KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, <sup>23</sup> GENTLENESS AND SELF-CONTROL. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Matthew 12:33 [words of Jesus]

<sup>33</sup> “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.”

What are the fruits of YOUR spirit? If a stranger met you, or came into your church, how would they describe you? What kind of character shows on the outside?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Good article: [www.christianity.com](http://www.christianity.com), search: WHAT ARE THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT. Disturbing visual (haha) but fun song 🎵 [1:59]: <https://youtu.be/xWoWDdeD-ns>, FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT | PRESCHOOL WORSHIP SONG.

**Today's Action:** If the fruits of your spirit need work, make a change to your growing conditions.

## My Role in the Church

Week 12 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Revisit Week 12, Day 2. What is your best talent? \_\_\_\_\_

What else are you good at doing? \_\_\_\_\_

*“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” --Howard Thurman [The Book of Awakening, Mark Nepo]*

How might you consider using your skills or talents to support and make a difference in your church?

I Corinthians 12:12-27

<sup>12</sup>Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup>Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

<sup>15</sup>Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup>If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

<sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, <sup>24</sup>while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, <sup>25</sup>so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

<sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

**Prayer/Reflection:** Lord, how should I use my skills and energy to support this body of believers? Help me have the courage to find my people and my place. Help me to show up and also not to over-commit. Amen.

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**Today’s Action:** Take a look at the chart on the next page. It shows opportunities you may not have thought of to offer your talents and skills to the members of this church. Review it with an open heart.

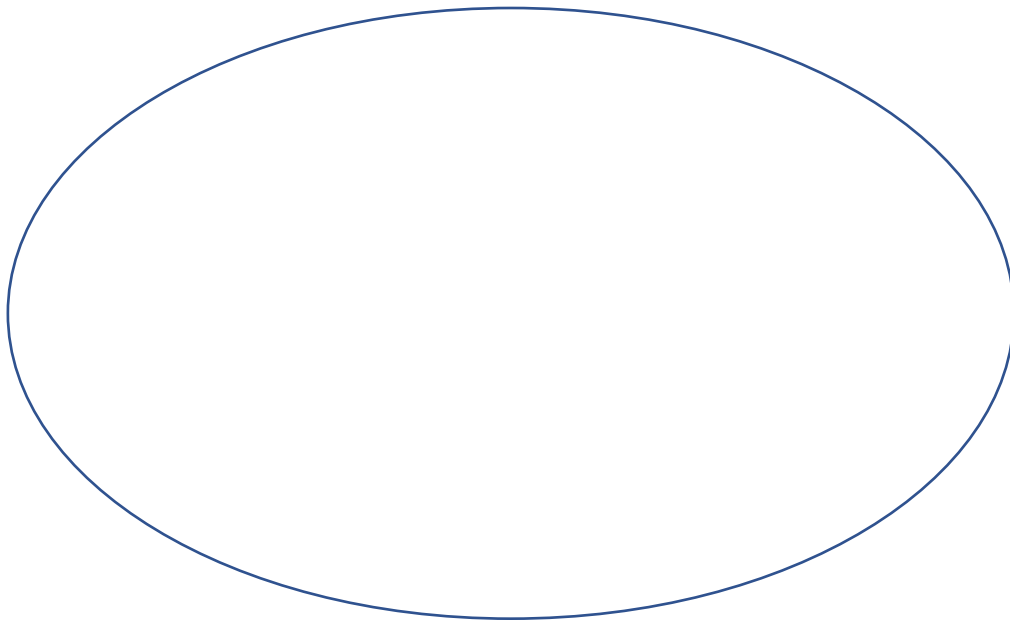
**DIRECTIONS:** Put a check mark ✓ next to anything that interests you. Put an X once you start to help.

Your Talent / Skill	Possible Ways to Volunteer Time and Energy	✓ or X
Good talker	Help connect people in church; get the word out about events, meetings, or issues; mentor new members; offer to contact all visitors and invite them back to church.	
Good writer	Help with monthly newsletter; prepare posters or flyers for events; help with bulletin board.	
Likes to read	Offer pastor your support with research; stay on top of UCC issues.	
Loves politics	Help with social justice groups; boil down legislative news into bite-size chunks for members; mobilize people for actions the church supports.	
Has little children at home or busy family	Post notifications about events on social media; provide supplies for Sunday school or picnics (parents are always grocery shopping); volunteer for one-time tasks, not a long role; support other parents.	
Empty nester; free time	Attend committee meetings and report back to membership through newsletter; help with outreach or events.	
Musical talents	Support the church choir; play music for services; offer to tune or repair instruments; offer to help with music selection.	
Feels lonely	Volunteer for assignments that allow you to meet other members; outreach to visitors or the sick; join a committee; invite or welcome visitors personally; ask them to sit at your table.	
Good math skills	Help with budgeting or grants; keep a spreadsheet for the church of members and their contact info; bring helpful questions to leaders.	
Strong computer skills	Prepare flyers for bulletin boards; make spreadsheets; create email group lists; make a phone tree for reaching members in a hurry.	
Enjoys art or crafts	Get fancy on bulletin boards; make positive message signs; help decorate events; provide Sunday school art ideas; make crafty thank you gifts for leadership team.	
Experience breaking addictions	Offer to start or aid the existing addiction support group; reach out to those who need a mentor or a sponsor.	
Super social; likes to plan parties	Plan social activities; take new members or visitors to coffee; start a book club! Plan holiday meals; share your million ideas to improve morale; you know how to gather a crowd and spread a "useful rumor."	
Remembers the details	Help plan events; offer to audit or double-check member info or review the budget for mistakes; help research an issue; keep meeting minutes; offer to contact new members and check on struggling members.	
Good at coming up with big ideas	Join the leadership team; help explain complicated issues to members during meetings or services (how does this fit in, what does this mean to you). Lead brainstorming activities.	
New member; needs to get connected	Offer to be a door greeter on Sundays; help plan the next social; ask for a mentor; maintain a church birthday spreadsheet and write cards.	
Long-time member; remembers the history	Consider joining the leadership team or a committee; offer to be a greeter; contribute to writing the church history; mentor 1-2 new members or train other mentors.	
Someone who works part-time	Offer to do small tasks; visit someone in hospital; run an errand for pastor or church secretary; pick up coffee or snacks for meetings.	
Doesn't mind cleaning	Offer to clean/straighten up after services, meetings, or events. Take responsibility for making the church look its best.	
Maintenance / construction skills	Make sure the leadership team knows they can call you for minor repairs and fixes. If something needs attention, fix it or offer help.	
Gardener, Hairstylist, Massage therapist	Visit church members who are housebound; offer your services for reduced cost. Members will appreciate your gifts and your company!	

## Let Nothing Stand in My Way

Week 12 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Look back at Week 1, Day 3: How Full is My Plate? Are all those things still on your plate or have some responsibilities come off (your class ended or your child's baseball games are over)? What does your plate look like now? Remember: Write on the plate anything that demands your time or attention.



Next question: Is there space for you to make the contributions to the church that you want to make?

Now consider, WHAT ELSE might be standing in your way of getting more involved with the church? [If you have determined you are *too* involved, what stands in your way of letting the responsibility go?]

Prayer/Reflection: \_\_\_\_\_

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[Did you know there is a UCC Ministry Opportunities Database, with service projects listed by State? <https://oppsearch.ucc.org/web/default.aspx>]

### Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred let me sow love;*

*Where there is injury, pardon;*

*Where there is doubt, faith;*

*Where there is despair, hope;*

*Where there is darkness, light;*

*Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek*

*To be consoled as to console;*

*To be understood as to understand;*

*To be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;*

*It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;*

*And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

<https://www.fspa.org/content/prayer/franciscan-prayers>

**Today's Action:** Watch *Fix You* (Official Music Video) [5:18] by Naturally7; watch until the end. Good luck trying not to cry: <https://youtu.be/c0SiswCgqAY>.

*It is much harder to deal with someone I love being in pain than me being in pain.  
When someone is hurting, I want to fix it.  
But there are problems I cannot fix today.  
Lord, sometimes I don't even know where to start looking for solutions.  
Do complicated situations require complicated coping strategies?  
Can I trust You? Are You handling this??*

**Meditation:** If you resonated with any of the statements above, you understand how I am feeling today. Frustrated, impatient, and powerless. The opposite of God-like. Anxiety and worry can create a noisy ruckus in your mind, making it hard to see solutions to life's puzzles...making it hard to think anything clearly at all! Especially when my child is hurting, I find it impossible to focus on anything other than how to solve his/her problems.

For some problems, there is no solution. Sometimes there's no solution YET. And sometimes, the problem is not mine to solve.

Those are extremely irritating sentences!

Faith requires me to "Let go and let God." Well, what does that even mean? Let things play out as they are naturally meant to; let your heavenly father/mother intervene, re-create, or solve as she sees fit. In other words, GET OUT OF THE WAY. That's hard. Kimberley Quinlan, author of the podcast, "Your Anxiety Toolkit" says, "Today is a beautiful day to do hard things." What hard things do you need to do today?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Check out the podcast *Your Anxiety Toolkit*, featuring Kimberley Quinlan, LMFT, focusing on strategies for dealing with anxiety, panic, OCD, and other mental health struggles. This podcast has over 230 episodes and is both calming and insightful: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/your-anxiety-toolkit-its-a-beautiful-day-to-do-hard-things/id1098792502>. Search: PODCAST YOUR ANXIETY TOOLKIT.

Proverbs 3:5-6

<sup>5</sup>*Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup>in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

**Today's Action:** Set it down, set it down, set it down. Sit with eyes closed, palms out, facing down. "Lord, I lay down my fears and worries, my...." List them for your heavenly father/mother. Then turn your palms up, open-handed. *Please fill me with patience and grace, more faith in your ability to fix and heal these troubles, peace that passes understanding.*

## Week Twelve Reflections

Week 12 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 58:6-12 [words of the Lord]

<sup>6</sup>*“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?*

<sup>7</sup>*Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and  
blood?*

<sup>8</sup>*Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*

<sup>9</sup>*Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

*“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,  
<sup>10</sup> and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the  
hungry*

*and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the darkness,  
and your night will become like the noonday.*

<sup>11</sup>*The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.*

*You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.*

<sup>12</sup>*Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and will raise up the age-old foundations;  
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*

**Meditation:** What have you learned about what God wants for you? \_\_\_\_\_

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What do you think the church should be doing? \_\_\_\_\_

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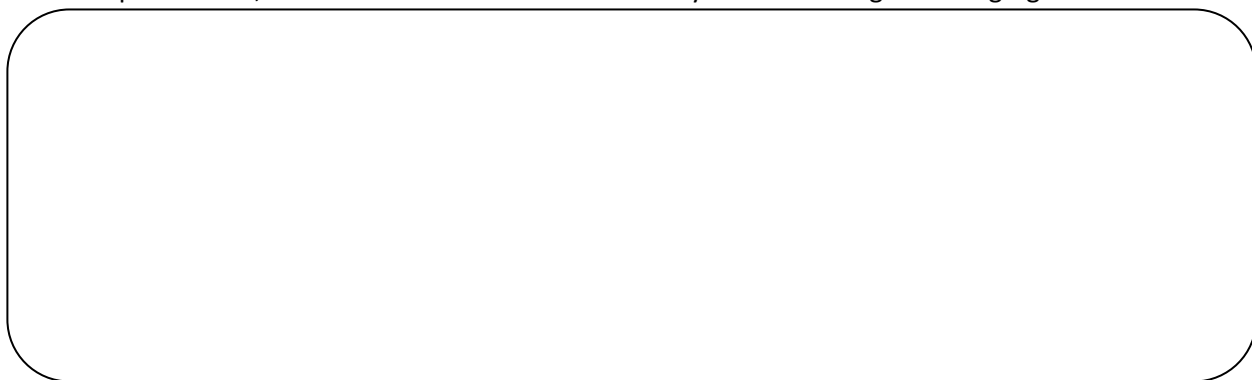
What questions would you like answered? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Today's Action:** Your answers above might be good things to bring up to your pastor or other mentors. Use the space below, to draw a sketch that reflects what you are thinking or feeling right now.





*Week 13*  
*Drawing Conclusions*

## Back to Priorities

**Week 13 / Day 1: Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

Turn back to Week 1, Day 1, “Make Room.” Review what your priorities were at the beginning of summer. Have they changed at all? ← There is no right answer to this question. What are your priorities now?


**Meditation:** Throughout this sabbatical, Pastor Marrone and his family have been seeking God, trying to refill their own buckets (self-care), and spending time nurturing relationships. Their journey will be different than yours. How has this journey been for YOU? Do you feel like you know yourself, what you need, and what you want any better? Have you made any decisions or changes in your life?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

Listen to *Fragile Forest* 🎵 [4:29], an instrumental by Phil Keaggy: <https://youtu.be/oQ-XAcTYZY>.

**Today's Action:** Take a walk in nature and let your mind quiet down for a few minutes. Give your heart a chance to speak up and see what surfaces. Take some deep, cleansing breaths. Ask God to keep speaking.

## Your Bucket and Your Relationships

Week 13 / Day 2: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Turn back to Week 2, Day 6, "Tools and Resources." Have you been able to fill your bucket at all with the things that bring you JOY, ENERGY, LOVE, and CONNECTION? Have you found any restoration?

My bucket level right now:



Where would I like it to be?



Tools I could use now to fill my bucket:

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Resources I have now that support me:

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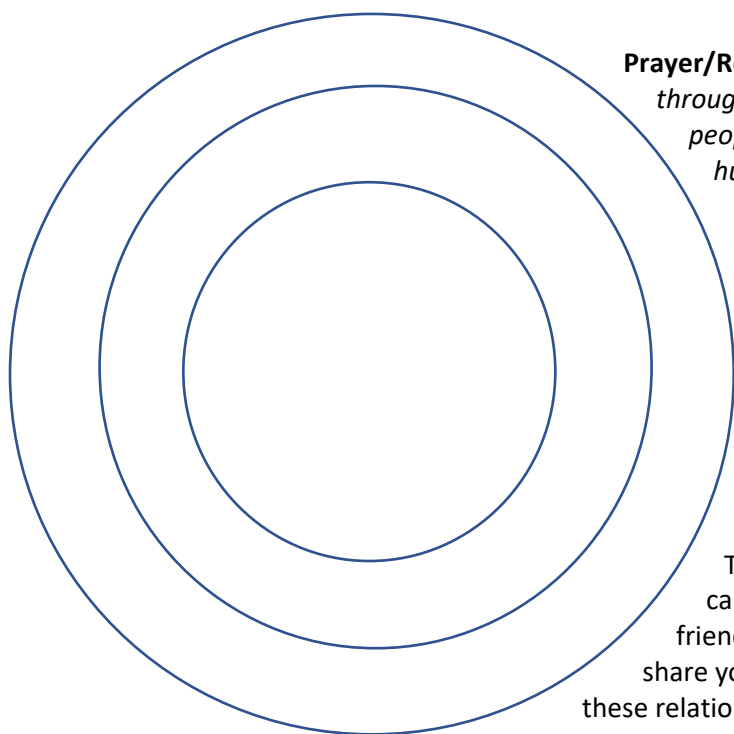
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Turn back to Week 2, Day 7, "Community and Week Two Reflections." Did you have a chance to spend any time with the people whose names you wrote down? If not, is it possible now?

Who would you like to spend some time with? \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** We talked a lot about ways we relate and connect with others. We discussed ideals and messy frustration pitfalls. Today gives you a chance to reflect on your own circle of people: family, friends, neighbors, community. Who is important to you? How can you better relate to each of them?



**Prayer/Reflection:** *Lord, let your grace and love flow through us like a vessel, bringing your spirit to the people we love. May we forgive when we are hurt. May we laugh at our failings. May we learn to let go, and to believe you are taking care of all things, even our relationships. May we be surrounded by those who support and love us, each and every day. Amen.*

**Today's Action:** Fill in the inner circle with names of your closest family and best friends. The second circle is for other family or friends who are very meaningful to you. The third circle is for people you pleasantly care about or who support you: co-workers, friends of children, people at church, buddies who share your hobby. These are your people. Nurture these relationships.

## Vulnerable Before God

Week 13 / Day 3: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Turn back to Week 6, Day 3, "So You're Mad at God." Were you able to reconcile? I know God loves you. Were you able to love God back? While you have breath in your lungs, there is still time.

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Review Week 6, Day 4, "Forgiveness: A Crazy Miracle." What has God's reckless, crazy love done for you?

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Turn back to Week 6, Day 6, "You Are a New Creation." Read those verses again. Have you been able to start on your goal yet? Is today a good day to start (or continue) working on it?

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**Meditation:** We have been through a lot, dug deep into God's Word, and found some surprising and amazing truths there. How has this time been for you?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*There's no shadow You won't light up,  
Mountain You won't climb up,  
Comin' after me  
There's no wall You won't kick down,  
Lie You won't tear down,  
Comin' after me*

*Oh the overwhelming, neverending,  
Reckless love of God  
Oh it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found  
Leaves the 99*

*I couldn't earn it  
I don't deserve it  
Still You give Yourself away  
Oh the overwhelming, neverending,  
Reckless love of God!*



Listen to *Reckless Love* 🎵 [5:32], by Cory Asbury: <https://youtu.be/Sc6SSHuZvQE>.

**Today's Action:** Praise! Give praise and more praise! We have received the gift of eternal life!

## Finding Love, Finding Joy

Week 13 / Day 4: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Turn back to Week 4, Day 4, “What Does It Mean that God is Love?” Rewrite your intentions (or change them if they have shifted).

Write down your intention for accepting God’s love: \_\_\_\_\_

Write down your intention for sharing this deep God-like love with someone else: \_\_\_\_\_

*You. Are. Good.  
In the morning I say,  
You. Are. Good.  
In the evening I say,  
You. Are. Good.  
You are good to me!*

(from *You Keep on Getting Better* 🎵 [10:34], Maverick City Music: <https://youtu.be/PMEGUx7MfCM>.)

Look at Week 4, Day 6, “Grab Moments of Joy.”

**Meditation:** What moments have given you joy, wonder, and amazement this summer?

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to *Muppet Songs: Kermit the Frog – Right Where I Belong* 🎵 [1:46]. <https://youtu.be/dLKzBOIkLsQ>.

YES, I SAID IT: MUPPETS. Joy!

**Today’s Action:** Keep seeking joy! It is there for the taking.

## What Was Left to Me, What I Will Leave

Week 13 / Day 5: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Reread your thoughts from Week 9, Day 2, “Ancestors.” What do you think your ancestors have left you?

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Take a look at Week 11, Day 3, “The Gift of a Mentor.” Were you able to identify any mentors that have left you with positive, life-affirming messages and guidance?

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**Meditation:** We’ve talked a lot about your role, your talents and gifts, and what you would like to do with them. Are you ready to be the mentor to someone else, to leave *your* chosen ancestral legacy? What would that look like?

Isaiah 6:8

*<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”*

*And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”*

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Today’s Action:** One of the mentors God placed in your life is Pastor Bob Marrone. If you haven’t had a chance to write a note to him, letting him know what he means to you (on Week 4, Day 7), do that now.

## Gratefulness, Part 3

Week 13 / Day 6: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** *Pray*, a poem by Pádraig Ó Tuama

*So let us pick up the stones  
over which we stumble, friends,  
and build altars.  
Let us listen to the sound of breath in our bodies.  
Let us listen to the sounds of our own voices,  
of our own names, of our own fears.  
Let's claw ourselves out from the graves we've dug.  
Let's lick the earth from our fingers.  
Let us look up and out and around.  
The world is big and wide and wild  
and wonderful and wicked,  
and our lives are murky, magnificent,  
malleable, and full of meaning.  
Oremus.  
Let us pray.*

**Prayer/Reflection:** *Lord Jesus, thank you for letting us enjoy your creation in nature, in the people, animals, and plants around us. Thank you for showing us your faithfulness and your eternal love in the sun rising every day, and in the moon taking responsibility for light and beauty each night. Thank you for showing up in this journey. We praise your Mighty Name!*

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What blessing are you grateful for today? \_\_\_\_\_

What person are you grateful for today? \_\_\_\_\_

What lesson are you grateful for today? \_\_\_\_\_

For more worship songs 🎵, search YouTube: HILLSONG WORSHIP BEST PRAISE SONGS COLLECTION 2020 [1:14:35] at <https://youtu.be/hZ-gUN1zk8c> and TOP BEST TRIBL MAVERICK CITY WORSHIP COMPILATION [44:34] at <https://youtu.be/CC0IPgwrsTk>.

**Today's Action:** We are so grateful that the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program allowed us to create and fund an adventure-filled, meaningful sabbatical for Pastor Bob and that the Sabbatical Committee worked so hard to put this experience together. As a final action, please use the next page to write to Pastor Bob's wife Jodi, thanking her for *her* support and grace throughout this rest and renewal.

To: Jodi Marrone

From: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*I am grateful for you!*





## Week Thirteen Reflections

Week 13 / Day 7: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Meditation:** Isaiah 43:1-2, 5-7, 10-13, 18-21, 25

<sup>1</sup> But now, this is what the LORD says—  
he who created you, Jacob,  
he who formed you, Israel:  
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

<sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze...

<sup>5</sup> Do not be afraid, for I am with you;  
I will bring your children from the east  
and gather you from the west.

<sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’  
and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’

Bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

<sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made.”...

<sup>10</sup> “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,  
“and my servant whom I have chosen,  
so that you may know and believe me  
and understand that I am he.

Before me no god was formed,  
nor will there be one after me.

<sup>11</sup> I, even I, am the LORD,  
and apart from me there is no savior.

<sup>12</sup> I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—  
I, and not some foreign god among you.  
You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I  
am God.

<sup>13</sup> Yes, and from ancient days I am he.  
No one can deliver out of my hand.  
When I act, who can reverse it?”...

<sup>18</sup> “Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.

<sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland.

<sup>20</sup> The wild animals honor me,  
the jackals and the owls,  
because I provide water in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland,  
to give drink to my people, my chosen,

<sup>21</sup> the people I formed for myself  
that they may proclaim my praise...

<sup>25</sup> “I, even I, am he who blots out  
your transgressions, for my own sake,  
and remembers your sins no more.

**Prayer/Reflection:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Philippians 4:1

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

**Today’s Action:** Congratulate yourself for doing the hard work of showing up for God. You have done an amazing thing. And your life will bear fruit.

## About the Author



Ally Snyder is a New Hampshire resident who writes poetry, essays, and humorous musings on motherhood, gardening, and faith. She grew up in an atheist household and found God on her own at the age of 13. She later shared the journey into Christian faith with her older sister, and she has been seeking God's wisdom and love for the last 35 years.

Ally went to Houghton College and studied humanities, educational ministries, and communications. She now works in education and event planning, raises two beautiful children, Lucinda and Jack, and looks after her mom with her partner in Hillsboro. Ally runs a grief support group on Facebook called *Life After a Death Support Group*; anyone interested is welcome to join. She is currently working on a book with a friend about building resilience in hard times. You can reach her by email at [allisoncs30@yahoo.com](mailto:allisoncs30@yahoo.com).

*This book is dedicated to my sister Lauren and my dear ancestor,  
Grandma Ruthie Cox, two incredible, inspiring women – both down-to-earth faith mentors.*

🎵 Note: I hope you have enjoyed the music! If you use Amazon Music and would like me to send you the playlist of these songs, email me.

Romans 15:13

*<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,  
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*



*Artwork by Pastor Bob Marrone*

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