

The Journey

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
And we, who with unveiled faces, all reflect the Lord's glory,
Are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory,
Which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

II Corinthians 3:17-18

The most significant growing up that any person does is to grow up as a Christian. –Eugene Peterson

Pathways of Growth

The Grace Saturated Embrace

*The Journey... Birth in the Spirit...
Community... Celebration... Consecration...*

Initiation and Instruction

Growth in the Secret Place

Authority and Power

*Confirmation of the Father's Love...
Empowerment*

Engagement

Message to Proclaim... Conflict

The Sacramental Life

*Communion... Compassion... Cross...
Practice Resurrection*

Become Like Jesus

Become like Jesus. Is that even possible? Paul tells us that it is not only possible, but that the heart of our call as Christians is to be “*transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory*” (II Corinthians 3:18). Of course, this is not an overnight event. Rather, if we are intentional, degree by degree, we come to reflect the Lord’s glory.

Not that this is something we can do by our own initiative. It can only be accomplished in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, our participation is required. As the writer of I Timothy reminds us, we must train in godliness (see I Timothy 4:8). So then, how do we begin? What does training in godliness look like? This study reflects on pathways of growth as modeled by Jesus. In and through his journey, may we come to understand our journey.

Commitment to the Journey

This study seeks to focus on those commitments that help us grow up in Christ, namely:

Core Identity in Christ—the Upward Journey... Character—the Inward Journey... Calling—the Outward Journey
as they serve as a foundation for heeding Christ’s Call to Serve—the Forward Journey.

Tell Me a Story!

Now with God's help, I shall become myself.
—Søren Kierkegaard

Tell me a story! The request often comes at bedtime, but also at the dinner table, and while on long drives. This is one of our favorite family activities. Donnie delights in Dick and me telling her the story of her life.

We tell of how we long awaited and anticipated her birth. We share in detail the day she was born (nine days late, on my birthday). We describe the snowstorm that blanketed New York and Connecticut on the weekend of her baptism. We report how people came from near and far, in spite of the snow, to celebrate her birth and participate in baptism, entrusting her to God's care. We talk about God's call to make the journey our home, a journey that has taken us from Connecticut and New York, to Pittsburgh, San Diego, and now Ohio.

Not only does Donnie love to hear the stories of her life, but those of her parents, her grandparents, her aunts and uncles and cousins. For in the telling she knows that she belongs and that she is loved, protected, and called.

But as precious as these stories are, they cannot be fully understood apart from knowing the story of God's love for her and for all creation. As John reminds us: *"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life"* (John 3:16, The Message).

This is the story that informs her—and our—story. It is the story that gives her life meaning and purpose and direction. The story helps her make sense of all life's complexity

and challenge. By this story, she knows that her core identity rests in Christ alone. She knows that as she walks in his path her character will reflect the fruit of the Spirit.

As psychiatrist Daniel Siegel notes, the "sharing of stories reflects the central importance of narratives in creating coherence in human life and connecting our minds to each other. Stories are passed from generation to generation and help keep the human soul alive" (*The Developing Mind*).

We are a storied people. An old Hebrew Midrash tells us that God created humanity because God loves stories. It has been said that narrative is the central function of the human mind as "our stories help us to navigate our world, to understand right and wrong, and to provide meaning" (*The Good and*

What is your story? What core narratives inform your understanding of self?
How has scripture informed those narratives? Do you know your story?

Beautiful God). It is through the biblical narrative that we come to understand life as it fits within the larger context of our relationship with God and the world in which we live. Because human experience is narrative in form, the medium of story allows us to identify with people of faith through time who have shared our struggles, our

doubts, our fears, our pain, and yet survived. While the doctrines of church inform and shape the understanding of our faith, it is the stories that speak to our hearts and imaginations.

There is an old saying: "You are what you eat." The same is true of memory: we are what we

remember. It is the stories of our life and faith that provide the bridge between who we are and who God calls us to be.

If we are to grow up into maturity in Christ, we need to know our story as interpreted through the lens of the story of our faith.

Tell me a story!

The Journey

Texts

Genesis 12:1-9, The Call of Abram and Sarai
 Psalm 139, I have searched you and known you
 Ephesians 4:1-16, Growing up into maturity in Christ
 Luke 2:52, Jesus grew up in wisdom and stature

*Sing my song backwards, from end to beginning, Friday to Monday, from dying to birth.
 Nothing is altered, but hope changes everything: Sing resurrection and peace upon earth!
 Stretch out a rainbow from cross to nativity. Deck out the stable with shepherds and kings,
 Angels and miracles, glory and poetry, sing my song backwards till all the world sings! –Brian Wren*

Our story is one of journey. From the beginning, God has called us to journey in faith. Just as Abraham and Sarah were called to leave their homeland and to trust their lives to God, so we too are called to be a pilgrim people following in the Way of Jesus.

We who are so often destination-bound would do well to remember that we are called to be pilgrims. As Suzanne Guthrie reminds us: “A pilgrim is not a tourist. A tourist comes to see a place; a pilgrim comes to a holy place expecting to be changed. A pilgrim recognizes a holy landscape as a place mirrored within the soul.” Such expectations open us to the transforming power of God.

Welsh hymn writer Brian Wren calls us to embark on the journey with the end in mind: “Sing my song backwards, from end to beginning, Friday to Monday, from dying to birth.” We live towards resurrection, yet to get there we must journey through death.

Beginning with our birth in the Spirit, we are gifted with community to celebrate, consecrate and protect us. As did Jesus, we too will receive confirmation of the Father’s love when our lives intersect in faith with the brokenness of others. We too will

be tested and given a message to proclaim. And, like Jesus, we too will encounter conflict, for not all will like the message we proclaim. But communion with the Father is promised for those who seek him. Out of such communion, compassion is born and courage given to take up the crosses we are given.

A central paradox of our faith is that death precedes resurrection. There is no other way. From birth to death, Jesus models how we are to grow up in him. To undertake the journey is to open us to the movement of the Spirit in our midst. It is to realize that, in this life at least, we never arrive. We only know that we must follow in the way of Jesus wherever he may lead us.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does the word “journey” connote for you?
2. What does it mean to follow in the way of Christ? How might Jesus’ earthly journey provide a model for us?
3. What would it mean for you to “become like Jesus”? What is needed for you to grow up in Christ?

Practice/Pilgrimage

Solitur ambulando... “It is solved by walking” (Augustine). For the early Christians, faith happened on the road; be it on the road to Emmaus or Damascus or throughout Asia Minor. On the road, Jesus revealed himself and invited us to follow him. One way to experience the power of pilgrimage is to walk the labyrinth. Labyrinths date back thousands of years. The earliest Christian labyrinth dates from 325 in a church in Algiers. In the Middle Ages, when pilgrimages became too dangerous due to the Crusades, the church ordained seven cathedrals in France as alternate pilgrimage sites; perhaps the best known is Chartres.

The labyrinth is a metaphor for life. The Christian life is often described as a pilgrimage. The labyrinth replicates our spiritual journey as we seek to follow Christ, not knowing where he will take us, but knowing we will eventually arrive at the center. At its heart the labyrinth is a walking prayer in which we commit the journey of our lives in faith to God. But you don’t need a labyrinth to walk the soul’s road map. Just take a walk using it as an opportunity to dedicate your life anew to God in Christ.

Birth in the Spirit

Texts

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Valley of Dry Bones

Acts 19:1-17, Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Romans 6:3-4, Baptized into Christ's death

Matthew 1:18-25, The Birth of Jesus

*I was there to hear your borning cry; I'll be there when you are old.
I was there the day you were baptized to see your life unfold.
I was there when you were but a child, with a faith to suit you well;
In a blaze of light you wandered off to see where demons dwell. –John Ylvisaker*

What an amazing reality! God was there, present at our birth to hear our borning cry. Indeed, as the Psalmist reminds us: “*All the days ordained for (us) were written in (God's) book before one of them came to be.*” (Psalm 139:16). We—each one of us—were created to be a masterpiece, God's poiëma (work of art). But, in order for us to truly realize this reality, we must be born in the Spirit.

Now I don't know about you, but neither my pastor nor my Sunday School teachers ever told me that I was to be born in the Spirit. Like the people in Ephesus, I knew what it was to be baptized into a baptism of repentance. Raised in a good Reformed congregation, I knew about sin. But it was only later that I learned about the gift of the Spirit and the call to transformation.

Like Israel in the Valley of Dry Bones, I too needed to receive the breath of the Spirit. For me, that breath came in my valley. It was a gift born of yearning for purpose, for meaning, but most of all for God.

The evangelist John tells us: “*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...*” “You know the rest: “*That all who should believe in him should have eternal life*” (John 3:16)). But there is more to the story. As early church father Tertullian reminds us: “God became who we are that we might become what God is.” I get ahead of myself. First, the delight. First, the joy. First, the grace saturated embrace.

Just as any child loves to hear the story of his or her birth, so God loves for us to share in the story of his Son's birth. For in Jesus' birth, we will come to more fully understand our own birth in the Spirit and God's delight in us.

The Psalmist calls us to “*delight (ourselves) in the Lord, and (God) will give (us) the desires of our heart*” (Psalm 37:4). In what do you delight? Are you ready to claim the power of the Holy Spirit that resides within you? To claim the Spirit's power can be unnerving, but it is a gift of God and the means by which we will grow up in Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you know the story of your baptism? If so, share it with a friend. If not, seek out those who will remember (even if you haven't spoken to them in years).
2. What does “birth in the Spirit” mean to you? How does scripture confirm and/or challenge your understanding?
3. What are the implications of receiving the Holy Spirit? What will this mean for your daily living?
4. Is there more learning involved? What would that entail?

Come, Holy Spirit!

Come, Holy Spirit,
 Enter our silences.
 Come, Holy Spirit,
 Into the depths of our longing.
 Come, Holy Spirit,
 Our friend and our love.
 Come, Holy Spirit,
 Unmask our pretending.
 Come, Holy Spirit,
 Expose our lives.
 Come, Holy Spirit,
 Sustain our weakness.
 Come, Holy Spirit,
 Redeem our creation.
 Come, Holy Spirit,
 Embrace us and free us.
 --Neill Thew, England, 1990

Birth in the Spirit/Practice

Martin Luther, who suffered from deep depression, had but one consolation: “I remember my baptism.” Take some time to sit in silence that you might remember your baptism. Then reflect on the prayer below; an ancient baptismal prayer that has been said for hundreds of years over those who are about to be baptized or who are renewing their baptismal vows. Note how the first petition invites God to deliver us from our old life that has bound us to sin. The next three petitions (Open... Fill... Keep) establish a new life pattern for the nurture and growth of the disciple. And the fifth and sixth petitions direct and enable ministry (Teach... Send). The final petition (Bring) calls for the fullness of God’s peace and glory.

As a means of inviting these actions of God to become the rhythm in our lives, make a daily practice in the next week of saying this prayer upon waking, at meal times, and upon the close of day.

As you pray this prayer, allow God to direct your thoughts and to lead you into further contemplation.

Don’t move on to the next petition until you are ready—or until the Spirit is ready!

You may also want to write the seven petitions on a small card that you can carry with you. Pray these petitions throughout the day.

Be attentive and expectant to the leading of the Spirit.

**Deliver me, Lord,
 from the way of sin and death.**

**Open my heart
 to your grace and truth.**

**Fill with your holy and life-giving
 Spirit.**

**Keep me in the faith and
 communion of your holy Church.**

**Teach me to love others
 in the power of the Spirit.**

**Send me into the world
 to witness to your love.**

**Bring me to the fullness
 of your peace and glory.**

--Book of Common Prayer

Source: David de Silva, *The Sacramental Life*

Community

Texts

Ruth 1:16-22, Your people shall be my people

Acts 2:42-47, The Community of Believers

Luke 1:39-66, Mary and Elizabeth

*Community will grow if we let it be more natural and spontaneous, because the kingdom of heaven is like yeast. The yeast that comes to us most spontaneously is natural friendship. The grace of God is with us and we need to let it work. But we are slow to believe this. Of course, sometimes it's quite hard to believe that grace is with us, because there seems to be something in the system that wants to cage up the Holy Spirit. –Thomas Merton, **Seeds of Contemplation***

Community comes in many forms and not always in ways we can anticipate. I imagine that Mary expected to be in her home with her family surrounding her as she gave birth to her first child. But God had other plans. Instead of her mother and other kinsfolk, God provided an angelic host with shepherds and magi to celebrate Jesus' birth. There was the support of community, but not as anticipated. Bonhoeffer reminds us that true community is God's grace: a gift to be received and treasured in whatever form it is given.

Our model for community is born out of the *perichoresis*—loosely translated, “the dance”—of the Trinity. Just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, three persons, so we become most fully ourselves in the context of community. Mary was given much to ponder in her heart at the time of Jesus' birth. The community made known God's intent, although Jesus' calling as God's Son would not be fully understood until after his death and resurrection—sing my song backwards! But the angels, the shepherds, the magi, all pointed to who Jesus was and would become.

At its best, Christian community provides the context in which we can grow up in God. In Christian community, we come to understand that we have been created for a purpose; that each one of us is called by God.

As a community of faith, we gather for worship, fellowship, study, and service. Anyone who has spent any time in church—as with family—knows that community is messy. Whether we intend to or not, we bring the bad with the good as together we seek to be shaped and formed in the image of Christ. It takes a sustained effort to build community. But, more than that, it takes a willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to be at work in our midst. To allow the leaven of the Spirit to nurture and grow our relationships. For then we come to see the face of Christ in one another and overcome the challenges that daily get in the way of being the body of Christ together. We express God's nature best when we are part of a community committed to transforming degree by degree into the image of Christ.

Questions for Reflection:

1. America has been called a “nation of cut-offs”. We are “cut off” not only from one another but also from God. Do you agree or disagree?
2. How do you respond to the words: dependent, independent, and inter-dependent?
3. How does your response affect your understanding and experience of Christian community?
4. When has the body of Christ nurtured and sustained you?
5. What gifts do you bring to community?

Whenever true
Christian community
is formed,
compassion happens
in the world.
Henri Nouwen

Community/Practice

Read and pray through the “One Anothers” of scripture:

- Be at peace with one another—Mark 9:50
- Wash one another’s feet – John 13:14
- Love one another— John 13:34; 15:12, 17; I John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; II John 5
- Be devoted to one another – Romans 12:10
- Honor one another above yourselves— Romans 12:10
- Live in harmony with one another— Romans 12:16
- Stop passing judgment on one another— Romans 14:13
- Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you— Romans 15:7
- Instruct one another – Romans 15:4
- Greet one another with a holy kiss— Romans 16:16
- When you come together to eat, wait for one another— I Corinthians 11:33
- Have equal concern for each other— I Corinthians 12:25
- Serve one another in love – Galatians 5:13
- Be patient, bearing with one another in love – Ephesians 4:32
- Be kind and compassionate to one another— Ephesians 4:32
- Speak to one another with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs— Ephesians 5:19
- Forgiving one another – Ephesians 4:32
- Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ – Ephesians 5:21
- Teach (one another) – Colossians 3:13
- Do not lie to one another. – Colossians 3:9
- Admonish one another – Colossians 3:16
- Encourage one another... daily— I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13
- Spur one another on towards love and good deeds— Hebrews 10:24
- Do not slander one another – James 5:16
- Don’t grumble against one another— James 5:9
- Confess your sins to one another— James 5:16
- Pray for one another – James 5:16
- Love one another deeply, from the heart –I Peter 1:22; 3:8; 4:8
- Live in harmony with one another—I Peter 3:8
- Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another—I Peter 5:5

Questions for Reflection:

1. Which three “one others” are most needed in the church today to create healthier relationships that lead toward communal “deep change”?
2. What is the best way that you can apply the “one others” in your context? With your family, in the workplace, in your church?

Source: **The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook/Pastors of Excellence**

Celebration

Texts

Exodus 15, The Crossing of the Red Sea
I Thessalonians 5:12-28, Rejoice always
Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-12, Angels, Shepherds, and Magi

May the Son of God who is already formed in you, grow in you—so that for you, he will become immeasurable, and that in you, he will become laughter, exaltation, and the fullness of joy, which no one can take away. –Isaac of Stella, 16th century Reformer

What a wonderful image: that the Son of God will become within us laughter, exaltation, and the fullness of joy! As people of resurrection, we are called to celebrate not in the absence of struggle or strife, but in the very midst of it. As Jeremiah, most morose of prophets, reminds us, we are to celebrate even when our souls are downcast (see Lamentations 3:20-24). Desert Father Abba Poeman put it this way: “The greater the hollow carved out in sorrow and grief, the more room for joy to dwell therein.”

There is much to distract us from the joy that dwells therein. Yet Jesus came that his joy might be in us and that our joy might be full (see John 15:11). How then do we prepare for such joy? How are we to welcome God into our hearts and lives? How do we celebrate the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst?

John the Baptist calls us to repent. He does not want anything to get in the way of our meeting Christ when he comes again. Mary calls us to

ponder the mystery of the Incarnation in our hearts. She knows that there are some truths which cannot be explained in human terms, but must be trusted to God. Jesus himself calls us to wait for we know not when or where he will come. But that does not mean that we simply sit back and do nothing.

Like the shepherds and Magi, we too must seek out Jesus in daily living of our lives. Jesus, who enters our lives in the most unexpected of ways and places, calls us to be ready.

With the angels, let us sing. With the shepherds and magi, let us bring our gifts: the gold of our doxology; the frankincense of our meditation; the myrrh of our sacrifice. But, most of all, as lambs of his flock, let us bring the gift of our very selves.

Celebration is a holy habit that must be nurtured and practiced as we “rejoice always... and give thanks in all circumstances” (see II Thessalonians 5:16). Moses’ sister Miriam understood the importance of celebration when she called Israel to singing and dancing in the

face of God’s mighty act of salvation. Celebration of God is not something to be saved for Christmas and Easter, for birthdays and anniversaries, but a way of being to be woven into the fabric of our lives that the Son of God might indeed become “laughter, exaltation and the fullness of joy.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Where are you most prone to celebrate God? With others? In worship? In silence and solitude? In nature?
2. What does this tell you about how God made you?
3. Is there a part of you—an overly critical nature, a seriousness, a wound—that gets in the way of your ability to celebrate God? How is God seeking to transform you in this area of your life?
4. Who do you know who really celebrates life and God? What can you learn from him or her?

Rejoicing always
in the God who
rejoices over you.
—Zephaniah 3:17

The Magi's Prayer

My singing heart,
my day's doxology,
my gold,
I bring for celebration.
My stillness,
my glimpses of serenity,
my frankincense,
I bring for meditation.
My brokenness,
my tears of sorrow,
my myrrh,
I bring for sacrifice.
—Kate Compston, England,
Bread for Tomorrow

Celebration/Practice

Celebration is a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship, praise, and thanksgiving. Delighting in all the attention and never-changing presence of the Trinity fuels celebration.

—Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, **The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook**

First Practice

Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recall all of God's gifts, provisions, guidance and love around you.

To celebrate God's grace with you, write a psalm—a song—of praise and thanksgiving...

Or make a collage that represents your joy...

Or write a poem of praise...

Or play music and dance before the Lord...

Or memorize a verse of praise and repeat it throughout the coming days.

Second Practice

Familiarize yourself with the liturgical calendar as set forth in the Presbyterian Planning Calendar and our Book of Common Worship.

Consider ways as a church—and with your family at home—that you can more intentionally celebrate the church year from Advent to Christmas to Epiphany to Baptism of Our Lord, to Lent to Easter (and Eastertide) to Pentecost to Trinity Sunday to Ordinary time to All Saints Sunday to Christ the King

Sunday. Plan ways to celebrate: as a congregation, a family and with friends.

Third Practice

Name all the people in your life who have given you joy. Ask God how you might celebrate them in a way that honors and encourages them.

Fourth Practice

Consider how God loves you. Read Zephaniah 3:17. Then be still and listen. How is God celebrating you? Celebrate the God who celebrates you. Intentionally ask for the gift of appreciating yourself the way God does.

Resource for Celebration

Celebration of Discipline, chapter 13, by Richard Foster

Consecration

Texts

I Samuel 1:21-28, Consecration of Samuel

Acts 9:1-19, Paul's conversion

Luke 2:21-40, Jesus' consecration

Consecration means dedication to God. It occurs when we claim our deepest desire for God, beneath, above and beyond all other things. We may not understand the full meaning of consecration: the ups and downs, the joys and agonies of the journey that must follow. And certainly we will be unable to grasp the overarching cosmic meaning of our small assent, the joy it gives to God, the deepening love it will bring to humanity, the universal covenant it has enriched. But our yes comes from some bare recollection of all these things. In a tiny space our hearts can say yes.

—Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace*

As was the custom, on the eighth day, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple that he might be consecrated unto the Lord (see Luke 2:21-40). They were two parents presenting their first born to the Lord, dedicating him to serve God in some way. That was ordinary. This was done with all first-born, as a recognition that children came from the Lord and were entrusted to the parents by God's Sovereign will.

What wasn't ordinary was the child himself. The one being dedicated truly was God's holy Son – incarnate, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin. What wasn't ordinary was that this holy child had been born without sin to take on the sin of the whole world—your sin, my sin. He entered our human situation, identifying fully with us, Emmanuel, God with us, that we might be saved. Jesus – the perfect sacrifice.

Mary and Joseph didn't even make it up the Temple steps before Simeon gave witness to God's intent: "Now let your servant depart in peace for these eyes of mine have seen the Savior whom you have prepared for all the world to see; a light to enlighten the nations and the glory of your people Israel" (v. 29-32). Quite a

proclamation for an eight-day-old child! But, as we know, Jesus was indeed God's light and our glory.

But, what of us? We too are called to be "the light of the world" and "salt of the earth" (see Matthew 5:13-16). Are we ready to consecrate our lives to God's purpose? Are we ready to acknowledge that we are called "to be holy" (see Romans 1:7)?

As Gerald May reminds us, "Consecration means dedication." It means that we desire God's will above our own. It means that we are ready to give our lives to God's purpose.

Jesus' whole life was one of obedience. As 21st century Americans, we shy away from such demands. But, if we are to dedicate our lives to God, obedience to God's way and God's call is a necessary commitment.

At its root, obedience means "to hear" or "to listen towards." Simply put, obedience means to hear and obey God's Word. As Jesus is God's Incarnate Word, we are to hear and obey him. It begins with the Great Commandment to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, even as we love our neighbors as ourselves (see Mark 12:28-31). And our obedience is lived out as we grow

up into maturity in Christ, being and making disciples (see The Great Commission, Matthew 28:16-20). Is that tiny space in your heart ready to say yes? Ready to be consecrated unto the Lord?

Questions for Reflection:

1. Read the Gerald May quote above. What response does it draw from you? What does your response tell you about your willingness to consecrate your life to God?
2. In many worship services, there is a prayer of dedication following the offering as we dedicate our tithes and gifts to God's purpose. What would it mean for us to dedicate not only our tithes and offerings but also our very selves to God?
3. How might you dedicate yourself and your life to God's service?

“The world has yet to see what
God can do with a (person)
fully consecrated to Him.”

Words spoken by Edward Kimball to
D.L. Moody, igniting Moody's sense of
calling, from *A Passion for Souls*
by Lyle W. Dorsett

*Beloved in Christ,
the grace bestowed
upon you in baptism is
sufficient for your calling,
because it is God's grace.*

*As you live
into your ministry,
may the strength of God
pilot you,
the power of God
preserve you,
the wisdom of God
instruct you,
the head of God
protect you
and your family,
the way of God direct you,
the shield of God
defend you,
and the host of God
guard you,
against the snares
of the evil one.
Amen.*

Consecration/Practice

Anointing

In Exodus 30:22-38, Moses is commanded to prepare oil for anointing with the rarest and most precious of spices and perfumes. The oil is to be used only for the most sacred purposes in the sanctuary. What is marked with the oil is thus declared holy and consecrated to God. Moses is to anoint not only Aaron and his sons, but also practically everything in the sanctuary.

Make a precious oil for yourself and your family using olive oil and Rosemary, the herb of remembrance. Then anoint yourself, your family and your home. Use words such as: “You are consecrated to God, set aside for God's work.”

As with Moses, may this act of consecration proclaim your true worth (and that of your family) in the Lord's eyes.

Source: *The Spiritual Formation Bible*

A Prayer of Dedication

Take, Lord,
and receive all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding,
and my entire will.
All I have and call my own.
Whatever I have or hold,
you have given me.
I return it all to you
and surrender it wholly
to be governed by your will.
Give me only your love
and your grace
and I am rich enough
and ask for nothing more.
--Ignatius of Loyola

Protection

Texts

Exodus 2:1-10; 11-25, Moses' birth/Moses flees to Midian
Galatians 5:1-21, Fruit of the Spirit
Matthew 2:13-18, The Flight to Egypt

I arise today. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.
I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, Through belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness, of the Creator of Creation.

—St. Patrick's Breastplate, 8th c, Ireland

The angel came to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," the angel said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him" (Matthew 2:13). And Joseph did as he was told. While Jesus was from the beginning the Savior, his time had not yet come. Like Moses before him, Jesus needed protection that he might grow up "and become strong; filled with wisdom, and the grace of God" (Luke 2:40). Joseph and Mary, along with extended family, were given the task of ensuring his safety and providing for his care.

The protection afforded Jesus prompts a question: in what ways are we to provide "protection" for those new to the faith that they too might grow up in wisdom and grace? How do we provide for the nurture and care of not only our children, but also all who seek to grow up in Christ?

There is a petition in Compline, the final Office of the day that haunts me. It calls upon God to "shield the joyous." That is, to allow for a

season of delight, to not rush the journey or hasten the growing up that will surely come.

For everything there is a season. And for those new or returning to the faith, or even at one of life's crossroads, it is important for us to protect and shield them... and even ourselves!

From what, you ask? Serving on committees that God has never called us to serve on. Triangles born of petty conflicts that have nothing to do with a newfound love of God. Cynicism that gets in the way of delight. Anything and everything that might prevent one from experiencing the joy born of knowing and loving God. As Abba Elias said: "If the spirit does not sing with the body, labor is in vain."

Joy is a precious gift, easily overturned by responsibilities and expectations that others and we place upon us. So, next time a new face appears in the pews, don't immediately think of what they can do for the church. Rather, ask how God might be calling you to "shield the joyous." How might you help

them—and yourself—to become more fully aware of the Christ who dwells with us, before us, beneath us, ahead of us? How might you protect them from that which will get in the way of their love affair with God?

Questions for Reflection:

1. Can you think of a time when the "work of the church" got in the way of your relationship with God? How did you protect your relationship with God?
2. What in you, in this season, needs to be protected and nurtured? Who will help to protect your relationship with God?
3. What is God calling you to protect in another? How might you "shield the joyous"?

Protection/Practice

Ignatius of Loyola notes that sin is unwillingness to trust that what God wants for us is our deepest happiness. Until I am absolutely convinced of this I will do everything I can to keep my hands on the controls of my life, because I think I know better than God what I need for my fulfillment. –David Brenner

Confessing Our Agendas to God

Lord, I am willing to receive what you give, release what you take, lack what you withhold, do what you require, and be who you desire. Amen.

Margins

It is not likely that we will protect others, if we do not first learn to protect ourselves. Augustine once noted, “Our hands are too full to receive the good that God desires to give us.” The challenge it appears is not to discern between good and bad, but rather to discern between good and faithful. Jesus’ strong injunction was to let our yes be yes and our no be no (see Matthew 5:37). So simple, yet so difficult.

Dr. Richard Swenson in his book **Margin** believes that we live margin-less lives. When we restore margins to our lives, we restore balance and health, thus increasing our capacity for joy.

Below are some ideas for creating better margins in your life:

- Cut out all unnecessary activities.
- Explore scaling back on some of your commitments, by asking: Is this essential? Is this of God?
- Get up 10 minutes earlier and create a space for silence to be with God at the start of the day.

Unplugging

Do a Technology Assessment. Keep track of the amount of time you spend on the computer or talking on the phone each day. How much time does this amount to each week? Keep track of the uninterrupted time you spend in the presence of God, family and friends each week. Compare the times. Is God inviting you to reprioritize your use of time? If you cut back on the computer one hour a week, how could you use that time to be in the presence of God or others?

Source: *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

Growth in the Secret Place

Texts

Exodus 2:11-22, Moses, an alien in a foreign land
Galatians 1:11-24, Paul in Arabia following his conversion
Matthew 2:13-18, Jesus in Egypt

*If then you are wise, you will show yourself rather as a reservoir than as a canal.
A canal spreads abroad the water as it receives it, but a reservoir waits until it is filled before overflowing,
and thus without loss to itself communicates its superabundant water.
—Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Songs, 18:2*

Our formation in Christ is not to be rushed. Moses spent 40 years as a nomadic shepherd. While a Pharisee among Pharisees, Paul also needed time apart in Arabia to nurture his newfound faith in Christ. Even Jesus himself did not begin his public ministry until he was thirty. He spent both the years in Egypt and in Nazareth in relative obscurity coming to know God and God's people.

Many of us, however, do not know how to be alone. We confuse solitude—growth in the secret place—with loneliness. Often it takes challenge and chaos to bring us to the secret place where we may come to know ourselves for who we are in Christ.

Moses, having killed an Egyptian, was literally running for his life. Paul, as a result of his conversion, was trusted neither by Jew nor Christian. Had Mary and Joseph remained in Bethlehem, Jesus would have been among those slaughtered.

But solitude and loneliness are not the same. One of the primary functions of solitude is to settle us

into God. Where loneliness is inner emptiness, solitude is inner fulfillment. Each of us needs time alone—time apart from our busy lives—in order that we might come to know our God and find ourselves. Only when our lives are rooted in Christ will we have something to give others. As a monk from the Abbey of Genesee put it: “The measure of our solitude is the measure of our capacity for communion.”

When we dare to allow ourselves time for growth in the secret place, we find ourselves freed to become the very people God created us to be. We are able to surrender our limitations and our fear, even as we take hold of the reality that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Only through time apart in “the secret place” will our lives come to be like reservoirs feeding from their overflow. Yet far too many of us live lives like canals that run until they grow dry. We never come to know our true selves. We never come to know the power of God within us.

There is a desperate need in our

times for spiritual depth born of growth in the secret place.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why do you think “growth in the secret place” was necessary for Moses, Paul and Jesus to live into God's call?
2. What would “growth in the secret place” look like for you? What shape might solitude—time apart with God—take in your life?
3. How might the expectation of growth in the secret place be woven into the expectations of your church family as you challenge one another to become like “reservoirs”?

Growth in the Secret Place/Practice

When we go
into silence and solitude,
we stop making
demands on God.
It is enough that God is
God and we are his...
this knowledge
progressively replaces
the rabid busyness
and self-importance that
drive (us).
--Dallas Willard

Solitude and Reflection

Your journey into the secret place need not be as dramatic as that of Moses, Paul, or Jesus. The impetus might simply be a longing that just won't go away—a sense of missing God—which all the accolades of ministry cannot fill. It might be a level of exhaustion that no one else knows about—yet! It might be an awareness of a sin pattern that you used to be able to control but now is pressing in on you with greater urgency. It might be feelings of hopelessness or depression that no one else sees and yet are a dark current crossing under the surface of your busy life, threatening to pull you under. It doesn't really matter how the invitation comes; what matters is that you say yes.

Take a few moments now to sit quietly in God's presence and notice what it is that is drawing you into growth in the secret place.

Try not to fight the awareness of need that comes or talks you out of solitude. If, like Moses, what you see causes you to be afraid, let yourself experience that fear. If, like Paul, yourself feel the need to deepen your relationship with God in preparation for heeding God's call, allow you the time apart with God. If, like Jesus, God seeks to protect and nurture you in this season, receive the gift.

--Adapted from Ruth Haley Barton,
**Strengthening the Soul of Your
Leadership**

Confirmation of the Father's Love

Texts

I Samuel 13:1-21, David, a man after God's own heart
 Romans 8:31-39, Nothing shall separate us from the love of God
 Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus' baptism

John preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." His baptism was for the masses of people whose failures, lukewarmness and mundane unfaithfulness made the prospect of coming judgment terrible. New converts to Judaism passed through a baptismal rite as part of their initiation. Now everyone who needed a fresh start as radical as the one made by a pagan who was converting to Judaism could be baptized. John was offering to the masses a new beginning. Jesus' response was a crucial turning point. He could have kept his distance, an innocent man conscious of unbroken faithfulness to God, looking with pity upon the thousands of ordinary people who were overwhelmed by the realization of their own moral inadequacy. But instead of looking down on them from afar, secure in his own guiltlessness, Jesus plunged into the waters with them and lost himself in the crowd. He threw away his separateness to take on the identity of struggling humanity who were reaching out en masse for the lifeline of forgiveness. Note that it was at that moment, precisely when Jesus had thrown away his innocent separateness in exchange for connection with the needy, failed, and struggling that "heaven opened up, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:21, 22). God's pleasure in Jesus can no longer be contained and it bursts out. God is well pleased precisely in Jesus' self-emptying assumption

by our identity. The Spirit reveals to Jesus that he is the beloved Son of God when Jesus had taken on the role of the Son of Man. In the muddy river Jesus takes on the role of representing humanity, of being our suffering heart and self before God. And as soon as Jesus had done that decisively, God flooded him with awareness of his unique relationship (Son) and anointed him with the life-giving Breath for his mission. Now I want to ask you to ponder the scene again. Can you feel and see yourself as part of the crowd on that muddy bank? Can you experience Jesus' entry into our condition...brokenness... need? It is into our very humanity that Jesus chose to plunge himself that day and, as a result, nothing about me, nothing about you, is foreign to him. He has chosen to be the Self of our selves. What a profound moment of truth for us as we heed God's call to serve! Think about it: at the very moment of Jesus' solidarity with us, God reveals his intimate relationship with Jesus. The Spirit descended when Jesus embraced the truth of our inter-connectedness, our belonging together in God. As soon as he undertook to live that truth to the full, he was suffused with an awareness of his own unique origin from and union with God and was filled with God's breath (the breath of life). This coincidence reveals the axis on which the gospel turns. The barriers that hold us back from one another in fearful isolation are the same barriers, which block the

embrace of God and insulate us from the Spirit. It is one and the same movement of surrender to open us to intimacy and personal union with God in the Spirit, and to open ourselves to compassion and solidarity with our struggling, needy fellow human beings. To be open to the Spirit is to be open to humanity in all its fractured confusion and poverty and its ardent reaching for wholeness. To be open to the embrace of the Father is necessarily and inevitably to be open to the whole creation, which is held in his embrace.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are we ready to allow our lives to run on that same axis? Are we ready to allow ourselves to bear God's suffering heart into the world?
2. Just as God's pleasure could no longer be contained when Jesus entered into our broken humanity, so God's pleasure is made known in us when we bear his heart into a suffering world. In what ways have you born Christ's heart into the world? What commitment(s) are you ready to make with regard to the shaping of your character?

Of the Father's love begotten,
 Ere the worlds began to be,
 He is Alpha and Omega,
 He the source, the ending He.
 Of the things that are,
 That have been,
 And that future years shall see,
 Evermore and evermore!
 --Aurelius Clemens Prudentius
 (348-413)

Come, O Holy Spirit.
 Come as Holy Fire
 and burn in us.
 Come as Holy Wind
 and cleanse us within.
 Come as Holy Light
 and lead us
 in the darkness.
 Come as Holy Truth
 and dispel our ignorance.
 Come as Holy Power
 and enable our weakness.
 Come as Holy Life
 and dwell in us.
 Convict us, convert us,
 consecrate us,
 until we are set free from
 the service of ourselves,
 to be your servants
 in the world.
 --Book of Common Worship

Confirmation of the Father's Love/Practice

Read I Peter 1:14-16.

Spend time in prayer in God's presence. Ask God to show you one character behavior of his, or one characteristic of his, that God would want you to embody and reflect more fully in your life. Ask God to show you more about how he enacts this character trait and to show you how to embody it as well in your specific circumstances.

As you come to take on this trait, explore with your pastor the possibility of renewing your baptismal vows in the context of a worship service. Baptism of Our Lord, the Easter Vigil, Pentecost and All Saints' Sunday are especially appropriate Sundays on which to make a renewal of baptismal vows.

Source: *The Sacramental Life*

Empowerment

Texts

Isaiah 6:1-8, The Call of Isaiah
 Acts 2:1-13, Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit
 Mark 1:9-13, Jesus' testing in the wilderness

It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the person away from the light and out into the nothing... Indeed, the safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

—C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

If I close my eyes I find I can see Jesus with John in the river Jordan, See him being driven into the desert. See him beginning his ministry that would lead to death on the cross. This is the place where we are all invited that we might take in the meaning of this movement from the river to the desert and to be caught up in it ourselves.

The Spirit of truth drives Jesus into the wilderness to initiate him into the truth, which sets us free. Mark's harsh verb "drove" was softened by Matthew and Luke to be the milder expression "led." But this word "drove" is very precious to me. I know that inertia, illusion, and fear hold me back from answering God's invitation to enter into the truth and thereby gain the freedom I so long for: freedom from anxiety, freedom from fear, freedom from (you name it). Yet even Jesus, free as he was from sin, needed the full force of the Wind of God (Spirit, Breath, Wind are all equally valid translations of *pneuma*) to make him enter the testing-grounds of the wilderness.

If I am going forward into that truth for which God knows I am ready at this point in my life, I know I need the Spirit to guide me. The forty days for Jesus began with the handing of himself over to the Spirit. *"The wind blows where it wills,*

and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Perhaps this word "surrender" should be enough for my prayer. Not the surrender of submission to an enemy, but the opposite, the laying down of resistance to the One who lives in me infinitely more than I can guess, the One who is more on my side than I am myself.

Dwelling on this thought of letting go, and handing myself over to the Spirit will bring me much closer to the experience of Jesus than the word "discipline" which so many of us have been trained to invoke.

It should help us smile at our anxious attempts to bring our life under control, the belt-tightening resolutions about giving up this or taking on that. What we're called to give up in Lent is control itself! Deliberate efforts to impose discipline on our lives often serve only to lead us further away from the freedom which Jesus attained through surrender to the Spirit, and promised to give. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Cor. 3:17).

Empowerment is about the freedom only gained through exposure to the truth. And "what is truth?" Pilate's question is partially

answered by unpacking the Greek word *aletheia*, which we translate as truth. The word literally means "unhiddenness." Truth is not a thing; rather it is an event, a relationship with the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Truth happens to us when the coverings of illusion are stripped away and what is real emerges into the open. *"When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth"* (John 16:13).

The Spirit promises to bring us into truth by stripping away more of the insulation and barriers which have separated us from living contact with reality: the reality of God, of God's world and our true selves.

Questions for Reflection

1. What role has testing played in shaping you as a disciple?
2. How would you define "truth"?
3. What is your experience of the Holy Spirit?

God's Own for the World

Look at your hands,
See the touch and the
tenderness—
God's own for the world.

Look at your feet,
See the path and the direction—
God's own for the world.

Look at your heart,
See the fire and the love—
God's own for the world.

Look at the cross,
See God's Son and our
Savior—
God's own for the world.

This is God's world—
And we will serve God in it!

--Wild Goose Worship,
A Wee Worship Book

*The Bible is much more concerned
about who a leader is than what a
leader does. Why? New Testament
leadership is about reflecting the
character of the Leader and
Shepherd of the flock, Jesus Christ.*

~Greg Ogden and Daniel
Meyer, *Leadership Essentials*

Empowerment/Practice

Taming Temptation

The Adversary has used predictable means to get at leaders: money, power and sex.

Money: The lure of material comfort. The longing to live a comfortable life can cause leaders to lose their leadership edge. How might this be true of you?

Power: The lure of ego. The longing to be known and exalted can cause leaders to place themselves at the center. How might this be true of you?

Sex: The lure of self-gratification. The longing for instant gratification to relieve stress can cause leaders to use others (and things) to make them feel good. How might this be true of you?

Each of us has susceptibilities to the way the enemy can bring us down. What have you noticed about where you might be most vulnerable?

The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right name.

~Chinese Proverb

Supplemental Questions

- What family-of-origin issues influence how you deal with temptation?
- What are your memories of early temptations?
- How have you “tamed temptation” historically? In light of Jesus’ model, what would you do differently?

Source: *Leadership Essentials*

Making Confession

Read Colossians 3:1-17.

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to show you those things which you need to “die” to in order for Christ to come alive in you more fully. What aspects of your old person does God want to work on with you at this point in your journey? Write in your journal those things which you are shown. Ask God to help you discern what spiritual grace you have already put on as part of the regular clothing of your new person. With what virtue or behavior does God want to endow you or cultivate in you more fully in this step along the path? Pray for the grace and discernment to walk in the new person in this way more fully.

Source: *The Sacramental Life*

Conflict

Texts

Joshua 1, Be strong and courageous
 Romans 5:1-5, Suffering... endurance... hope
 Ephesians 6:10-20, The Armor of God
 Matthew 23:23-26, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees

A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or herself, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good. ~Parker Palmer

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! These are harsh words, words that we would prefer to have directed at someone other than ourselves. But it seems to me Jesus' words to the Pharisees bring home those things within each one of us that need addressing. Things like enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, and envy.

Seen in this context, conflict is an opportunity for getting our lives back on track with God and one another. Conflict calls us to let the power of the gospel take hold of us that the Spirit might break in and nurture the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control within us. Woe, indeed, to the scribe and Pharisee that dwells within each one of us.

The contrast between the defensive responses of the scribes and Pharisees and God's chosen leaders is dramatic. I am reminded of the prophet Isaiah when he first encountered the awesome majesty of God: "Woe is me! ...For I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). Similarly, Simon Peter, weary and

discouraged after a night on the boat with no catch, when he first met Jesus said: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). In their humility, neither man felt deserving of God's attention. They knew the condition of their souls and did not project their brokenness onto others. Both men took responsibility for what was going on inside himself, one of the first prerequisites for receiving God's call.

Of course, there are times our acts of faithfulness will result in conflict. In such times, we will encounter rejection and even persecution as Jesus did. As with Joshua God calls us "to be strong and courageous" in the face of opposition (Joshua 1:6). This can be easier said than done. But God's promise is to be always with us, especially in times of challenge.

Indeed, God uses conflict to shape and form us more deeply in his image. The Apostle Paul understood this when he called us to "rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance,

perseverance, character, and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us" (Romans 5:3-5).

Next time you find yourself in conflict, ask first what role you have played in creating it. If your role is born of God's call, then trust the outcome to God, allowing God to use it to develop more fully your character in Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. Can you think of a time when you have behaved as a scribe and Pharisee? Explain.
2. What family-of-origin issues influence how you deal with conflict? How does Jesus model a better way?
3. How does God use conflict to more fully develop our character in Christ? Can you think of particular times when this was so in your own life?

A Formation Prayer

O Lord, my God,
 Form me more fully
 into your likeness.
 Use the circumstances and
 interaction of this day
 to form your will in me.
 From the frustrations of this day
 form peace.
 From the joys of this day
 form strength.
 From the struggles of this day
 form courage.
 From the beauties of this day
 form love.
 In the name of Jesus Christ
 who is all peace and strength
 and courage and love. Amen.
 --Richard Foster

Conflict/Practice

Conquering Criticism

1. What “faces of resistance” have you seen—passive, active, aggressive?
2. Which of the dangerous effects can you relate to—active denial, overcompensation, burnout, involuntary shut down, lash back, other?
3. When it comes to adaptability to change where do you see yourself—innovator, early adaptor, early majority, late majority, laggard?
4. Which of the responses have you engaged in?
 - ___ Lean on God in prayer
 - ___ Let your furnace become a crucible
 - ___ Eliminate enemies by making them friends
 - ___ Refuse to be undone by untruth
 - ___ Extend muscular grace
 - ___ Build amid the bombing

Which of the responses will you intentionally engage in living forward? Source: **Leadership Essentials**

Making Confession

Imagine yourself in a safe place, surrounded by the life of God. Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you. Remember that he sees you absolutely and with love. Using the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1-21) as a guide, journal your sins. When you have finished, go through each commandment one at a time, asking God to forgive you and help you to change. Then burn your list as a symbolic act of what it means to have God remove your sins from you.

Source: *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

Putting on the Armor of God

When you find yourself facing a major challenge or in the midst of a difficult conflict, take time to pray through Ephesians 6:10-18. Paul calls us to remember that our ultimate struggle is not against flesh and blood, but rather the powers and principalities of this world and the spiritual forces of evil. It is important that we never demonize one with whom we disagree, but rather seek to bear God’s truth in love. With Paul, let us put on “the armor of God”.

Engagement

Texts

Exodus 18:13-27, Jethro advises Moses to delegate responsibility

Romans 12:1-8, The body of Christ

Mark 3:13-15, The calling of the twelve

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another... I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall love as Christ loved, I shall be his work. –John Henry Newman

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out ...” (see Mark 3:13-15).

From the beginning, Jesus has modeled that together we are the body of Christ and individually members of that body (see I Corinthians 12). Unlike the Rabbis of his day, he did not seat himself in the synagogue and wait for disciples to come and sit with him. Rather, he prayed to God and called those whom God appointed. “Come, follow me.” And follow they did.

Having called them, he then trained them. First, he showed them how to do the ministries to which they were called—preaching, teaching and healing. Then he sent them out two by two to engage in works of ministry.

He also modeled for them (and us) the balance needed between time together and time apart. He knew that they (and we) would struggle to learn that he is the source and that they (and we) must abide in him if they want to do the work to which he calls us (see John 15). The same remains true for us.

Like Moses, all too often, we take on burdens God never intended for us to carry alone. Like Moses, we find ourselves burned out and over-extended. And, it takes our Jethros to tell us that “this is not good,”

that the work is meant to be shared and delegated among many.

The Apostle Paul makes clear that we are to serve out of our gifts. God has created each one of us for a purpose. Part of the joy and challenge is to discern that purpose. It begins with coming to know ourselves in Christ as we claim the reality that each one of us is called through our baptism.

Business consultant Peter Drucker once said that most people think they know their gifts and most are wrong. Odd. Yet, I believe, this is because many of us carry the burden of expectations placed on our shoulders by others, often unintentionally. By contrast, Jesus calls us to place “his yoke” on our shoulders that we might learn “the unforced rhythms of grace” (see Matthew 11:28-30, The Message).

Gifts... Passions... Needs... all play a role in discerning and living out God’s call. As Paul reminds us: “God is our Maker and in our union with Christ, God has created us for a life of good works which has already been prepared for us to do” (see Ephesians 2:10). The challenge is to discern that for which we have been created. Therein lies our greatest joy as we become the people we were created to be by God. It is then we are set free to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love (see Ordination Vows for ministers, elders and deacons in the Book of Order).

It is then that we most fully engage with our world in the name of Jesus.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What do these three texts have to teach us about call?
2. Who is your “Jethro”? Are you currently engaged in a ministry that leaves you feeling over-extended and on the brink of burn-out? What is God seeking to tell you through your “Jethro”?
3. How has God called you to serve? Do you know your gifts? Would others agree with you?
4. Do you know “the good works” that God has prepared for you to do?
5. When have you felt most alive in your service? When have you found yourself set free to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination and love?

Surrender

Take, Lord, all my liberty,
my memory, my
understanding, and my
whole will.

You have given me

all that I have,

all that I am,

and I surrender all

to your Divine will.

Give me only Your love

and Your grace.

With this I am rich enough,

and I have no more to ask.

—Ignatius of Loyola

Engagement/Practice

Mission Immersion

Anyone who has ever been on a mission immersion will tell you that we—not those we go to serve—are the ones most deeply blessed.

Mission immersions help us return to our own communities with fresh eyes. They gift us with “Christ eyes” as we come to know ourselves in a new way.

Develop a yearly practice of involving yourself in one intentional service, mission or relief project. Consider which type of project speaks to some of the longings of your own heart.

Spiritual Exercise

Divide a paper into three columns. Above one column, put “For Me.” Above the second write, “For Others.” And above the third write: “For God.” Review the past week or month. Jot down in each column the things you have bought and done for yourself, for others, and for God. What does this inventory reveal about your life?

Take time to read Luke 23. Gaze at Jesus on the cross. What has God given because he loves you? How would you like to see the answers in your columns change over the next months? Listen to your longings and God’s promptings.

Spiritual Gifts

Do you know that you are called? Do you understand that God has created you for a purpose? Each one of us has a unique set of gifts and strengths. Each one of us has passions that God intends us to honor through service.

Ask those who know you what your spiritual gifts are. Explore the possibility of participating in a discernment, such as “Discover Your Place in Ministry” (available at www.MVPJourneyingwithJesus.org). Plan a way of using your spiritual gifts to benefit others over the next week and month.

Adapted from *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

A Message to Proclaim

Texts

Isaiah 61, The Year of the Lord's Favor
 Acts 2:14-41, Peter's first sermon
 Luke 4:14-30, Jesus is rejected at Nazareth

The Celtic Rune of Hospitality

I saw a stranger yesterday.

I put food in the eating place, drink in the drinking place, and music in the listening place.

And in the sacred name of the Triune God, he blessed myself and my house, my cattle and my dear ones.

As the lark says in her song, "Often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise."

Soon after his testing in the wilderness, Jesus preached in his home synagogue:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

At the heart of these words is the call to extend the radical hospitality of God. Jesus both taught and modeled with his life that it is in the space between the stranger and the self that the divine is encountered.

As he told his disciples:

When I was thirsty, you gave me water... as you did to the least of these... (Matthew 25:45).

Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus proclaims the radical hospitality of God which beckons all the excluded and disabled and powerless with the promise of healing and wholeness: shalom.

At first the words seem to welcome Jesus' neighbors and the synagogue warms with pleasure. But, with sickening rapidity, it grows cold, as Jesus makes clear that he knows that they do not really understand or truly welcome him. In no time at all, the congregation turns into a lynch mob

and Jesus narrowly escapes with his life.

Quaker Parker Palmer talks about the problems religious communities have with practicing radical hospitality born of the acceptable time of the Lord:

... if the church is to serve as a school of the spirit, and as a bridge between the private and public realms, it must find ways of extending hospitality to the stranger. I do not mean coffee hours designed to recruit new members for the church, for these are often aimed at making the stranger "one of us." The essence of hospitality is that we let our differences, our mutual strangeness, be as they are, while still acknowledging the unity that lies beneath.

Our unity then is found in Christ. But there is danger here: there will be change. Part of the spiritual practice of radical hospitality is to learn to recognize our internal reactions to people whom we consider "strangers." It is to name our fears of change and make a conscious decision to "let go."

To whom do we find it hardest to extend hospitality? What of our past will be the hardest to "let go" of that there might be space for "the new" born of God's call? The answers for each of us are probably different.

Radical hospitality is more than giving guests a warm welcome. It is certainly more than growth in membership. It is an ongoing spiritual practice... It is a looking beneath the surface differences

between us and engaging with the holiness that is the foundation of every person. Like every spiritual practice it is meant to change us... until we come to bear the image of Christ into the world.

Questions for Reflection

1. How are you and your congregation called to "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"?
2. To whom do you find it hardest to extend hospitality?
3. Our first act of hospitality is to **receive** those whom God sends to us. Think of a time when you have received Christ in the stranger's guise and of another time when you have "closed the door"?
4. How is hospitality understood in the church today? How does this differ from the biblical accounts?
5. Reflect on the significance of these differences.
6. Who are the strangers or enemies in our lives today? What would offering them hospitality look like? What would make it possible to do so?

Almighty God,
 Father
 of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 Grant, we pray,
 that we might be grounded
 and settled in your truth,
 by the coming
 of your Holy Spirit
 into our hearts.
 What we do not know,
 reveal in us.
 What is lacking within us,
 make complete.
 That which we do know,
 confirm in us.
 And keep us blameless
 in your service
 through Jesus Christ
 our Lord. Amen.
 —Clement of Rome

I know that at times
 I will be troubled.
 I know at times that
 I will be belabored.
 I know that at times
 I will be disquieted,
 but I believe that
 I will not be overcome.
 —Julian of Norwich

A Message to Proclaim/Practice

The Paradox

...of hospitality is that it wants to create an emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness, where strangers can enter and discover themselves created free, free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a change for the guest to find his or her own.

—Henri Nouwen

Word Study

Xenos—One NT word incorporates a profound truth: *xenos*, the word that means “stranger” in Greek, also means “guest” and “host.” This one word signals the essential mutuality that is at the heart of hospitality. —Practicing Our Faith, p. 33

Philoxenia—hospitality, a love of guest or stranger.

Xenophobia—fear of the stranger

Questions for Reflection

1. Everyday there are opportunities for us to bear and receive Christ in the stranger’s guise. Name three to five ways in which we can more intentionally practice hospitality.
2. Reflect on the Nouwen quotation above, as well as Philippians 2. How does the practice of emptying relate to the practice of hospitality? Why is this important?
3. Reflect on the study of the root word “*xenos*”. What might we learn about “the essential mutuality that is at the heart of hospitality”?

Write a Litany

...confessing the ways in which we, individually and collectively, have failed to practice hospitality and welcome Christ in the stranger’s guise.

Prayer

Fearful God, you require of our love appalling sacrifice; and your lasting promise is contained in contradiction. May we so lay on your altar our dearest desires that we may receive them back from you as unaccountable gift, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*

Communion

Texts

Psalm 42, As a Deer Longs

Romans 8:18-39, The Spirit Intercedes

Mark 1:35-39, Alone with the Father (or John 15, Abide with me)

The moment you have a self, there is the possibility of putting yourself first—wanting to be at the center—wanting to be God, in fact... (But) God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn on, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other... God cannot give us a happiness or peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

—C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Jesus understood the importance of time alone with the Father. Even if it meant getting up early before dawn, he sought out time with the Father. It didn't matter that the day before was long and hard. Indeed, the intensity of the day underscored his need for time apart. He knew that the Father was his life source and that without him he could do nothing.

The same is true of us. As he was to later tell the disciples, "Abide in me and I in you, for apart from me you can do nothing" (see John 15:4). Communion with God is a prerequisite to kingdom service.

It is the place—or rather state of being—that opens us up to the movement of the Spirit in our midst. Communion is a spiritual state that we often resist (for reasons we can't even articulate), yet it is the state we yearn for. And when we enter that state, we know ourselves to be blessed as we simply rest in God.

Without communion there can be no compassion for others. Nor do we truly intercede for those entrusted to our care. We are too preoccupied with ourselves.

Jesus' capacity to be with God deepened his ability to be with us in all our fractured brokenness. In his time apart, he was often present to God on our behalf, listening. It is that same listening that we are called to today that the Spirit might intercede with sighs too deep for words (see Romans 8: 26-27).

Not that we understand this much better than the disciples. When dawn broke, they sought Jesus out, exclaiming when they found him, "Everyone is looking for you" (Mark 1: 37).

We too can get so caught up in the busyness of ministry that we forget to be still. We forget that we are to serve in the supply of the Spirit, not our own power. But the time will come when we learn that we cannot sustain the pace we have set for ourselves, that we cannot manage apart from the Source.

Henri Nouwen writes: "A certain unavailability is essential for the spiritual life of the (leader)." It prompts the question: who would we be if communion were to shape our understanding of leadership?

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus made time to be with the Father even if it meant getting up before dawn. When do you spend time with the Father?
2. What practices help you to "abide" with Jesus and commune with the Father?
3. In what ways do you think that communion with God directs and shapes our intercession for others?
4. Do you agree or disagree with Nouwen that "a certain unavailability" for spiritual leaders is essential? Why?

Develop in Me a Longing

I ask you, Lord Jesus,
to develop in me, your lover,
an immeasurable urge
toward you,
an affection that is unbounded,
a longing that is unrestrained,
a fervor that throws discretion
to the winds!

The more worthwhile our love
for you,
all the more pressing
does it become.
Reason cannot hold it in check,
fear does not make it tremble,
wise judgment
does not temper it.
--Richard Rolle

Desire and pray always
that God's will be perfectly
fulfilled in you.

--Thomas à Kempis

Communion/Practice

Come to Me

Transformation involves heeding
Christ's invitation to communion:

*"Come to me, all you who are weary
and burdened, and I will give you rest.
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. For my yoke is easy and my
burden is light."* -Matthew 11:28-30

Ponder Christ's invitation in light of
the challenges you face in your
present call and ask how Christ is
seeking to speak to you through
these words:

- Come
- To me
- I will give
- Learn from me
- I am gentle and humble
- Easy and light

Questions for Reflection:

1. Practically speaking, what
must you relinquish in
order to enter Christ's rest?
2. What must you embrace?
3. Where do you most need
Shalom in these days?
4. How can you position
yourself for communion
with God?

Source: Pastors of Excellence

Defeating Discouragement

As you sift through your own
experience with the dirt of
discouragement, which of the
following has been particularly
difficult for you:

- ___ Disappointment: *It didn't
happen like I'd hoped.*
- ___ Frustration: *God or other people
failed me.*
- ___ Failure: *I blew it!*
- ___ Worthlessness: *I was not valued.*
- ___ Loneliness: *I felt very alone.*

Which of the signs of
discouragement might someone
have noticed if he or she got close
to you?

- ___ Anger
- ___ Depression
- ___ Resignation

How does this show itself?

As you think about some of the
suggested steps out of the pit of
discouragement, which of the eight
strategies would be most helpful?

Name a person who would respond
helpfully if you cried out to him or
her. Name those who make up
your community.

List three things you need to be
faithful to God's call to
communion.

*Who shall separate us from the love of
God? ~Romans 8:35*

Source: Leadership Essentials

Compassion

Texts

Zechariah 7:8-10, Show compassion
Galatians 4:8-20 (focus verse 19), Labor until Christ is formed in you
John 6, Jesus had compassion
(also Matthew 9:35-37)

The ground of compassion is love and the working of compassion keeps us in love. Compassion is a sweet gracious working in love, mingled with abundant kindness. –Julian of Norwich, Revelation of Divine Love

News of Jesus' ministry was spreading. He had healed people of their diseases and his popularity was becoming enormous. But it was also tragedy time in Israel. According to the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist had just been beheaded. John the Baptist, was the greatest moral force, the greatest spiritual force, the greatest prophet the land of Israel had experienced for four hundred years. He was the person that everyone looked to for religious inspiration, and he was just beheaded by King Herod.

Everyone was stunned by this tragedy, by this enormous loss, including Jesus, who had been baptized by John. And so it was grieving time in Israel, mourning time. And Jesus wanted to get away by himself to grieve, to pray, to remember. He wanted to get away to a lonely place and so he got into a boat to sail across Lake Galilee to a remote point, some four miles away, in order to get away from the massive crowds who were following him, to be alone and grieve the loss of John the Baptist.

But crowds followed along the shoreline, keeping an eye on his boat, and so when Jesus' boat landed, many of the crowd had already arrived. His reaction to the thousands who had shown up? Irritated? Angry? Imposed upon? No, he looked on the massive crowd with compassion, like they were sheep without a shepherd, like people who were in need of spiritual feeding for their inner

spiritual hungers. And so he taught them and he healed them.

The day quickly passed. It got to be later, long into the day, and one of the disciples said: "Lord, the hour is late and the people don't have any food and we are a long way from any villages. Maybe you should send them home now."

And Jesus said to Philip, according to John's version of the story, "How are we going to buy bread, so that people can eat?" Jesus said this *in order to test* Philip. Philip replied, "It would take more than two hundred denarii, more than two hundred days of wages, and even that wouldn't be enough bread to feed all these people." Jesus said, Look around the crowd and see what you can find.

Andrew found a young boy with five loaves of bread and two fish, and brought the boy, fish and bread to Jesus. Jesus invited everyone to be seated on the green grass. Jesus took the bread...looked up into heaven...gave thanks... broke it...gave it to his disciples...who gave it to the crowds. And they *all* ate and were *all satisfied* ...*and*...there were twelve baskets of bread left over. The number who ate were five thousand men, plus women and children.

That story was told over and over again in the gospels, but it continued. A few days later, Jesus was again out in the wilderness, again with a large crowd of four

thousand men plus women and children, and the same story happens again. This time, seven loaves and a few fish were found. And once again, Jesus took the bread...looked up into heaven...gave thanks...broke it...gave it to his disciples...who shared it with everyone. And *everyone* ate and *everyone* was *satisfied*, ... there were seven baskets of bread left over after the feeding of the four thousand plus.

And then we read the Gospel of John's version of this story, and we discover that the feeding of the five thousand is prelude to Jesus' teaching that "I am the Bread of life" and Holy Communion. In John, chapter six, we also find the most complete description of Holy Communion in the whole Bible. In John, chapter six, Christ says: "I am the Bread of life. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, I live in that person and that person lives in me." "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will never die but live forever." Incredible words. Incredible promises. And so the feeding of the 5000 in chapter six of John is a prelude to the teachings about Holy Communion.

Jesus can work miracles with five loaves and two fish. And God will do the same with us when we bring our meager gifts to God, our five loaves and two fish, our and ordinary talents and gifts.

Praying the Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven.

*God have mercy on me, a sinner.
Help me accept my brokenness,
my emptiness, and need for you.*

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

*Lord, help me not to pretend but to
embrace my vulnerability,
humanity, and limits.*

Blessed are the meek, for they
will inherit the earth.

*Lord, grant me grace to trust you
and drop my defenses, be
approachable, kind, merciful, and
appropriately assertive.*

Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness, for
they will be filled.

*Help me love you above all else.
Purge my soul of all polluted
affections, habits, and rebellions.*

Blessed are the merciful, for
they will be shown mercy.

*Enable me to forgive as generously
and consistently as you, Lord,
forgive me.*

Blessed are the pure in heart, for
they will see God.

*Lord, I ask for a pure (clean,
uncluttered) heart. I long to see
your face, that there would be
nothing between you and me.*

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children
of God.

*Lord, fill me with courage to disrupt
false peace around me when needed.
Give me wisdom and prudence to be
a true peacemaker.*

Blessed are those who are
persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.

*Lord, fill me with courage to speak
and live the truth, even when it is
not popular or convenient.*

--Matthew 5:3-10

Compassion/Practice

Questions for Reflection

1. Implied in the story is this question: Have you surrendered your five loaves and two fish to Christ? Have you surrendered the meagerness of who you are to Christ? Why or why not?
2. How does Jesus' feeding of the 5000 help us to understand communion?
3. Jesus was grieving his cousin's death, yet he had compassion on the crowd. Can you think of a time when you were in deep personal need, yet God called you first to have compassion on others before caring for yourself?

Putting On Christ

*Therefore as Christ's chosen people, holy
and dearly loved, clothe yourself
with compassion, kindness, humility,
gentleness, and patience.*

~Colossians 3:12

Read Colossians 3:1-17.

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to show you those things to which you need to "die" in order for Christ to come alive in you more fully. What aspects of your old person does God want to work on with you at this point in your journey? Write in your journal those things which you are shown. Ask God to help you discern what spiritual grace you have already put on as part of the regular clothing of your new person. With what virtue or behavior does God want to endow you or cultivate in you more fully in this step along the path?

Pray for the grace and discernment to walk in the new person in this way more fully. ~David De Silva,

The Sacramental Life

Without love, the outward work is of no value; but whatever is done out of love, be it ever so little, is wholly fruitful. For God regards the greatness of love that prompts a man, rather than the greatness of achievement.

--Thomas à Kempis



The Cross

Texts

Malachi 3:1-3, Refiner's fire
 Philippians 2:1-11, Empty yourself
 Matthew 16:21-28, Take up your cross
 Luke 23:26-49, Jesus' crucifixion

*That which is Christ-like within us shall be crucified. It shall suffer and be broken.
 And that which is Christ-like within us shall rise up. It shall love and create. –Leunig*

Death precedes resurrection. There is no way around it. Much as we might want to leap over Holy Week from Palm Sunday to Easter, it cannot be done. Nor should we even try.

Jesus approached his death with a mixture of dread and yearning. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am constrained until it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50). While he entered into the fullness of our humanity, in all our brokenness, it was only with his death that he completed his kenotic descent into our sinful state. So full was his identification that he could utter: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

We live in a world where death dominates and is used as a means of power and control. I speak here not just of physical death, but also of spiritual death: a slow, painful eroding of the soul. Our Lord's death and resurrection tells us that death no longer has the final word, that Jesus on the cross claimed victory over ALL death once and for all.

Yet we continue to allow our lives to be directed by death, rather than by life. Perhaps that is because so much of life is lived in the face of death that deep down we don't

really believe that God is victorious over the grave. Or, perhaps even closer to the truth, we don't believe forgiveness is truly possible. For we know that we are all one in sin, even as we are all one in guilt. Yet for our sake, God "made him to be sin who knew no sin" (II Corinthians 5:21).

Julia Esquivel, a teacher, activist, and prophet, uses her poetry to "threaten (us) with resurrection," noting that life which "does not come out of death" is not life. She understands that keeping death before our eyes motivates us to live with integrity the life set before us by Jesus himself.

The way of the cross requires trust. Trust in God. It involves long nights in prayer while others fall asleep. It calls for surrender in our Gethsemanes: "Not my will, but yours be done" (see Luke 22:42). Sometimes our tears become like blood the suffering is so great. Yet when we dare to follow in the way of the cross, we are set free to love without restraint. We dare to embrace the pain within us that we might encounter the fullness of life that God offers. We let go of the illusion that life without the cross can lead to happiness and wholeness. We come to understand that it is in the giving

that we receive and in the letting go that life is given. It is then that we are ready to practice resurrection knowing "that which is Christ-like within us shall be crucified. It shall suffer and be broken. And that which is Christ-like within us shall rise up. It shall love and create." Praise be to God.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is your experience of death? How does your experience shape your response to our Lord's death?
2. How does fear of death get in the way of experiencing resurrection? What does it mean to be "threatened with resurrection?"
3. What would you need to surrender in order to be able to pray with Jesus to the Father "Not my will, but your will be done"?
4. What does it mean for Jesus to call us to take up our cross and follow him?

Threatened with Resurrection

I am no longer afraid of death.
I know well
Its dark and cold corridors
Leading to life.

I am afraid rather of that life
Which does not come out of
death,
Which cramps our hands
And retards our march.

I am afraid of my fear
And even more of the fear of
others,
Who do not know where they
are going,
Who continue clinging
To what they consider to be life
which we know to be death.

I live each day to kill death;
I die each day to beget life,
And in this dying unto death,
I die a thousand times and
Am reborn another thousand
Through that love
From my people
Which nourishes hope.

--Julia Esquivel, Guatemala, 1992

The Cross/Practice

Prayer at the Cross

Read: Matthew 27:32-55

Imagine you are standing at
Golgotha at the foot of the cross
while Jesus is being crucified.
Listen to the sound of the hammer
pounding nails into the soft flesh,
the thud of the cross as it is lifted
into place. Look at the people there
with you. Some are mocking, some
weeping. What are you doing? Do
you walk to others or keep to
yourself? What are your thoughts
and feelings as the sky grows dark
and Jesus cries out?

Sing a hymn such as “Go to Dark
Gethsemane” or “Were You
There?” or “When I Survey the
Wondrous Cross.” What emotions
do you experience as you sing?
How have you encountered the
reality of Jesus’ crucifixion and
death through these hymns?

Source: *The Spiritual Formation Bible*

Prayer of Relinquishment

Pray to recognize and relinquish
anything that takes priority over
God’s will. This is at the heart of
Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane where
he prayed to take away the cup,
yet... “Nevertheless, not my will,
but thine.” This prayer is often
called the “prayer of
relinquishment” as it calls us to let
go of our will and desire,
surrendering our life to God alone.
As you enter into this prayer, ask
God to move in your will so that
you follow in the way of the cross.
Note: If you can’t pray this prayer,
than pray for the desire to pray this
prayer.

Prayer of Surrender

Take, O take me as I am.
Summon out what I shall be.
Set your seal upon my heart.
And live in me. Amen.

Practice Resurrection

Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing him(or her)self. –Leo Tolstoy

The gospel simply stated is: Become like Jesus.
–Henri Nouwen

Becoming ourselves! Becoming the men and women God has created and called us to be. Isn't that at the heart of growing up in Christ? Isn't that what transformation is all about?

The word for transform in Greek is "*morphoo*" and it means the inward and real formation of the essential nature of a person. Paul uses the word in a number of places in the Epistles, including Galatians where he writes: "I labor until Christ is *formed*—*morphoo*—in you" (4:19). "I labor," Paul exhorts until your core identity, character, call, and competencies are formed in and through the power of the Holy Spirit in service to God in Christ.

Paul, in likening our formation to the growth of an embryo, reflects the reality that we are pregnant with more possibility than most of us can imagine.

In Romans, Paul calls us to be "conformed to the image of the Son." The word, "*summorphizo*," means to have the same form as another, to shape a thing into a durable likeness. Spiritual growth is a molding process. We are to be to Christ as an image is to its original.

But, as Bob Quinn notes in **Deep Change** "The problem is that to grow, to take the journeys on which our growth is predicated, we must confront our own immaturity,

selfishness, and lack of courage. In a sense, life is all about our forceful, often overpowering need to take journeys, yet our tendency is to grip the swings ever more tightly" (p. 37).

The choice is ours. God invites us to practice resurrection through the living of our lives. But note this: the Spirit will not enter us by force or without our consent.

Questions for Reflection

1. Based upon your journey through this study, take some time to reflect on what it means to be transformed into the Lord's likeness with ever-increasing glory.
2. Reflect on a time when you yourself or another person experienced such transformation. What new behaviors emerged? What did you experience and learn?
3. Develop a shared covenant with your family, a fellow disciple, or your congregation in which you commit to "growing up in Christ" through a shared rule.

Engaging the Word

Read Luke 24:13-36.

Following the sequence of events in this passage, note the ways the hidden Christ is revealed. Then reflect on how God speaks to you through the following elements:

- Body movement (walking);
- Conversation (reflecting)
- Listening (attentive to stories and feelings);

- Printed and spoken Word (interpreting Scripture);
- Nature (sunset, beauty);
- Friendship (Empathizing with... sadness and joy);
- Hospitality (inviting... receiving);
- Prayer (blessing the bread);
- Communion (breaking the bread);
- Knowing (as he vanished from them);
- Surprise (the guest was the host, the stranger a friend);
- Celebrating the memory (sharing how their hearts burned).

Practice Resurrection

Write a resume of your core identity, character, and call (not your competencies or expertise). What does this reveal about who you are becoming? Are you following in the way of Christ? Are you on the path to humility (see Philippians 2:1-11)?

The Journey: Growing Up in Christ

The Grace Saturated Embrace

Focus	Scripture	Hymns
The Journey	Genesis 12:1-9, The Call of Abram and Sarai Psalm 139, I have searched you and known you Ephesians 4:1-16, Growing up in maturity Luke 2:52, Jesus grew up in wisdom and stature	488—The God of Abraham Praise 309—Of the Father's Love Begotten 223—O My Lord, Bless Your Redeemer 343—Called as Partners in Christ's Service
Birth in the Spirit	Ezekiel 37:1-14, Valley of Dry Bones Psalm 139 Acts 19:1-17, Baptism of the Holy Spirit Romans 6:3-4, Baptized into Christ's death Matthew 1:18-25, The Birth of Jesus	Borning Cry 248—You Are Before Me, Lord 316—Breathe on Me, Breath of God 376—Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
Community	Ruth 1:16-22, Your people shall be my people Psalm 24, Lift Up the Gates Acts 2:42-47, The Community of Believers Luke 1:39-66, Jesus' Birth	40—Joy to the World 177—Lift Up the Gates Eternal 311—We Meet You, O Christ 538—Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing
Celebration	Exodus 15, The Crossing of the Red Sea Psalm 37, Delight Yourself I Thessalonians 5:12-18, Rejoice Always Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 2:1-12, Angels, Shepherds, Magi	8—Left Up Your Heads Delight Yourself in the Lord (Praise Song) 66—We Three Kings 464—Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
Consecration	I Samuel 1:21-28, Consecration of Samuel Psalm 100 Acts 9:1-19, Paul's Conversion Luke 2:21-40, Jesus' Consecration	62—Bring We the Frankincense of Our Love 220—All People That On Earth Do Dwell 391—Take My Life 375—Lord of All Good
Protection	Exodus 2:1-10; 11-25, Moses' birth/Flight to Midian Psalm 90 Galatians 5:1-21, Fruit of the Spirit Matthew 2:13-18, The Flight to Egypt	260—A Mighty Fortress is Our God 210—Our God Our Help in Ages Past 341—Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine 540—God Be With You Till We Meet Again

Initiation and Instruction

Focus	Scripture	Hymns
Growth in the Secret Place	Exodus 2:11-22, Moses, An Alien in a Foreign Land Psalm 143 Galatians 1:11-24, Paul in Arabia Following His Conversion Matthew 2:13-18, Jesus in Egypt	282—If Thou But Trust in God to Guide Thee 251—Your Faithfulness, O Lord, Is Sure 327—O Word of God Incarnate 426—Lord, Speak to Me, That I May Speak

Authority and Power

Focus	Scripture	Hymns
Confirmation of the Father's Love	I Samuel 13:1-21, David, A Man After God's Own Heart Psalm 16 Romans 8:31-39, Nothing Shall Separate Us from God's Love Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus' Baptism	409—Wild and Lone the Prophet's Voice 165—When In the Night I Meditate 72—When Jesus Came to Jordan 493—Dearest Jesus, We Are Here

The Journey: Growing Up in Christ

Authority and Power (continued)

Focus	Scripture	Hymns
Empowerment	Isaiah 6:1-8, The Call of Isaiah Psalm 139 Acts 2:1-13, Pentecost, The Gift of the Spirit Mark 1:9-13, Jesus' Testing in the Wilderness	417—Christ if Made the Sure Foundation 248—You Are Before Me, Lord 127—Come, O Spirit 357—O Master Let Me Walk With Thee

Engagement

Focus	Scripture	Hymns
Message to Proclaim	Isaiah 61, The Year of the Lord's Favor Psalm 32 Acts 2:14-41, Peter's First Sermon... Cut to the Heart Luke 4:14-30, Jesus is Rejected at Nazareth	411—Arise, Your Light is Come 129—Come, O Spirit, Dwell Among Us 184—How Blest Are Those 332—Live Into Hope
Conflict	Joshua 1, Be Strong and Courageous Romans 5:1-5, Suffering... Endurance... Hope Ephesians 6:10-20, The Armor of God Matthew 23:23-26, Woe to You, Scribes and Pharisees	420—God of Grace and God of Glory 401—When Will People Cease Their Fighting 345—Dear Lord and Father of Mankind
Engagement	Exodus 18: 13-27, Jethro Advises Moses to Delegate Romans 12:1-8, The Body of Christ Mark 3:13-15, The Calling of the Disciples	148—At the Name of Jesus 125—Come, Holy Spirit, Our Souls Inspire 434—Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples

The Sacramental Life

Focus	Scripture	Hymns
Communion	Psalm 42, As a Deer Longs Romans 8:18-39, Nothing Shall Separate Us from God's Love Mark 1:35-39, Alone with the Father (or John 15, Abide)	303—Jesus, Lover of My Soul 189—As Deer Long for Flowing Streams 426—Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak 438—Blest Be the Tie that Binds
Compassion	Zechariah 7:8-10, Show Compassion Psalm 121 Galatians 4:8-20, Labor Until Christ is Formed in You John 6, Jesus had Compassion (also Matthew 9:35-37)	353—Great God, Your Love Has Called Us 234—I to the Hills Will Lift My Eyes 402—Now Praise the Hidden Love of God
The Cross	Malachi 3:1-3, Refiner's Fire Psalm 22 Philippians 2:1-11, Empty Yourself Matthew 16:21-28, Take Up Your Cross/Luke 23:26-49	83—O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High 168—Lord, Why Have You Forsaken Me 555—Now Thank We All Our God 393—Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said
Practice Resurrection	II Corinthians 3:17-18, Be Transformed Psalm 118 One of the Resurrection Narratives	118—The Day of Resurrection 230—This Is the Day the Lord Has Made 371—Lift High the Cross 429—Lord, You Give the Great Commission

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The resurrection of Jesus establishes conditions in which we live and mature in the Christian life... We live our lives in the practice of what we do not originate and cannot anticipate. When we practice resurrection, we continuously enter into what is more than we are. When we practice resurrection, we keep company with Jesus, alive and present, who knows where we are going better than we do, which is always "from glory unto glory".

--Eugene Peterson