

# A Season of Healing



# A Season of *Healing*

365 Readings

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

Frank Logue



# *King of Peace*

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The cover photographs were taken along the Blue Ridge Parkway.  
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*This book is dedicated with love to my mother Julia Sullivan Logue  
who has had more than her share of mourning  
and is offered with thanksgiving to Maris Cato Morris who patiently  
weeded out the worst of my errors during her own season of healing.  
She edited the text and offered helpful thoughts on how to improve  
the book you hold. The remaining errors (and oddities) are my own.*

## *The Start of a New Season*

Like an early frost, the shock of loss never comes in due season. Whether a surprise, or long anticipated, there is the time before the loss and the time after. A clear delineation in our lives, cutting apart what was, from what will be.

Grief takes time. There is no shortcut. Healing after a loss is not soon accomplished whether the loss is a divorce, the death of a loved one, or the loss of abilities due to disease or an accident. And yet we know that time in and of itself accomplishes little or nothing. These seemingly opposing statements fit together as healing is a journey. That journey takes time, but it also takes the work of the Holy Spirit.

This book was created to make that journey with you as you grieve. The daily readings are short and varied as the last thing you need on this journey is weighty advice, no matter how well meaning the words.

The title *A Season of Healing* may be a bit odd for a book that will take you through four seasons of the year. This is purposely to acknowledge the way time stretches and bends in grief. The first year after a painful loss will at times seem so long. And yet looking up and finding a year is already passed happens another way so quickly. While, as these pages seek to make clear, real grief does not ever completely go away, the sense of unbearable loss can.

This book works on themes of dealing with loss, finding forgiveness, and being open to healing as each of these subjects are bound up in grief. Often after a death, and almost inevitably following a divorce, there are issues of

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forgiveness. You may need to forgive the person who has died. You may need to forgive yourself. There is also a theme of love through this book as recapturing a biblical view on loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves is also closely tied to healing.

The daily readings are meant to open your heart to how the Spirit of the living God is speaking to you on a given day. Listening to God, or even yelling at God, are more important than the readings themselves. So whether you find the reading for a given day helpful or hopelessly pointless, remember that you are not reading this book alone, but in the presence of The One who is seeking to heal your heart through this year-long journey. And it is that process of opening your heart to the healing which can come from God alone which is the goal of this season.

### **One word of warning**

**I**f you have just experienced a loss, wait to start reading. Give yourself at least two weeks and probably a full month before beginning this season of healing. You need time to grieve without these words getting in the way. Then when the friends and family have gone home, and the calls become less frequent, you will be ready to start the daily readings.

# Day 1

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“My Mother is a fish.” These five words are the full text of the nineteenth chapter of William Faulkner’s stream of consciousness novel *As I Lay Dying*. They offer a window into the chaotic course of coming to terms with death. The book tells the story of the Bundren Family’s quest to honor their matriarch, Addie, in her desire to be buried in the town of Jefferson.

When this shortest chapter in literary history comes along, we have already seen Vardaman struggling to comprehend his mother’s death. The boy caught a huge fish earlier in the day and wanted to show it to her. But his mother died before he got to share his catch. When Vardaman understands the coffin will be nailed shut, he drills holes in it so that she can breathe. These five words, “My Mother is a fish,” offer Vardaman Bundren’s enigmatic view of what is happening from his 7-10 year old point of view.

This short chapter shows in brief, what the novel reveals more fully, that each of us comes to term with the death of a loved one in our own way. The mental and emotional process is messy and sometimes incoherent to others or even to ourselves. The emotional roller coaster of grief has so many ups and downs that it is difficult to get your bearings at times. One moment you realize the reality of death; the next you see how impossible it is that the person has died.

Know that as you come to terms with the death of someone you love, some of your responses will naturally be a bit irrational. Be kind to yourself. Don’t make rash judgments. Wait to make big changes in your life. As much as the demands of others will allow, leave room to grieve first. Some things do have to be done. Put off everything else. If you do need to make key decisions, lean on the counsel of those you trust to guide you.

Go slow. Breathe. Pray.

## Day 2

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“Trust in the slow work of God.

We are, quite naturally, impatient in everything  
to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way  
to something unknown, something new,  
and yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through  
some stages of instability—  
and that it may take a very long time.

Your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,  
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don’t try to force them on,  
as though you could be today what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances  
acting on your own good will) will make them tomorrow.

Only God could say what  
this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

Give our Lord the benefit of believing  
that His hand is leading you,  
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense and incomplete.”

~Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)



## Day 3

John Donne (1572-1631) was an Anglican priest and a poet. In the 1620s, Donne contracted a serious illness and thought he was dying. Around him, he could hear the bells of London tolling following the deaths of many a person. Lying in extreme sickness, he composed in his head a series of devotions which on recovering he wrote down. They were published in 1624 as *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. In the most famous, Donne writes:

“The church is catholic, universal, so all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that body which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated...and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another...”

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by sea, Europe is no less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of a friend’s or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

## Day 4

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**S**tart a journal. It will give you a place to think out loud about what you are going through. Don't try to create beautiful prose, or a moving meditation. Just write what you feel.

If you are not sure what to write, try the time-tested advice found in Julia Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way*, in which she counsels to just sit and write three pages of whatever comes into your mind, even if you only write that you don't know what to write. Just three hand-written pages each day. This will get things flowing on to paper and before long, you will find a way to pour out your heart on paper. This is a helpful creative outlet for an interior voyage of healing.

## *Day 5*

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“**W**hen a person is born we rejoice, and when they’re married we jubilate, but when they die we try to pretend nothing has happened.”

~Margaret Mead (1901-1978)

“**B**ut Zion said, ‘The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.”

~ Isaiah 49:14-16

## Day 6

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“He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it.”

~Turkish Proverb

“Every one can master a grief but he that has it.”

~William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

~Jesus (Matthew 5:4)

It's all right to cry. What are you saving your tears for if not for this? It's also all right to laugh and enjoy yourself when you can. Just because you laugh or have some fun, does not mean that your loss is any less real. Grief has lots of ups and downs. When you are feeling a little better, nourish that feeling, don't fight it out of a misplaced sense of guilt. Both laughter and tears are gifts; receive them as such and be blessed. Fight back the tears, hold back the laughter and you hold back the healing it can bring over time.

## *Day 7*

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Grief takes a toll on your health. Make and keep an appointment with your doctor. Watch your diet. Exercise. Take the time to take care of your physical body as you ride on the emotional roller-coaster which is grief.

“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the human heart which only God, made known through Jesus Christ, can fill.”

~Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

## *Day 8*

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**T**ake a break from the news. The world will continue just fine if you avoid TV and radio news and give up on the newspaper for a week. Avoid online news as well. The problems of the world will be there next week. For now, unplug from the woes of others. Use the time to watch a favorite movie, spend time with a book you have been meaning to get around to reading, or take a walk.

# Day 9

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“Sorrow makes us all children again ~ destroys all differences of intellect.  
The wisest know nothing.”

~Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

“So often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

~Leo Buscaglia (1924-1998)

## Day 10

When a tragedy strikes, well meaning friends and acquaintances sometimes use words that cause more pain, more confusion, more misunderstanding. They opt for words aimed at making the loss all okay, as if that were possible. But words like “God needed another angel” or “God has a plan” ring hollow.

Far from the calm, soothing words we often hear, the Bible cries out at times from a place of anger, pain, and loss. In the 22nd Psalm we hear the cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me and are so far from my cry and from my words of distress?” It’s not only okay, but a good idea to call out and ask, “God, how could you let this happen? Where were you at the time of death? Were you looking the other way?”

So often when death comes, it all seems so arbitrary. So pointless. So painful. The loss is too difficult to bear and can never be born if we don’t vent some of the hurt. But the place to put the loss is not to fire the pain back into yourself. Blame can only poison, it can never heal. You can poison your life with pain and not add a single moment to the life of someone you love.

The place to put this anger and frustration is on God. God can take the heat of your anger, the pain of your loss. God can take the questions and God will remain with you as you live into a future not without grief, but with a sorrow you can bear.

Do not be afraid to rail against God. In times of pain, sharing your anger with God is better than turning your back on God. For the Holy Spirit can guide you to a place of peace, but only if you stay in conversation.

Don’t be afraid to talk to God, even if all you want to do right now is yell. If that is where you find yourself, by all means, yell.



# Day 1 1

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Esther de Waal writes in her book *Seeking God* how we might miss God's presence:

"To listen...means in the first instance that we have to listen whether we like it or not, whether we hear what we want to or something that is actually disagreeable or threatening. If we pick and choose we are in fact turning a deaf ear to the many unexpected and perhaps unacceptable ways in which God is trying to reach us...

"To listen closely, with every fibre of our being, at every moment of the day, is one of the most difficult things in the world, and yet it is essential if we mean to find the God whom we are seeking. If we stop listening to what we find hard to take then, as the Abbot of St Benoît-sur-Loire puts it in a striking phrase, 'We're likely to pass God without even noticing Him.'"

# Day 12

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**H**enri J.M. Nouwen wrote this prayer for the season of Advent in which we look to Christ's coming again even as we look to celebrate anew his coming in Bethlehem. But it is a prayer suited for any day of the year, particularly when we want the light of Christ to come anew into the dark places of our lives:

“Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, ‘Come Lord Jesus!’ Amen.”

# Day 13

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“For everything there is a season,  
And a time for every matter under heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
A time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to seek, and a time to lose;  
A time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
A time to tear, and a time to sew;  
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate,  
A time for war, and a time for peace.”

~Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

# Day 14

The tract “Focused” fell into the hands of Helen Howarth Lemmel (1864-1961) in 1918. She read there, “So then, turn your eyes upon Him, look full into His face and you will find that the things of earth will acquire a strange new dimness.” She would later recall, “Suddenly as if commanded to stop and listen, I stood still, and singing in my soul and spirit was the chorus, with not one conscious moment of putting word to word to make rhyme, or note to note to make melody.”

“O soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There's light for a look at the Savior,  
And life more abundant and free!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grown strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.

Through death into life everlasting He passed,  
and we follow Him there;  
Over us sin no more hath dominion—  
For more than conquerors we are!

His word shall not fail you—He promised;  
Believe Him, and all will be well:  
Then go to a world that is dying,  
His perfect salvation to tell!”

# Day 15

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If someone asks you how you are doing, you will tend to say that you are fine. We all do it. But your friends and family know that you are journeying through grief. Do them the honor of being honest. You probably are not fine. Say so. Let a trusted inner circle know how you are coping. When you are going through an especially difficult day, pick up the phone and tell someone. You do not have to make this journey on your own.

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# Day 16

“The risk of love is loss, and the price of loss is grief - But the pain of grief is only a shadow when compared with the pain of never risking love.”

~Hilary Stanton Zunin, *The Art of Consolation*

“Tearless grief bleeds inwardly.”

~Christian Nevell Bovee (1820-1904)

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

~Revelation 21:4

## Day 17

“Anger is most useful as a diagnostic tool. When anger erupts in us it is a signal that something is wrong. Something isn’t working right. There is evil, or incompetence, or stupidity lurking about. Anger is our sixth sense for sniffing out wrong in the neighborhood. Diagnostically it is virtually infallible, and we learn to trust it. Anger is infused by a moral/spiritual intensity that carries conviction—when we are angry we know we are on to something that matters, that really counts.”

~Eugene Peterson (1932- )

“We should think of anger not as a spiritual enemy, but as a spiritual ally, associated with hope, courage, intimacy, and recovery of self, and functioning as an idol detector and ‘diagnostic window’ that provides opportunities for emotional and spiritual growth.”

~Andrew Lester, *The Angry Christian*

Anger will inevitably arise on grief. One may get angry with the source of the grief, whether the husband or wife who left or the friend or loved one who died. Or one might get angry with oneself for doing something hurtful or not doing something helpful. Most common is to get angry with God for allowing this to happen.

As Peterson and Lester write about above, anger occurs over things that matter and give us a window into our deepest hopes and fears. Anger in and of itself is neither good or bad, but a natural response arising out of concern. Yet, when we internalize this powerful emotion, it can surface later in our emotions

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as depression or in physical ways including high blood pressure, headaches, and a lowered immune response. The way to avoid these problems is to recognize the anger rising in you.

If there is a creative and helpful way to channel that anger, use that option. Sometimes there is anger that arises from a sense of injustice and dealing with that injustice directly can be healing. For example, when a child dies in a car accident at an intersection that has long needed a traffic signal, action is called for. While successfully lobbying for and getting the red light installed will not in and of itself heal the pain of grief, it is still a creative and useful way to direct the anger toward justice.

If no such creative use of the anger is open to you, find a way to express your emotions anyway. Talking it through with a friend or pastor or counselor and writing about your anger in a journal are more helpful than bottling up the anger and hoping it will go away on its own. Your anger is revealing a deep pain that needs attention. Don't ignore this feeling, but give anger voice in creative and safe ways rather than letting it eat away inside you.



## Day 18

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“People tell me that answers to prayer are merely coincidences. I can only reply that when I pray coincidences happen and when I stop praying they stop happening.”

~William Temple (1881-1944)

“A coincidence is a small miracle for which God chooses to remain anonymous.”

~source unknown

“Think of prayer less as an activity for God and more as an awareness of God. Seek to live in uninterrupted awareness. Acknowledge His presence everywhere you go.”

~Max Lucado (1955- )

## Day 19

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“Awake in the morning and the first thing you do, thank God for it, even if you don’t feel particularly happy about the day which is to come. ‘This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be grateful in it.’ Once you have done this, give yourself time to realize the truth of what you are saying and really mean it—perhaps on the level of deep conviction and not of what one might call exhilaration. And then get up, wash, clean, do whatever else you have to do, and then come to God again. Come to God again with two convictions. The one is that you are God’s own and the other is that this day is also God’s own; it is absolutely new, absolutely fresh. It has never existed before. To speak in Russian terms, it is like a vast expanse of unspoiled snow. No one has trodden on it yet. It is all virgin and pure in front of you. And now, what comes next? What comes next is that you ask God to bless this day, that everything in it should be blessed and ruled by Him. After that you must take it seriously, because very often one says ‘O God, bless me,’ and having got the blessing we act like the prodigal son—we collect all our goods and go to a strange country to lead a riotous life.”

~Anthony Bloom (1914-2003), *Beginning to Pray*

## Day 20

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“So I pray that God, who gives you hope, will keep you happy and full of peace as you believe in him. May you overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

~Romans 15:13

“Expect to have hope rekindled. Expect your prayers to be answered in wondrous ways. The dry seasons in life do not last. The spring rains will come again.”

~Sarah Ban Breathnach, *Simple Abundance*

“The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof.”

~Barbara Kingsolver (1955- )

## Day 21

The journey of grief involves stages. J. William Worden's book *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* identifies the following as "four tasks of mourning":

1. To accept the reality of the loss
2. To experience the pain of grief
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing
4. To withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it in another relationship

Others compare the journey of the mourners as being like that taken by a person who is dying and so look to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' book *On Death and Dying* in which she famously identified the five stages one should go through (though not necessarily in order):

1. Denial and isolation
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Either of the lists above is helpful in noting varying stages. When looked at as a numeric list, each can be counter productive as they suggest an orderliness to a more disorganized process. If you have been with someone in a longterm illness as he or she approaches death, you know that a person may go straight to bargaining, then move to anger and denial, and, sadly, may not find acceptance. Similarly, these two lists are printed to show some common stages in the journey of grief, not to give a precise map for what should happen to you. There is no should here. Your journey will be your own.

## Day 22

In 2003, seven members of the Melanesian Brotherhood were kidnapped and killed. The group of Anglican monks is known for their peacemaking efforts in the Solomon Islands. And in this work of seeking peace in the midst of armed conflict, the simple, peaceful brothers saw many things no one should have to see and also endured the martyrdom of their brothers.

The Rev. Peter Hosking spoke to the group in the aftermath of the murders. Hosking's words, quoted below from Richard Carter's book, *In Search of the Lost*, speak to all sorts of pain, and of a type of healing needed by many whose experiences in life have layered on hurt, resentment, and un-freedom. He reveals how healing is a process that works through layers of hurt:

"If we haven't been healed of the wounds of our past life, there is a strong possibility that we'll pass those wounds on to others—our community, our family members, friends and so on....

"An unwillingness to forgive others for the real or imaginary wrongs they have done us is a poison that can affect our health—physical, emotional and spiritual—sometimes very deeply....

"Healing, praying, and loving all go hand in hand. Healing is loving. When we heal, we love; when we love, we heal; when we love one another, we affirm, we nurture and we cherish that person. Sometimes in our lives we can try to solve a problem and there is time for that.

"But sometimes just letting ourselves love again and be loved can solve so many problems. When we let go and just soak up love from the Lord and others, we have a whole new power to go on again....

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“Healing does not usually take place instantly but is a process. Deep pain and resentment, which have developed over time, will usually take time and love and patient prayer to heal. Often there are layers of hurt, resentment, and un-freedom that need to be uncovered in prayer. Once one layer of hurt, resentment and un-freedom has been healed, others may present themselves for healing. We know we are healed when we can recall the hurting experience without trauma.”

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## *Day 23*

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If you are grieving over someone who has died, bring the person up in conversation with others. If you are grieving after a loss of abilities due to disease or accident, bring up the illness. If you are grieving from a divorce, bring up the divorce. This is not to say that your grief is all you should talk about. But if you bring the situation up, it gives others permission to talk about the loss. When others know you are grieving, they may fear bringing up a topic they consider hurtful to you. Bring it up yourself and in so doing, give your friends and family permission to talk.

# Day 24

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“Sometimes people just need to cry. Tears are cleansing....It releases tension and gets painful feelings out in the open.

“There is often a heavy price to be paid for not crying. Burying feelings—pretending that all is well, keeping a stiff upper lip—is a very real danger to one’s emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical self.”

~Kenneth C. Haugk, *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart*



## Day 25

Forgiveness is an integral part of healing from divorce, and from the death of a person where some issues remained unresolved. But even in healthy relationships we need to forgive one another and ask for God's forgiveness for the ways in which we have fallen short of the mark set by God.

In forgiving someone who has mistreated you, it is best to start by remembering that person is as human as you are. To take but one example, imagine that your father treated you roughly when you were growing up. You can start by recalling that while he was tough on you, he treated you as badly as he himself was treated by his own father. By forgiving your father for the wrongs he did to you, you may break the cycle that began generations earlier. This is not to excuse the father's actions or to say that what he did was right, but to come to understand more and to forgive.

Breaking that cycle of abuse usually starts by seeing the person who has hurt you as yet another fallible person like yourself. Then try to see that person as God sees him or her. God sees this person as someone in need of forgiveness and healing, just as you are in need of that same forgiveness and healing.

This forgiveness you offer is an act of the will first. You will not be able to at first say with all your heart that you forgive someone who has hurt you, but say it anyway. Pick a person who has wounded you even as you read this column. You won't have to think long. The name that first came to mind may be a person who you have trouble imagining how you can forgive. Try it anyway.

Say to yourself, "I forgive," then say the person's name, "for the ways he/she has injured me, especially," and then name some of the ways this person has

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caused you pain. Saying this is not a heart decision first, but something that you do by force of will.

Saying the words has power. For in the end, it is not through your own force of will that the healing power of forgiveness comes. That healing comes from God's love, which you can begin to release more fully by saying those words. If you can only say the words and not really believe them, don't fret. Try it again later. Keep coming back to those words of forgiveness. There is power in releasing the other person from that debt he/she owes you for the suffering he or she caused.

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## Day 26

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“In our sickness we need a savior, in our wanderings a guide, in our blindness someone to show us the light, in our thirst the fountain of living water, which quenches for ever the thirst of those who drink from it. We dead people need life, we sheep need a shepherd, we children need a teacher, the whole world needs Jesus!

“If we would understand the profound wisdom of the most holy shepherd and teacher, the ruler of the universe and the Word of the Father, when using an allegory he calls himself the shepherd of the sheep, we can do so for he is also the teacher of little ones....Such is our Teacher, both good and just. He said he had not come to be served but to serve; and so the gospel shows him tired out, he who labored for our sake and promised to give his life as ransom for many, a thing which, as he said, only the Good Shepherd will do.

“How bountiful the giver who for our sake gives his most precious possession, his own life! He is a real benefactor and friend, who desired to be our brother when he might have been our Lord, and who in his goodness even went so far as to die for us!”

~Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), *The Teacher*

# Day 27

“The Truth, even though I cannot feel it right now, is that I am the chosen child of God, precious in God’s eyes, called the Beloved from all eternity and held safe in an everlasting embrace.”

~Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), *The Life of the Beloved*

“I know God will not give me anything I can’t handle. I just wish that He didn’t trust me so much.”

~Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)

Beverly Vye, who is a member of King of Peace, says that her grandmother had this little framed quote on her wall. Bev’s grandmother would read the quotation to her when, as a child and a teenager, Bev was feeling sad and lonely:

Somebody Cares  
Somebody cares! What a world of woe  
Lifts from our hearts when we really know  
That somebody really and truly cares,  
That we’re in somebody’s thoughts and prayers.  
I want you to know, and I feel that you do,  
That somebody always is caring for you.

## Day 28

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“I pray, O God, that I may know You and love You, so that I may rejoice in You. And if I cannot do so fully in this life may I gradually progress until it comes to fullness. Let the knowledge of You grow in me here, and there be made complete; let Your love grow in me here and there be made complete, so that here my joy may be great in hope, and there be complete in reality. Lord, by Your Son You command, or rather, counsel us to ask and you promise we shall receive so that our joy ‘may be complete.’ I ask, Lord, as You counsel through Your admirable counselor. May I receive what You promise through Your truth so that my ‘joy may be complete.’ God of truth, I ask that I may receive so that my ‘joy may be complete.’ Until then let my mind so meditate on it, let my tongue speak of it, let my heart love it, let my mouth preach it. Let my soul hunger for it, let my flesh thirst for it, my whole being desire it, until I enter into the ‘joy of the Lord,’ who is God, Three in One, ‘blessed forever. Amen.’”

~Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), *Proslogion*

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# Day 29

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“Grief causes a fog to roll into our lives. The fog of grief can affect our ability to think or concentrate. This fog often sets in right after a loved one has died. But even after the shock wears off, the fog can linger or come and go for a long time....

“If you’re stuck in the fog of grief, be patient with yourself. It’s normal and will pass in time. For now, try to avoid tackling anything that is really difficult or requires a lot of concentration. If you must do such a task, ask someone to help.”

~Kenneth C. Haugk, *A Time to Grieve*

# Day 30

**I** know just how you feel.”

You have certainly heard these words by now. If not, you have endured similar expressions from people you know who want to find something to say to you as you cope with grief. These are perhaps the six least helpful words to hear and yet people say them again and again.

Let me be clear. I do not know how you feel. I do not know what you are going through. I can not know. The grief that you are coping with after a divorce or death, or your experience in pain and suffering, these are yours. I can never know just how you feel.

Each relationship is different and so are the many ways we experience grief. While someone who has experienced the death of a child, does know more of what it is like for someone else who loses a child, those experiences remain unique. So too with others who have lost their husband or wife, a brother or sister, a parent or grandparent, a boyfriend or girlfriend. While others who have been through grief will know something of what you are going through, no other person will be able to truly say, “I know just how you feel.”

Yet this is not to say that you are alone in your grief. The Holy Spirit knows well how you feel and what this loss is like for you. God lives in the depths of your heart and there behind the façade you have to project for others, God understands exactly what this is like for you.

Be kind to those who tell you they know how you feel. They are just looking for words of comfort, even if their actual words wound more than heal. In those times, turn to the one in your heart of hearts, who does know, does care and is taking this journey of healing with you. You are not alone.

# Day 31

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“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart  
and try to love the questions themselves.  
Do not seek the answers, which cannot be  
given you because you would not be able  
to live them. And the point is to live everything.  
Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then  
gradually, without noticing it, live along some  
distant day into the answers.”

~Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), *Letter to a Young Poet*

I know that sometimes I want an answer now, a solution now, and for whatever reason it can not yet come. Not until I stop working it out my way. Not until I stop asking. Not until I am still and waiting and at peace with the wait, or as Rilke puts it “Loving the question.”



## Day 32

“Letting Go does not mean to stop caring—it means not to take responsibility for someone else.

“Letting Go is not to cut myself off from others—it’s realizing I can’t control others.

“Letting Go is to admit my own powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.

“Letting Go is not to try to change or blame others—but to make the most of myself.

“Letting Go is not to care for—but to care about.

“Letting Go is not to fix—but to be supportive.

“Letting Go is not to be in the middle of arranging—but to be on the sidelines, cheering.

“Letting Go is not to be protective—it is to permit another to face reality.

“Letting Go is not to deny—but to accept.

“Letting Go is not to nag, scold, or argue—it is to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.

“Letting Go is not to adjust to my desires—but to take each day as it comes, and cherish myself in it.

“Letting Go is not to criticize and regulate others—but to be what I can become.

“Letting Go is not to regret the past—but to grow and live for the future.

“Letting Go is to fear less, and love more.”

~from the newsletter of Church of the Holy Cross in Shreveport, Louisiana

## Day 33

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“The mother picks up the child and says—in the oldest myth in the world—  
'Let me kiss it and make it well.' . . .

“She picks up the child, kisses the skinned place, holds the child in her lap, and all is well. Did her kiss make it well? No. It was that ten minutes in her lap. Just sit in the lap of love and see the mother crying.

“‘Mother, why are you crying? I’m the one who hurt my elbow.’

“‘Because you hurt,’ the mother says, ‘I hurt.’

“That does more for the child than all the bandages and medicine in the world, just sitting in her lap.

“What is the cross? Can I say it this way? It is to sit for a few minutes in the lap of God, who hurts because you hurt.”

~Fred Craddock, *Cherry Log Sermons*

## Day 34

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“There are two things you have to look out for, two extremes: On the one hand, an impractical realism, and on the other hand, a sort of passive realism. The impractical idealism is the kind that says, “I’ve worked it out beforehand, and that’s the way it’s got to be.” On the other hand, the passive kind of realism says, “Well, this is the way it is, what can I do?” And just does nothing.

“Both these views are basically static. They never get anywhere. In between, there is the kingdom view, which is: “In the reality which I have and am now, there is a possibility for growth which God has put there. There’s a seed God has planted there and is going to make grow, and what I have to provide is the love and assent that’s going to permit it to grow.”

~Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

# Day 35

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“[Jesus’] heart overflowed with compassion.”

~Luke 7:13

“By compassion we make others’ misery our own, and so, by relieving them, we relieve ourselves also.”

~Thomas Browne (1605-1682)

“Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.”

~Frederick Buechner (1926- )

“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.”

~from The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

## Day 36

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“No one is exempt from grief.”

~Gregory Maguire (1954- )

“Grief is the price we pay for love.”

~Elizabeth II (1926- )

“You may encounter loving and well-meaning friends who hate to see you hurt and want to see your mourning end. They may not understand that the worst thing you can do is to try to shut off or deny these powerful feelings. Often they are people who have never experienced the death of a loved one and don’t yet comprehend the function and importance of mourning. If you have friends pushing you in this direction, simply tell them that you can recover from your grief but that you need time to work it out.”

~Helen Fitzgerald, *The Mourning Handbook*

# Day 37

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“The pursuit of a prayerful life of simple love and discipline sets us in isolation from and opposition to the mainstream, mammon-directed culture in which we live. We become deserters from technocracy, disaffiliating ourselves from its power, rejecting its false values. To pray is to drop out in the most profound and positive sense.”

~Kenneth Leech (1939- )

“We must realize in advance that in every confrontation between our inner peace and the hurly-burly of life, victory will go to the turmoil, because our prayer is weak and life is hard. Life is ruthless whereas our prayer, our inner peace and serenity, is fragile. If we want to keep it and gain victory over life, this must not be by open confrontation but as water waters the earth. The Fathers said that water is an image of humility. It goes to the bottom. This is quite true, but water is also invincible. When through its weight it reaches the bottom, it begins to rise and nothing can stop it. This is what our prayer should do.”

~Anthony Bloom (1914-2003)

## Day 38

There is a Jewish collection of sayings from two hundred years before Jesus not found in the Old Testament that speaks to death. The Wisdom of Ben Sirah gives insight into Jewish thought at the time and on those who have died. It says: “Let us now sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations. The Lord apportioned to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning. There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name for themselves by their valor.”

Ben Sirah went on to write of those famous for their intelligence, and for ones famed for speaking prophecies, or wise teaching, or musical ability or the gift for writing, and others who were “the pride of their times.”

Then Ben Sirah moved beyond those famed in their day: “But of others there is no memory; they have perished as though they had never existed; they have become as though they had never been born, they and their children after them. But these also were godly men, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten.”

Notice that when he moves to those of whom there is no memory, he says that they were godly and their righteous deeds have not been forgotten. This is a reminder that though no people remember the good done, God does not forget. God remembers those whom history forgets and those who never achieved fame of any kind.

Jesus put it this way: “Not even a sparrow, worth only half a penny, can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to him than a whole flock of sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31)

# Day 39

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“Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” “No!” Jesus replied, “Seventy times seven!”

~Matthew 18:21-22

“Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit.”

~Peter Ustinov (1921-2004)

“Forgiving our debtors their debts is the same thing as the total acceptance of the will of God.”

~Simone Weil (1909-1943)

“There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness.”

~Josh Billings (1818-1885)

“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

~M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948)



## Day 40

The Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote of the difference between those who merely admire Christ from those who seek to follow him:

“It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression ‘follower.’ He never asks for admirers, worshippers, or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for.

“Christ understood that being a ‘disciple’ was in innermost and deepest harmony with what he said about himself. Christ claimed to be the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). For this reason, he could never be satisfied with adherents who accepted his teaching—especially with those who in their lives ignored it or let things take their usual course. His whole life on earth, from beginning to end, was destined solely to have followers and to make admirers impossible.

“Christ came into the world with the purpose of saving, not instructing it. At the same time—as is implied in his saving work—he came to be the pattern, to leave footprints for the person who would join him, who would become a follower. This is why Christ was born and lived and died in lowliness. It is absolutely impossible for anyone to sneak away from the Pattern with excuse and evasion on the basis that It, after all, possessed earthly and worldly advantages that he did not have. In that sense, to admire Christ is the false invention of a later age, aided by the presumption of ‘loftiness.’ No, there is absolutely nothing to admire in Jesus, unless you want to admire poverty, misery, and contempt.

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“What then, is the difference between an admirer and a follower? A follower is or strives to be what he admires. An admirer, however, keeps himself personally detached. He fails to see that what is admired involves a claim upon him, and thus he fails to be or strive to be what he admires.

“To want to admire instead of to follow Christ is not necessarily an invention by bad people. No, it is more an invention by those who spinelessly keep themselves detached, who keep themselves at a safe distance....”

# Day 41

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“The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him, ‘What are you going through?’”

~Simone Weil (1909-1943)

“Honest listening is one of the best medicines we can offer the dying and the bereaved.”

—Jean Cameron (written while dying of cancer, 1982)

## Day 42

“The story is told of a poor grass cutter who found a beautiful stone in the jungle. He had often heard of people finding valuable diamonds and thought this must be one. He took it to a jeweler and showed it to him with delight. Being a kind and sympathetic man, the jeweler knew that if he bluntly told the grass cutter that his stone was worthless glass, the man would either refuse to believe it or else fall into a state of depression. So instead, the jeweler offered the grass cutter some work in his shop so that he might become better acquainted with precious stones and their value.

“Meanwhile, the man kept his stone safely locked away in a strongbox. Several weeks later, the jeweler encouraged the man to bring out his own stone and examine it. As soon as he took it out of the chest and looked at it more closely, he immediately saw that it was worthless. His disappointment was great, but he went to the jeweler and said: ‘I thank you that you did not destroy my hope but aided me instead to see my mistake on my own. If you will have me, I will stay with you and faithfully serve you, as you are a good and kind master.’

“In the same way, God leads back to truth those who have wandered into error. When they recognize the truth for themselves, they gladly and joyfully give themselves in obedient service.”

~Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929), *A Sadhu's Wisdom*

# Day 43

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“Never cut a tree down in the wintertime.  
Never make a negative decision in the low time.  
Never make your most important decisions  
when you are in your worst moods.

Wait. Be patient.  
The storm will pass.  
The spring will come.”

~Robert H. Schuller (1926- )

“Love is life. All, everything that I understand,  
I understand only because I love.”

~Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

## Day 44

“I have heard people say, ‘At one time I was very near to God, but he didn’t hear me. Since then I haven’t been so sure about him.’ Such people fail to recognize that God wanted to say something to them, namely, that none of us really knows what to pray for. We certainly do not always know what is best. If we want to give God orders according to our will, if we want to dictate God’s direction through our prayers, then such prayers are not under the blessing of God. Rather, these prayers are born of the spirit of darkness, the spirit that told Eve, ‘You shall be like God.’

“True prayer acknowledges that of ourselves we are incapable of striking the right course in prayer. True prayer demands complete surrender and complete confidence, so that we can say, ‘We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express’ (Romans 8:26-30).

“When we come before God, we do not always find the right words. We are often unclear about what we want to pray for. We are sometimes so weak we cannot even gather our thoughts sufficiently to frame our prayer in words at all. Yet there is one who knows everything that is in our hearts. If we know him, then we will say with Peter, ‘Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you’ (John 21:15-17).”

~Eberhard Arnold (1883-1935)

## Day 45

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“Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

“We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

“We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

“We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

“Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

“Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.”

~The Book of Common Prayer, page 836

# Day 46

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“Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
and things are not what they seem.  
Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art; to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.”

~Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)



## Day 47

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In her book *Amazing Grace: A vocabulary of faith*, Kathleen Norris writes:

“As is often the case, what comes easily is of considerably less value than that which comes hard, earned over time and with a struggle.

“I once heard a Holocaust survivor asked if her experience of a death march and forced labor camp hadn’t destroyed her faith in God. ‘Of course,’ she said, adding, ‘but only for a time.’ She had come to the conclusion that what she and so many others had endured was not God’s doing, but was due to human beings having chosen to do evil. She said she now believed that God was good, but had given people the ability to choose between good and evil. As for the terrors that she and the other Jews of her village had endured, she had come to believe that God had been there all the time, suffering with them....”

“The woman was describing the God of ordinary religious faith, but her rediscovery of this God in adulthood had come to her by extraordinary and unspeakably cruel means.

“Does faith have to come through a hard struggle? Or is it just more valuable if it does come through darkness and tears?”

# Day 48

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“God has been very good to me, for I never dwell upon anything wrong which a person has done, so as to remember it afterwards. If I do remember it, I always see some other virtue in that person.”

~Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”

~Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

“I believe in the holy, infallible church, of which I regret to say at present I am the only member.”

~William Temple (1881-1944)

“The presence of community does not mean the absence of differences.”

~anonymous

## Day 49

Jerry D. Jones' book *201 Great Questions* asks, "Mother Theresa called you today and said she is very short-staffed and desperately needs your help in India for two years. There is no pay, but she can provide a bed for you and simple meals with her staff. She explained that your primary responsibilities would be emptying bedpans and giving spoonfuls of water to the dying. What would you tell her? Why?"

A retired Bishop told me this story of when he was a young minister sent to work for a time among Mother Teresa's community. Soon after his arrival, the young minister was sent with a team to go change lepers' bandages in the streets. One leper saw the minister working at the station and asked him to lay hands on him and pray for healing. Horrified by the disfigured face, he ran to the nun leading the group.

"That man wants me to lay hands on him and pray for him. What should I do?" the nervous minister asked.

"What would our Lord do?" the nun asked.

"I know what our Lord would do. I want to know what I am to do," he stammered back. "How is the disease transmitted?"

"You want a medical answer, and I will not give you one," the nun replied. "The man wants God's healing touch. If you are a priest, you will do what your Lord would do. As you walk back over there, decide whether you intend to be a priest or not."

The now retired Bishop said that the nun's insistence on following Jesus' example was the kick in the seat of the pants he needed to become a real minister of Gospel.

# Day 50

In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."

Eugene Peterson interpreted this same passage in his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*:

“Are you tired? Worn out?  
Burned out on religion?  
Come to me. Get away with me,  
and you'll recover your life.  
I'll show you how to take a real rest.  
Walk with me and work with me...  
watch how I do it.  
Learn the unforced Rythms of grace.  
I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.  
Keep company with me,  
and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

A yoke is what oxen wore to pull the plow together in a field. Yokes are for work and service. Yet, with a yoke one is tied to another who pulls too. Jesus says “take my yoke upon you.” We do not go it alone, Jesus is yoked with us, pulling with us. This is what makes it easy and light and in this we find ourselves refreshed.

# Day 51

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“It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.”

~C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), *Mere Christianity*

## Day 52

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“Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.”

~Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

“Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.”

~Frederick Buechner (1926- )

## Day 53

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“I remember being at a retreat once where the leader asked us to think of someone who represented Christ in our lives. When it came time to share our answers, one woman stood up and said, ‘I had to think hard about that one. I kept thinking, Who is it who told me the truth about myself so clearly that I wanted to kill him for it?’ According to John, Jesus died because he told the truth to everyone he met. He was the truth, a perfect mirror in which people saw themselves in God’s own light.

“What happened then goes on happening now. In the presence of his integrity, our own pretense is exposed. In the presence of his constancy, our cowardice is brought to light. In the presence of his fierce love for God and for us, our own hardness of heart is revealed. Take him out of the room and all those things become relative. I am not that much worse than you are nor you than I, but leave him in the room and there is no room to hide. He is the light of the world. In his presence, people either fall down to worship him or do everything they can to extinguish his light.”

~Barbara Brown Taylor (1951- )

# Day 54

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“Servant Christ,  
Help us to follow you  
Deep into the waters of baptism,  
To break the chain of past wrongs;  
To become fit to face your coming age:  
Servant Christ, help us all to follow you.  
Help us to follow you in untiring ministry to town and village,  
To heal and restore the broken body of humanity,  
To cast out the demonic forces  
Of greed, resentment, communal hatred  
And self-destructive fears.  
Servant Christ, help us all to follow you.  
Help us to follow you on the road to Jerusalem,  
To set our faces firmly against friendly suggestions to live  
A safe, expedient life; To embrace boldly the way of self-offering,  
The way of life given for others’ gain.  
Servant Christ, help us all to follow you.  
Help us to follow you out of the dark tomb;  
To share fully in your resurrection life,  
To be renewed daily in your image of love,  
To serve daily as your new body  
In ministering to the world.  
Servant Christ, help us all to follow you.”

~A prayer from India shared in an Anglican Communion News Service article



## Day 55

In an email discussion group on worship to which I belong, there has been a recent discussion of people killed in worship services including Oscar Romero, who died celebrating communion, and Dr. Martin Luther King's mother, who was assassinated while playing the organ at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

The discussion then took an amazingly bleak turn with story related by the Rev. Donald Schell:

"The most startling story I've heard of death in the liturgy was from Frank Houdek, S.J., a superb teacher at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley. It's a story of another kind of violence.

"One of Frank's teaching specialties was discernment—classical Jesuit stuff nuanced with contemporary theology and other sources as well, and a really fine apologetic and interpretation of all this in experience and storytelling. To explore the question of 'how we know God' he had a whole list of ways and stories to go with them, silence, beauty, human love, and so on, and the last one (which took a strong story to make it clear) was God's absence, the void.

"The story he told was that as a Jesuit novice in St. Louis, fifty plus years ago, his novice house had a notorious feuding pair of retired, old Jesuits; their feud was talked of throughout North America, though no one was sure how it had begun. They were about the same age and had probably been novices and seminarians together, and now they hadn't spoken to one another for years and years.

"One morning Frank was serving one of the old men in 'his mass' at an old-fashioned monastic church with as many small altars as there were clergy in

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the community. Suddenly the other priest at a nearby altar collapsed in a heap, and lay barely breathing, crumpled face down on the floor. His old despised adversary stopped 'his mass' and he and Frank rushed over and turned the gasping crumpled body face up so he could breathe, and when the dying man opened his eyes to see who it was, with his last breath he uttered the bitter words stored up for half a century, 'Take your God-damned hands off me, you bastard.'"

"Frank described the darkness and void he felt in that moment as so bleak and intense and empty of God, that God's presence in the ordinary moment before was palpable. He said that recalling that event and the despairing anger of the old priest's end over many years, opened him to looking for and feeling the presence of God in ordinary moments."

I am horrified at the idea of two monks, both of whom were priests, nurturing such bitterness. It is an extreme example of the ways in which any of us can harbor anger, or feed a grudge.

Let the stark outline of this true story recall you to the healing Jesus has for you. Who do you need to forgive? What anger are you hanging on to?

## Day 56

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“Seeing death as the end of life is like seeing the horizon as the end of the ocean.”

~David Searls

“While we are mourning the loss of our friend, others are rejoicing to meet him behind the veil.”

~John Taylor (1753-1824)

“When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language.”

~John Donne (1572-1631)

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

~1 Thessalonians 4:13

# Day 57

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“There will always be many who love Christ’s heavenly kingdom, but few who will bear his cross. Jesus has many who desire consolation, but few who care for adversity. He finds many to share his table, but few who will join him in fasting. Many are eager to be happy with him; few wish to suffer anything for him. Many will follow him as far as the breaking of bread, but few will remain to drink from his passion. Many are awed by his miracles, few accept the shame of his cross.

“Many love Christ as long as they encounter no hardship; many praise and bless him as long as they receive some comfort from him. But if Jesus hides himself and leaves them for a while, they either start complaining or become dejected. Those, on the contrary, who love him for his own sake and not for any comfort of their own, praise him both in trial and anguish of heart as well as in the bliss of consolation. Even if Jesus should never comfort them, they would continue to praise and thank him. What power there is in a pure love for Jesus—love that is free from all self-interest and self-love!

“Do not those who always seek consolation deserve to be called mercenaries? Do not those who always contemplate their own profit and gain prove that they love themselves rather than Christ? Where can we find anyone who is willing to serve God for nothing? It is surely rare to find a person spiritual enough to strip himself of all earthly things. And where can we find anyone so truly poor in spirit that he is free from being dependent on created things? Such a person is worth far more than the jewels brought from the most distant lands.”

~Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380-1471), *The Imitation of Christ*

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# Day 58

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“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

~Philippians 4:6

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.”

~Helen Keller (1880-1968)

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

~Jesus (John 6:39-40)

# Day 59

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“In struggling against anguish one never produces serenity; the struggle against anguish only produces new forms of anguish.”

~Simone Weil (1909-1943)

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

~Hebrews 2:14-15

“Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows but only empties today of its strengths.”

~Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

## Day 60

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“Well at least....” You have heard statements like these: Well at least he isn’t suffering any more. Well at least she lived a long full life. Well at least he died doing what he loves. Well at least you have your other children.

Even if true, it doesn’t help. This type of comment hurts so deeply as it seems dismissive of the very real pain you feel. For while he may have died doing what he loved, he died too soon just the same. Or while she may have lived a long full life, that doesn’t mean that you don’t miss her.

Others may try to dismiss the very real pain and loss you feel by pointing out that things could have been worse. Perhaps the statement is of comfort to the one who says it, but it leaves you feeling hurt. Let their words go. Don’t hold on to them.

But if you do appreciate that the person you love is no longer suffering, or that his or her life was full, these are your own minor consolations and at least your own “well at least” statements won’t diminish the pain you still feel.

## Day 61

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**A**s you only have so much time to spend, an important part of deciding what you would like to do, is deciding what you need to stop.

Business guru Jim Collins has written of this in describing an encounter very influential to him. In a *USA Today* article Collins said he learned the importance of occasionally asking yourself, What things, even good things, do I need to stop doing, in order to make room in my life for the things that will make the biggest difference over the long haul?

Spending time with people you love is one great way to make a difference over the long haul. The questions are: What matters to you? What ways of spending your time and energy will most matter over the long haul? What do you want to do more of? What do you need to stop doing?



# Day 62

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“To a child a few weeks seem long.  
To a youth a few months seem long.  
To an adult a few years seem long.  
To an old person decades seem short.

The old person is closest to God.  
To God decades are seconds,  
Centuries minutes.  
To him eternity is every moment.

Be patient with yourself;  
Think like God.”

~Traditional Celtic Poem

# Day 63

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“Would you know my name  
If I saw you in heaven  
Will it be the same  
If I saw you in heaven?”

~Eric Clapton (1945- )

“If I am not allowed to laugh in heaven, I don’t want to go there.”

~Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“For the Christian, heaven is where Jesus is. We do not need to speculate on what heaven will be like. It is enough to know that we will be for ever with Him.”

~William Barclay (1907-1978)

“I had a million questions to ask God: but when I met Him, they all fled my mind; and it didn’t seem to matter.”

~Christopher Morley (1890-1957)

“The unthankful heart... discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day and, as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings!”

~Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)

## Day 64

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Jesus came to bring peace. Yet Jesus wants no lesser peace to take the place of true and lasting peace. Unless the drug use stops, how can there be peace for the drug user or peace for the family? Unless the affairs stop, how can there be peace in the marriage? But all too often we grab hold of a lesser peace and we don't rock the boat. Rather than having the courage to speak the truth in love, we hold our peace and prevent real peace from entering in.

We can allow old wounds to be healed in this way. You get hurt by someone, but instead of dealing with the hurt and resolving the issues, you just act as if nothing happened. Then things heal over on the surface. But it's like a stabbing wound where the outer flesh heals, but underneath infection takes hold, and when it finally erupts, things will be much worse.

Is God using this short reflection to speak to your heart? Perhaps there is a way you need to speak the truth in love. When you do so, it may divide a household two against three or mother against daughter. But if God is speaking this truth to your heart, you may be being led from a lesser peace to true and lasting peace. The cost is high. So high in fact that most of us shrink back and become lesser men and women. We let coworkers steal from the company, friends cheat on their spouses, brothers fall deeper into drug use. We do all of this to keep the peace. But instead we are simply trading a lesser peace for the deep peace Jesus wants for us. Is there some lesser peace you need to confront in order to get to the deeper, lasting peace that Jesus has for you?

## Day 65

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“After a recent Holy Week, Paul, one of our pastoral interns, reflected in a small group on an experience he had the previous week. Paul had made a run to the grocery store after our Good Friday worship. While standing in the checkout line he noticed the cover of one of the magazines in the display rack, which featured a very attractive teenage girl. She was well endowed, thin, physically fit, and scantily clad. On the cover were these words: ‘You can have a body just like this one!’

“Paul said that after being immersed in the church’s story in the intensive way that Holy Week immerses us and experiencing how it is that Jesus Christ’s death was God’s affirmation of the infinite worth of all human beings, this encounter with the magazine’s cover message angered him. The cover was from a world that exists in opposition to the church. As the cover begged to invite him into the false promise it offered, he said he was carrying in his soul an image proffered in our worship center that night: the accusers pointing their fingers at Jesus.

“Paul worked among our high school youth, which included a particular young lady whose genetic make-up meant that she would always be heavy. She regularly had to endure some dehumanizing bullying at school, and Paul experienced the magazine as a cultural statement of the world pointing its finger at this girl. Outside the church, the world saw a fat teenager who probably had little going for her. Inside the church she had infinite worth and was a leader among our youth.”

~Rick Barger, *A New and Right Spirit*

# Day 66

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“The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn’t have been complete without you.”

~Frederick Buechner (1926- )

“The one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God’s friend.”

~Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-c.395)

# Day 67

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“But why, you may ask, must we make so much ado about human sin? It is because in our inmost being we have each gone astray: I am godless, loveless, self-seeking, God-escaping. This is not manifested merely in those obvious weaknesses and vices that everyone condemns and with which, to a very large extent, we ourselves can deal. No, sin—the corruption of our nature - lies much deeper and is manifest even when we are occupied with the highest and holiest things.

“The message of the cross goes to the root of our ills, and it alone can cure them radically. Just for that reason it spells folly and scandal. How? In the Bible it is not we who find a way to God; it is God who comes to us. It says nothing about practicing mystical introspection, of otherworldliness, of cultivating the interior life, with a view to reaching ultimately the divine ground of the soul. It is not a question of our own performances and exercises as a result of which we might hope to become pious and well-pleasing to God. That, in the last analysis, is self-praise. The central point of scripture is that God has mercy on us who are stuck so fast in the mire—if I may be pardoned the expression -that we cannot help ourselves.”

~Emil Bruner (1889-1966)

## Day 68

The renowned early 19th century English painter John Constable (1776-1837) was admired for his large landscapes often shown under a brooding sky. Patchwork fields crossed by ancient hedges, old churches and mills, and other scenes particularly of the countryside around first Suffolk and later Salisbury are his best-known subjects. His paintings of the Stour River caused that area to become known as “Constable Country.”

Constable saw beauty in the English countryside in situations where others found no magnificence at all. He said, “I never saw an ugly thing in my life: for let the form of an object be what it may—light, shade, and perspective will always make it beautiful.” He went on to say, “The sound of water escaping from mill dams, willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts and brickwork, I love such things. These scenes made me a painter.”

When venturing out hunting for new vistas, Constable often took some or all of his seven children with him. At night he painted the final canvases with his family still close at hand. Constable’s eldest son wrote a series of diaries, which give us insight into the man behind the large landscapes.

Once when Constable was putting on an exhibit, he was to show one of a new “six-footer” as he called his big canvases. Art critics came to Suffolk to see the new works, including the latest, which would be unveiled at the start of the exhibit.

With the crowd gathered round and anticipation at its height, the artist pulled back the cloth covering the painting. No one spoke a word. Rather than an awed silence, it was an awkward one. The great painting’s most obvious feature was a rather large tear running from top to bottom of the outsized

## *A Season of Healing*

canvas. After the uncomfortable gathering finally ended, Constable was once more alone with his family. The oldest son tells that he was away, avoiding his father's wrath. When the son finally returned home, his father asked, "Did you do this?" The boy answered that he had. He remembers that his father said the most amazing thing. "How shall we mend it, my dear?"

"How shall we mend it, my dear?" This image of an unbelievably understanding father of a mischievous son shows us something of God's view of our world. The overarching story of the Bible is that of a perfect painting—the world as God created it—marred by the way we humans chose to use our freewill. Through our own actions, we have torn the canvas. But the story of scripture is not that of a vengeful God exacting retribution for our wrongdoings. Instead we meet in the Bible our loving creator who looks at the mess we make of our lives and says, "How shall we mend it, my dear?"

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*



## Day 69

Of Peter's walk on the water, the great Christian writer of 5th century North Africa, Augustine of Hippo, wrote:

"Look at Peter, who in this episode is an image of ourselves; at one moment he is all confidence, at the next all uncertainty and doubt; now he professes faith in the immortal One, now he fears for his life.

"Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you upon the water. When the Lord said Come Peter climbed out of the boat and began to walk on the water. This is what he could do through the power of the Lord; what by himself? Realizing how violently the wind was blowing, he lost his nerve, and as he began to sink he called out, 'Lord, I am drowning, save me!'

"When he counted on the Lord's help it enabled him to walk on the water; when human frailty made him falter he turned once more to the Lord, who immediately stretched out his hand to help him, raised him up as he was sinking, and rebuked him for his lack of faith.

"Think, then, of this world as a sea, whipped up to tempestuous heights by violent winds. A person's own private tempest will be his or her unruly desires. If you love God you will have power to walk upon the waters, and all the world's swell and turmoil will remain beneath your feet. But if you love the world it will surely engulf you, for it always devours its lovers, never sustains them.

"If you feel your foot slipping beneath you, if you become a prey to doubt or realize that you are losing control, if, in a word, you begin to sink, say: 'Lord, I am drowning, save me!' Only he who for your sake died in your fallen nature can save you from the death inherent in that fallen nature."

# Day 70

“I think the experience of losing your faith, or of having lost it, is an experience that in the long run belongs to faith; or at least it can belong to faith if faith is still valuable to you, and it must be or you would not have written me about this. I don’t know how the kind of faith required of a Christian living in the 20th century can be at all if it is not grounded on this experience that you are having right now of unbelief. ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief’ is the most natural and most human and most agonizing prayer in the gospels, and I think it is the foundation prayer of faith.

“A friend once wrote to the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins and asked him to tell him how he could believe. He must have expected a long philosophical answer. Hopkins wrote back, “Give alms.” Perhaps he was trying to say that God is to be experienced in Charity (in the sense of love for the divine image in human beings). Don’t get so entangled with intellectual difficulties that you fail to look for God in this way.

“Faith is what you have in the absence of knowledge... and that absence doesn’t bother me because I have got, over the years, a sense of the immense sweep of creation, of the evolutionary process in everything, of how incomprehensible God must necessarily be to be the God of heaven and earth. You can’t fit the Almighty into your intellectual categories.

“If you want your faith, you have to work for it. It is a gift, but for very few is it a gift given without any demand for time devoted to its cultivation... Even in the life of a Christian, faith rises and falls like the tides of an invisible sea. It’s there, even when he can’t see it or feel it, if he wants it to be there.”

~Flannery O’Connor (1925-1964)

# Day 71

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“When you rise in the morning,  
what fills your head?  
Are you thinking of  
food and drink,  
the pleasures ahead?

Are you planning  
the work you must do,  
the labor ahead?

Are you fearful of  
snares and dangers,  
the evils ahead?

Are you hopeful of  
all you’ll achieve,  
the successes ahead?

Let all those worldly thoughts  
swirl in your mind;

Then let them flush away,  
like dirt in a river.

Empty your head;  
Let your brain be at peace.

Quietly, calmly, serenely  
Offer the day to God.”

~Traditional Celtic Poem

## Day 72

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“Many people think of Job as the epitome of misery in the Bible. He lost his children, his wealth, his health. Job’s story is powerful, but he is not alone. In fact, significant suffering touched most of the men and women whom God singled out by special call. Abraham and Sarah’s infertility caused severe distress and led to marital strain. Moses was an outcast for forty years—rejected by both Egyptians and Hebrews. Further, the driving goal and ambition of Moses’ life—to lead God’s people to the promised land of Israel—was left unfulfilled. David endured repeated attempts on his life, the untimely death of his best friend, the death of an infant, the murder of one son at the hands of another son, and the death of a rebellious son. An unnamed “thorn in the flesh” troubled the apostle Paul. These pillars of the faith—and many others who were much loved by God—still experienced profound suffering.

“And then, of course, there was Jesus himself—a man of sorrows, well acquainted with pain and suffering.”

~Kenneth C. Haugk, *Don’t Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart*

## Day 73

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One of the great treasures within the Christian tradition are the sayings of the monks (male and female) who lived in the desert of Egypt during the 4th century. The teachings of these earliest Christian monks come to us in short sayings. Here are two from a collection edited by Thomas Merton called *Wisdom of the Desert*:

“Abbot Pastor said: if there are three monks living together, of whom one remains silent in prayer at all times, and another is ailing and gives thanks for it, and a third waits on them both with sincere good will, these three are equal, as if all were performing the same work.

“He said, again: Malice will never drive out malice. But if someone does evil to you, you should do good to him, so that by your good work you may destroy his malice.”

## Day 74

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“O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

It is both true and truly amazing that God became human in the form of Jesus of Nazareth and showed his power chiefly through showing mercy and pity. Jesus proved his power through his willingness to be powerless. This paradox is counter to how we humans expect things to be. Yet, human history shows that keeping control through power only works so long. Dictators can make the trains run on time, but not forever, only as long as they exert force.

Jesus’ leadership through mercy, pity and powerlessness came with authority. Our scripture tells us that those who heard him were amazed at the authority with which Jesus preached. Jesus’ authority came out of the life he lived that was synonymous with the Gospel he preached. While power cannot outlive the dictator, Jesus’ authority continues.

## Day 75

“Sacrament” is the ecclesiastical or church word for something that conveys God’s presence in the here and now. The Book of Common Prayer defines a sacrament as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” This means that the bread and wine of communion are the outward and visible signs of the inward grace (meaning gift from God) of Jesus’ presence.

The primary sacraments of the church are the two instituted by Jesus during his ministry, which are baptism and communion. The other sacraments of the church are confirmation, ordination, marriage, reconciliation of a penitent (confession), and prayers for healing and for the dying.

The water of baptism is the outward sign of the inward grace of cleansing from sin. The outward signs in the other sacraments are oil and rings and the laying on of hands. But we know that these are not the only things that can convey God’s presence.

We can experience God in a powerful way in a hike through a canyon, or by watching a sunset, or through the birth of a baby. World War II era Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple declared that we live in a “sacramental universe” meaning that everything can and does show us God’s presence in our lives. The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning spoke of the sacramental universe through some oft-quoted lines:

Earth’s crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.

## *A Season of Healing*

I agree with Temple and Browning that everything and every place is potentially the moment of The Burning Bush as all creation is marinated in God's abiding presence. How have you seen God's presence lately? Where have you experienced Christ in nature or in others? Where might you have passed by God's presence without paying attention?

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*



## Day 76

“Once as I wandered in the mountains, I came upon an outcropping of rocks, and as I sat on the highest rock to rest and look out over the valley, I saw a nest in the branches of a tree. The young birds in the nest were crying noisily. Then I saw how the mother bird returned with food for her young ones. When they heard the sound of her wings and felt her presence nearby, they cried all the more loudly and opened their beaks wide. But after the mother bird fed them and flew away again, they were quiet. Climbing down to look more closely, I saw that the newly hatched birds had not yet opened their eyes. Without even being able to see their mother, they opened their beaks and begged for nourishment whenever she approached.

“These tiny birds did not say: ‘We will not open our beaks until we can see our mother clearly and also see what kind of food she offers. Perhaps it is not our mother at all but instead some dangerous enemy. And who knows if it is proper nourishment or some kind of poison that is being fed to us?’

“If they had reasoned thus, they would never have discovered the truth. Before they were even strong enough to open their eyes, they would have starved to death. But they held no such doubts about the presence and love of their mother, and so after a few days, they opened their eyes and rejoiced to see her with them. Day by day they grew stronger and developed into the form and likeness of the mother, and soon they were able to soar up into the freedom of the skies.

“We humans often think of ourselves as the greatest living beings, but do we not have something to learn from these common birds? We often question the reality and the loving nature of God. But the Master has said: ‘Blessed are

*A Season of Healing*

those who have not seen and yet believe.' Whenever we open our hearts to God, we receive spiritual nourishment and grow more and more into the likeness of God until we reach spiritual maturity. And once we open our spiritual eyes and see God's presence, we find indescribable and unending bliss."

~Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929)

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

## Day 77

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There is a story told of an Amish man who was once asked by an enthusiastic young evangelist whether he had been saved, and whether he had accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

The gentleman replied, “Why do you ask me such a thing? I could tell you anything. Here are the names of my banker, my grocer, and my farm hands. Ask them if I’ve been saved.”

“Instead of loving what you think is peace, love others, and love God above all, and instead of hating the people you think are warmongers, hate the appetite and disorder in your own soul, which are also causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed—but hate these things in yourself first, not in others.”

~Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

## *Day 78*

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“The deep pain that is felt at the death of every friendly soul arises from the feeling that there is in every individual something which is inexpressible, peculiar to him alone, and is, therefore, absolutely and irretrievably lost.”

~Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

“Memory is a way of holding onto the things you love, the things you are, the things you never want to lose.”

~From the television show “The Wonder Years”

## Day 79

“Where there is much light, the shadow is deep.”

~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

There is an old parable told within Celtic Christian traditions of Saint Comgan who helped a widow overcome her grief at the loss of her husband. The old couple had long been admired by everyone in the village as enjoying the happiest marriage. The two had never argued. They were each unfailingly loving to one another so that their care was the envy of all. After a long marriage, the husband died, and the wife was devastated. Neighbors offered food and company. The children tried everything they knew to bring her peace. More than a year passed and the woman's grief seemed to grow rather than dissipate as she wept day after day for her lost love.

When Comgan learned of the woman's pain in grief, he asked a wealthy friend to loan him a ring with a precious jewel set in it. He took the fine ring to the widow, and said to her, “Take this ring and give it to the family who has experienced no sorrow.”

The widow wanted to do as the saintly Comgan asked her. She set out to quickly discharge her duty. Day after day she visited with families and talked to them of their lives, their joys and their sorrows. The task proved more difficult than the widow imagined. At last she returned to Comgan to give back the ring. She still mourned for her husband, but the hard edge to the grief had worn smooth and she no longer spent her days in sorrow. She began again to spend time with her friends, her children, and their children.

## Day 80

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Real grief abides. Yet seemingly unendurable grief can be transformed into a sorrow that you can bear. The story in my own family is of the time when my mother's family was burned out of their home, losing all but everything they owned. My grandmother was prostrate with grief for their home and possessions for quite some time. Then another family in the area had their house burn to the ground, losing some of their children to the blaze. My grandmother got up, prepared the family a meal to take over and ceased complaining about her own loss.

Knowing that others have it worse may not be the ticket out of grief, though it does help. Knowing that you are not alone in your sorrow probably matters more. It is God's healing presence within the grief that gently transforms that seemingly unendurable grief into a sorrow that you can bear.

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light—a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow.”

~Isaiah 9:2

# Day 81

“I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

~Jesus (Matthew 28:20)

“Anxiety and fear are what we know best in this fantastic century of ours. Wars and rumors of wars. From civilization itself to what seemed the most unalterable values of the past, everything is threatened or already in ruins. We have heard so much tragic news that when the news is good we cannot hear it.

“But the proclamation of Easter Day is that all is well. And as a Christian, I say this not with the easy optimism of one who has never known a time when all was not well but as one who has faced the cross in all its obscenity as well as in all its glory, who has known one way or another what it is like to live separated from God. In the end, his will, not ours, is done. Love is the victor. Death is not the end. The end is life. His life and our lives through him, in him. Existence has greater depths of beauty, mystery, and benediction than the wildest visionary has ever dared to dream. Christ our Lord has risen.”

~Frederick Buechner (1926- ), *The Magnificent Defeat*

## Day 82

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Nationally-known speaker Mariah Burton Nelson tells how when she forgave the man who molested her; it released her as well. She no longer defines herself as a survivor of sexual abuse. That past is behind her. She is free to define herself without reference to what that man did to her.

You do not have to be the sum total of the injuries you have received. This is the secret of forgiveness. For in forgiving others the hurts, often very bad emotional pain they have caused you, you too are released. Yes, you release that person, but in so doing, you no longer have to hold on to the hurt that person inflicted on you.

Forgiving others who have wronged you unlocks your heart so that you can receive more of God's love and forgiveness. Need a little extra inducement? Here's my one last reason to forgive those who have treated you wrong: It'll drive them nuts. That's not just me talking, it's actually scriptural and you'll find it in the Bible in Proverbs (25:11) and Romans (12:19-21) "But if your enemy is hungry; feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."



## Day 83

My Mother shared the prayer that follows with me. It has been very helpful to her in healing past hurts. She has found as she has prayed it over time that more hurts come up, but that the first ones have been healed. She received a photocopy of a photocopy with no attribution, though it may come from Christian Healing Ministries in Jacksonville who does use the prayer. I offer this prayer as something that could be meaningful to many:

“Lord, I don’t know how to make forgiveness happen. I can’t cleanse my heart or change my feelings. I don’t know how to trust, and I’m afraid to hold my heart open. But today I’m making a choice to forgive. I know I’ll have to choose again and again until you make forgiveness real and complete in me. Please God, give me the willingness and strength to persevere in choosing until forgiveness is accomplished in me by Your power. I choose to forgive my father for [name aloud things to forgive]. I choose to forgive my mother for [name aloud things to forgive]. Forgive me for all my sinful responses.

Father, I let go of all resentments and bitterness stored up in my heart. Wash me clean. Forgive me for all the condemning judgments I have made. Give me a new and right spirit that will help enable me to hate sin but look with Your compassion and love upon sinners. Heal the wounded heart of the child within me. Pour Your love in. Bless those who wounded me.

Forgive me, Lord, for projecting childish pictures of my parents on to You, and onto others, especially those I love. Bring those pictures to death. Bring my childish ways and expectations to death. Let Your light shine into all the hidden places of my heart. Enlighten the eyes of my heart, Lord, to see You and love You as You really are, and to walk in Your ways. In Jesus Name, Amen.”

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# Day 84

“Lord of the loving heart, may mine be loving too,  
Lord of the gentle hands, may mine be gentle too.  
Lord of the willing feet, may mine be willing too,  
So may I grow more like thee  
In all I say and do.”

~anonymous

## Day 85

**F**rom *Come Aside Awhile...A Retreat with the Monks* a guide written by Anthony Delisi of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia:

“Once one settles down, there is the boredom that sets in with nothing to do....In the mist of this silence and solitude it is quite normal to have the memory become active and events of the past to replay.

“I recall a Nigerian on retreat who shared with me that all the bad things he had done during his life kept coming back to him. When I shared at the orientation talk that takes place on Tuesday and Saturday morning that it is a common thing to happen, he was relieved. Saint Bernard taught that the first step to knowing God is to know oneself. Ezekiel 36:31 speaks of the grace of being able to recall the past: “Remember your evil conduct and your evil actions. Your deeds were not good. Loathe yourselves for all your sins...be ashamed of who you are...”

“What does one do with all of this recall which I might call ‘junk?’ I tell retreatants to take all their junk and throw it in God’s septic tank: the confessional. The time of retreat is an ideal time to make a good confession and get rid of the burden being carried. For those in AA, this would entail the fifth step. Once one has confessed all the evil of one’s past life, then there is the need to trust in God’s forgiveness and keep living. The past is the past and there is no reliving of the past. All we can do is repent and strive to do better for the present and the future. A septic tank will not work if one keeps stirring the contents. There is need to let things settle and then the bacteria will do the rest. In the same way there is need to confess one’s sins and then simply trust in God’s mercy and stop replaying the past and keep living.”

# Day 86

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“How many grains of sand on the beach?  
How many blades of grass in the meadow?  
How many drops of dew on the tree?  
If you could count all these,  
You could count the number  
of God’s blessings.  
Do not even try to count.  
Just trust, and enjoy,  
and give thanks.”

~anonymous

## Day 87

A pagan at 12, a complete agnostic at 16, G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) wrote, “I am the man who with the utmost daring discovered what had been discovered before,” to describe how to his surprise all the questions he had about the way of the world were answered in Christianity. In his book *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton wrote of an essential problem we all face at some point.

“We have all read in scientific books, and, indeed, in all romances, the story of the man who has forgotten his name. This man walks about the streets and can see and appreciate everything; only he cannot remember who he is. Well, every man is that man in the story. Every man has forgotten who he is. One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the self is more distant than any star. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; but thou shalt not know thyself. We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names. We have all forgotten who we really are.”

The problem is that we go to the wrong sources to discover who we are. It is in the eyes of The Beloved that you learn who you are, for it is the God who made you and who was willing to die to redeem you who knows you by name and wants you not to call upon “The Great High God,” as in some unknown diety but to call upon “Abba,” or “Daddy,” who knows you like no other, loves you just as you are, and wants something better for you as you conform your life more to the life and teachings of Jesus.

# Day 88

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“Knowing God  
without knowing our own wretchedness  
makes for pride.

Knowing our own wretchedness  
without knowing God  
makes for despair.

Knowing Jesus Christ  
strikes the balance  
because he shows us  
both God  
and our own wretchedness.”

~Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

## Day 89

Søren Kierkegaard wrote of this in his Parable of the Two Artists in his book *Works of Love*:

“Suppose there were two artists, and one said, ‘I have travelled much and seen much in the world, but I have sought in vain to find a man worth painting. I have found no face with such perfection of beauty that I could make up my mind to paint it. In every face I have seen one or another little fault. Therefore I seek in vain.’ Would this indicate the artist was a great artist?

“On the other hand, the second one said, ‘Well, I do not pretend to be a real artist; neither have I travelled foreign lands. But remaining in the little circle of men who are closest to me, I have not found a face so insignificant or so full of faults that I still could not discern a more beautiful side and discover something glorious. Therefore I am happy in the art I practice. It satisfies me without my making any claim to being an artist.’ Would not this indicate that precisely this one was the artist, who by bringing a certain something with him found then and there what the much-travelled artist did not find anywhere in the world, perhaps because he did not bring a certain something with him! Consequently the second of the two was the artist.

Would it not be sad, too, if what is intended to beautify life could only be a curse upon it, so that art, instead of making life beautiful for us, only fastidiously discovers that not one of us is beautiful. Would it not be sadder still, and still more confusing, if love also should be only a curse because its demand could only make it evident that none of us is worth loving, instead of love’s being recognized precisely by its loving enough to be able to find some loveliness in all of us, consequently loving enough to be able to love us all.”

# Day 90

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Some psychologists have theorized that it takes three weeks to build up a habit. Try something for a few days and you will still easily fall back into earlier patterns. But try a new practice for 21 days and you will more likely stick with it. My twenty-one day plan is this. Read the Gospel of John, one chapter a day.

Find time, preferably first thing in the morning or at lunch, any time when you still have energy. If possible, do not leave this until bed time. Then each day at the same time, read a single chapter of John's Gospel. It will be tempting to read more. If you really still want to read, then re-read the same chapter. Go no farther than one a day. In twenty-one days, you will have read through the Gospel.

Sometimes called the love Gospel, John was written by Jesus' own beloved disciple and you will find yourself immersed for three weeks in the love of Jesus.

What next? Now that you have the habit of reading a little of the Bible each day, try a one chapter a day, 28 day tour through Matthew, then 16 days with Mark and 24 days with Luke.

Those three months of reading will have you grounded in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, which is the best possible lens through which to read the rest of the Bible. You will be ready then to look for a one or two year plan to read through the whole 66-book library which is the Bible.



# Day 91

“If a newborn child does not cry out and scream, then it must be slapped until it does. No one has joy in slapping a child—only the longing that it makes full use of its lungs and draws in life-giving air. So in perfect love, God may strike us with blows and stings of pain so that the breath of prayer flows freely through the lungs of our souls. This is the only way we can become strong and fit for eternal life.

Look at the pearl. A pearl is a product of pain and suffering. Tormented by some foreign matter against its soft flesh, the oyster responds by embracing the irritant and transforming it into an object of great beauty. The creation of the pearl not only provides relief to the oyster but is also a source of wonder and pleasure to many others. But beware! The unique luster of the pearl can be easily destroyed. Ink or oils can contaminate and destroy its beauty. Pearls laid in ancient tombs often decay with the corpse of their owners; the dust of the pearls is then mingled with the dust of the dead.

Spiritual life—like the pearl—grows out of pain and suffering. And even when the pain has been transformed into a thing of beauty, the lustre of our spiritual lives can easily become contaminated and decay. Thousands of years of heat and pressure come to bear on black carbon before it is transformed into a precious diamond. Even then, diamonds do not dazzle unless they have first been cut. When cut and polished, then the rays of the sun make them shine with wonderful colors. Scientists may manufacture artificial diamonds in laboratories, but careful examination exposes their inferiority. Likewise, we cannot attain spiritual perfection without passing through pain and suffering.”

~Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929)

## Day 92

A group of Pharisees and Herodians seek to snare Jesus with a trap in the form of the question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor?” Jesus responds, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.”

Lawrence of Brindisi (1559-1619) wrote of this passage: “To each, he says, must be given what belongs to him. This, surely, is a judgment full of heavenly wisdom and instruction. For it teaches that authority is twofold, having an earthly and human aspect, and a heavenly and divine aspect. It teaches that we owe a twofold duty of obedience: to human laws and to the law of God.

“The coin bearing Caesar’s likeness and inscription must be given to Caesar, and the one stamped with the divine image and likeness must be given to God. We bear the imprint of your glorious face, O Lord.

“We are made in the image and likeness of God. So you, O Christian, because you are a human being, are God’s tribute money—a little coin bearing the image and likeness of the divine emperor. Therefore with Christ I ask, whose likeness and inscription is this? Your answer is, God’s. To which I reply, Then why not give God what belongs to him?

“If we really want to be God’s image, we must be like Christ, for his is the image of God’s goodness and the perfect copy of his nature, and God foreordained that those he has chosen should take on a likeness to his son.”

## Day 93

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“I heard of a boy once who was brought up an atheist. He changed his mind when he saw that there were a hundred-odd species of warblers, each bedecked like to the rainbow, and each performing yearly sundry thousands of miles of migration about which scientists wrote wisely but did not understand.

“No ‘fortuitous concourse of elements’ working blindly through any millions of years could quite account for why warblers are so beautiful. No mechanistic theory, even bolstered by mutations, has ever quite answered for the colors of the cerulean warbler, or the vespers of the woodthrush, or the swansong, or—goose music. I dare say this boy’s convictions would be harder to shake than those of many inductive theologians.”

~Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), *A Sand County Almanac*

# Day 94

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“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.”

~Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“If you keep thinking about what you want to do or what you hope will happen, you don’t do it, and it won’t happen.”

~Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536)

## Day 95

“All man-made religion stands in opposition to the gospel. It is an ascent toward the eternal, perfect God. Up, up—that is its call. God is high above, we are down below; and now we shall soar by means of our moral, spiritual, and religious endeavors out of the earthly, human depths into the divine heights.

“God is too high and the evil in us too deep for us to reach the goal this way. Our souls become crippled and cramped by trying to rise to the highest height. The end is despair, or a self-righteousness that leaves room neither for love of God nor for love of others.

“So if we are honest, we have to say that we cannot reach the goal. We cannot become what we ought to become, true men and women. Many let the matter rest there; they confess it, but take no action. They make themselves satisfied with half because they cannot have the whole. God demands all, not just half. And this “all” we are not capable of giving. What is impossible for us is what God wants—all love to him and to our fellow humans. If this is true, it would seem that we can have no good conscience, no trusting relationship with God, no inner peace, and no freedom of the soul.

“But God has in his mercy shown us a different way. “You cannot come up to me, so I will come down to you.” And God descends to us human beings. This act of becoming one of us begins at Christmas and ends on Good Friday.

“God goes to the end. He reaches the goal. To be sure, this end is exactly the opposite of what we fix as our goal. We wish to climb up to heaven; God, however, descends—down to where? To death on the cross. This is why Jesus Christ had to descend into hell. He had to go the way to its very end. Our rightful end is hell, that is, banishment from God—godforsakenness. Only

## *A Season of Healing*

there has God completely come to us, there where he has taken upon himself everything, even the cursed end of our way.

“Jesus Christ has gone into hell in order to get us out of there. For with everything he does, that is his goal, that he may get us out, reconcile us with God, and fill us with God’s Spirit. He had to despair of God for us (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) so that we do not have to despair of God. He has taken this upon himself so that we may become free of it.”

~Emil Brunner (1889-1966), *The Divine Scandal*

## Day 96

On July 21, 1944, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who would be put to death by Nazi Germany for his part in a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler, wrote the following from Tegel Prison to a friend:

“During the last year or so I’ve come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldiness of Christianity. The Christian is not homo religiosus, but simply man, as Jesus was a man—in contrast shall we say, to John the Baptist. I don’t mean the shallow and banal this-worldiness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldiness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection. I think Luther lived a this-worldly life in this sense.

I remember a conversation that I had in America thirteen years ago with a young French pastor. We were asking ourselves quite simply what we wanted to do with our lives. He said he would like to become a saint (and I think it’s quite likely that he did become one). At the time I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him, and said, in effect, that I should like to learn to have faith. For a long time I didn’t realize the depth of the contrast. I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.

I discovered later, and I’m still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!),

## *A Season of Healing*

a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In doing so we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is metanoia; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jeremiah 45!). How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God's sufferings through a life of this kind?"

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*



## Day 97

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Today we can travel to the great cathedrals of England and see such beautiful woodwork, stained glass and other art, that we can forget how much of the art was destroyed during the Reformation. Seeking to purge the church, Protestant Roundheads stormed cathedrals, wreaking havoc in an effort to destroy the religious symbols found there.

A huge stained glass window was shattered in Winchester. When the ransacking was ended, the cold stone was covered with shards of colorful glass. The shattered pieces could never be knit back together to form the stained glass image that had long beautified the cathedral.

Rather than throw away that broken glass, the fragments were lovingly picked up. A new round window was made and the sun shown through the colorful glass once more. Long before artists started creating abstract art, the window was leaded together into no pattern at all, just a jumble of brokenness as the shards were assembled in a hodgepodge that filled the round void in the cathedral once more. But that fractured window has now shown for another 300 years.

This is what we do again and again. We take what has been dedicated to God and fracture it in our broken humanity. Yet, that is not the end. The spirit of God working all things together for the good, knits our lives back together so that Christ may shine through us once more.

# Day 98

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The following is by the Rev. Dr. Joe Bowden, who in addition to being an Episcopal priest is an Emeritus Professor of Surgery at the Medical College of Georgia and Chief of General Surgery at the Augusta Veterans Administration Hospital. He has been Editor-in-Chief of the surgical journal *The American Surgeon* for fifteen years.

“I recently had the opportunity to work with a small church that wanted to start a healing ministry. After I had given my prepared remarks and offered what I thought their healing ministry should look like, I asked the group to honestly tell me what they thought about what I had said. Their immediate response made me wish that I had left well enough alone, because they went straight to the big questions:

‘What if it doesn’t work?’

‘What do we do if people are not healed?’

‘What if we fail?’

“I would have ducked those questions, but if I had tried to do so, my visit with them would have been meaningless. The questions are good ones and the obvious fact is, not everyone ministered to is healed, or so that would appear.

“I responded to their concerns by comparing medical care to church healing ministry. In spite of the miracles of modern medicine, most people have no difficulty understanding the need for a lengthy course of medical treatments, or undergoing months of physical therapy or rehabilitation until a musculoskeletal problem is resolved or maximized. But, on the other hand,

## *A Season of Healing*

many people seem to believe that if immediate improvement is not experienced after one prayer, then healing prayer is a waste of time, and they give up. I'm not saying that dramatic healings don't happen—they do with medicine and healing prayer, but most often healing is gradual. The body, when wounded, undergoes a sequence of physiological events known as the healing process. That process takes time even when enhanced by modern medicines, advanced by surgical techniques, and healing prayer. The point here is that in medicine we keep on treating as long as there is hope for recovery. Bottom line—we don't give up—persistence is our battle cry.

“I see the church's healing ministry as an ongoing ‘curing of souls,’ which persists in spite of apparent ‘successes’ or ‘failures.’ I see the church, as a hospital where broken lives are made whole and spirits are restored through everything we do as a community of faith. Just as in a hospital where rounds are made every day we too, as Gospel physicians, are called to make our daily rounds in prayer. I believe that is what Paul meant when he wrote 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to ‘pray without ceasing.’ He was telling the church to persist regardless of what happened.

“Throughout the entire history of God's relationship with his creation one clear quality of God emerges—our God is persistent. Can we do any less?”

# Day 99

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“Peace is an overriding objective of Benedictine life, and *pax* has become a Benedictine watchword. ‘Let peace be your request and aim; Seek peace and pursue it.’

“Lack of interior peace threatens the whole fabric of the community and that is why St. Benedict starts here, where that lack of peace begins, inside ourselves, with the murmuring which fragments and destroys us. When there is so much concern today with the peace of the world, when peace movements multiply and peace groups proliferate, and the discussion of peace-making becomes more and more urgent and insistent, St. Benedict brings us back to this very simple and basic root: peace must start within myself. How can I hope to contribute to the peace of the world when I cannot resolve my own inner conflicts?”

~Esther de Waal, *Seeking God*

# Day 100

“God heals through time. It’s true: time heals. The loss of a loved one is a kind of emotional amputation. A real part of you is gone, and it is hard to get used to that idea. We have read of people, for example, who have had a leg amputated, but still feel an itch in the foot that is no longer there. The brain has not adapted to the fact that the leg and foot are gone. In time, the brain does seem to adapt, but this does not occur immediately. It is a slow process; it takes time. In like manner, the emotional amputation in the grief process takes time.

“A key to understanding the grief process is to remember *that grief is a journey, a pilgrimage*—something we ‘pass through.’ The psalmist spoke of ‘going through the valley of the shadow.’ Jesus spoke of the strength that comes from ‘going through mourning.’ Grief is a journey, and it takes time to make the pilgrimage.”

~James W. Moore, *When Grief Breaks Your Heart*

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# Day 101

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While those we know and love who die are no longer present to us, we trust that they are still present to God as Jesus told the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” So while we can no longer be with those we love, we can not only remember them, we can also remember them to God in prayer.

So often we who have lost someone dear to us experience that others stop remembering. We no longer get a chance to talk about the people we love even though we still grieve. We can remember those we love who have died in the context of worship and prayer assured that God has never forgotten him or her for a moment either and that all is well.

# Day 102

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“You will find stability at the moment when you discover that God is everywhere, that you do not need to seek Him elsewhere, that He is here, and if you do not find Him here it is useless to go and search for Him elsewhere because it is not Him that is absent from us, it is we who are absent from Him...It is important to recognize that it is useless to seek God somewhere else. If you cannot find Him here you will not find Him anywhere else. This is important because it is only at the moment that you recognize this that you can truly find the fullness of the Kingdom of God in all its richness within you; that God is present in every situation and every place, that you will be able to say, ‘So then I shall stay where I am.’”

~Anthony Bloom (1914-2003)

## Day 103

In his book, *Love's Endeavor, Love's Expense*, W.H. Vanstone writes of the work of the Church as nothing more or less than an offering to God. Then he goes on to look at some instances of this. The section below comes as Vanstone looks at our prayers for others as an offering, comparing the work of praying for another to a spectator cheering on someone involved in a feat of athletic prowess, such as mountain climbing. We cheer them with great sympathy on account of the precariousness of the situation. Vanstone writes:

“Intercession is felt to be appropriate, and indeed, to be a duty; yet on certain interpretations of the activity of God and of the nature of the Church, it is a duty which can not be easily explained or justified. If the purpose of God proceeds by assured programme, and if the Church is no more than the instrument of that programme, intercession can effect nothing and can be no more than an expression of resignation.

“If on the other hand, the activity of God is precarious creativity, ever poised between tragedy and triumph, ever redeeming tragedy into triumph; and if the Church is responsive offering to God; then the intercession of the Church is the offering of its own will to participate, to uphold, to support. We are moved to intercession by tragedy or the possibility of tragedy: by that which has ‘come wrong’ or is in danger of ‘coming wrong.’ We presuppose that this is the situation in which the activity of love will be strained to the greatest intensity, in which love can discover yet further resources only because it must. We are as men watching the most precarious stage of a rescue or a mountain climb, or the supreme effort of an artist or athlete. We have no power to give



## *A Season of Healing*

practical help: he who struggles must struggle in his own strength. Yet the will to help and uphold is strong in us. It demands expression: and it finds expression in the movement of our lips and the involuntary tension of our own limbs. The will is stirred in us by our perception of the peculiar intensity of another's effort: it is his endeavor, even more than to his cause, that our will responds. Where the progress of his cause is relatively easy, we who watch relax: it is when he is strained and spent that our will is stirred.

We are moved to intercession to the degree that, at the point of tragedy or potential tragedy, we understand the intensity of the divine self-giving: and if our intercession is feeble or infrequent, it is because of the feebleness or failure of our understanding. We are assisted in prayer by imaginative sympathy with the person for whom we pray or the situation about which we pray: we are assisted yet more by understanding of that divine activity which is expended upon that person or that situation, of the extremity and costliness of its endeavour.

“The intercession of the Church expresses our understanding of how costly a thing we are asking when we say, ‘Thy will be done.’”

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# Day 104

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“Consult not your fears but your hopes and dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is still possible for you to do.”  
~Pope John XXIII (1881-1963)

“When the world says, ‘Give up,’ hope whispers, ‘Try it one more time.’”  
~Anonymous

“Show me your hands. Do they have scars from giving?  
Show me your feet. Are they wounded in service?  
Show me your heart. Have you left a place for divine love?”  
~Fulton Sheen (1885-1979)

## Day 105

Kathleen Norris, in her book *Amazing Grace: a vocabulary of faith* relates a real-life story of epiphany—or a revelation of God:

“Once a little boy came up to me and said, ‘I saw the ladder that goes up to God.’ I closed the book that I was reading which happened to be *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, by a fierce sixth-century monk, John Climacus, and I listened. The boy told me that the ladder was by his treehouse and that God had come halfway down. God’s clothes were covered with pockets—like a kangaroo, he said, and we both laughed. Even God’s running shoes had pockets, he told me, full of wonder, and we laughed again. He told me that God carried food in the pockets to feed all the dead birds and the dead people.

“This boy had recently experienced that most fierce of childhood experiences, the death of a beloved dog. It had been bitten by a rabid raccoon on his family’s ranch, and his father had had to shoot both animals. As the boy told me of his dream, I thought about Jacob, who during a time of crisis in his life had also seen a ladder going up to heaven. Jacob’s response has always appealed to me; when he wakes, he says, ‘God is in this place, and I did not know it.’

“Revelation is not explanation, and it is not acquired through reading John Climacus, or anyone else. It is the revealing of the presence of a God who cares for all creatures, even a little boy who lives on a ranch in a part of America that has often been called ‘godforsaken.’ A boy whose dog had died, and who needs, and receives divine consolation.”

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# Day 106

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“The Russians, I am told, report that they have not found God in outer space. On the other hand, a good many people in many different times and countries claim to have found God, or been found by God here on earth...

“Space travel has nothing to do with the matter. To some, God is discoverable everywhere; to others nowhere. Those who do not find Him on earth are unlikely to find Him in space. (Hang it all, we’re in space already; every year we go a huge circular tour in space.) But send a saint up in a spaceship and he’ll find God in space as he found God on earth. Much depends on the seeing eye.”

~C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), *The Joyful Christian*

# Day 107

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When we hit tough times and wonder where God is in the troubles we face, we can look back to how God has been faithful. Sometimes it is difficult to look out the windshield at the road ahead and see God's presence. But when we look in the rear view mirror, we see God everywhere, having been present with us in the past. That's a resource for those tough times you face. Look to how God has been faithful in the past and trust that God is faithful still and that God is with you in the problems you face this week.

# Day 108

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“Where grief is fresh, any attempt to divert it only irritates.”

~Samuel Johnson, (1709-1784)

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

~Isaiah 40:18-31

# Day 109

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“Forgiveness is the act of admitting we are like other people. We are prone to make mistakes that cause confusion, inflict pain, and miscommunicate our intentions. We are the recipients of these human errors and the perpetrators. There is no way we can avoid hurting others or being hurt by others, because this is exactly the nature of our imperfection.

“The only choice we have is to reconcile ourselves to our own flaws and the flaws in other people, or withdraw both from our humanness and our connection to the sacred....

“To fully live, we must choose to enter freely the cycle of interaction in which we will hurt and be hurt, forgive and be forgiven, and move on with love intact....Lack of forgiveness destroys the peace in our hearts.”

~Christina Baldwin, *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest*

*A Season of Healing*

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# Day 110

“Peace is not a goal. It is a starting place. It must be lived not sought. It is a gift to be accepted not an ideal to be discovered. The time for peace is now, the place is here, and the way is by loving one another.”

~Charlie Palmgren, *The Chicken Conspiracy*

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*



# Day 111

Prayers for healing were an important part of Jesus' ministry. Jesus also sent his disciples out to heal, and their own ministry of praying for healing continued after Jesus' resurrection. As such, healing prayers have always been a part of our Christian tradition.

In James 5:14, scripture counsels us, "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." This is what we do in coming to church and asking for healing prayers.

We come in faith asking for others to pray for what we need from God. Sometimes people will feel something when being prayed for healing. Many other times the person will feel nothing. Whether you feel anything or not, God is present and we trust God to heal us as is best for us. Prayer is a request and not a demand made upon God.

We may pray for healing of body and God may allow our sickness of body to get our attention and keep it focused as a means of learning and growing. In those times healing may come, even if it is not the sort of healing we had in mind. So, we approach God with an open mind, knowing that God desires our wholeness and well-being and has instructed us not only to pray for that health, but at times to seek out the elders of the church, by coming forward for the laying on of hands.

# Day 112

In his book, *Forgive and Get Your Life Back*, Dennis Maynard relates the following:

“The story is told of a little girl in a remote village who reported to her parents that she was having conversations with God. Her faith was so sincere and her descriptions so believable that the parents reported her experiences to the village priest. The priest was also astounded by what appeared to be a truly miraculous event. The priest reported the happenings to the bishop.

“The bishop came to the village church for a visitation. He interviewed the little girl. He decided to test her experience. ‘Next time you talk with God,’ the bishop counseled her, ‘Ask God to list for you the sins that the bishop reported in his last confession.’

“A few weeks went by and the bishop returned to the village to meet with the little girl. ‘Did you ask God to list for you the sins that this bishop recited in his last confession?’

“‘Yes, I asked God for a list of your sins,’ the little girl responded.

“‘And what did God tell you?’ the bishop asked.

“The little girl began to laugh and dance around the room. ‘God told me he forgot!’”

# Day 113

“Alone” was originally a positive word. Arising in Middle English, the word was originally a contraction of “all” and “one” in the sense of being “complete” or “whole.” Why then is there a negative connotation in saying that one is all alone? Some psychologists have speculated that our fear of being alone comes about naturally as infants, when if left to our own devices, we would die. Now that we no longer have to have another person take care of us to ensure our survival, we can still avoid being alone as if our life did depend on others.

Henri Nouwen writes of this, “When loneliness drives us away from ourselves into the arms of our companions in life, we are, in fact, driving ourselves into excruciating relationships and suffocating embraces. No friend or lover, no husband or wife, no community or commune will be able to put to rest our deepest cravings for unity and wholeness.”

That unity and wholeness Nouwen writes of is what was present in the word “alone,” when it meant “all one.” Being whole in this sense means you do not fear solitary times. Embracing solitude does not mean that you don’t want or need others in your life. Instead, it is finding a completeness within yourself and then bringing that renewed sense of self into relationship with others.

This comes through spending time alone, which all humans need, but many of us avoid. In this time, get to know yourself better, by learning your likes and dislikes, interests and so on apart from others. Relationships with others then become more meaningful as there is a new “you” who is more distinct from others. Do you find time for solitude or avoid it? How might you learn to become more at home with yourself? How could you more fully discover who you are apart from others?

## Day 114

I noticed we need more hazelnut creamer at the church (It is our most popular flavor of creamer by far, with French Vanilla second and Irish cream third). The hazelnut reminded me of the revelation God gave Julian of Norwich (1342-1413) who wrote,

“In this vision he showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, and it was round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought ‘What may this be?’

“And it was generally answered thus: ‘It is all that is made.’

“I marveled how it might last, for it seemed it might suddenly have sunk into nothing because of its littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: ‘It lasts and ever shall, because God loves it.’”

While the properties do not apply to the creamer, they do apply to all creation, including you and me. God made, loves, and preserves all creation and God made, loves, and preserves you and me.

It is probably an occupational hazard that a coffee creamer reminds me of a 14-15th century English mystic, but I don’t think that is all that is going on here. I find that the most ordinary things can remind us of God, and I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is in on that inspiration. No matter how insignificant it may seem, it is pretty cool that a coffee creamer can remind me of God’s love.

Has anything unlikely reminded you of God lately? Be on the lookout. It happens all the time if you are open to it.

# Day 115

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Joan Anderson, in her book *A Year by the Sea* recalls a friend who trained monks in “ritualization”:

“‘When they started Communion,’ she explained, ‘they would pick up the chalice without giving it any thought, purely an object to be used, not treated as holy. What they needed to learn was the importance of developing a relationship with liturgical things and become involved with them. Only then would the ceremony have meaning.’

“Listening to her, I couldn’t help but imagine what my world might be like if I looked at the human beings I was closest to as holy and treated them with that same sense of respect.”

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# Day 116

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“It’s very important for you to accept your grief because other people may not. You may find that people around you will mistakenly think that after a few months you’ve grieved enough and that it’s time for you to “get over it” or “get on with your life.” Or you may run into people who may feel so uncomfortable with grief that they’d rather not talk with you about it. Whatever the reason, a lot of people will say or do things to discourage you from grieving. So don’t depend on others to give you permission to grieve—give that permission to yourself.”

~Kenneth C. Haugk, *Experiencing Grief*

# Day 117

“The Gospel is not one thing in the midst of other things, to be directly apprehended and comprehended. The Gospel is the World of the Primal Origin of all things, the Word which, since it is ever new, must ever be received with renewed fear and trembling. The Gospel is therefore not an event, nor an experience, nor an emotion—however delicate! Rather, it is the clear and objective perception of what eye hath not seen nor ear heard. Moreover, what it demands of men is more than notice, or understanding, or sympathy. It demands participation, comprehension, co-operation; for it is a communication which presumes faith in the living God, and which creates that which it presumes.”

~Karl Barth (1886-1968), *The Epistle to the Romans*

# Day 118

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“There are two things you have to look out for, two extremes: On the one hand, an impractical realism, and on the other hand, a sort of passive realism. The impractical idealism is the kind that says, ‘I’ve worked it out beforehand, and that’s the way it’s got to be.’ On the other hand, the passive kind of realism says, ‘Well, this is the way it is, what can I do?’ And just does nothing. Both these views are basically static. They never get anywhere. In between, there is the kingdom view, which is:

“In the reality which I have and am now, there is a possibility for growth which God has put there. There’s a seed God has planted there and is going to make grow, and what I have to provide is the love and assent that’s going to permit it to grow.”

~Thomas Merton (1915-1968)



# Day 119

“There is in God (some say), A deep but dazzling darkness.”

~Henry Vaughan (1622-1695)

Dazzling darkness is just the sort of paradox writers of the middle ages and previous often used to describe how the deep and hidden things of God can break into our lesser understanding of God. In the Exodus account, we are told of Moses entering a cloud to experience God more deeply. Solomon asserted that God has said he will live in deep darkness. Alongside the imagery of God as light, we also find scripture that speaks of darkness. We learn from this darkness imagery primarily that God is God and we are not. God’s thoughts are not our thoughts; God’s ways are not our ways.

In a sermon titled “The Dark Night,” Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams puts it like this:

“If you think devotional practices, theological insights, even charitable actions give you some sort of a purchase of God, you are still playing games. On the other hand, if you can accept and even rejoice in the experience of darkness, if you can accept that God is more than an idea that keeps your religion or philosophy or politics tidy—then you may find a way back to religion, philosophy, or politics, to an engagement with them that is more creative because you are more aware of the oddity, the uncontrollable quality of truth at the heart of all things.”

# Day 120

A prolific hymn writer, Fanny Jane Crosby (1820-1915) composed more than eight thousand hymns, writing three new hymns each week during much of her adult life. Blind from infancy, Crosby did not let her blindness interfere with her work. She thought through the whole text, dictating the final work for an assistant to write down for her.

In 1873, Pheobe Palmer Knapp, wife of the founder of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, composed a hymn tune, for which she asked Crosby to write a hymn text. Knapp played the tune for Crosby and asked, “What does this tune say?” There was no response. She turned around and found that the hymn writer was kneeling in prayer. Knapp turned back to the organ and played the tune through two more times. Inspiration struck. Crosby said, “That says, ‘Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!’”

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long;  
This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight! Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;  
Angels descending bring from above Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission—all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest;  
Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.”

# Day 121

The Rev. Richard Laribee, an Episcopal priest in Maryland, wrote at his blog re-Marks:

“For more than 25 years as an ordained pastor or priest, I have noticed something that I once thought was odd, but now understand to be normal. In any given worship gathering in any given congregation, there may be someone in the pew who isn’t really sure he or she wants to be there. They sit alone, trying to be anonymous. If they had a cloak of invisibility they would certainly use it. They may feel shattered, burned out, or beaten up. They may be merely exhausted. They may feel dead. They may feel nothing at all. They definitely feel out of place, and some wonder whether they will ever recover. Many, but not all of them, are ordained.”

He goes on to reflect on what a community of faith can offer those who have gotten hurt or burned out. He distinguishes a church as a community, rather than a family.

“One of the things that became clear to me in my healing was that the church is a community, not a family. You can’t be anonymous in a family—to attempt to be anonymous in your own family entails rejection of family relationships and is perhaps even hostile. But communities are different: communities allow for all kinds of things that families don’t. Communities allow for friendships and families, but they also allow for anonymity.”

Why would we want a community rather than a family? Toward the conclusion Laribee writes: “Loving my neighbor doesn’t require me to actually LIKE my neighbor—just to be willing to behave like Christ to my neighbor.”

# Day 122

The poet W.H. Auden (1907-1973) wrote:

“You need not see what someone is doing to know if it is his vocation,

you have only to watch his eyes:  
a cook mixing a sauce, a surgeon

making a primary incision,  
a clerk completing a bill of lading,

wear the same rapt expression,  
forgetting themselves in a function...

There should be monuments,  
there should be odes...

to the first flaker of flints  
who forgot his dinner,

the first collector of sea-shells  
to remain celibate.

What is your vocation, in the sense of meaning what were you created to do?  
What gives you energy? What makes your heart sing? Find a way to day that  
thing that gives you joy and find a way to enjoy it more often.

# Day 123

In the letter we call First John in which John writes, “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

John is writing here to a congregation that has just gone through a painful split. Some, who held that Jesus was not really fully human, but only divine, were teaching that Jesus only seemed human. They have now left to form their own church.

John gives the congregation a quick test to see if they have made the transition from being hurt by someone, through the process of feeling the pain of that loss to the other side when they can once again love and pray for the very people who caused the pain. John writes, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another.” Passing from death to life is a conversion of the heart. John says the test is whether you love one another, even the one another who has hurt you most. This is no easy test.

John ties love to concrete actions. He asks how anyone who has the ability to help someone can see a fellow human in need and not help out. For John it's not possible to say you have love without acting on that love. John writes that we are to love not in word and speech but in truth and action. This fits so well with John's teaching in the Gospel and his three letters. For John, Truth is not something you are aware of. Truth is not a fact to learn. Truth is a verb. Truth is something you do.

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# Day 124

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Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Ellie Wiesel (1928- ) wrote:

“I think the greatest source of danger in this world is indifference. I have always believed that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. The opposite of life is not death, but indifference. The opposite of peace is not war, but indifference to peace and indifference to war. The opposite of culture, the opposite of beauty, the opposite of generosity is indifference. Indifference is the enemy.”

Jesus said, “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil” (Matthew 5:37).

# Day 125

The Rev. Dr. Michael Battle has an essay in William Placher's *Essentials of Christian Theology* which tells of seeing messengers of God (or angels) in unlikely places and ways. He writes:

"The late Alexander Schmemmann, a distinguished Orthodox priest and teacher, once told a group of students why he believed Christians have to practice sensitivity to the presence of angels. When he was a young man living in Paris, he was traveling on the Metro one day with his fiancée. They were very much in love and bound up only in each other. The train stopped and an elderly and very ugly woman got on. She was dressed in the uniform of the Salvation Army and, to their disgust, she sat near them. The young lovers in Paris began to whisper to each other in Russian, exclaiming to each other about the grossness and ugliness of the old woman in a language they assumed she would not understand. The train came to a stop. The old woman got up and, as she passed the two young people, she said to them in perfect Russian, 'I wasn't always ugly!'

"That person, insisted Father Schmemmann, was an angel of God. She brought the shock of revelation, the shock that was needed for him to see that what was here was much, much more than an ugly old woman. Next time he would be able to look at an unattractive person in a self-effacing, uninterfering way. It takes practice, however, to spot angelic presences, just as it takes practice to recognize God."

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# Day 126

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours, no feet but yours,  
Yours are the eyes through which  
Christ’s compassion looks out to the world;  
Yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good;  
Yours are the hands with which he blesses people now.”  
~Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of  
God’s varied grace.”

~1 Peter 4:10



# Day 127

The Rev. James Liggett writes, “Everybody knows that oysters sometimes make pearls; and that fascinating reality has been used to illustrate many a point. But here’s an old truth said in a new way, a way that gives it more power. It seems pearls aren’t automatic. When an oyster — who must ordinarily have an enviably calm life lying around eating soft, pleasant food — somehow gets a bit of sand inside its shell, then one of two things will happen. The oyster will create a pearl, or it will die. The pearl, a thing of beauty and value, is the oyster’s way of staying alive after something very irritating has gotten past its shell, into its heart....

“And we get confused when we forget that the Lord does not call us to be powerful or effective as the world sees power and effectiveness. The Lord calls us to be faithful — to live his life, to follow his steps. Part of that involves remembering that, of the twelve disciples, Judas was the most effective at using both money and the powers that be to get what he wanted. Just trying to fix things doesn’t get rid of our problems, either.

“This is grit, not pearls. We don’t have a list of rules telling us how not to be of the world because we know that it isn’t that simple. Still, we do know, and we must never forget, that the way we treat each other, and the way we treat our bodies, and our time, and our money, and the things we call “mine” — these are and will remain very important. And our Lord has something to say about them. We also know that all the good works, reforms, and changes we make, as important as they are, will not take away the problem, either. This side of the Kingdom, the world as Jesus spoke of it of business as usual, this will

## *A Season of Healing*

always, in one way or another, be the alternative to faithfulness, and not the means to it.

“We need to make our own pearls, or we will die. We need to look honestly at the world, at the culture around us, and at who we are — and who the Lord would have us be. We must always make choices. We may even discover that Jesus was right, and that, in one way or another, the world will hate us. But the Lord continues to pray for us, we are promised all of the help we need. And pearls come from the oddest places.”

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 128

When I was in seminary, I would often say, “Lord, if you are going to return soon, please do so before I have to actually get around to writing this paper or before I have to take that test, because I would hate to waste the effort on all this school work only to have you come back right afterwards.” Now I see that same thought in many problems, which are much more serious. Lord, if you are coming soon anyway, come before this person gets the results back on the biopsy. Come before that person has to go through chemotherapy, or this couple’s marriage breaks apart. Come Lord before this teen has yet another friend stab him in the back, saying mean things to others only to act like his friend when they are together. Come quickly Lord before all these things happen.

Of course, that sort of prayer is all wrong. Jesus taught that he has already come and by the power of the Holy Spirit he is present still in the class with the teacher you think has it in for you, at work with the boss who won’t give you a break, or the co-worker who drives you crazy. Jesus is already here in the marriage that is falling apart and in the frightening news you await from the doctor. When we pray “Come quickly, Lord Jesus,” it should not be an invitation for Jesus to come back in glory to make all our problems go away. Instead we should pray “Come quickly, Lord Jesus, into my problems and my pain.”

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# Day 129

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“We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.”  
~ Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968)

“When you say a situation or a person is hopeless, you’re slamming the door in the face of God.”  
~Charles L. Allen (1913-2005)

“Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And because God raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory, your faith and hope can be placed confidently in God.”  
~1 Peter 1:21

# Day 130

Mark's Gospel tells us of a time when Jesus is asleep in a boat on the storm-tossed sea. The disciples, many of whom were storm-hardened fishermen, grew frightened as the boat was being swamped and they woke him saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus then wakes up, rebukes the wind and says to the sea, "Peace, Be still!" Mark tells us the wind ceased and there was dead calm. Jesus then says, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

This passage of scripture has long been moved from its setting on an actual sea with real wind and waves to apply to our storm-tossed lives. For example, here is a brief passage from a sermon given by Augustine of Hippo in the 400s:

"When you have to listen to abuse, that means you are being buffeted by the wind. When your anger is roused, you are being tossed by the waves. So when the winds blow and the waves mount high, the boat is in danger, your heart is imperiled, your heart is taking a battering. On hearing yourself insulted, you long to retaliate; but the joy of revenge brings with it another kind of misfortune—shipwreck. Why is this? Because Christ is asleep in you. What do I mean? I mean you have forgotten his presence. Rouse him, then; remember him, let him keep watch within you, pay heed to him."

Augustine teaches that Christ is present within us even when we don't feel it. We just have to revive that sense of Jesus within us. The trick is to do this in the midst of the storm. I don't know what winds are buffeting you or what waves are tossing you about, but I do know that Christ is with you in the midst of any storm. The problem is not the lack of Jesus' presence, but that we forget He is there. Seek to control the storm on your own and you will sink. Be still and know that He is God and whether the storm passes or rages, you will be safe.

# Day 131

In her book, *Leaving Church*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes of her and her husband's decision making saying, "Since we are both intuitive types, we do not decide things as much as we gravitate toward them. This is not very theological language, I know, but on the subject of divine guidance I side with Susan B. Anthony. 'I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do,' she once said, 'because I notice it always coincides with their own desires.' Having been somewhat of an expert on the sanctification of my own desires, I try not to pin them on God anymore. At the same time, I recognize the enormous energy in them, which strikes me as something God might be able to use.

"When I read the stories in the Bible about people such as Sarah, Jacob, or David, what stands out is not their virtue but their very strong wants. Sarah wanted her son to prevail over Hagar's son, Jacob wanted his older brother's blessing, and David wanted Bathsheba. While these cravings clearly brought them all kinds of well-deserved trouble, they also kept these characters very, very alive. Their desires propelled them in ways that God could use, better than God could use those who never colored outside the lines. Based on their example, I decided to take responsibility for what I wanted and to trust God to take it from there."

# Day 132

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A story survives from the hermits who populated the desert of Egypt in the 4th century

“Once Abbot Anthony was conversing with some brethren, and a hunter who was after game in the wilderness came upon them. He saw Abbot Anthony and the brothers enjoying themselves, and disapproved.

Abbot Anthony said: ‘Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.’

This he did. ‘Now shoot another,’ said the elder. ‘And another, and another.’

The hunter said, ‘If I bend my bow all the time it will break.’

Abbot Anthony replied: ‘So it is also in the work of God. If we push ourselves beyond measure, the brethren will soon collapse. It is right, therefore, from time to time, to relax their efforts.’”

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# Day 133

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**P**eter Abelard (1079-1142) wrote a hymn for Good Friday and Holy Saturday which ended with the stanza,

“Grant us, Lord, so to suffer with you  
that we may become sharers in your glory,  
to spend these three days in grief  
that you may allow us the laugh of Easter grace.”



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# Day 134

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“That I feed the hungry, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ—all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren, that I do unto Christ.

“But what if I should discover that the least amongst them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very real enemy himself—that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness—that I myself am the enemy who must be loved? What then?”

~Carl Jung (1865-1961)

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# Day 135

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“Let yourself be plumbed to the depths, and you will realize that everyone is created for a presence. There, in your heart of hearts, in that place where no two people are alike, Christ is waiting for you. And there the unexpected happens.”

~Brother Roger of Taizé (1915-2005)

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

~Frederick Buechner (1926- ), *Wishful Thinking: a theological ABC*

# Day 136

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**F**amed Christian writer William Barclay has written of the sinking of the Titanic's press coverage and what it showed of how the world sees things. The next day, the headline of a famous newspaper was devoted entirely and exclusively to the death of the multimillionaire, John Jacob Astor. At the end of the article, the newspaper almost casually mentioned the other 1800 people who died. The other 1800 were not that important. Such is the attitude of the world and many public media, but not God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is concerned about every single person and no person is lost in the crowd, however unimportant that person may be in the eyes of the world.

# Day 137

The sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel tell us of a time when Jesus returned to his hometown after having begun his ministry on the road. As Jesus taught, the people listened to his words about how the Kingdom of God had come near. He called them to repent and believe in the Good News. But the Good News Jesus offered was too much for the people of Nazareth to swallow. The crowd asked, "Where did this man get all this?" He might have gotten straight "A"s at Nazareth Elementary, but that didn't qualify him for "Son of God." The people of Nazareth knew Jesus too well as a human—a boy and then a man—to readily accept him as Messiah and Lord.

There is Good News in the lack of warm reception for Jesus in his hometown. It shows how the people of Nazareth knew Jesus to be one of them, in many ways like everyone else. This reveals that Jesus, the Son of God, knows our joys and our sorrows better than a distant God ever could. Because we do not worship a distant God who can't understand us. We worship a God who has lived among us, knows our joys and our pain.

It was in Nazareth that Jesus mourned as his adopted father Joseph died. Jesus understands when we mourn for our family and friends who die. It was in Nazareth, that Jesus first felt the temptation to sin and came to understand the various temptations we all face. Jesus knows the pain of a family torn apart, as his own family was torn by his calling to live as God among us. Jesus knows all the broken parts of our human lives and loves us anyway. And it is to Jesus who knows well our temptations and our sorrows that we pray and through him that we receive the forgiveness of his loving Father, our God and Creator, and the strength to find healing and wholeness in loss and pain.

# Day 138

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In his book on prayer *With Open Hands*, Henri Nouwen writes of a compassion that comes from learning through prayer how alike all other humans we truly are:

“Compassion grows with the inner recognition that your neighbor shares your humanity with you. This partnership cuts through all walls which might have kept you separate. Across all barriers of land and language, wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, we are one, created from the same dust, subject to the same laws, and destined for the same end.

“With this compassion you can say, “In the face of the oppressed I recognize my own face and in the hands of the oppressor I recognize my own hands. Their flesh is my flesh; their blood is my blood; their pain is my pain; their smile is my smile. Their ability to torture is in me, too; their capacity to forgive I find also in myself.

“There is nothing in me that does not belong to them, too. There is nothing in them that does not belong to me, too.”

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# Day 139

“Lord Jesus Christ,  
you are for me medicine when I am sick;  
you are my strength when I need help;  
you are life itself when I fear death;  
you are the way when I long for heaven;  
you are light when all is dark;  
you are my food when I need nourishment.”  
~Ambrose of Milan (340-397)

“If you have not chosen the Kingdom of God first, it will in the end make no  
difference what you have chosen instead.”  
~William Law (1686-1781)

# Day 140

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“In my heart, I know their yearning for love and down to my entrails, I can feel their cruelty. In another’s eyes, I see my plea for forgiveness and in a hardened frown, I see my refusal. When someone murders, I know that I too could have murdered, and when someone gives birth, I know that I am capable of birth as well. In the depths of my being, I meet my fellow humans with whom I share love and hate, life and death.

“It’s not addition that makes one holy but subtraction: stripping the illusions, letting go of pretense, exposing the false self, breaking open the heart and the understanding, not taking my private self too seriously.”

~Richard Rohr (1943- )

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# Day 141

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“Don’t tell me what you believe.  
Tell me what difference it made  
That you believed.”

~Verna Dozier (1917-2006)

“The point of following Jesus isn’t simply so that we can be sure of going to a better place than this after we die. Our future beyond death is enormously important, but the nature of the Christian hope is such that it plays back into the present life. We’re called, here and now, to be instruments of God’s new creation, the world-put-to-rights which has already been launched in Jesus and of which Jesus’ followers are supposed to be not simply beneficiaries but also agents.”

~N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian*



# Day 142

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We know ourselves to be both good and bad. In our heart of hearts, where only God is present with us, each of us knows that we sometimes do the right thing for all the wrong reasons. Each of us also knows that we sometimes do all the wrong things for the wrong reasons as well. We are, each of us, mixed bodies. We have weeds growing among the wheat. This is the human condition.

Yet, we turn our gaze to others and size them up with a different set of scales than we care to have used on the content of our own heart: “I am complicated; he or she is just plain evil.” We don’t use those words, but we act on that premise. This is also the human condition.

But the divine condition is quite different. God, whose Holy Spirit dwells within your very being, sees the mixed body and patiently works for the good. God knows your confused motives, and wants to bring healing and wholeness to the side of you no one else can see.

When you shred the gifts God has given you, God takes the torn fragments and weaves something beautiful. This ability of God to work the sin and sorrow of our lives together for the good when we offer them to him, offers a glimpse at how we are to be less judgmental, more forgiving of others, knowing that we too fall short of the glory of God.

# Day 143

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“The main object of religion is not to get a man into heaven, but to get heaven into him.”

~Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

“Heaven goes by favor; if it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in.”

~Mark Twain (1835-1910)

“Who seeks for Heaven alone to save his soul  
May keep the path, but will not reach the goal;  
While he who walks in love may wander far,  
Yet God will bring him where the blessed are.”

~Henry Jackson van Dyke (1822-1891)

# Day 144

When listening to the exalting music of Handel's Messiah, it sounds as if that masterpiece of music was written by a man at the pinnacle of his success. That is not the case. In fact, Messiah was written after Handel suffered a stroke. He was recovering from the stroke, living in poverty amid bleak surroundings.

He would later say that he had suffered through a particularly deep night of gloom and despair over his failure as a musician, and the next morning he unleashed his creative genius in a musical score that continues to thrill and inspire us generations later.

Try to find a copy of Messiah. Listen to it knowing that it was written out of the depths of suffering and poverty. Let the music wash over you as a gift from one person who found the music to praise God at a time when others would have more easily cursed God and their fate.

“Unless we form the habit of going to the Bible in bright moments as well as in trouble, we cannot fully respond to its consolations because we lack equilibrium between light and darkness.”

~Helen Keller (1880-1968)

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# Day 145

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“Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God.”  
~Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“Sociologists have a theory of the looking-glass self: you become what the most important person in your life (wife, father, boss, etc.) thinks you are.

“How would my life change if I truly believed the Bible’s astounding words about God’s love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees?”

~Philip Yancey (1949- ), *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*

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# Day 146

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“He that cannot forgive others, breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would reach heaven: for every one has need to be forgiven.”

~Thomas Fuller (1608-1661)

“Forgiveness is not just an occasional act: it is a permanent attitude.”

~Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)

“Forgiveness is the answer to the child’s dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is made clean again.”

~Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961)

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# Day 147

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“For death is no more than a turning of us over from time to eternity.”

~William Penn (1644-1718)

“When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.”

~Proverbs 14:32

“In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

~1 Corinthians 15:52-57

# Day 148

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“Set yourself earnestly to see what you are made to do,  
and then set yourself earnestly to do it.”

~Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

“How wonderful it is that nobody  
need wait a single moment  
before starting to improve the world.”

~Anne Frank (1929-1945)

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# Day 149

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“Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.”

~G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket- safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.”

~C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)



# Day 150

I have come to the conclusion that if you do not have any difficult people in your life, God will issue you one. In fact God will probably issue you more than one. But I have also learned something else about difficult people—they are a gift. Perhaps a gift in odd wrapping paper with the bow all askew, but a gift nonetheless.

The gift comes as the problem person helps you deal with the rough edges in your own life. And that is it. You don't get the privilege of fixing the other person. You just get to deal with yourself. The people who bother you bring up issues within yourself that you don't want to face. And as you face that issue and deal with the problems within, the person's habits can come to seem eccentric, or even a nuisance, but they don't have to lead to anger and hatred.

There is a simple prayer that will help you: "Bless [name of problem person]. Change me." Begin to pray, really pray for the difficult people in your workplace, class, Bible study, or other group.

I once prayed a bad boss into a happy marriage and a move to Switzerland. I kid you not. But I didn't get to get her gone until I came to terms with some of what she brought up in me. And you won't be able to get all the problem people in your life shuttled off to Switzerland either. It's just not that big a country and the Alps would be crushed under the weight of the problematic personalities anyway.

You may never make peace with the problem person, but you should be able to make peace within yourself as you deal with that person. And you will learn more about yourself and grow in the process.

# Day 151

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“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, ‘The first.’”

~Jesus (Matthew 21:28-31a)

“When it’s all said and done, more will be said than done.”

~Anonymous

“Promises can never take the place of performance. Fine words are never a substitute for fine deeds. Let’s be a people of fine words and fine deeds.”

~William Barclay (1907-1978)

“Let’s not talk about love. Let’s not sing about love. Let’s put love into action and make it real.”

~Clarence Jordan (1912-1969), Cotton Patch Gospel version of I John

## Day 152

Sudden reminders can be painful. By now, you have experienced many. Even though you have come to know and expect the ups and downs that go with grief, there remains the shock of the sudden jolt. The causes vary so widely you can't predict what it might be—a song on the radio, the phone call of a friend who somehow never got the news, yet another piece of mail addressed to your loved one—but you know the pain of having the loss flood over you anew.

This is a natural part of grief. The triggers that set off these painful remembrances will lessen in time. Yet, even years after a loss this sort of flashback to the initial loss can occur. These are signs of how entwined the person you lost was in your life. To wish them away would be to wish you had not loved so deeply or so long.

The only cure to these unexpected events is to simply mourn. Cry. Get angry all again at the unfairness of it all. Cry some more. However it is that you grieve, don't hold it back, no matter how long after the loss the reminder comes. The work of grief is messy, and part of how that work gets done is through grieving when your loss is brought up once more suddenly and powerfully.

Give yourself room to feel the loss again. It hurts. Let it hurt. Dealing with the pain directly is so much better for your mental and physical health than trying to too quickly brush aside an incident like this. Let your own body tell you how to grieve, and through not trying to hold back tears or anger or frustration, live into how your body is teaching you to grieve.

# Day 153

In 1902, Adelaide A. Pollard's greatest wish was to go to Africa to serve a time as a missionary, but she could not raise adequate funds for the trip. Feeling disappointed, she attended a prayer meeting and heard an old woman simply asking for an understanding of God's will for her life. Pollard would later say that on returning home, she meditated on Jeremiah 18:3-4 with its image of a potter working with clay: "Then I went to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." Pollard immediately composed the hymn "Have Thine Own Way" finishing it before going to sleep that night:

“Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the potter, I am the clay!

Mold me and make me After Thy will,

While I am waiting, Yielded and still.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own Way!

Search me and try me, Master, today!

Whiter than snow, Lord. Wash me just now,

As in Thy presence Humbly I bow.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Wounded and weary, Help me, I pray!

Power- all power- Surely is Thine!

Touch me and heal me, Savior divine!”

# Day 154

“All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired, although not in the hour or in the measure, or the very thing which they ask. Yet they will obtain something greater and more glorious than they had dared to ask.”

~Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“When you walk to the edge of all the light you have  
and take that first step into the darkness of the unknown,  
you must believe that one of two things will happen:  
There will be something solid for you to stand upon,  
or, you will be taught how to fly.”

~Patrick Overton, *The Leaning Tree*

# Day 155

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Some believe in a God that is more like a big meanie, Hell bent on punishing those who cross the line. The following is an anonymously-authored story that better shows how God is more concerned with love than rules and what a difference that distinction makes in our lives:

“A husband and wife didn't really love each other. The man was very demanding, so much so that he prepared a list of rules and regulations for his wife to follow. He insisted that she read them over every day and obey them to the letter. Among other things, his "do's and don'ts" indicated such details as what time she had to get up in the morning, when his breakfast should be served, and how the housework should be done. After several long years, the husband died.

“As time passed, the woman fell in love with another man, one who dearly loved her. Soon they were married. This husband did everything he could to make his new wife happy, continually showering her with tokens of his appreciation. One day as he was cleaning house, she found tucked away in a drawer the list of commands her first husband had drawn up for her. As she looked it over, it dawned on her that even though her present husband hadn't given her any kind of list, she was doing everything her first husband's list required anyway. She realized she was so devoted to this man that her deepest desire was to please him out of love, not obligation.”

# Day 156

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“We are not citizens of this world trying to make our way to heaven; we are citizens of heaven trying to make our way through this world. The radical Christian insight can be life-changing. We are not to live so as to earn God’s love, inherit heaven, and purchase our salvation. All those are given to us as gifts; gifts bought by Jesus on the cross and handed over to us.

“We are to live as God’s redeemed, as heirs of heaven, and as citizens of another land: the Kingdom of God. We live as though we are on a journey home: a home we know will have the lights on and the door open and our Father waiting for us when we arrive. That means in all adversity our worship of God is joyful, our life is hopeful, our future is secure. There is nothing we can lose on earth that can rob us of the treasures God has given and will give us.”

~from *The Landisfarne* (via the *Anglican Digest*)

## Day 157

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A professor of theology at my seminary found himself in a very dark place. His daughter died unexpectedly. One day while playing alone, she accidentally hung herself. Clearly not a suicide, it was a very unfortunate accident. He was not going to speak at his daughter's funeral. But he did decide to take to the pulpit to share from the midst of his pain and loss. Still very much in grief for his daughter, he nonetheless told those gathered, "I have been to the bottom and found it firm."

"I have been to the bottom and found it firm." When his daughter died, the theologian had cried out to God. And in his dark despair, God comforted him and his family, giving them the strength to bear the seemingly unbearable. He was not left alone. God was there grieving with the theologian and his family in their loss. His loss was real and very painful and God's presence was just as real and comforting.

When he said that he had been to the bottom, he meant it in a way I hope I never have to experience. I've gone through some things and am going through some things now which are very trying. But I have to agree with the professor's experience, in finding God's presence and some sense of God's peace that is beyond understanding even there in the pit of Hell. When life takes you to the bottom, through your fault or no fault of your own, you will find that God is there in the pit of darkness, despair, and loneliness. God may allow you to hit rock bottom hard enough to crack the concrete when you land, but God will never leave you alone. God is a very present help in those times of trouble.



# Day 158

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“But the church is not only about meeting my needs but also about rearranging my needs, giving me needs I would never have had had I not come to church.”

~William Willimon (1946- )

“The best parable has always been  
the life of a human being who is able  
to listen to GOD and live with Neighbors.”

~John Wesley (1703-1791)

“I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.”

~Anne Lamott (1954- )

# Day 159

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The prayer I often use for myself and when praying for others is that God will close the doors that are the path contrary to God's will, blocking the way while also praying God will open the doors to the path that is God's will. I use this prayer often with people who come wanting to decide about a career move, a decision about their marriage, or other areas of discernment. I have found in time that the prayer is answered in wonderful ways, but not usually quickly. It is a prayer that requires patience.

Often the first part will come true, and some opportunity that seemed like a good alternative is suddenly and otherwise inexplicably closed off. The sure thing becomes impossible. And then there is an awkwardly long in between time with no options available. Remain faithful in that place of uncertainty trusting God to make a way where there is no way. Trust God to open up the path toward his will. It will happen, but almost never on your timetable.

Eventually the wall you have been beating your head against will fall, but usually in such a way that you can see it as the answer to prayer that it is. In the meantime, you have to hang in there and trust God with as much patience as you can muster.

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# Day 160

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“Expect to have hope rekindled. Expect your prayers to be answered in wondrous ways. The dry seasons in life do not last. The spring rains will come again.”

~Sarah Ban Breathnach

“Hope is the thing with feathers—  
that perches in the soul—  
and sings the tune without the words—  
and never stops—at all.”

~Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

“Hope is a waking dream.”

~Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

“Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn’t permanent.”

~Jean Kerr (1922-2003)

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# Day 161

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“It’s only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth—and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up, we will then begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had.”

~Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1926-2004)

“Eternity is not something that begins after you’re dead. It is going on all the time. We are in it now. “

~Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)

# Day 162

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“The diagnosis of the world’s sickness (and, therefore, of the individuals who comprise the world) is that the power to love has been wrongly directed. It has either been turned in upon itself or wrongly given to the wrong things. The outward symptoms, and the results, of this misdirection are plainly obvious (at least in other people) in what we call ‘sin’ or ‘selfishness.’ The drastic ‘conversion’ which God-became-Man called for is the reversal of the wrong attitude, the deliberate giving of the whole power to love, first to God, and then to other people. Without this reversal He spoke quite bluntly of a world doomed to destruction. Where it genuinely takes place He spoke plainly of men being able to ‘know’ God, to begin a new quality of living which physical death is powerless to touch.”

~J.B. Phillips (1906-1982), *Your God Is Too Small*

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# Day 163

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“Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future.”  
~Lewis B. Smedes (1921-2002)

“Peace is not arbitrary. It must be based upon definite facts. God has all the facts on His side; the world does not. Therefore God, and not the world, can give peace. “  
~Billy Graham (1918- )

“Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The way to trouble God is not to come at all.”  
~Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899)

# Day 164

**I** tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

~Jesus (Matthew 6:19-34)

# Day 165

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“Think of a lover who has received a letter from his beloved—as precious as this letter is to the lover, just so precious to you, I assume, is God’s Word; in the way the lover reads this letter, just so, I assume, do you read God’s Word and conceive that God’s Word ought to be read.”

~Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), *For Self-Examination*



# Day 166

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I find that God speaks in stereo and is extremely good at confirming something through various means. You will have someone say something in passing, and then hear something else on TV, and yet something else in a sermon or Bible reading and all of it will confirm what God is speaking to your heart. That is then much more likely to be God's will if the same words or images are revealed through another means which God had until then only spoken to your heart.

Also, you will know it is God's will when you set out on that path and face some obstacles and find unlikely help and support that gets you through the problems. Then you can look back and say God was in it.

Turn over whatever decision you are trying to make to God in prayer. Don't ask for your will but for God's. Let go of your timetable and your solutions and ask for God to close the wrong path and open the right one. Then keep praying. If it is of God, a way will be opened and that path will be confirmed. If it is not God's will, you won't want it to work out anyway.

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# Day 167

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“Eating or preparing to go to sleep in humility, thankfulness and temperance, is, by Christian standards, in an infinitely higher state than one who is listening to Bach or reading Plato in a state of pride.”

~C S. Lewis (1898-1963)

“Love and pity and wish well to every soul in the world; dwell in love, and then you dwell in God.”

~William Law (1686-1761)

## Day 168

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Our lives can come to resemble a woman's purse. If a woman does not change purses frequently, it is typical that stuff builds up in a pocketbook. She might toss in cough drops in cold season, but then forget to take them out as the weather changes. And so it goes with more things added than taken away. In time there is a lot of extra stuff to clean out.

Our lives can be like an overloaded purse, filled with things of which we need to let go. This is especially true of past hurts. We tuck those wounds in to our emotional purse and hang on to them. Every once in a while we take out those old injuries and look them over before tucking the pain back in the purse.

Yet it is for our own health and healing that God advises a different path. We should let go of past hurts, forgiving the people who have wounded us. We are, in fact, to forgive as we have been forgiven. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

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# Day 169

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“To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness.”

~Erich Fromm (1900-1980)

“There is no grief which time does not lessen and soften.”

~Cicero (circa 106-43 B.C.)

“For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

~Psalm 22:24

# Day 170

“**H**ow do you recover from an extraordinary loss? Take stock of the loved ones around you. Hug them, love them, and cherish them. When you appreciate the joys in your life, it makes sorrow that much easier to swallow.”

~Joseph Simmons (1964- )

“**W**e who must keep the church going and keep it alive have certain basic guidelines to follow—to preach good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted...to set at liberty them that are captives. You see, the church is not a social club. The church is not an entertainment center. The church has a purpose. The church is dealing with ultimate concern. Sunday after Sunday, week after week, people come to church with broken hearts. They need a word of hope.... The church heals the broken-hearted.”

~Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)

“**S**o when we sing, ‘Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,’ we are not thinking of the nearness of place, but of the nearness of relationship. It is for increasing degrees of awareness that we pray, for a more perfect consciousness of the divine Presence. We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts.”

~A.W. Tozer (1897-1963)

# Day 171

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Known best for her book, *The Color Purple* writer Alice Walker said this to a group in receiving the California Governor's Award for Literature as she wondered what we would do if we knew we had just five minutes left on earth:

"Let our awareness of and our tenderness to the most helpless be our diamonds and our gold. Our last five minutes on Earth are running out. We can spend those minutes in meanness, exclusivity, and self-righteous disparagement of those who are different from us, or we can spend them consciously embracing every glowing soul who wanders within our reach... Perhaps the greatest treasure left to us, maybe the only one, is that we can still choose."

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# Day 172

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“When we deal with each other, we should do so with the sense of awe that arises in the presence of something holy and sacred. For that is what human beings are: we are created in the image of God.”

~National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*

“A Christian is nothing but a sinful man  
who has put himself to school for Christ  
for the honest purpose of becoming better.”

~Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)

# Day 173

The following poem, *The Pillar of the Cloud*, was written by theologian John Henry Newman (1801-1890). This poem, which became a popular hymn, was inspired by a journey from Italy to France in a boat which was becalmed in the Strait of Bonifacio on June 16, 1833. Newman had just recovered from a serious fever and was returning to England convinced that God had important work for him there, yet he sat waiting for wind to power the boat:

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home—  
Lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet: I do not ask to see  
The distant scene, —one step enough for me.  
I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou  
Shouldst lead me on.  
I loved to choose and see my path; but now  
Lead Thou me on!  
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.  
So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still  
Will lead me on,  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone;  
And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.



# Day 174

You are powerless. This is an acknowledgement of the way the world works. You know that there are times when you feel like you have life under control. Everything is going well and the various areas of your life are all wired. Then there are other times when things spin out of control and nothing seems to go right. The reality is that the times when everything seems under control are an illusion. You are just kidding yourself. It's the times when things spin out of control that are real. This is because you can't control every area of your life. You simply can't do it.

This is why scripture teaches us to put our trust in God. Paul writes that when push came to shove for him, God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you." Grace is the free gift of God's love. Like a good parent's love for a child, grace is unearned and sometimes undeserved. It is that unearned love of God, which Paul found to be sufficient, especially when he had to acknowledge his own weakness. God also told Paul that power is made perfect in weakness.

It is only when you are strong enough to admit that you can't do it on your own that you can actually get somewhere. Your burdens are too much and you need God to be present with you. This is not a decision for wimps. Wimps give in. Muscular faith says, "I can be strong enough to stay in a situation I am powerless to change on my own."

Try these strong statements out:

I will stay in my good job with great benefits and pray for God to bless my bad boss with a promotion out of here. Or, I admit that I really am addicted to alcohol. I can't kid myself anymore. I am powerless to beat this thing on my own. Or, I am powerless to change (then enter in your situation, you can say

## *A Season of Healing*

my school, my job, my marriage, my relationship with my children, my illness). So, for example, I am powerless over cancer on my own, but I can be strong enough to continue to make a stand, bearing witness to what a strong Christian is like when facing cancer.

It is only when you admit that you are powerless to find the healing you seek on your own that you will make the room in your own heart to let God's healing flow in. Find the hidden strength in your powerlessness.

It's a paradox and so it can sound wrong. But Paul is right, whenever I am weak, then I am strong. The real power comes from admitting that you are powerless to make a change, but you are not powerless about being faithful. Real strength is in not giving in and giving up, but being strong enough to be faithful while praying for deeper, lasting change. Real change comes from living into the knowledge that it is when you are weak that you are strong as God's grace is sufficient.

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

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# Day 175

“I really only love God  
as much as I love  
the person I love the least.”

~Dorothy Day (1897-1980)

“I am only one, but still I am one.  
I cannot do everything, but still I can do something;  
and because I cannot do everything,  
I will not refuse to do something that I can do.”

~Helen Keller (1880-1968)

“Some people came to Calcutta, and before leaving, they begged me: ‘Tell us something that will help us to live our lives better.’ And I said: ‘Smile at each other; smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other—it doesn’t matter who it is—and that will help you to grow up in greater love for each other.’”

~Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)

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# Day 176

“Grant that I may not pray alone with the mouth;  
help me that I may pray from the depths of my heart.”

~Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“Resolution One: I will live for God.  
Resolution Two: If no one else does, I still will.”

~ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, ‘O God, forgive me,’ or ‘Help me.’”

~Billy Graham (1918- )

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# Day 177

“Sometimes I wish that I might do  
Just one grand deed and die,  
And by that one grand deed reach up  
To meet God in the sky.  
But such is not Thy way, O God,  
Not such is Thy decree,  
But deed by deed, and tear by tear,  
Our souls must climb to Thee,  
As climbed the only Son of God  
From manger unto Cross,  
Who learned, through tears and bloody sweat,  
To count this world but loss;  
Who left the Virgin Mother’s Arms  
To seek those arms of shame,  
Outstretched upon the lonely hill  
To which the darkness came.  
As deed by deed, and tear by tear,  
He climbed up to the height,  
Each deed a splendid deed, each tear a jewel shining bright,  
So grant us, Lord, the patient heart, to climb the upward way,  
Until we stand upon the height,  
And see the perfect day.”

~Geoffrey “Woodbine Willie” Studdert Kennedy (1883-1929)

# Day 178

“Once when travelling in Tibet, I was crossing a high mountain pass with my Tibetan guide. The weather had suddenly turned bitterly cold, and my companion and I feared that we might not make it to the next village—still several miles away—before succumbing to the frost.

“Suddenly, we stumbled upon a man who had slipped from the path and was lying in the snow. Looking more closely, I discovered that the man was still alive, though barely. ‘Come,’ I said to my companion, ‘help me try to bring this unfortunate man to safety.’ But my companion was upset and frightened for his life. He answered: ‘If we try to carry that man, none of us will ever reach the village. We will all freeze. Our only hope is to go on as quickly as possible, and that is what I intend to do. You will come with me if you value your life.’ Without another word and without looking back, he set off down the path.

“I could not bring myself to abandon the helpless traveller while life remained in him, so I lifted him on my back and threw my blanket around us both as best I could. Slowly and painstakingly, I picked my way along the steep, slippery path with my heavy load. Soon it began to snow, and I could make out the way forward only with great difficulty. How we made it, I do not know. But just as daylight was beginning to fade, the snow cleared and I could see houses a few hundred yards ahead. Near me, on the ground, I saw the frozen body of my guide. Nearly within shouting distance of the village, he had succumbed to the cold and died, while the unfortunate traveller and I made it to safety. The exertion of carrying him and the contact of our bodies had created enough heat to save us both. This is the way of service. No one can live without the help of others, and in helping others, we receive help ourselves.”

~Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929)

# Day 179

“The cross of Christ then is not a call either to resignation in the face of unutterable pain or to a life of masochistic pursuit of suffering, often called ‘the way of the cross.’ It is a call to recognise solidarity with the Christ who has confronted pain and death once for all, and a call to minister to the wounded Christ as he is found broken and bruised on the highways of the world. And here we see both the concrete significance and, in a profound sense, the irrelevance of Bethlehem and Calvary. Bethlehem and Calvary were the concrete, historic locations, the ‘sites of significance,’ chosen of God and precious, the redeeming places. Yet Bethlehem is wherever there is no room; Calvary is all sites of cruelty and oppression. ‘Just as you did it to the least of these...you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40).”

~Kenneth Leech (1939- ) *We Preach Christ Crucified*

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# Day 180

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“Anger makes you smaller, while forgiveness forces you to grow beyond what you were.”

~Cherie Carter-Scott (1949- )

“Forgiveness is almost a selfish act because of its immense benefits to the one who forgives.”

~Lawana Blackwell

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

~Jesus (Matthew 6:14-15)



# Day 181

“Whenever I dwell for any length of time on my own shortcomings, they gradually begin to seem mild, harmless, rather engaging little things, not at all like the glaring defects in other people’s characters.”

~Margaret Halsey (1910-1997)

“Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.”

~Jesus (Matthew 7:1-5)

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.”

~Carl Jung (1875-1961)

# Day 182

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Jesus says, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.” Jesus is certainly not advising us to start strapping millstones around our necks and take a flying leap into the sea. Jesus is showing how serious it is when we cause a fellow Christian to stumble in his or her walk of faith. Rather than choosing to leap into the sea with a great millstone tied to our necks, Jesus was kind of hoping we might decide not to cause one another to stumble in our faith.

Jesus challenges those who follow him to consider the costs of discipleship. Jesus is not holding out a cheap grace in which following him leaves our lives unchanged. Instead, Jesus is suggesting that we might have to make some changes that cost us dearly, as dearly as losing a limb. And further, the cost will not be the same for everyone, for what will cause each of us to stumble will not all be the same.

Jesus warns that whatever it is that causes you to stumble, whatever it is that leads you further from God rather than closer to God, whatever those unwholesome, unhealthy influences are, you are going to need to cut yourself off from those influences or you may find your whole self lost body and soul.

## Day 183

Theoretical physicist turned Anglican priest, John Polkinghorne (1930- ) wrote in his book, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity*: “Everyone knows that religion involves faith. Many people seem to think that faith involves shutting one’s eyes, gritting one’s teeth, and believing six impossible things before breakfast, because the Bible or the Pope or some other unquestionable authority tells us so. Not at all! Faith may involve a leap, but it’s a leap into the light, not the dark. The aim of the religious quest, like that of the scientific quest, is to seek motivated belief about what is the case....

“Nevertheless, there are obviously differences between science and religion. One of the most significant is that science deals with a physical world that is at our disposal to kick around or pull apart as we please. In short, science can put things to the experimental test. God, however, is not at our disposal in this way. The Bible says, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ It’s no good saying, ‘If there is a God, let him strike me down dead.’ He just doesn’t play that sort of silly game....In the realm of personal experience, whether between ourselves or with God, we all know that testing has to give way to trusting....Another difference between scientific knowledge and religious knowledge lies in the consequences that they have for us. My belief in quarks and gluons is intellectually satisfying, but it doesn’t affect my life in a radical way. God, on the other hand, is not just there to satisfy our curiosity. The encounter with him will involve the call to obedience as well as the illumination of our minds. Religious knowledge is much more demanding than scientific knowledge. While it requires scrupulous attention to matters of truth, it also calls for the response of commitment to the truth discovered.”

# Day 184

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“Steer the ship of my life, good Lord, to your quiet harbour, where I can be safe from the storms of sin and conflict. Show me the course I should take. Renew in me the gift of discernment, so that I can always see the right direction in which I should go. And give me the strength and the courage to choose the right course, even when the sea is rough and the waves are high, knowing that through enduring hardship and danger in your name we shall find comfort and peace.”

~Basil of Caesarea (329-379)

# Day 185

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“For this is what the LORD says:  
‘I will extend peace to her like a river,  
and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream;  
you will nurse and be carried on her arm  
and dandled on her knees.  
As a mother comforts her child,  
so will I comfort you;  
and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.’  
When you see this, your heart will rejoice  
and you will flourish like grass;  
the hand of the LORD will be made known to his servants,  
but his fury will be shown to his foes.”  
~Isaiah 66:12-14

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# Day 186

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The following prayer is said to have been found on a scrap of paper at the liberation of Ravensbruck Concentration Camp in Germany. I don't know that I would have had the faith/strength/courage to write this prayer in that setting, but I do wonder at its ability to speak to loving our enemies.

“Lord, remember not only the men of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us. Remember rather the fruits we have brought, thanks to this suffering: our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown out of this. And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness.”

# Day 187

St. Francis of Assisi held out extremely high ideals for himself. He sought to really and truly humble himself and to be as Christlike as possible. One example is a writing on true joy he dictated to a fellow monk. Francis said,

“What true joy is: A messenger comes and says that all the masters in Paris have come into the Order; this is not true joy. Or that all the prelates beyond the mountains and the king of England [have entered the Order]; this is not true joy. Again, that my brothers have gone to all the unbelievers and converted all of them to the faith; again, that I have so much grace from God that I heal the sick and perform many miracles: I tell you that joy does not consist in any of these things.

“What then is true joy? I return to Perugia and arrive there in the dead of night; and it is winter time, muddy and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs, and blood flows from such wounds. And all covered with mud and cold, I come to the gate and after I have knocked and called for some time, a brother comes and asks, ‘Who are you?’ I answer, ‘Brother Francis.’ And he says ‘Go away; this is not the proper hour for going about; you may not come in.’ And when I insist, he answers, ‘Go away, you are a simple and stupid person; we are so many and we have no need of you. You are certainly not coming to us at this hour!’ And I stand again at the door and say: ‘For the love of God, take me in tonight.’ And he answers, ‘I will not. Go to the Crossiers’ place and ask there.’

“I tell you this: If I had the patience and did not become upset, there would be true joy in this and true virtue and the salvation of the soul.”

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# Day 188

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The following was in a sermon the Rev. Grant LeRoux gave at Holy Nativity Church on St. Simons Island some years back:

“When you look upon a brother who has sinned, there are 3 things you do not know...

- 1.You do not know how hard he tried to resist temptation...
- 2.You do not know the strength of the forces assembled against him...
- 3.You do not know what you would do in the same circumstances.”



# Day 189

The following was created as a part of an evening prayer service by Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), who was an Anglican priest and bishop and one of the key translators of the King James Version of the Bible.

“To my weariness, O Lord, vouchsafe Thou rest,  
to my exhaustion renew Thou strength.  
Lighten mine eyes that I sleep not in death.  
Deliver me from the terror by night,  
the pestilence that walketh in darkness.  
Supply me with healthy sleep,  
and to pass through this night without Fear.  
O keeper of Israel, who neither slumberest nor sleepest,  
guard me this night from all evil,  
guard my soul, O Lord.  
Visit me with the visitation of Thine own,  
reveal to me wisdom in the visions of the night.  
If not, for I am not worthy,  
not worthy, at least, O loving Lord,  
Let sleep be to me a breathing time  
as from toil, so from sin.  
Yea, O Lord, nor let me in my dreams imagine  
what may anger Thee, what may defile me.  
Let not my loins be filled with illusions,  
yea, let my reins chasten me in the night season,

*A Season of Healing*

yet without grievous terror.  
Preserve me from the black sleep of sin;  
all earthly and evil thoughts put to sleep within me.  
Grant to me light sleep, rid of all imaginations  
fleshly and satanical.  
Lord, Thou knowest how sleepless are mine unseen foes,  
and how feeble my wretched flesh,  
Who madest me ;  
shelter me with the wing of Thy pity;  
awaken me at the fitting time, the time of prayer;  
and give me to seek Thee early,  
for Thy glory and for Thy service.

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 190

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The hardest person to forgive is not the one who caused you the greatest hurt. The hardest person to forgive is your self. Seeing others as God sees them, means also seeing yourself as God sees you.

When Jesus said, “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matthew 6:14), he wasn’t just being mean and saying “do this or I’ll punish you.” Jesus was describing the way the world works. To find forgiveness, you need to become forgiving. It is in giving forgiveness to others, that you will find the path to accept it for yourself.”

# Day 191

In thinking through how he could know Jesus had been bodily resurrected, the French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote about the faith of the apostles. Pascal noted that the apostles were in a position to know whether Jesus had truly been resurrected. After that first Easter they lived their lives transformed by the truth of that event. Pascal wrote:

“The hypothesis that the Apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus’s death and conspiring to say that he had risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be.

The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny his story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death, and they would all have been lost. Follow that out.”

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?”

~Hosea 13:14

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# Day 192

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“**H**ope is the word which God has written on the brow of every man.”

~Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

“**T**o love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless.”

~G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

“**H**ope travels through, nor quits us when we die.”

~Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

“**H**ope is the struggle of the soul, breaking loose from what is perishable, and attesting her eternity.”

~Herman Melville (1819-1891)

## Day 193

The Poet and Preacher John Donne (1572-1631) was fascinated by the Resurrection. He wrote of it again and again in his sermons. Donne saw that resurrection was something we could not see in nature, but we saw it foreshadowed in nature. The same way the sun dies each day to appear anew the next. The same way an acorn drops to the ground, seemingly dead, and then grows into a mighty oak. In that same way, if we saw actual resurrection, the way we see its foreshadowing, then we would not marvel at resurrection. Donne wrote:

“If churchyards did vent themselves every spring, and that there were such a resurrection of bodies every year, when thou had seen as many resurrections as years, the resurrection would be no stranger to thee, than spring is....”

We have signs of these own little resurrections in our own lives. We have it in the springtime, when the seemingly dead branches spring forth with life. We have it elsewhere as well. But we cease to marvel, just as Donne wrote that we would cease to marvel, if the graveyards gave up their dead every spring. It's as if God is shouting that death and resurrection are still an option and we are not always listening.

## Day 194

There is a folktale from Romania which says, of all the birds the crow is considered the ugliest, especially its young fledglings. The legend tells that sometime after God had created all the living beings, he called everyone to see them and their offspring. He wanted to see how the young birds and animals looked, and then to give them suitable gifts, and food for their little ones.

They came one by one, and God looked at them, patted some and stroked others, and was very pleased with every one of them, for each one had something of beauty in it. And so he blessed them and gave them food by which to live. The last to come was the crow, bringing her little brood with her, very proud of them.

When God cast his eyes upon the young crows, he spat in astonishment, and said, "Surely these are not my creatures. I could not have made such ugly things. Every one of my creatures has such beautiful young ones that they are a pleasure to look at, but yours are so ugly that it makes one sick to look at them. Where did you get this one?"

"Where should I get them from?" replied the crow. "It is my very own young child," she added with pride.

"You had better go back and bring me another one. This is much too ugly. I cannot look at it."

Annoyed at the words of God, the crow went away and flew all over the earth to search for another young one that would be more beautiful than the one she had brought to God. But no other young bird appeared so beautiful in her eyes as her own. So she returned back to God and said, "I have been all over the world, and I have searched high and low, but young birds more

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beautiful and more dainty than mine I have not been able to find.”

Then God smilingly replied, “Quite right. Just so are all mothers. No other child is so beautiful in their eyes as their own.”

Then he blessed the little crows and sent them away into the world with his gifts. For God sees as beautiful creations all those that others see as ugly.



# Day 195

“All our forgiving is inescapably incomplete. That’s why it’s so crucial to see our forgiving not simply as our own act, but as participating in God’s forgiving. Our forgiving is faulty; God’s faultless. Our forgiving is provisional; God’s is final. We forgive tenuously and tentatively; God forgives unhesitatingly and definitely. As we forgive, we always wrong the offender by inadequate judgment and pride; God forgives with justice and genuine love.

The only way we dare forgive is by making our forgiving transparent to God’s and always open to revision. After all, our forgiveness is only possible as an echo of God’s. In the here and now, that echo is distorted, but it is inescapably distorted. One day the distortion will be removed.

The Apostle Paul wrote that one day we will all ‘appear before the judgment seat of Christ.’ The day of judgment stands as the boundary between transitoriness and everlasting life, between this world of sin and the coming world of love. Mostly we think that at the judgment day we’ll receive ‘recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil,’ as the Apostle said.

But Christ’s judgment is also a judgment of grace. As a result, we’ll be transformed and fully reconciled with God and one another. That’s how it must be. Otherwise judgment could not be what faith claims it is—the door to the world of love.”

~Miroslav Volf (1956- ), *Free of Charge*

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# Day 196

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Jesus tells a scribe that he has answered wisely when he says, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Of the commands to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself, Dr. Reginald Fuller writes, “Jesus understands the interconnection between the two commandments in a quite radical sense. Love of God is illusory if it does not issue in love of neighbor, and love of neighbor is refined self-love if it does not proceed from the love of God.”

“I sought my soul, and the soul I could not see.

I sought my God and God eluded me

I sought my neighbor and found all three.”

~anonymous poem

# Day 197

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There is a story told of a little boy who came to see the Washington Monument, noticed a National Park Service ranger standing by it and said, "I want to buy it." The ranger stooped down and said, "How much do you have?" The boy reached into his pocket and pulled out 25 cents. The guard said, "That's not enough." The boy replied, "I thought you would say that." So he pulled out nine cents more.

The guard looked down at the boy and said, "You need to understand three things: First, 34 cents is not enough, 34 million dollars is not enough to buy the Washington Monument. Second, the Washington Monument is not for sale. And third, if you are an American citizen, the Washington Monument already belongs to you."

The same is true of God's love: You can not earn it. You can not buy it. You already have it.

# Day 198

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“As Christians we want to be forgivers of sins, the lovers of men, new incarnations of Christ, saviors rather than saved; secure in our own possession of the true religion, rather than dependent on a Lord who possesses us, chooses us, forgives us. If we do not try to have God under our control, then at least we try to give ourselves the assurance that we are on His side facing the rest of the world; not with that world facing Him in infinite dependence, with no security save Him.”

~H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962)

# Day 199

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“In the days of His earthly ministry, only those could speak to Him who came where He was: if He was in Galilee, men could not find Him in Jerusalem; if He was in Jerusalem, men could not find Him in Galilee. His Ascension means that He is perfectly united with God; we are with Him wherever we are present to God; and that is everywhere and always. Because He is “in Heaven” He is everywhere on earth: because He is ascended, He is here now.

“Our devotion is not to hold us by the empty tomb; it must lift up our hearts to heaven so that we too “in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell”: it must also send us forth into the world to do His will; and these are not two things, but one.”

~William Temple (1881-1941)

# Day 200

“If you have ever lost someone very important to you, then you already know how it feels, and if you haven’t, you can not possibly imagine it.”

~A Series of Unfortunate Events,  
*Book the First: The Bad Beginning*, by Lemony Snicket

With the dawning reality that a loved one has died, comes the knowledge that real grief does not go away. Real grief stays with you. In fact, we not only can’t expect grief to go away, we also shouldn’t want it to do so. For as the person you loved is not returned to you, how can you stop grieving? The loss remains and so does the grief. But grief can and does change. We pray not for an end to the grief, but for our unbearable sense of loss to be replaced by a sorrow we can bear. And in this, we are helped by the knowledge of the resurrection.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Clearly he didn’t think that people would not die. What he taught was that not only do we find death in the midst of life, but we find life in the midst of death. Those who die will live again. This is Christian teaching and it is why even at the grave we can praise God.

# Day 201

“Grief makes one hour ten.”

~William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

“If you suppress grief too much, it can well redouble.”

~Moliere (1622-1273)

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.”

~Psalm 46:1-2

“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.”

~Nahum 1:7

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# Day 202

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“If all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wildflowers.”

~Teresa of Lisieux (1873-1897)

“You rescue those who are humble, but you humiliate the proud.”

~Psalm 18:27

“To one of the brethren appeared a devil, transformed into an angel of light, who said to him: I am the Angel Gabriel, and I have been sent to thee. But the Brother said: Think again—you must have been sent to somebody else. I haven’t done anything to deserve an angel. Immediately the devil ceased to appear.”

~4th century Egypt, from *The Wisdom of the Desert*

“But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

~Jesus (Matthew 23:12)



## Day 203

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

~Jesus (John 14:1-4)

You can also experience something of the hereafter in practicing the presence of God and being aware of God in all the places you find yourself in this life. The proof of Heaven is the presence of God in the here and now. You don’t have to wait until you die to be with God. God is with you now if you open yourself up to the presence of the spirit of God within you.

We will still feel the sting of death in that we grieve for those we love who have died. But we Christians are an Easter people who can gather at the grave and sing Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia—Praise God, Praise God, Praise God. For death is not the final answer. Jesus Christ defeated the power of death. Our mortal bodies can be clothed in immortality.

The power of Easter is the power to face your own death without fear. One story I cherish is the true story of a woman consoling her grandmother at her death bed. She said, “Grandma, Heaven will be great. Everyone you love will be there.” Her grandmother’s face lit up and she replied, “Oh, it’ll be much better than that dear. Everyone who will be there, I’ll love.”

## Day 204

The word “religion” comes across in the New Testament as something of a bad word. “Thraiskos” was the New Testament word for “religion.” Its origin was the island of Thrace whose inhabitants were known for their excessive religiosity. The Thracians were fanatics and the Bible’s word “religion” means that you are “like the people on Thrace.” That’s why it is used negatively in scripture. The positive word in scripture is “faith” not “religion.”

The Book of James uses the word to point toward a better way to be religious: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

For scripture then religion seems to be a problem and the way to know if one has the good kind of religion is if one’s faith bears good fruit. If you are taking care of those in need and not getting tied up in the chaos and confusion of the present age, then you have true religion rather than just religiosity.

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# Day 205

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“We should so work as if we were to be saved by our works; and so rely on Jesus Christ, as if we did no works.”

~Francis Asbury (1745-1816)

“No man or woman can be strong, gentle, pure, and good, without the world being better for it and without someone being helped and comforted by the very existence of that goodness.”

~Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

“Do your little bit of good where you are; its those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

~Desmond Tutu (1931- )

## Day 206

“People who cannot bear to be alone are the worst company.”

~Albert Guinon (1863-1923)

“The Absence of other voices compelled me to listen more intently to the inner one. I became aware that the interior voice, so often before stifled or stilled entirely by what I thought others wanted to hear, or what I considered to be socially acceptable, grew gratifyingly louder, more insistent.

“I was lonely because I had no experience with solitude. I never realized I had been given a gift; I didn’t know how to use the great present of time alone.

“In the silence I eagerly sought, I could hear myself think, and what I heard was, sadly, often not worth listening to.

“I realized how much more I was aware of my vices (envy, gloating, egotism) when I was alone. In the presence of others, it was possible to ignore them, or even deny that they existed.”

~Doris Grumbach (1918- )

“For as long as you can remember, you have been a pleaser, depending on others to give you an identity. You need not look at that only in a negative way. You wanted to give your heart to others, and you did so quickly and easily. But now you are being asked to let go of all these self-made props and trust that God is enough for you. You must stop being a pleaser and reclaim your identity as a free self.”

~Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

## Day 207

Years ago a farmer owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops.

As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals. Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer. 'Are you a good farmhand?' the farmer asked him."

"Well, I can sleep when the wind blows," answered the little man.

Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him. The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work.

Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, "Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!" The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, "No, sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows."

Enraged by the old man's response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm.

To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down. Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, so he returned to his bed to also sleep while the wind blew.

## *A Season of Healing*

The hired hand in the story was able to sleep because he had secured the farm against the storm. We, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, secure ourselves against the storms of life by grounding ourselves firmly in the Word of God, in prayer and worship. These are the means to preparing for whatever storms life may throw our way.

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 208

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“The highest perfection consists not in interior favors or in great raptures or in visions, or in the spirit of prophecy, but in the bringing of our wills so closely in conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realize that He wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might, and take the bitter with the sweet, knowing that to be His Majesty’s will.”

~Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

“If we are to follow Christ, it must be in our common way of spending every day. If we are to live unto God at any time or in any place, we are to live unto him in all times and in all places. If we are to use anything as the gift of God, we are to use everything as his gift.”

~William Law (1686-1781)

## Day 209

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I know a retired chaplain who works not too far away bagging groceries for a large supermarket. He considers this his ministry. And the smile, the thoughtful words of encouragement are how he lives into that ministry. He also makes it a point to pray for every person who passes through the checkout where he works. No one knows this is his ministry. Or do they? Perhaps there is a reason why folks prefer being in the line where he's bagging their items.

How many encounters do you have in a typical day? More than you might first think. There are the people in line with you at a store. The folks you pass in a parking lot coming or going. The person next to you at a red light. The list just gets longer of the people whose day you can effect for the better. A smile works wonders. A kind word is even better. But how about letting that Mom with the baby she's trying to handle get ahead of you at the grocery store? It adds two minutes to your time on line, but decreases her stress in greater measure.

It's about using small encounters, the briefest of exchanges, to create a real connection with someone else.



## Day 210

The following is a story that survives from the Christian hermits of the deserts of Egypt circa 400 A.D.

“Three old men, of whom one had a bad reputation, came one day to Abba Achilles.

“The first asked him, ‘Father, make me a fishing-net.’

“‘I will not make you one,’ he replied.

“Then the second said, ‘Of your charity make one, so that we may have a souvenir of you in the monastery.’

“But he said, ‘I do not have time.’

“Then the third one, who had a bad reputation, said, ‘Make me a fishing-net, so that I may have something from your hands, Father.’

“Abba Achilles answered him at once, ‘For you, I will make one.’

“Then the two other old men asked him privately, ‘Why did you not want to do what we asked you, but you promised to do what he asked?’

“The old man gave them this answer, ‘I told you I would not make one, and you were not disappointed, since you thought that I had no time. But if I had not made one for him, he would have said, ‘The old man has heard about my sin, and that is why he does not want to make me anything,’ and so our relationship would have broken down. But now I have cheered his soul, so that he will not be overcome with grief.’”

# Day 211

Jesus returns to his hometown and reads the Prophet Isaiah in the synagogue worship saying,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

For Luke this seems to be a summary of Jesus’ ministry, almost like a modern mission statement for a corporation or church. Lindy Black of the Navigators offers the following at her Sermon Nuggets website, a thought-provoking way of looking at Jesus’ promise to proclaim release to the captives:

“When the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in the midst of the Civil War, the slaves who lived within the realm of the Confederacy remained in bondage. Many did not know about the proclamation when it went into effect. Its authority was denied and nullified by local and regional power.

“Yet Lincoln, in both his words and his claim to authority over the whole of the split and rebellious Union, contended that the proclamation was nonetheless true and real. And so this flawed and partial emancipation became the herald of a fuller freedom, a fulfillment yet unreached.

“Jesus’ proclamation...no different.

“What holds people captive today? How might we continue to live into Jesus’ goal to proclaim release to the captives?”

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## Day 212

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“The greatest gift you can give is to genuinely forgive sin committed against you. It is a comparatively small thing to wish someone well or to do good to someone who hasn’t hurt you. But it is much greater to love and wish your enemy well. When you have the opportunity, do good to those who want to make you suffer and do you harm. For in doing this you obey God’s command: ‘Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute you.’ This is a frame of mind that only the children of God can reach.

“All believers should strive after it, by prayer earnestly struggling with themselves to attain this standard. However, such a high degree of goodness can hardly be met by all the people who pray: ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.’ In view of all this, those who don’t yet love their enemies can fulfill this command when they forgive someone from the heart who has sinned against them.”

~Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses,  
your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

~Jesus (Matthew 6:14)

# Day 213

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“All of us are meant to be contemplatives.

“Frequently we assume that this is reserved for some rare monastic life, lived by special people who alone have been called by God. But the truth of the matter is that each one of us is meant to have that space inside where we can hear God’s voice. God is available to all of us. God says, ‘Be still and know that I am God.’

“Each one of us wants and needs to give ourselves space for quiet. We can hear God’s voice most clearly when we are quiet, and then you begin to see with the eyes of the heart.”

~Desmond Tutu (1931- ), *God Has a Dream*

## Day 214

I'm not good at recalling my dreams. But last night I had one in which God was speaking to me and I still remember it. I was trying to pray and getting distracted; God told me to find the quietest place to pray. And in the frustrating way that dreams can work I tried different places and they were all distracting in various ways. God told me again to find the quietest place. And I felt like, "Duh, it's not where you are in some external sense."

Then I imagined myself descending quite literally into my own heart. There the "lub, dub" of my heart beat slowed as time approached standing still. And within my own heart I found the quietest place to be with God, no matter what is going on around.

The sharp edges of the dream are disappearing as I write this this morning, but I wanted to get it down, and to share it. This is no great prayer breakthrough. It's something like planting the flag in Times Square and claiming it as my own. Lots of folks have discovered this territory before me.

Yet I am thankful for the dream and the knowledge that the God I seek is seeking me in my own heart. And I have a sneaking suspicion that the same is true for you.

# Day 215

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“**M**an, when he does not grieve, hardly exists.”

~Antonio Porchia (1885-1968), (translated from Spanish by W.S. Merwin)

“**L**isten to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.”

~Frederick Buechner(1926- )

“**G**ive sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o’er-fraught heart and bids it break.”

~William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

# Day 216

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Jesus told the now famous story of The Good Samaritan in which two religious leaders (a priest and a Levite) pass by a man who thieves beat and left for dead. The man was cared for instead, by a Samaritan, who would have been expected not to care for an Israeli. Famed Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) has written this about the people in Jesus' parable:

“The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’

“But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’”

# Day 217

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“The friend who holds your hand and says the wrong thing is made of dearer stuff than the one who stays away.”

~Barbara Kingsolver (1955- )

“When we honestly ask ourselves which people in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing, and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”

~Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

“Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment, for it is an old one you have always had, right from the beginning. This commandment—to love one another – is the same message you heard before.”

~I John 2:7 (New Living Translation)



# Day 218

“When we pray, ‘Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,’ we had better know what we are about. He will not carry us to easy triumphs and gratifying successes; more probably He will set us to some task for God in the full intention that we shall fail, so that others, learning wisdom by our failure, may carry the good cause forward.

“He may take us through loneliness, desertion by friends, apparent desertion even by God; that was the way Christ went to the Father. He may drive us into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. He may lead us from the Mount of Transfiguration (if He ever lets us climb it) to the hill that is called the Place of the Skull. For if we invoke Him it must be to help us in doing God’s will, not ours. We cannot call upon the Creator Spirit, by whose aid the world’s foundations first were laid in order to use omnipotence for the supply of our futile pleasures or the success of our futile plans.

“If we invoke Him, we must be ready for the glorious pain of being caught by His power out of our petty orbit into the eternal purposes of the Almighty, in whose onward sweep our lives are as a speck of dust. The soul that is filled with the Spirit must have become purged of all pride or love of ease, all self-complacence and self-reliance; but that soul has found the only real dignity, the only lasting joy. Come then, Great Spirit, come. Convict the world; and convict my timid soul.”

~William Temple (1881-1944)

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# Day 219

“O Lord and Master of my Life,  
Take away from me the spirit of laziness,  
faint-heartedness, lust for power, and idle talk.

Instead grant me, your servant,  
the spirit of purity, humility, patience, and love.

Yes, Lord and King,  
give me the power to see my own faults  
and not to judge my brother.  
For You are blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.”

~Ephrem the Syrian (306-373)

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# Day 220

“We must alter our lives in order to alter our hearts,  
for it is impossible to live one way and pray another.”

~William Law (1686-1781)

“Our ordinary views of prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer as a means for getting something for ourselves; the Bible’s idea of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.”

~Oswald Chambers (1874-1917)

# Day 221

“At about three o’clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”  
~Matthew 27:46

“Since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too.”  
~1 Peter 4:1 (New Living Translation)

“...If God were in every respect incapable of suffering, he would also be incapable of love. He would at most be able to love himself, but not anything other than himself. But if he is capable of loving something other than himself, then he opens himself for the suffering which love for the other brings him, while still remaining master of the pain which is the consequence of his love. God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings. But he does suffer from his love, which is the overflowing superabundance of his being. And in this sense he can suffer.”  
~Jürgen Moltmann (1926- ) *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*

## Day 222

“We do not usually rush to expose our vulnerability and our sinfulness....If a husband and a wife have quarreled without the wrongdoer acknowledging his or her fault by confessing, so exposing the cause of the rift; if a husband in this situation comes home with a bunch of flowers and the couple pretends all is in order, then they will be in for a rude shock. They have not dealt with their immediate past adequately. They have glossed over their differences, for they have failed to stare truth in the face for fear of a possible bruising confrontation.

“They will have done what the prophet calls healing the hurt lightly by crying, ‘Peace, peace where there is no peace.’ They will have only papered over the cracks and not worked out why they fell out in the first place. All that will happen is that, despite the beautiful flowers, the hurt will fester. One day there will be an awful eruption and they will realize that they had tried to obtain reconciliation on the cheap. True reconciliation is not cheap. It cost God the death of His only begotten Son.”

~Desmond Tutu (1931- )

# Day 223

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“I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you.”

~Jesus (John 15:12)

“Lord, grant that I might not so much seek to be loved as to love.”

~Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)

“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.”

~G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

“For our religion commands us to love even our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us, aiming at a perfection all its own, and seeking in its disciples something of a higher type than the commonplace goodness of the world. For all love those who love them; it is peculiar to Christians alone to love those that hate them.”

~Tertullian (d. 220-240)

“Christian love, which applies to all, even to one’s enemies, is the worst adversary of Communism.”

~Nikolai Bukharin (1888–1938)

# Day 224

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“The proof of spiritual maturity is not how pure you are but awareness of your impurity. That very awareness opens the door to grace.”

~Phillip Yancey (1949- )

“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”

~C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)

“If we learn not humility, we learn nothing.”

~John Jewel (1522-1571)

## Day 225

“The story is told of a wise man who met three pilgrims on the road. The first was pale and withered and cringing with fear. The wise man asked him, ‘Why are you in such a frightful state?’

“Haltingly, the man answered: ‘All that I have ever done wrong haunts me. I fear the consequences of all the evil I have done knowingly or unknowingly. I am afraid that I will suffer the eternal punishment of naraka, what men call hell.’

“The wise man spoke to him, saying: ‘It is sad and distressing that you do not turn your heart and thoughts to God, who alone is the source of all wisdom. Instead, you live in continual fear of hell. So your pilgrimage is not genuine. You are trying to offer your pilgrimage as a bribe to God, so that you will not be punished for your sins. You will never find peace along this path.’

“The second pilgrim was consumed with worries and doubts. The wise man asked him, ‘Why do you seem so sad and worried?’

“The pilgrim answered, ‘I desperately want to find the bliss and peace of the heavenly realm, but I fear I will not find it.’

“The wise man rebuked him sharply, saying: ‘It is shameful that you fail to think of God’s creative power and love. This alone should fill your heart with great awe and thankfulness. Instead, you are consumed by your own desire for peace and joy. You only pray in order to gain fulfillment of your own selfish desires. Such prayer is worthless and will never lead you to peace.’

“Afterward, the wise man turned to the third pilgrim who radiated joy and contentment. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘what is the secret of your joy and peace?’



*A Season of Healing*

“The pilgrim answered: ‘My heart is filled with joy, and I am filled with thankfulness to God who has opened the way for me to know his presence and find unity with him. May he open my heart more and more so that I can love and serve him with heart and soul and strength and so that I can worship him for love alone.’

~Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929)

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## Day 226

The story of 19th century preacher John Todd has been widely circulated. Orphaned at the age of six, Todd was taken in by an aunt who raised him. She later wrote her nephew expressing that even though she was a Christian she had a strong fear of death. He wrote to her: “It is now 35 years since I, as a boy of 6, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word you would give me a home and be a kind mother to me. I have never forgotten the day I made the long journey to your house. I can still recall the disappointment when, instead of coming for me yourself, you sent your hired man, Caesar, to fetch me.

“I remember my tears and anxiety as, perched high on the back of the horse and clinging tight to Caesar, I rode off to my new home. Night fell before we finished the journey, and I became lonely and afraid. ‘Do you think she’ll go to bed before we get there?’ I asked Caesar.

“‘Oh no!’ he said reassuringly, ‘She’ll stay up for you. When we get out o’ these woods, you’ll see her light shinin’ in the window.’

“Presently we did ride out into the clearing, and there, sure enough, was your light. I remember you were waiting at the door, that you put your arms close about me—a tired and bewildered little boy. You had a fire burning on the hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove. After supper you took me to my new room, heard me say my prayers, and then sat beside me till I fell asleep.

“Auntie, some day soon God will send for you, to take you to a new home. Don’t fear the summons, the strange journey, or the messenger of death. God can be trusted to do as much for you as you were kind enough to do for me so many years ago. At the end of the road you will find love and a welcome awaiting, and you will be safe in God’s care.”

*A Season of Healing*

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# Day 227

“**H**ope is grief’s best music.”

~Anonymous

“**H**ope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don’t give up.”

~Anne Lamott (1954- )

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# Day 228

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“To others I am always honest;  
myself I sometimes deceive.

To others I say what I believe to be true;  
myself I can make believe a lie.

To others my smile is intended to be sincere;  
myself I can fool into hiding my anger.

To others I always wish to do good;  
myself I can blind to my evil motives.

Lord, let me be honest with myself  
as I am with others.”

~Early Irish

# Day 229

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“If there be anywhere on earth [where] a lover of God is always kept safe from falling, I know nothing of it, for it was not shown me. But this was shown: that in falling and rising again we are always kept in the same precious love.

“Between God and the soul there is no between.

“He did not say, You will never have a rough passage, you will never be over-strained, you will never feel uncomfortable, but he did say You will never be overcome.”

~Julian of Norwich (c. 1342-1416), *Revelations of Divine Love*

## Day 230

In 1905, Albert Einstein wrote a scientific paper that changed the world of physics. Among other things, Einstein proclaimed that light was both a particle and a wave. This notion was so radical that it took 20 years to really be acknowledged and even longer to be adequately validated by research to become part of a scholarly consensus.

Einstein's work was at the forefront of what we now call Quantum Physics. As physicists dove under the layers of the visible world to explore subatomic particles, they found in their mathematic equations an interconnectedness that surprised and sometimes frightened them.

The problem with light had been described in either-or terms. Light was either disconnected particles or an interconnected wave. But Einstein theorized and others proved that light is both particle and wave. Neither particle theory nor wave theory can describe light. This understanding of light has now become scientific dogma. In fact, this discovery has been part of the push in Quantum Physics to understand the interconnectedness of all things. In the Quantum universe, relationships are more important to study than the particles themselves. We once saw the world as filled with more than 90% dark matter, or the absence of stuff. But now scientists can find and show connections between particles where no matter connects the two. There is an essential connectedness among all things.

We long for a connection to other people as we were created to share our lives with others. Connections are important. What can you do today to strengthen a connection with someone with whom you have lost touch?

*A Season of Healing*

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# Day 231

“Look to each other’s interests  
and not merely to your own.”

~Philippians 2:4

“The truest help we can render an afflicted man  
is not to take his burden from him,  
but to call out his best energy,  
that he may be able to bear the burden.”

~Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

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## Day 232

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

~Romans 8:38-39

Corrie Ten Boom became an internationally renowned author through her autobiography of her life during the Nazi occupation. Corrie was raised in a Christian home in Holland. When the Nazis came in and began to persecute the Jews, her family built “a hiding place” into their house, to hide a Jewish family. In time, Corrie’s family was found out and sent off to die with the family they had protected. Corrie was the sole survivor out of the two families.

The interviewer asked Corrie something like, “What was the greatest miracle you experienced in the extermination camps?”

She responded, “The presence of Jesus Christ.”

The interviewer was a little taken aback and sought to clarify, “But didn’t you write about miracles and deliverances in the camps?”

“Yes,” Corrie replied, “But the greatest miracle was Christ’s presence.”

Corrie Ten Boom learned that no matter how she and her family were persecuted, none of it could separate her from God’s love in Christ Jesus. There was no greater miracle possible and nothing else needed.



# Day 233

“May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

“May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

“May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

“May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God’s grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

“And the blessing of God the Supreme Majesty and our Creator, Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word who is our brother and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Guide, be with you and remain with you, this day and forevermore. Amen.”

~a Four-fold Franciscan Blessing

# Day 234

Lindy Black of The Navigators relates the following story at her Sermon Nuggets website:

“A woman had a challenging dream—that she walked into a new shop in the mall—and to her surprise, found God behind the counter. ‘What do you sell here?’ she asked. ‘Everything your heart desires,’ said God. ‘Everything.’

“Hardly daring to believe what she was hearing, the woman decided to ask for the best things a human could wish for. ‘I’ll take some peace of mind and love and happiness and wisdom and freedom from fear,’ she said. Then as an afterthought, she added, ‘Not just for me. For everyone on earth.’

“God smiled. ‘I think you’ve got me wrong, my dear,’ God said, ‘We don’t sell the fruits here. We only sell the seeds.’”

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# Day 235

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“Don’t be misled. No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others – ignoring God! – harvests a crop of weeds. All he’ll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God’s Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.”

~Galatians 6:7-16 paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*

The prayer attributed to Francis of Assisi offers some pairings for what we should sow:

“Where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is discord, union;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.”

## Day 236

Esther de Waal's book, *Seeking God* is about following Jesus in the spirituality of Saint Benedict. In the chapter on Material Things she writes,

"God is neither idea nor ideal; he is exceedingly concrete reality and it is only in the concrete reality of my daily living that I am going to encounter him. The difficulty is that most of the time I am so busy and so involved that I simply have not the time (nor the incentive) to see my daily life and work in this sort of way at all. Yet that deeply sacramental understanding which emphasizes common creation, which plays down the division between the sacred and the secular, which brings awareness that all comes from God, is something which speaks most immediately to my condition and I am a fool if I do not hear it. For it enables me to seek God here and now, just as I am, caught up in all the absurdly down-to-earth chores and demands which I feel trap me day by day....

"I should look around me and see that seeking God does not demand the unusual, the spectacular, the heroic. It asks me as wife, mother, housewife that I do the most ordinary, often dreary and humdrum things that face me each day, with a loving openness that will allow them to become my own immediate way to God....

"Care is to be taken over even the most unrewarding of chores."

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# Day 237

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) wrote the following prayer on how our nature comes from God's nature and as such we should be on fire with love:

“In Your nature,  
eternal Godhead,  
I shall come to  
know my nature  
And what is my nature,  
boundless love?  
It is fire,  
because You are nothing  
but a fire of love.  
And You have given humankind  
a share in this nature,  
for by the fire of love  
You created us.  
And so with all other people  
and every created thing;  
You made them out of love.  
O ungrateful people!  
What nature has your God given You?  
His very own nature!  
Are you not ashamed  
to cut yourselves off from such a noble thing

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through the guilt of deadly sin?

O eternal Trinity,  
my sweet love!

You, light,  
give us light.

You, wisdom,  
give us wisdom.

You, supreme strength,  
strengthen us.

Today, eternal God,  
let our cloud be dissipated  
so that we may perfectly know and follow

Your Truth in truth,  
with a free and simple heart.

God, come to our assistance!

Lord, make haste to help us!

Amen.”

## Day 238

Jesus referred to himself saying “I Am.” This was a way of self-referral so blasphemous, that one could be put to death by Jewish law just for uttering those words. That is unless, perhaps, the person saying “I Am” was standing on a blustery sea when saying the words.

Jesus did just that. On the night after he fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, Jesus remained behind to pray as his disciples went ahead across the lake. During that night, the disciples strained against the wind, having trouble piloting the boat in such rough seas. What would usually have been a two-hour row across the lake is turning into an all-nighter. The Greek New Testament literally says they are “tortured in their rowing.”

The disciples are in no real danger. Jesus is not saving their lives, but breaking open their minds to see more clearly who he is. This encounter on the Sea is an “aha” moment when the disciples are given a chance to understand that Jesus really is God become man.

Straining to row into the wind, the disciples see a robed figure out on the waves. They assume it is a ghost. The water was featured in all the old myths of the Ancient Near East as a place of chaos. Out on the sea at night, a superstitious first century Palestinian would have been fearfully on the lookout for an evil spirit out looking to kill and destroy. The disciples then see what they want to see—a ghost—and they scream out, shaken by terror.

It is just then that the Epiphany comes, the moment when Jesus identifies himself saying, “Take heart, it is I; Do not be afraid.” I prefer to translate Jesus’ self-identification more literally, “Be of good courage. I Am. Stop fearing.” The “I Am” in the midst of Jesus statement is very significant. This is the same

## *A Season of Healing*

identification found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when God reveals himself in the burning bush to Moses as “I Am that I Am.”

Jesus who can calmly walk across the sea into a strong headwind now makes the obvious fact more plain. I can be out here on the water precisely because “I Am.” To underline the point, Jesus steps into the boat and the wind dies.

Are you straining against the wind, tortured in your rowing, in some area of your life? Is there some way in which you feel like you are out on the sea and God has abandoned you to the wind and waves? It may be time to open up your mind. Stop closing off possibilities of how God can act in your life. Have the faith to see that God may yet be walking in to your situation in some unexpected way. The “I Am” is with you on every wind driven sea you encounter in your life. Do not be afraid to open your heart and mind and believe, knowing that the God present in your heart is more real and lasting than the waves tossing you about.



# Day 239

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“Our walls of division do not rise all the way to heaven.”

~Philaret of Moscow (1782-1867)

“All the way to Heaven is Heaven.”

~Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

“We may be surprised at the people we find in heaven. God has a soft spot for sinners. His standards are quite low.”

~Desmund Tutu (1931- )

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

~Jesus (Matthew 6:19-21)

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# Day 240

“Dearest Lord, may I see You today and every day in the person of Your sick, and, while nursing them, minister unto You. Though You hide Yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize You, and say, ‘Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve You.’”

~Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)

“The paradox of the ministry indeed is that we find the God we want to give in the lives of the people to whom we want to give Him.”

~Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

# Day 241

The German reformer, Martin Luther, wrote about two competing theologies: the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. He saw the theology of glory in a church that emphasized triumphalism without acknowledging suffering first. The theology of glory is sort of spiritualized positive thinking that talks of resurrection without mentioning the cross. This theology of glory works great until something goes wrong in your life. Once you realize you're not yet in heaven, this way of talking about God falls short.

Luther contrasted the theology of glory with a theology of the cross. This is a way of speaking about God that doesn't try to sweep under the rug such inconvenient ideas like sin, judgment, and death. This is a way to talk about God that acknowledges the very real darkness in the world around us.

In understanding the theology of glory and the theology of the cross, the songwriter Johnny Mercer is helpful. Johnny Mercer sang "You gotta accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative and don't mess with Mr. In Between." That is the theology of glory. It is nothing much more than the Power of Positive Thinking. Be positive and everything will work out just fine. But that sort of raging optimism doesn't get you too far in the real world. Eliminating the negative would eliminate the cross, suffering and death. If we remove the cross of Christ from our theology, our own suffering is senseless.

On the other hand, we don't want to focus on suffering and death, not that alone. The theology of the cross uses the experience of the cross as a means to understand the resurrection. We know that God is with us in our suffering and that the pain, hurt, and loss we feel is not the end because we see that the

## *A Season of Healing*

cross was not the end of the story. Jesus was resurrected, as you too will come to the day where God wipes every tear from your eye.

So rather than accentuating the positive or the negative, we become Mr. and Ms. In Between. We live in the time between the times. Jesus has already died and rose for our sins. We have not yet come into the fullness of God's kingdom.

Jesus took on the negative. He died for us while we were yet sinners. That's a good thing too as we are still sinners. We have an ongoing need for redemption. So it matters that God loved us before we deserved it. We'll probably never deserve the love God has for us. But God goes on loving us even as we try to get our act together.

We are Mr. and Ms. In Between. We have already been shown the love God has for us and we have not yet fully responded to that love. To get there, we can't eliminate the negatives. It is a fallen and hurting world. We live our lives in this fallen world. But we do so transformed by the hope that is in us. We have the knowledge that this fallen world is not all there is. The glory to be revealed is still on the way.

We are called to be with one another in that in between. Sometimes we are the one caught in between the pain and suffering of this world and the redemption and glory of the next. Then we need others to be with us. At other times, we are to sit alongside others in their pain and suffering, to make God's presence real in their lives. We do this in response to the love of Jesus, the original Mr. In Between. He left behind the light of heaven and came to the darkness of earth to bridge the gulf made by human sin. Jesus reached across the divide between us and God to reconcile us to himself. Jesus showed that God is present in our suffering helping to make sense out of the pain we feel. God does not abandon us, but lives with us and in us in the vast In Between.

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 242

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“O Lord my God,  
teach my heart this day where and how to see You,  
where and how to find You.

You have made me and remade me,  
and You have bestowed on me  
all the good things I possess,  
and still I do not know You.  
I have not yet done that  
for which I was made.

Teach me to seek You,  
for I cannot seek You  
unless You teach me,  
or find You  
unless You show Yourself to me.

Let me seek You in my desire,  
Let me desire You in my seeking.  
Let me find You by loving You,  
Let me love You when I find You.”

~Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

## Day 243

“It seems to me that many people are walking backwards into their future and then wondering why they trip over things or never seem to get where they want to go.

“Having a bad past or a great past can be equally hypnotizing. When the past is bad we may spend our time afraid that the past will catch up and overwhelm us and so we watch our past vigilantly and lose sight of where we want to go. When the past has been great we long for it to return and spend our time grieving for what once was and miss the life that is currently being offered to us.

“Since we will spend the rest of our lives in the future it makes more sense to me, as my mother always told me to, ‘look where you are going.’ That is not to ignore the past. What we need to discover in our past are the timeless life-giving qualities, such as friendship or love, and distinguish them from the temporal ways we experienced those qualities.

“When we cling to the temporal manifestation of a timeless quality, such as a particular friend, we become trapped in idolatry and are unable to experience friendship as it is currently being offered to us.

“When we discover these timeless life-giving qualities and discern their current manifestation we can turn our attention to the future and begin to co-create with God a future that grows these life-giving qualities.”

~Rob Voyle, in the Clergy Leadership Institute newsletter

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## Day 244

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“What does love mean?” This question was posed to a group of children 5-8 years old. Here are some of their answers:

“Chrissy, 6: “Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs.”

“Nikka, 6: “If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate.”

“Tommy, 6: “Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.”

“Elaine, 5: “Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken.”

“Rebecca, 8: “When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis, too. That’s love.”

~from an anonymous email

# Day 245

If you don't have happiness and peace within yourself, then you can't find peace anywhere else. But once you can find happiness and peace within yourself, you'll start to find them everywhere you look.

The only sure thing you get from the pursuit of more and better stuff is not a larger and better life. The only sure thing you get from the pursuit of more and better stuff is more and bigger debts.

But we also find this theme amplified in Christian writings. Famed Christian author C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) wrote: "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

For the great writer, pursuing happiness and peace apart from God is to try to continually redefine happiness and peace. I would be happy if... I would have peace in my life if...

But instead of this endless pursuit, what if we stopped and acknowledged that if the whole Christian story is true, then there is a loving creator who wants what is best for us. That loving creator wants happiness and peace for us and the way to find that happiness and peace is in coming to terms with ourselves. Finding peace within means figuring out that we really are okay. We really are worthy of being loved.

The message of the world is "you would be lovely if..." While the message of God is you are lovely just as you are and because I love you so much I want something even better for you. This is what Jesus said. This is how Jesus acted. And throughout human history there have been scores of Christians who got this message of God's love deep within their bones and found it transformative.



# Day 246

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“To be a Christian means gradually, Sunday after Sunday, to be subsumed into another story, a different account of where we have come from and where we are going, a story that is called “gospel.” You are properly called a “Christian” when it’s obvious that the story told in Scripture is your story above all other stories that the world tries to impose upon you and the God who is rendered in Scripture is the God who has got you.”

~William H. Willimon (1946- ) from his blog

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# Day 247

“I see his blood upon the rose  
And in the stars the glory of his eyes;  
His body gleams amid eternal snows,  
His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;  
The thunder and the singing of the birds  
Are but his voice – and carven by his power,  
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by his feet are worn,  
His strong heart stirs the ever beating sea,  
His crown of thorns is twined in every thorn  
His cross is every tree.”

~Joseph Mary Plunkett, 1916

# Day 248

“If I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not love, I am nothing.”  
~ Paul (I Corinthians 13:2b)

“The soul is made of love and must ever strive to return to love. Therefore, it can never find rest nor happiness in other things. It must lose itself in love. By its very nature it must seek God, who is love....”  
~Mechthild of Magdenburg (1210-1285)

“Let us say that a person knows much about God and spiritual things, even to the point of imagining he or she knows what God is. Without Love, this person will never be Godlike, or share in the divinity of God.”  
~*The Way of Jesus*, anonymously written around 1350

“Beware you be not swallowed up in books!  
An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge.”  
~John Wesley (1703-1791)

“You could be a holy prophet, get a blessing off it,  
Or you could fast for fifty days,  
You could shake hands with the devil,  
or give your life to God on the level,  
But without love you ain't nothing.”  
~Larry Norman (1947-2008) “Righteous Rocker”

## Day 249

There is an old Celtic story of a saintly Christian arriving in a village soon after the death of the priest. A man of some substance, the priest had 17 horses, but he left no will. The people were arguing among themselves as to who should get the horses when the saintly person comes riding onto the scene.

The saint told them he could both solve the horse dilemma and find the village a new priest. He said that the horses should be divided so that the sexton should have half the horses for digging the graves and caring for all the property; the beadle should get a third of the horses for his care of the church's things, especially those items used in worship; and the choirmaster should receive a ninth of the horses for leading the church music. And the person who could resolve how to divide the horses should be the new priest. The village was mystified, but agreed to the plan. The sexton, beadle and choirmaster set out to find someone who could solve the new mathematical problem of how to divide 17 into half, a third and a ninth without sawing up any horses or dividing days of the week. They ran into lots of people interested in the dilemma, but none who could solve it.

Then a young man offered his own horse to the priest's herd. Now enlarged to 18, the herd was divided in half, with the sexton receiving his nine horses. The beadle got his third by taking home six horses, and the choirmaster got a ninth of the herd with two horses. The original 17 thus divided, the young man took his own horse back.

The villagers promptly asked the man to be their priest, citing the saint's advice. The man agreed and he was sent to the bishop for first training and

## *A Season of Healing*

then ordination before returning to the village for three decades of faithful service to the congregation who miraculously found him.

One has to assume the role of The Holy Spirit in this story. The story doesn't work without the Holy Spirit animating it by touching the hearts of those involved, speaking with that still small voice. The Holy Spirit is the one who inspires the saint to set up the task and also inspires the young man to ride into the village and offer a solution. The same Holy Spirit then gets the Bishop to back the whole plan and leads the young man to return to be a faithful priest after going away to study.

The Holy Spirit is that 18th horse. Just as the inheritance issue could not have been solved without first adding the 18th horse, so there are things in your life that you will not be able to get through or able to bear without the Holy Spirit. For God's presence working in and through you can get you through problems you consider insurmountable.

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 250

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“Isn’t it time you got over it?”

People are not usually so tactless as to come out and say this quite so bluntly. Yet others will show you they have tired of your grief and are ready for you to get over it and go on with your life.

When you began this journey, I noted that real grief does not go away. This is not to say that it does not change with time, or that the raw edges of grief do not get smoothed over with healing. It is to say that the loss you experienced that started you on this journey remains and so grief remains.

Knowing that grief will not completely go away, try this self check. Are you getting out and staying active? Have you gotten too active? In grief, we can err in two directions. On the one hand, we can close ourselves off from others. On the other hand, we can let busy lives overtake us and not make room for healing.

How are you doing? Yes, you are still on a roller coaster, but even with the emotional ups and downs, are you balancing your need to be with others and your need to be alone? Do you need to have the courage to spend some time alone? Or have you been holed up on your own and need to be more intentional about getting out? Perhaps it is time for some adjustments.

# Day 251

“Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.”

~I Peter 4:8

“Life is short and we never have enough time for gladdening the hearts of those who travel the way with us. Oh, be swift to love! Make haste to be kind.”

~Henri-Frederic Amiel (1821-1881)

“I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love.”

~Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)

“Pay mind to your own life, your own health, and wholeness. A bleeding heart is of no help to anyone if it bleeds to death.”

~ Frederick Buechner (1926- )

“Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections but instantly set about remedying them—every day begin the task anew.”

~Francis de Sales (1567-1622)

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# Day 252

“Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime,  
Therefore, we are saved by hope.

“Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense  
in any immediate context of history;  
Therefore, we are saved by faith.

“Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone.  
Therefore, we are saved by love.

“No virtuous act is quite as virtuous  
from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own;  
Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love,  
which is forgiveness.”

~Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)



# Day 253

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“Resentment and gratitude cannot coexist, since resentment blocks the perception and experience of life as a gift. My resentment tells me that I don’t receive what I deserve. It always manifests itself as envy. Gratitude, however, goes beyond the “mine” and “thine” and claims the truth that all life is a pure gift.”

~Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

“Not everything that can be counted, counts. And not everything that counts, can be counted.”

~Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

# Day 254

The 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard captures this in his work, *Purity of Heart*:

“When a woman makes an altar cloth, so far as she is able, she makes every flower as lovely as the graceful flowers of the field, as far as she is able, every star sparkling as the glistening stars of the night. She withholds nothing, but uses the most precious things she possesses. She sells off every other claim upon her life that she may purchase the most uninterrupted and favorable time of the day and night for her one and only, for her beloved work. But when the cloth is finished and put to its sacred use: then she is deeply distressed if someone should make the mistake of looking at her art, instead of the meaning of the cloth; or make the mistake of looking at a defect, instead of at the meaning of the cloth. For she could not work the sacred meaning into the cloth itself, nor could she sew it on the cloth as though it were one more ornament.”

How can we put such care into whatever God calls us to do that others see our work as being to the glory of God? If this is difficult, as Kierkegaard states, for the woman sewing an altar cloth, how much more so for the soldier, policeman, teacher, real estate agent, banker and so on. Yet each of us is called to do just that. The meaning of our work, no matter what we do, is that we do it as if our work is God’s glory.

# Day 255

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“Do not pray for easy lives,  
but pray to be stronger men.  
Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers,  
but pray for power equal to your tasks.

Then the accomplishing of your work  
shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle.  
Every day you shall wonder at yourself  
and the richness of life  
which has come to you  
by the grace of God.”

~Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), *Heaven on Earth*

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# Day 256

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“God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.”

~Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961)

“Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion; it is like a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ. The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless.”

~The Rev. Billy Graham (1918- )

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# Day 257

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“He that cannot forgive others, breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for everyone has need to be forgiven.”

~George Herbert (1593-1633)

“Real forgiveness is not a purely interpersonal matter, but it reaches deeply into the relationship of men before God.”

~Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971)

“Peter came to Jesus and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how ften should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

~Matthew 18:21-22

# Day 258

Walking is a favorite expression in the Old Testament for a relationship with God. We walk in God's ways. We walk by faith. We walk with God. This idea of walking is such a part of Old Testament thought that Jews call their moral and ethical code "halachah," which means "the way to walk."

Walking. It had deep roots in the culture of the Jews. They began as a nomadic people. The essential Jewish statement of history begins, "A wandering Aramean was my father..." Abraham left the home of his father and wandered out into the desert to walk with God.

We find the ongoing theme in scripture that God has little interest in religion. The content of a person's heart, and the ongoing walk, mattered to God then and now.

God does not want you to come to one big religious moment of making things all better and then get on with the rest of your life as usual. God wants the rest of your life. God wants an ongoing relationship that is more about the journey than the destination. The prophet Micah put it like this, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

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# Day 259

“To the person that sleeps on horsehair  
A down mattress is heaven.  
To the person that lives on spuds  
Roast beef is heaven.  
To the person in a rough wool tunic  
A silk shirt is heaven.  
To the person with a nagging spouse  
Quiet solitude is heaven.  
To the person living alone  
A loving spouse is heaven.  
Let the Lord give us what we need,  
And let heaven be heaven.”

~Traditional Celtic Poem

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# Day 260

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“The most important commandment is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

~Jesus (Mark 12:29-31)

“Every individual will receive from God the amount of indulgence he has himself given to his neighbor.”

~Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

“He alone loves the Creator perfectly who manifests a pure love for his neighbor.”

~Venerable Bede (672-735)

“How seldom we weigh our neighbor in the same balance with ourselves.”

~Thomas á Kempis (1380-1471)

“The capacity for getting along with our neighbor depends to a large extent on the capacity for getting along with ourselves. The self-respecting individual will try to be as tolerant of his neighbor’s shortcomings as he is of his own.”

~Eric Hoffer (1898-1983)



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# Day 261

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God cannot be controlled. Sometimes we will seek God and not find God, not because God is not there, for God is present in the silence, but because God avoids our every attempt at making God predictable, tame, safe.

When you reach out to God and experience darkness and silence, God is in that darkness and silence. Sometimes darkness and silence are the only ways the God of light and word can get our attention. Don't give up on God but pray for a deeper experience of him even as you feel most deeply God's absence.

## Day 262

“It is only as joy that the Church was victorious in the world, and it lost the world when it lost that joy, and ceased to be a credible witness to it. Of all accusations against Christians, the most terrible one was uttered by Nietzsche when he said that Christians had no joy.

“Let us, therefore, forget for a while the technical discussions about the Church, its mission, its methods. Not that these discussions are wrong or unnecessary—but they can be useful and meaningful only within a fundamental context, and that context is the “great joy” from which everything else in Christianity developed and acquired its meaning.

“For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy’—thus begins the Gospel, and its end is: ‘And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy’ (Luke 2:10, 24:52). And we must recover the meaning of this great joy. We must if possible partake of it, before we discuss anything else—programs and missions, projects and techniques.”

~Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983)

“I went into church and sat on the velvet pew. I watched as the sun came shining through the stained glass windows. The minister dressed in a velvet robe opened the golden gilded Bible, marked it with a silk bookmark and said, ‘If any man will be my disciple,’ said Jesus, ‘let him deny himself, take up his cross, sell what he has, give it to the poor, and follow me.’”

~Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

# Day 263

“How Great Thou Art” is a hymn used for decades now by Billy Graham in his evangelistic crusades. In 1886 Swedish pastor Carl Boberg (1859-1940) was caught in a sudden thunderstorm while traveling through the countryside. The storm passed as quickly as it had arisen. Bird song broke out and the sunlight played on the green hillsides coated from the rain, and Boberg composed the nine original stanzas of this hymn.

In time the hymn was translated into Russian and a British missionary who was serving in the Ukraine came to sing the hymn frequently in that language. The missionary, the Rev. Stuart Hine (1899-1989), later translated three stanzas into English from the Russian adding the fourth verse himself.

“O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed,  
  
Then sings my soul, My Savior, God, to Thee:  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, My Savior, God, to Thee;  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur  
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze,

*A Season of Healing*

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation  
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!  
Then I shall bow in humble adoration  
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!”

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

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# Day 264

“We should seek to become reservoirs rather than canals. For a canal just allows the water to flow through it, but a reservoir waits until it is filled before overflowing, then it can communicate without loss to itself. In the church today, we have many canals but few reservoirs.”

~Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

“The Church is the only society that exists  
for the benefit of those who are not its members.”

~William Temple (1881-1941)

“If we attempt to act and do things for others or for the world, without deepening our own self-understanding, our own freedom, integrity and capacity to love, we will not have anything to give to others. We will communicate nothing but the contagion of our own obsessions, our aggressiveness, our own ego-centred ambitions...”

~Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

# Day 265

Speaking of calling oneself a Christian, Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977) wrote,

“If you are not putting that claim to the test, where the rubber meets the road, then it’s high time to stop talking about being a Christian. You can pray until you faint, but if you’re not gonna get up and do something, God is not gonna put it in your lap.”

“Teach me to live, that I may dread  
The grave as little as my bed;  
Teach me to die, that so I may  
Rise glorious at the awful day.”

~Thomas Ken (1637-1711)

*A Season of Healing*

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# Day 266

**I**n the name of God, stop a moment,  
cease your work, look around you.”

~Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 267

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“To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all our lives—the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections—that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment.

“As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for.”

~Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), *Bread for the Journey*



# Day 268

The Bible teaches a great deal about fear. Fear is revealed to not be of God with scripture including 2 Timothy 1:7 which says, “God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind.” We also learn that part of Jesus’ ministry on earth was to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:15).

The Bible teaches that the way to fight fear is with fear, godly fear. To understand that statement, we have to take a deeper look into a biblical understanding of fear. The essence of biblical wisdom is summed up in Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.” Many teachers are quick to point out that the word “fear” here means “reverence” and “awe.” So the verse could equally read “Reverence of God is the beginning of wisdom.”

We should not be so quick to understand the biblical teaching of fearing God as having nothing to do with actual fear. To truly encounter God in a powerful way brings with it a clearer understanding of God. Feeling something of the full measure of God’s power will awaken within us fear, as well as reverence, and awe. This is an appropriate response to God and it helps fight other fears.

# Day 269

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“We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed away our sins, and that by dying he has disabled death. That’s the formula, that’s Christianity. That’s what has to be believed.

“Any theory we build up has to how Christ’s death did all this are, in my view, quite secondary; mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they don’t help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself.”

~Ambrose of Milan (338-397)

# Day 270

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“God,  
I don’t know if you’ll grant  
my wishes.  
I’m not on my knees.  
I’m doing the dishes.

The dogs are all barking  
it’s raining hard too.  
It’s hardly the time  
to be talking to you.

I do have a problem.  
I really need aid.  
I’ve opened my great big mouth  
I’m afraid.

I’ve said hurtful things  
and I’ve not acted nice.  
The big problem is that it’s  
not happened twice.

I hope you’ll forgive me.  
I do need your love.

*A Season of Healing*

I need your forgiveness  
from heaven above.

I'm willing to change,  
I feel better already.  
Thank you dear God that  
your love is so steady."

~Janet Finkelstein (1920- )

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# Day 271

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“Forgive wicked offenses so that you can receive a royal pardon for your own offenses. The greater the wrongs you forgive, the greater the pardon you will receive. Therefore, we have been told to say, “Forgive us, as we forgive.” This teaches us that the measure of our forgiveness begins with us. As a result, the degree to which we benefit from the enemy’s attacks is proportionate to their severity. So then let us eagerly seek reconciliation with those who might have hurt us, whether or not they were right...

“Christ tells us to go to those who provoke us. He said, “Forgive your debtors in order that your Father may also forgive your trespasses.” Christ didn’t offer us a small reward, but an exceedingly great one. So then, reflecting on all this, considering the reward, and remembering that wiping away sins doesn’t take much work and passion, let us forgive those who have wronged us.”

~ John Chrysostom (347-497)

## Day 272

Eleven days before the prison was liberated by the Allies, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was put to death on April 9, 1945 at Flossenbug Prison.

With that martyrdom came sainthood for the German pastor. So often we see saints as so, well, saintly, that we miss their more human side. With Bonhoeffer we get to hear him wrestling with who people thought he was versus who he knew himself to be. He wrote the poem “Who Am I” while imprisoned by the Nazi government.

“Who am I? They often tell me  
I would step from my cell’s confinement  
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,  
Like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me  
I would talk to my warders  
Freely and friendly and clearly,  
As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me  
I would bear the days of misfortune  
Equably, smilingly, proudly,  
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?  
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?  
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,

*A Season of Healing*

Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,  
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,  
Tossing in expectation of great events,  
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,  
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?  
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?  
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
And before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?  
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,  
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?  
Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.  
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!"

Struggling with the difference between the saint others thought him to be and the weary and fearful man he knew himself to be, Bonhoeffer still affirmed himself as completely God's. Here we see the real man who faced death as a consequence of following Jesus as best he knew how in a world turned more toward evil than good.

Even those we view as saints had no more access to God than you. Others may see you as heroic for the way you have borne up under grief. Know that as Bonhoeffer could admit his failings in his heart of hearts, so you too can drop the mask. You do not always have to be the hero for others. For hero or not, you are God's child and your loving creator is on this journey with you.

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

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# Day 273

“Just these two words He spoke  
changed my life,  
‘Enjoy Me.’

What a burden I thought I was to carry -  
a crucifix, as did He.

Love once said to me, ‘I know a song,  
would you like to hear it?’

And laughter came from every brick in the street  
and from every pore  
in the sky.

After a night of prayer, He  
changed my life when  
He sang,

‘Enjoy Me.’”

~Daniel Ladinsky, *Love Poems from God*



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# Day 274

“To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness.”

~Erich Fromm (1900-1980)

“Friendship doubles our joy and divides our grief.”

~Swedish Proverb

“You can’t think straight with a heart full of fear,  
for fear seeks safety, not truth.

If your heart’s a stone, you can’t have decent thoughts  
—either about personal relations or about international ones.

A heart full of love, on the other hand,  
has a limbering effect on the mind.”

~William Sloane Coffin (1924-2006)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

~Jesus (John 14:27)

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# Day 275

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“It is not only prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting an anvil, sawing a beam, white-washing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory if being in His grace you do it as your duty.

“To go to communion worthily gives God great glory, but to take food in thankfulness and temperance gives Him glory too. To lift up the hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a dungfork in his hand, a woman with a slop pail, give Him glory too. God is so great that all things give Him glory if you mean that they should.”

~ Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

# Day 276

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourself enough to admit that you don't have all the answers. Why spend the night tossing and turning worrying about stuff? God is going to be awake anyway. Turn your cares, your anxieties, your fears over to God. Really truly admit that you don't know what to do with the things that are pulling you in different directions. Then find the trust to really truly pray for God's will to happen rather than your will.

Cast your anxiety on him, then you can become the non-anxious presence you need in your own life and that your husband or wife needs in your marriage, that your kids need in your house and your boss wants on the job. A non-anxious person is not one with no anxiety, but is someone who has conquered the worst effects of the anxiety and can be present in anxious times without sharing or cranking up everyone else's fears.

To become the non-anxious presence God created you to be, give your fear to God, be humble enough to admit that you don't have the answers, and cast all your anxiety on our loving God, because he cares for you.

# Day 277

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“Among all of God’s creatures, human beings are the only animals who both laugh and weep—for we are the only animals who are struck with the difference between the way things are and the way things ought to be.”

—William Willimon (1946 - )

“The very essence of sin is taking ourselves too seriously.”

~Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

“Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all.”

~William Temple (1881-1944)

“Humility is nothing else but a right judgment of ourselves.”

~William Law (1686-1761)

# Day 278

Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929) wrote in *A Sadhu's Wisdom*:

“Dolphins can live in the deepest water without danger because they regularly come to the surface and take in the air that sustains them. We, too, must rise in prayer into the spiritual realm. To pray is to breathe in God’s life-giving spirit that gives life and peace, even in this world.

“The new-born child needs no instruction in drinking, but instinctively turns to its mother’s breast for nourishment. For her part, the mother withholds no good gift from her child, but still the child cannot receive the mother’s milk without effort. In the same way, we are carried at God’s breast, but we must turn to God in prayer for the spiritual milk that sustains our souls.

“The root tips of trees are so sensitive and responsive that they instinctively turn away from places where there is no nourishment and spread themselves instead in places where they can drink in moisture and life.

“I have seen green and fruitful trees standing in the middle of a dry and barren desert. These trees survive and flourish because their roots have driven down and discovered hidden streams of flowing water.

“Some people live in the midst of evil and misery but still radiate joy and lead fruitful lives. Through prayer, the hidden roots of their faith have reached down to the source of living water. They draw from it energy and life to bear spiritual fruit. If we lead active lives of prayer, we will also gain the spiritual discernment to turn away from illusion and evil and to find the truth we need for life.”

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# Day 279

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“O God, our hearts are made for thee,  
and they shall be restless until they rest in thee!”  
~Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

“We’re aware of something we need or lack most of the time. We’re not complete. We’re not fully human. This sense of being unfinished is pervasive and accounts for a great deal that’s distinctive in us humans. We then attempt to complete ourselves by getting more education or more money, going to another place or buying different clothes, searching out new experiences.

“The Christian gospel tells us that in and under and around all of these incompletions is God: God is who we need; the God-hunger, the God-thirst is the most powerful drive in us. It’s far stronger than all the drives of sex, power, security, and fame put together.”

~Eugene Peterson (1932- )

# Day 280

Louisa M. R. Stead (1850-1917) was on a beach with her husband and their four-year-old daughter on a Long Island beach when they heard a boy crying for help. Her husband dove into the waves to save the boy, but both were drowned in the surf as Louisa and their daughter watched in horror.

With no means of support, she shortly found herself broke and with cabinets bare of food. Yet, she opened the front door that day to find both food and money anonymously left at her door. Stead wrote the hymn, “Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus” that very day. These are not the words of a person who had everything writing out of plenty. These are the words of a woman who found God present through the love of others when she had reached bottom:

“Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him; how I’ve proved Him o’er and o’er!  
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more.

‘Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His Word,  
Just to rest upon His promise, Just to know ‘Thus saith the Lord.’

O how sweet to trust Jesus, Just to trust His cleansing blood,  
Just in simple faith to plunge me ‘Neath the healing, cleansing flood!

Yes, ‘tis sweet to trust in Jesus, Just from sin and self to cease,  
Just from Jesus simply taking Life and rest and joy and peace.

I’m so glad I learned to trust Him, Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend;  
And I know that He is with me, Will be with me to the end.”

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# Day 281

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“There are as many nights as days, and the one is just as long as the other in the year’s course. Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness, and the word ‘happy’ would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness.”

~Carl Jung (1865-1961)

“As only New Yorkers know, if you can get through the twilight, you’ll live through the night.”

~Dorothy Parker (1893-1967)



## Day 282

In 1666 at the age of 18, Nicholas Herman underwent a conversion experience. He was walking on a winter day when he saw the bare limbs of a tree standing out against a world shrouded in snow. He knew with certainty that in a matter of months, the tree would once again sprout leaves, then flowers and fruit. The certainty of that little resurrection had a profound affect on the teenager. He knew that God was faithful and could be counted on in all things.

Nicholas decided to join a monastery. He selected the Discalced Carmelites, discalced meaning that they wore no shoes. This reformed group were monks' monks. Here they valued Nicholas no more than the rest of the world. They did not set him out to study the scripture. Instead they put him in the kitchen. He took the name Brother Lawrence in the monastery and set about the task of providing meals for more than 100 monks.

He did get to go to chapel to pray, but then he did not study or copy scripture. Brother Lawrence went back to the kitchen. Day in, day out, for years he toiled in the kitchen. If any of the monks in that monastery in Paris had an excuse to be distracted, it was Lawrence.

This became his prayer, "Lord of all pots and pans and things, make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates."

Lawrence decided that there was something in the work of pots and pans. There might be something in being a servant to his fellow monks. Lawrence came to realize that God was present in the kitchen all the time. Yes, he could go to chapel and God would be present, but he did not have to go to the chapel to be with God.

## *A Season of Healing*

Right there in his kitchen, Lawrence became so aware of God's presence that the distractions proved to be less of a distraction and then no distraction at all. Lawrence put it like this: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer. In the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Supper."

There is an image of distraction: In the noise and clutter of the kitchen, several persons at the same time calling for different things, and yet he was not pulled away or dragged apart. In the midst of that noise and clutter, Lawrence was centered on the one thing.

Lawrence found a way to center on God's presence that really applies to our lives. Lawrence did not just focus on God's presence while in church taking communion, but he was centered on God in a whirlwind of activity that could easily have pulled him away from God's presence. It was in the turmoil that he knew God is present. In that same way, the Holy Spirit can still be present with you in a powerful way even in the midst of what could otherwise be distractions. Churches are important. Our worship with others matters. But we can be with God everywhere by opening up ourselves to God's presence even in the midst of a busy day.

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# Day 283

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“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief...and unspeakable love.”

~ Washington Irving (1783-1859)

“Tears have a wisdom all their own. They come when a person has relaxed enough to let go and to work through his sorrow. They are the natural bleeding of an emotional wound, carrying the poison out of the system. Here lies the road to recovery.”

~ F. Alexander Magoun

“What soap is for the body, tears are for the soul.”

~ Jewish Proverb

# Day 284

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“Christian living appears as strange and shocking – You mean you really have to be kind to people, to be patient, to forgive people, to put their interests ahead of your own? You mean you really can live without being greedy and snatching at power and using other people as objects in your quest for pleasure or prestige? Most of the world has no idea you can live like that.”

~N.T. Wright (1948- ) from a sermon “Dreaming of a White Easter”

# Day 285

“When Orthodox Christians recall the Resurrection, they are not primarily concerned intellectually with how that miracle actually took place. In fact, they think less of an empty grave and more of an open tomb, which remains an open invitation to those who believe. The miracle of Resurrection calls for an openness to confess the reality of the darkness within us and around us, admitting our role and responsibility in refusing to eradicate the suffering in our world. Then, when we stand honestly before the reality of our evil – in earnest recognition and prayerful confession of the hurt we inflict upon our neighbor within society and within the global community, and the abuse with which we treat the earth’s resources—at that very moment of realization are we also able to perceive the hope and light of the Resurrection. Only then are we able to apprehend the relationship between the Resurrection and the presence of war, racism, global warming and terrorism in our world. For then, we shall also be able to discern the light of the Resurrection in our hearts and in our world.”

~Bartholomew I (1940 - ) Ecumenical Patriarch

# Day 286

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“I think that if I had understood then as I do now that this great King really dwells within a little palace of my soul, I should not have left Him alone so often and never allowed his dwelling place to get so dirty.”

~Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

“Forgiveness is the answer to the child’s dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is made clean again.”

~Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961)

“Forgiveness is the remission of sins. For it is by this that what has been lost, and was found, is saved from being lost again.”

~Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

“Forgiveness is the final form of love.”

~Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

“Forgiveness is the giving, and so the receiving, of life.”

~George MacDonald (1824-1905)

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# Day 287

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**H**ere's how you'll know you have succeeded in forgiving someone: If you truly forgive—when the old wound resurfaces, you won't have the anger, the resentment, the negative energy rise up like it does now. You will remember the pain. You will see how you have grown from finding the lasting healing for yourself, but you will no longer face the ragged edge of the pain. It is then when you recognize the wound and no longer feel the hurt as you once did, that you will know you have truly forgiven.

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# Day 288

“Light of the sun, Splendor of fire,  
Swiftess of wind, Depth of the sea,  
Stability of earth, Firmness of rock.

I arise today  
Through God’s strength to pilot me;  
God’s might to uphold me,  
God’s wisdom to guide me,  
God’s hand to guard me.

Afar and anear, Alone or in a multitude.  
Christ shield me today against wounding:

Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me, Christ on my right,  
Christ on my left, Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me, Christ in me.

I arise today  
Through the mighty strength  
Of the Lord of Creation.”

~ Patrick of Ireland (c. 387-493)



# Day 289

The bold claim of Christianity is that we have God with us. Our with-us God came and lived among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It was then and remains God's boldest experiment. People could have rejected God completely and never given it another thought. That's almost what happened. At the time he died, Jesus had been abandoned by his disciples, those closest to him in his ministry, to die a lonely, shameful death. Jesus could have changed the rules and come down off the cross. But, God had humbled himself to become human and God would not change the rules when the world dished out the worst it had to offer. If being a human who spoke out for love and justice got a human a shameful death on a cross, then God made flesh in Jesus would die on a cross. God would not give up on loving us no matter how much that love cost.

So when bad things happen to good people (or to bad people), God is there. God is with us in the right choices we make, rejoicing and with us in the wrong choices we make, suffering with us. God gave us free will and so introduced the possibility of suffering in this world. Then God entered our world, with all of its joys and sorrows and suffered as one of us, not just to see how humans live, but to show us how much God cares for us.

# Day 290

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The following is “The Devil’s Beatitudes” from the newsletter of the Third Order Society of Saint Francis Australian Province, Eastertide 2009:

“Blessed are those who are too tired, busy or disorganized to meet with fellow Christians on Sundays each week. Their hearts are not in it.

“Blessed are those who enjoy noticing the mannerisms of clergy and choir. Their hearts are not in it.

“Blessed are those Christians who wait to be asked and expect to be thanked. I can use them.

“Blessed are the touchy. With a bit of luck they may even stop going to Church. They are my missionaries.

“Blessed are those who claim to love God at the same time as hating other people. They are mine forever.

“Blessed are the trouble-makers. They shall be called my children.

“Blessed are those who have no time to pray. They are easy prey for me.

“Blessed are you when you read this and think it is about other people and not about yourself.”

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# Day 291

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“Greed and selfishness, which are the cause of most wars and human conflicts, are rooted in an underlying anxiety about material goods. With the psychology of scarcity, there is not enough to go around, so I’m going to hold on to what I have and get more if I can.

“Jesus much preferred a psychology of abundance shared; there is plenty to go around if we let go of our anxiety and greed.”

~Richard Fewkes

“When we see the lilies spinning in distress, taking thought to manufacture their own loveliness. When we see the birds all building barns for store...twill then be time to worry, not before.”

~Uncle Ben’s *Quote book*

## Day 292

Francis MacNutt of Christian Healing Ministries writes: “I once prayed with a man whose life had been devoted to working with psychotic patients: he broke into convulsive sobs and shared that he was often tempted to commit suicide. This is a normal human reaction. When we share in the pain of our suffering world, we can be overcome by the enormity of its evil. When we see so much suffering, we find it hard to take time out to enjoy life: to go out to dinner, to play tennis, or to watch sunsets. These seem such a waste of time when Lazarus is starving outside our door (Luke 16:19-31). How can we be so heartless as to leave him, while we go to laugh and play?

The only way I have learned to deal with this guilt is by remembering something I heard many years ago in the seminary: “You have to decide whether your life is a long-distance race or a sprint.” Early on, I decided that I could ultimately help more people if I treated my life and ministry as a long distance run (as best I can, realizing my life’s length is up to God to determine), rather than burning myself out. I am a limited human being and the best I can do sometimes is to pass by this one person sitting outside my door so that I can have the energy and enthusiasm to answer God’s call to minister to the ten, twenty or hundred that will be there tomorrow....

We must learn to ask the Lord if HE has sent the people who come for help at inopportune times. Often he has not! Sometimes our pride is appealed to: “I have to talk to you. Only you can help me!” This is just not true. There is only one Savior and we are not him.”

# Day 293

“The world organizes itself around the story of unresolved human conflict, power struggles, greed and violence. The church organizes itself around the story of God, who comes to dwell with us, beginning as a defenseless baby, declaring peace and amnesty; being crucified, raised from the dead, and available and accessible to the church as the Living One. The distinction between the stories is the question of whether sin and death hold the last word or whether God does. Being grasped by one story necessarily requires being in tension with the other.

“Today the world’s story tells our teenagers that their value comes from looks, the “right clothes,” sex appeal, popularity, and accomplishments. The church’s story tells them they are inherently valuable just as they are. The world’s story tells us to take control of our lives and eliminate uncertainty. The church’s story calls us to trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead, and to accept that living in ambiguity is not only healthy—it is also unavoidable! The world’s story tells us that personal failure is greatly to be feared. The church’s story lifts up Jesus Christ crucified as the one rejected by all. The world tells us that we have only limited resources. The church’s story, declaring that there is enough for all, calls us to reorder our lives so that others might live.

“The church’s story will always be in tension with the world’s.”

~Rick Barger, *A New and Right Spirit*

# Day 294

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“Think of people you consider fanatical. They’re overbearing, self-righteous, opinionated, insensitive, and harsh. Why? It’s not because they are too Christian, but because they are not Christian enough. They are fanatically zealous and courageous, but they are not fanatically humble, sensitive, loving, empathic, forgiving, or understanding—as Christ was.”

~Tim Keller (1950- ), *The Reason for God*

# Day 295

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“Disturb us, Lord, when  
We are too well pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true  
Because we have dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely  
Because we sailed too close to the shore.  
Disturb us, Lord, when  
With the abundance of things we possess  
We have lost our thirst  
For the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life,  
We have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision  
Of the new Heaven to dim.  
Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wider seas  
Where storms will show your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.  
We ask You to push back the horizons of our hopes;  
And to push into the future  
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

~Circa 1577, Attributed to Sir Francis Drake

# Day 296

**E**vagrius Ponticus (345-399) taught that in loving our neighbor we love God for each person is made in the image of God. We can't truly love God without loving others. Theodoret of Cyrrihus (393-457) taught that if we want to imitate God, we must love others for God loves everyone. The great reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) taught that our neighbor is needy and God needs nothing. So in serving our neighbor whose needs are great, we serve God who desires nothing but love. Throughout the centuries, Christian writers have struggled to find the words to say that it is in loving others that we show our love for God.

**“W**hat does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”

~Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

**“P**eople killin’, people dyin’  
Children hurt and you hear them cryin’  
Can you practice what you preach  
And would you turn the other cheek  
Father, Father, Father help us  
Send some guidance from above  
‘Cause people got me, got me questionin’  
Where is the love?”

~“Where is the Love” The Black-Eyed Peas 2004



# Day 297

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Kathleen Norris writes in *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* of a story that's said to come from a Russian Orthodox monastery:

“A seasoned monk, long accustomed to welcoming all guests as Christ, says to a young monk, ‘I have finally learned to accept people as they are. Whatever they are in the world, a prostitute, a prime minister, it is all the same to me. But sometimes,’ the monk continues, ‘I see a stranger coming up the road and I say, ‘Oh, Jesus Christ, is it you again?’”

# Day 298

Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop Anthony Bloom (1914-2003) wrote about being in God's presence in his book *Beginning to Pray*. He writes how after his ordination he visited an elderly parishioner at a nursing home. The woman wanted his advice on prayer. She said that she had tried zealously following others' advice on prayer and had never perceived God's presence.

Bloom counseled the woman: "Go to your room after breakfast, put it right...and first of all take stock of the room. Just sit, look round, and try to see where you live....And then take your knitting and for fifteen minutes knit before the face of God, but I forbid you to say one word of prayer. You just knit and try to enjoy the peace of your room." Bloom reports that the woman followed his unconventional advice and later told him, "You know, it works." She went on to say that as she knitted a while she increasingly noticed the silence. She told Bloom she realized "this silence was not simply the absence of noise, but the silence had substance. It was not the absence of something, but the presence of something. The silence had a density, a richness, and it began to pervade me. The silence around began to come and meet the silence in me." She discovered the God in her knitting, who had eluded her in years of fervent prayer. The thing that matters most is to realize that you are always in God's presence. Always. No matter what life throws at you, you are always in God's presence if you will open yourself up to that deeper reality.

# Day 299

Before being ordained to the Methodist ministry in 1970, Frank Topping worked in the theatre and television, both as a producer and a performer. He then worked for BBC Radio Bristol before moving to BBC London in 1974. He is known in Britain not only through his radio broadcasts but also because of his West End partnership with Donald Swan in ‘Swann and Topping’ and his television series ‘Topping on Sunday.’ He penned the following poem:

“Lord,  
teach me how to still my racing thoughts.  
Help me to come to you  
arguing nothing,  
pleading nothing,  
asking nothing,  
except to be still  
in your presence.

Give me faith that will enable me  
to lay my burdens at your feet,  
and to leave them there  
in exchange for the peace  
which passes all understanding.”

# Day 300

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“You can set up an altar to God in your minds by means of prayer. And so it is fitting to pray at your trade, on a journey, standing at a counter or sitting at your handicraft.”

~John Crysostom (347-407)

“Sometimes the Lord rides out the storm with us and other times He calms the restless sea around us. Most of all, He calms the storm inside us in our deepest inner soul.”

~Lloyd John Ogilvie (1930- )

“The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us; just as the roof of a sunhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright, but becomes bright because the sun shines on it.”

~C.S.Lewis (1898-1963)

# Day 301

Once Jesus was teaching about the need to repent, to turn away from your sins, and be ready for God's Kingdom. Right in the middle of this teaching, some people in the crowd speak up and tell Jesus about a group of people from Galilee killed by Pilate at the Temple (Luke 13:1-9). Pilate mingled their blood with the sacrifices offered at the Temple. It was a bloody sacrilege offered by the very Roman ruler who would later condemn Jesus to death.

Of all the people Pilate could kill, why would God allow this group to die? They were at the Temple in Jerusalem offering sacrifices to atone for their sins. We have to assume that they were there in order to get right with God. Instead, they get on the wrong side of the Roman leadership and end up violently put to death. It's a murder in the very House of God. The crowd wants to know how this can happen Jesus asks the ones who bring up this particularly bad news whether they think that the Galileans were more sinful than all the other people in the Galilee were. Why would Jesus do this?

The common explanation about why bad things happen to good people was that the people bad things happened to were not actually good. The idea was that the loving God rewarded good people and punished the bad ones. Therefore, the people who were killed by Pilate must have had it coming. Otherwise, the all-powerful, all-good God on high would have prevented the murder in his own house. Right?

Wrong. Jesus rejects that notion completely. He goes their example one better by adding to it another case taken from the current events of his day. He asks if the people listening to him think that the 18 who were killed when the

## *A Season of Healing*

Tower of Siloam fell were the worst sinners in Jerusalem. No, he tells the crowd, once again rejecting the direct connection between our own sins and the bad things that happen to us. Jesus acknowledges that bad things can and do happen to good people all the time.

Reaching out to people that others thought were cursed by God was a bit of a specialty in Jesus' ministry. He didn't treat lepers and other outcasts of society as people who should be cast out. Jesus constantly ministered to the people no one else cared about. He showed that the leprosy they had, the other problems they suffered with, did not mean that they were beyond God's love and care.

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

*A Season of Healing*

# Day 302

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“Sad will be the day for any man when he becomes contented with the thoughts he is thinking and the deeds he is doing—where there is not forever beating at the doors of his soul some great desire to do something larger; which he knows he was meant and made to do.”

~Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

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# Day 303

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The following prayer is one of Benedict of Nursia (480-547) the founder of a form of monasticism that seeks a balance of work and prayer.

“Father,  
in your goodness  
grant me the intellect to comprehend you,  
the perception to discern you,  
and the reason to appreciate you.

In your kindness  
endow me with the diligence to look for you,  
the wisdom to discover you,  
and the spirit to apprehend you.

In your graciousness  
bestow on me a heart to contemplate you,  
ears to hear you, eyes to see you,  
and a tongue to speak of you.

In your mercy  
confer on me a conversation pleasing to you,  
the patience to wait for you,  
and the perseverance to long for you.

Grant me a perfect end—your holy presence.  
Amen.”



# Day 304

“Simone Weil (1909-1943) wrote of the influence George Herbert’s poem “Love” had on her life:

“There was a young English Catholic there from whom I gained my first idea of the supernatural power of the sacraments because of the truly angelic radiance with which he seemed to be clothed after going to communion. Chance—for I always prefer saying ‘chance’ rather than ‘Providence’—made of him a messenger to me. For he told me of the existence of those English poets of the seventeenth century who are named metaphysical. In reading them later on, I discovered the poem....It is called ‘Love.’ I learned it by heart. Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it, the recitation had the virtue of a prayer.”

She goes on to write of how the prayer led to the mystical experience of feeling Christ present with her through reciting the poem. George Herbert’s poem “Love” is as follows:

“Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-ey’d Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning  
If I lack’d anything.  
“A guest,” I answer’d, “worthy to be here”;

*A Season of Healing*

Love said, "You shall be he."  
"I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear,  
I cannot look on thee."  
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,  
"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve."  
"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"  
"My dear, then I will serve."  
"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."  
So I did sit and eat."

Born in a secular Jewish household, Weil had been a standout student who therefore relied on her intellect. Looking back on coming to the Christian faith and to her experience of Jesus in prayer, she wrote:

"For it seemed to me certain, and I still think so today, that one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth. Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms."

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 305

Paul writes in Philippians 3:7-9a, “Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.”

Paul looks to all his goals in life and realizes they are rubbish. Only Paul doesn't say rubbish. That's the cleanest word the translators of our Bible could come up with. The New Jerusalem Bible says he considered all he had once pursued as “filth.” The venerable King James Version didn't mince words. The KJV has Paul telling it like it is saying, “I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but dung.”

Paul is telling the Church in Philippi that compared to knowing Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection life, everything else was a load of, well, crap. Pardon my French and insert the word “compost,” “manure,” or the King James' English “dung” in that place if you must. But at least understand that Paul is using strong language because he sees that we strive for things that won't endure. We set goals not worth reaching. Paul thinks it all stinks to high heaven.

Paul tells us to forget all that other junk that seems to matter so much. For him, what matters is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. At this point in his life, Paul has suffered much, but he regards that suffering in the light of his relationship with God and finds the goals he once had no longer measure up.

# Day 306

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“I have climbed highest mountain,  
I have run through the fields  
only to be with you, only to be with you.  
I have run, I have crawled, I have scaled these city walls,  
these city walls only to be with you.  
But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.  
But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.”  
~U2 lyrics from “Only to be with you”

“Let yourself be plumb to the depths, and you will realize that everyone is created for a presence. There, in your heart of hearts, in that place where no two people are alike, Christ is waiting for you. And then the unexpected happens.”

~Brother Roger of Taizé, who founded the Taizé community in 1940

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# Day 307

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“On the day of judgment, surely, we shall not be asked what we have read but what we have done; not how well we have spoken but how well we have lived.”

~Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380-1471) *The Imitation of Christ*

“Lord,  
Help me to live this day,  
Quietly, Easily  
To lean on Your great strength  
Trustfully, Respectfully,  
To await the unfolding of Your will,  
Patiently, Serenely  
To meet others,  
Peacefully, Joyously  
To face tomorrow,  
Confidently, Courageously.  
Amen.”

~reprinted from *Anglican Digest*

# Day 308

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At a clergy conference I attended, the most recent Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey told us that the world needs and expects believing priests. This is of course true. I can write clearly as possible that I know in my bones and it does not contradict what I know with my brain, that there is a God who made us, loves us, and wants to redeem us. I believe the Bible and try to pattern my life to follow its teachings.

But I can't stop there and neither did Archbishop Carey. He went on to say that the faith we should have is an active faith not afraid of working through doubts and uncertainties to greater truth.

He then said, "Do I doubt? Of course. Every thinking person doubts. The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty." For Carey, doubts and uncertainties may be God's spirit leading us beyond the lesser truths where we have stopped along the way to a fuller understanding of who God is and how God acts in our lives.

What has caused you to doubt your faith? These doubts may not be signs of God's failing you. Instead they can be markers showing where your understanding of who God is and how God acts is inadequate. Give those doubts to God in prayer. Talk about them with Christian friends or a pastor. Let your doubts and uncertainties lead not away from God, but into a deeper knowledge of him.

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# Day 309

“If you are suffering the agonies of grief, you may be asking yourself, “When will I recover?” There is no simple answer to your question because, in part, the definition of recovery will vary from person to person. However, I suggest that you reflect on the goals you have set for yourself: what you feel should take place so you can recover. Are your expectations realistic? Do you expect never to feel some sadness for your loved one? Do you expect to return to life exactly as it was before the death? Do you expect never to feel the need to cry again? If your answer to any of these questions is yes, you probably know that you’re being unrealistic.”

~Helen Fitzgerald, *The Mourning Handbook*

# Day 310

Love is a verb. Love is a decision, an action. We find this in scripture where the New testament Greek word for the love Jesus showed was *agape*. Agape is a love more concerned about the other than oneself.

This agape kind of love can give us a pattern for our actions. But don't think of this as an excuse to become a doormat. Real love that is concerned about the other person is not that simple. This kind of love means that if we find out that a dear friend is involved in child pornography, then the most loving response is to turn that person in to the police so that he never has a chance to go further down the path that is bringing so much pain and lifelong damage to others.

Love may mean kicking someone out of your house. Love may mean separation and divorce. This is not doing what you want and calling it love. I am struggling to find the words to convey a love that is truly more concerned for the other person than it is for yourself. The abusive alcoholic needs to live with the consequences of his actions. It may be the only way healing can occur. The manipulative friend may need to be pushed away as enabling her behavior is not loving.

The criteria of love is far from easy. It may be the hardest determining factor. I ask myself, "What is a loving response?" Often the answer is a kind word, a smile, a hug, and other actions we easily equate with love. But love has its firm side as well. Love is not simple. Love is not usually easy, at least not for long.

This we find lived out most fully in Jesus. He came and lived among us to show us what love looks like. And in response, people offered judgment and



## *A Season of Healing*

hate. Jesus showed love for those others considered unlovable and was put to death for it.

Love is not easy because it depends on much more than how you feel. Love is hard because it involves a choice, a decision. Love requires action. Jesus made that choice. He stood by that decision and he took action. We too are to not just take the easy path and get along. We are to show our love of God, our love of our neighbor and love of oneself in ways that might be quite difficult; after all, it could include changing dirty diapers or washing the dishes.

For some, Valentine's Day is the one day of the year devoted to love. But there are two other days we should associate with love instead. The first is Good Friday. On that day Jesus showed the extent of his love. If loving humanity meant death, then Jesus would pay that price. The second day is Easter. For in raising Jesus from the dead, God showed that in the end love wins. Hate and anger and fear were nailed to the cross. Jesus' resurrection shows that the last word is not hate or anger or fear. The last word is love.

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# Day 311

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“Not only should we be unashamed of grief, confident that its expression will not permanently hurt us, but we should also possess the wisdom to talk about our loss and through that creative conversation with friends and companions begin to reconstruct the broken fragments of our lives . . . We should not resist the sympathy and stimulation of social interaction. We should learn not to grow impatient with the slow healing process of time . . . We should anticipate these stages in our emotional convalescence: unbearable pain, poignant grief, empty days, resistance to consolation, disinterestedness in life, gradually giving way under the healing sunlight of love, friendship, social challenge, to the new weaving of a pattern of action and the acceptance of the irresistible challenge of life.”

~Joshua L. Liebman (1907-1948)

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# Day 312

“**B**ereavement in their death to feel  
Whom We have never seen —  
A Vital Kinsmanship import  
Our Soul and theirs — between —

For Stranger — Strangers do not mourn —  
There be Immortal friends  
Whom Death see first — ’tis news of this  
That paralyze Ourselves...

Who, vital only to Our Thought —  
Such Presence bear away  
In dying — ’tis as if Our Souls  
Absconded — suddenly —”

~Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

# Day 313

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God made the world to work around the principle of love and the love that starts it all is loving yourself. Notice that God doesn't say love others. God says to love them as you love yourself.

There is no room for self-loathing because that is self defeating. Instead the goal is to build yourself up. Realize that you are worthy of love and then you'll come to see that others are worthy of that love too. Start acting like they are worthy of love and they'll come to seem it more and more.

We are not the victim of our feelings. By changing our actions our feelings can come to change. Not sure you love your parents anymore? Maybe it's your siblings. Act like you love them. Treat them lovingly and some of that will change. The same applies to your husband or wife. If you act like you don't love them, then feelings will follow. But if you act on the love you want to have, love can be nurtured and grow.

From a Christian standpoint we see this is because this is the way God made the world to work. God created the world out of love, animated the world with love, and wants us to live into that love. Start acting lovingly. Pray for God to be present in that love and real love will follow. The best place to start is in loving yourself as God loves you, which is the prerequisite for loving others.

# Day 314

“Alone with none but Thee, my God, I journey on my way;  
What need I fear, when Thou art near, O king of night and day?  
More safe I am within Thy hand, than if a host did round me stand.

My destined time is fixed by Thee, and death doth know his hour.  
Did warriors strong around me throng, they could not stay his power;  
no walls of stone can man defend when Thou Thy messenger dost send.

My life I yield to Thy decree, and bow to Thy control  
in peaceful calm, for from Thine arm no power can wrest my soul.  
Could earthly omens e’er appal a man that heeds the heavenly call!

The child of God can fear no ill, His chosen dread no foe;  
we leave our fate with Thee and wait Thy bidding when we go.  
Tis not from chance our comfort springs, Thou art our trust, O king of kings.”

~Columba (521-597)

# Day 315

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“O, man, forgive thy mortal foe,  
nor ever strike him blow for blow;  
For all the souls on earth that live  
to be forgiven must forgive.”

~Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

“God comforts us in the pressures we have to endure...Remember that ‘comfort’ does not mean relief from the pressure. It is not a feather bed to lie on or a cushion to absorb the blows. It means, literally, ‘with strength.’ God gives to the person who trusts him strength to bear the pressures. Remember, too, that it is always given for the added purpose of equipping us to help others who need comfort.”

~ L. D. Johnson, Furman University Chaplain 1967-1981

“The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides and gravitation — after all the scientific and technical achievements, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And then, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire!”

~Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

## Day 316

Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for Faith* tells how Christian philosopher Dallas Willard causes his students to confront this quandary each year. Try thinking through this scenario from Willard's in-class hand-out:

"Next Tuesday morning, just after breakfast, all of us in this world will be knocked to our knees by a percussive and ear-shattering thunderclap. Snow swirls, leaves drop from trees, the earth heaves and buckles, buildings topple and towers tumble. The sky is ablaze with an eerie silvery light, and just then, as all the people of this world look up, the heavens open, and the clouds pull apart, revealing an unbelievably radiant and immense Zeus-like figure towering over us like a hundred Everests. He frowns darkly as lightning plays over the features of his Michaelangeloid face, and then he points down, at me, and explains for every man, woman, and child to hear, "I've had quite enough of your too-clever logic chopping and word-watching in matters of theology. Be assured, Norwood Russell Hanson, that I most certainly do exist!"

Dallas Willard then asks his students, if the heaven opened and God so spoke that clearly and directly to some guy named Norwood Russell Hanson, what would this Hanson do? Willard's best guess is that he would explain the whole thing away. Each of us has encountered God in some meaningful ways, but if we don't watch ourselves, we could explain it all away. No matter how God acts, we could decide we were deluding ourselves. How has God acted in your life? When have been the times that you have felt his presence? If you can easily remember a time when God felt real to you, share that experience with someone you love. If you strain to remember a time when God was real to you, ask some Christian friends to tell you about their experiences of God.

# Day 317

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“LORD, you have searched me out and known me;  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You trace my journeys and my resting-places  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,  
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.  
You press upon me behind and before  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.  
Where can I go then from your Spirit?  
where can I flee from your presence?  
If I climb up to heaven, you are there;  
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
Even there your hand will lead me  
and your right hand hold me fast.  
If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will cover me,  
and the light around me turn to night,’  
Darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day;  
darkness and light to you are both alike.” ~Psalm 139:1-12



# Day 318

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The following story was told by the monks in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century:

“There was...a meeting in Scetis about a brother who has sinned. The Fathers spoke, but, Abba Pior kept silence. Later, he got up and went out; he took a sack, filled it with sand and carried it on his shoulder. He put a little sand also into a small bag which he carried in front of him. When the Fathers asked him what this meant, he said, ‘In this sack which contains much sand, are my sins, which are many; I have put them behind me so as not to be troubled about them and so as not to weep; and see here are the little sins of my brother which are right in front of me and I spend my time judging them. This is not right. I ought rather to carry my sins in front of me and concern myself with them, begging God to forgive me for them.’ The Fathers stood up and said, ‘Truly, this is the way of salvation.’”

# Day 319

“Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

~Jesus (Luke 12:15)

A fraction of a penny was all it took for Chester Carlson to amass a fortune. It helped that he earned that fraction of a penny on every single photocopy made on a Xerox machine. But even more remarkable than the fortune is what Chester did with his money.

Chester was born in Minnesota in 1906. His father suffered from both tuberculosis and severe arthritis in his spine, that left him unable to work for much of Chester's life. Chester's odd jobs became the household's main source of income by the time he was in high school. During his junior year, his Mom died, leaving Chester to provide for himself and his father.

Chester was an inventor at heart. He kept a notebook full of ideas of all kinds. The notebook expanded during his three years at a local junior college and as he finished at Cal Tech with a degree in Physics. Chester went to work for Bell Labs, first as a researcher, then in their patent department. While working in the patent office, Chester took law classes. He could not afford his textbooks and so spent many hours at the library often copying long passages down by hand. This got Chester working on the problem of document duplication.

By 1937, Chester was ready to apply for a patent of his own for a process that would later be named xerography. On October 22, 1938, Chester's theories had gone so far as to allow him to make the first photocopy. As

## *A Season of Healing*

Chester Carlson worked to market the invention, he was turned away by 20 companies including Kodak and IBM before convincing Haloid to take on the project after a decade of working to sell the concept.

Years of refining were still needed. Other engineers worked on the project and Haloid changed its name to Xerox, but Chester stayed with his baby and it paid off in ways he could never have foreseen. He got a mere fraction of a cent for every photocopy. In 1964, that was nine and a half billion copies. Chester amassed more than 200 million dollars in a hurry.

Chester built a fairly modest three bedroom house in which he and his wife lived out their days. The last 10 years of his life, Chester spent giving away money faster than he could make it. His philanthropy seemed to know no bounds and it was mostly anonymous. He built university buildings and had other people's names put on them. Chester supported Civil Rights, international aid organizations, libraries and more.

When Chester died in 1968 at the age of 62, with far more money than he could give away even while working at it very hard, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said, "He was generally known as the inventor of xerography, and although it was an extraordinary achievement in the technological and scientific field, I respected him more as a man of exceptional moral stature.... He belonged to that rare breed of leaders who generate in our hearts faith in man and hope for the future."

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

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# Day 320

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“Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have, which once you have got it you may be smart enough to see is what you would have wanted had you known.”

~Garrison Keillor (1942- )

“Hope is a higher heart frequency, and as you begin to re-connect with your heart, hope is waiting to show you new possibilities and arrest the downward spiral of grief and loneliness. Listening to the still small voice in your heart will make hope into a reality.”

~ Sara Paddison, *The Hidden Power of the Heart*

# Day 321

Time is a different concept in the Bible. Jesus has two time based sayings he uses a lot. One is to say that something will happen “in the fullness of time.” The other is to say, “The hour is coming and now is.” That’s about as precise as Jesus got with time. Jesus was expressing the biblical view that there are two types of time.

In the Greek of the New Testament, the two types of time are *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is regular clock time. A watch is also called a chronometer, because it ticks off the seconds, minutes, and hours of *chronos* time. The other kind of time in scripture is *kairos*, which refers to God’s time. Something like the appointed time, the right time, or as Jesus puts it, “the fullness of time.”

When God looks at his watch, it either says “already” or “not yet.” Something has either happened or not. Soon is a bit vague in God’s *kairos*. It’s God’s time when it’s God’s time. You may or may not like that answer, but that’s what scripture teaches us. The fullness of time or the right time does not come when we want it to, not ever. God’s right time comes when a group of conditions come together that we could never take into account or predict.

When Paul wrote the First Letter to the Thessalonians written in the year 51, it was the first piece of writing from the early Christians we still have today. At that time, Paul was sure that Jesus would soon return in glory to declare the end of the age.

Thank God Paul was wrong. If Jesus returned in Paul’s lifetime, it would have left us out. We don’t know what factors God is taking into account. If Jesus returns before you finish reading this day’s reflection, or waits another 2,000 years, the timing will be just right. What is true now that was true then

## *A Season of Healing*

is that Jesus' return is imminent, meaning it could happen at any time.

If we can not use the scripture about Jesus' return to guess when the end of time will come, then what is the good of these verses? The goal was never to give a timetable. Paul, for example, was not writing about Jesus' return exactly. Paul wrote to explain that God has not forgotten anyone who has died. Those of us who are alive are no more alive to God than those who came before us. All of us who love God will be with our Lord forever. Paul wrote first and foremost to be a comfort to all who mourn.

If you mourn for loved ones who are now gone from you, remember that they are not beyond God's reach. Paul reminds us that we should not grieve as those who have no hope. We have the expectation that Jesus will return. We are taught by experience that God's timing is perfect, where ours is not.

Whether Christ returns or we live many more years before we die and are reunited with those we love who have gone before, God will be with us. Our hope is not in a timetable, or we would be continually disappointed at not getting what we want when we want it. Our hope is in God's eternal puposes which work themselves out at the right time.

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# Day 322

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“Grief drives men to serious reflection, sharpens the understanding and softens the heart.”

~John Adams (1735-1826)

“I still miss those I loved who are no longer with me but I find I am grateful for having loved them. The gratitude has finally conquered the loss.”

~ Rita Mae Brown (1944- )

## Day 323

Books written for children often offer adult-sized lessons. The only problem is that we adults only read children's books if and when we read them to our children.

One of the best examples of this for me is Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic, *The Little Prince*. My favorite line from this gem of a book is, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." In the book, the Little Prince lives alone on a tiny planet, which is no bigger than a house. He owns three volcanoes, two active and one extinct. The Little Prince also owns a flower unlike any flower in all the galaxy.

The only problem with the plant is that it is very vain. The rose bragged that she was born the same moment as the sun and went on about how magnificent she was and how she was the only one of her kind in the entire galaxy. The Little Prince carefully cared for the little flower's every needs, but he also became perturbed with the proud plant. Later he wished that he had judged the rose by her deeds, how she cast her lovely fragrance and radiance on his whole planet. But the Prince ran off from his planet and began to travel the galaxy. His travels eventually brought him to earth, where he found a garden filled with roses. His flower was not unique. The Little Prince felt sad. He knew his rose would be annoyed to learn that she was common.

It was just then that the Little Prince met a fox. The fox's fondest wish was that the prince would tame him. He told the prince that to tame something was to establish ties with it. To be tamed was to become connected. The fox told the prince:



## *A Season of Healing*

“To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world...”

‘I am beginning to understand,’ said the little prince. ‘There is a flower...I think that she has tamed me...’”

The Little Prince patiently tamed the fox, coming at the same time each day. Each day they got closer and closer together until at last the fox was tamed and the Little Prince and the fox could play together. But the time was drawing near for the Little Prince to move on. The fox warned that he would cry when the Little Prince left. The prince said that being tamed had done the fox no good at all. The fox insisted that being tamed had indeed done him good. The fox then told the prince to go visit the roses a second time and then return to see him one last time.

When he looked again at the roses, he realized that they were roses like thousands of other roses. They were not his rose. The Prince told the roses, “You are like my fox when I first knew him. He was only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But I have made him my friend, and now he is unique in all the world.”

“You are beautiful, but you are empty,” he went on. “One could not die for you. To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you—the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of you other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under a glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind a screen; because it is for her that I have killed caterpillars (except the two or three that we saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is my rose.”

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

## *A Season of Healing*

When the Prince went back to the fox to say goodbye, the fox gave the Prince his secret saying, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” The fox went on to tell the Prince that “It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.”

I have not retold anything near the whole story of *The Little Prince* and it would be well worth your time to read it if you have enjoyed this sample. Notice for now how closely this section parallels the Bible’s story of God’s love for us.

God became human and lived among us. Then as a human, God extended that same care through Jesus that God had always had for the creation. Jesus looked with compassion on the people around him. He brought harsh words of condemnation for those who saw themselves as righteous in their own eyes. But for the hurting people he saw, Jesus brought hope and healing.

The care and attention God has wasted for us is what makes each of us special. You are *not* just like everyone else. To the God who formed you, the God who loves you, the God who listens when you grumble or boast or say nothing at all, you are unique and special.

If you look with the eyes of this world, you may miss the care God has lavished on you. Like the Little Prince, we have to look using the eyes of our hearts. For what is essential is invisible to the eye. Know in your heart that God has wasted immense amounts of time on you out of love. For you are unique and special.

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# Day 324

“Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not so,  
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,  
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,  
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,  
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then;  
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.”  
~John Donne (1572-1631)

# Day 325

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A few days before his death, Dr. F. B. Meyer (1847-1929) wrote a very dear friend these words: “I have just heard, to my great surprise, that I have but a few days to live. It may be that before this reaches you, I shall have entered the palace. Don’t trouble to write. We shall meet in the morning.”

“The poet, James Whitcomb Riley, has a poem in which he tells of the death of a worker in a shop. He pictures his fellow workmen standing around on the day of his funeral talking about him. One man, tears in his eyes after saying some complimentary things, added, ‘When God made him, I bet He didn’t do anything else that day just set around and feel good.’”

~from *Morning Glory*, January 8, 1994.

## Day 326

The hymn, “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name” was written by the Rev. Edward Perronet (1726-1792). The son of an Anglican priest, he was ordained and worked closely with John and Charles Wesley for many years in England’s eighteenth century revival. He faced persecution in the early days of Methodism. In John Wesley’s journal, there is an entry: “Edward Perronet was thrown down and rolled in mud and mire. Stones were hurled and windows broken.”

But his best known hymn’s most impressive story comes in the next century on a distant continent. Perronet’s hymn has become well known and was in the repertoire of the Rev. E. P. Scott, who served as a missionary to India in the mid 1800s. Scott used a violin for playing hymns and could play and sing to lead a congregation in music. While serving in India, Scott saw a man whose appearance stood out on the streets and asked after him. He learned the man came from a remote hill tribe and the missionary became determined to share the Good News of Jesus’ love with the tribe.

Scott ignored his fellow missionaries who assured him it would be a suicide mission to go into that tribes territory. The missionary felt led by God and so walked up into the tribe’s area to be stopped by a large party of warriors who surrounded him with pointed spears.

Scott would later say that he was sure he was about to be killed. But he tried to remain calm. He took out his violin, closed his eyes, and began to play and sing, “All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!” He played and sang through the first two verses and on reaching the words, “Let every kindred, every tribe,” he

*A Season of Healing*

opened his eyes. The spears were lowered and some men had tears in their eyes. Scott spent the next two years evangelizing the tribe.

All hail the power of Jesus' name!  
Let angels prostrate fall,  
Let angels prostrate fall;  
Bring forth the royal diadem,  
And crown Him,  
crown Him, crown Him, crown Him,  
And crown Him Lord of all.

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,  
Ye ransomed from the fall,  
Ye ransomed from the fall;  
Hail Him who saves you by His grace,  
And crown Him,  
crown Him, crown Him, crown Him,  
And crown Him Lord of all.

Let every kindred, every tribe,  
On this terrestrial ball,  
On this terrestrial ball,  
To Him all majesty ascribe,  
And crown Him,  
crown him, crown him, crown him,  
And crown Him Lord of all.

# Day 327

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“Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.”

~Dale Carnegie (1888-1955)

“Where there is no vision, there is no hope.”

~George Washington Carver (1864-1943)

“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all.”

~Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

“Faith has to do with things that are not seen and hope with things that are not at hand.”

~Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

# Day 328

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C.S Lewis wrote the following in reflecting on the death of his beloved wife, Joy: "Getting over it so soon? But the words are ambiguous. To say that the patient is getting over it after an operation for appendicitis is one thing; after he's had his leg off it is quite another. After that operation either the wounded stump heals or the man dies. If it heals, the fierce, continuous pain will stop. Presently he'll get back his strength and be able to stump about on his wooden leg. He has 'got over it.' But he will probably have recurrent pains in the stump all his life, and perhaps pretty bad ones; and he will always be a one-legged man. There will be hardly any moment when he forgets it. Bathing, dressing, sitting down and getting up again, even lying in bed, will be all different. His whole way of life will be changed. All sorts of pleasures and activities that he once took for granted will have to be simply written off. Duties too. At present I am learning to get about on crutches. Perhaps I shall presently be given a wooden leg. But I shall never be a biped again."



# Day 329

Do you ever feel separated from God? It's the feeling that your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, or that there is no God to hear them. How do we make sense of that feeling when the Bible promises that nothing can or will separate us from God?

The Apostle Paul is the one who wrote, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And by that point, Paul should know. He had already experienced hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, and peril. He was six down with one to go.

Yet Paul answered his own question about who will separate us from God with resounding words of encouragement: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul said "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." The Greek here is familiar to our modern ears. To be victorious or conquer in ancient Greek was *nike*, like the sports shoe company. However, Paul did not just say that the Christians were *nike*, he wrote they would be *hyper nike*, more than conquerors. What a great name for a Christian clothing company—*hyper nike*, more than *nike*. Paul proclaimed that Christians would not simply be victorious, they would more than conquerors.

Paul wrote, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life"—If we die, we are with God, if we live, God is with us as well.

## *A Season of Healing*

“Nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come”—Nothing you face now, nor anything you will ever face in the future will be able to separate you from God’s love. There is nothing to fear in all your tomorrows because it can’t separate you from God.

“Nor powers, nor height, nor depth”—Paul isn’t being literal here referring to the top of Everest and the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Rather, no matter how joyous things are, God is still there. After all, it is when everything is going well that we are most tempted to turn away from God, as we feel we no longer need God. But when things are going good God is there. Also, no matter how low you get, no matter how depressing life is, God is there.

Paul goes on to say that there is nothing “in all creation” that “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As we can not be separated from the love of God, then the only thing that can happen is that we can feel separated. That gulf is not from God’s side, but from ours. God is already present to us. While we won’t always feel God’s presence, God will always be with us.

Faith is what bridges the gap between our last experience of God and our next experience of God. Know that even when you feel your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, keep praying. God is not off in heaven anyway. Not merely there. God is right there with you. Keep praying. You are more than a conqueror.

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# Day 330

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“The Stoics say: ‘Withdraw into yourself, that is where you will find peace.’  
And it is not true.

“Other says: ‘Go outside: look for happiness in some diversion.’ And that is  
not true: We may fall sick.

“Happiness is neither outside nor inside us: it is in God, both outside and  
inside us.”

~Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) *Pensées*

# Day 331

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“When you are in the final days of your life, what will you want? Will you hug that college degree in the walnut frame? Will you ask to be carried to the garage so you can sit in your car? Will you find comfort in rereading your financial statement? Of course not. What will matter then will be people. If relationships will matter most then, shouldn’t they matter most now?”

~Max Lucado (1955- )

# Day 332

When I was studying German, I had a teacher, Dr. Weatherford, who was particularly gifted at speaking just slightly over my head. No matter how much I knew, he could speak to me using just that vocabulary with an occasional word I did not know thrown in to challenge me. It took everything I had to hang with a conversation. No matter how much German I learned, Dr. Weatherford was always just in front of me using a little bit more of the language than I knew. It was never enough to frustrate me into quitting. Rather, he offered enough of a challenge to keep me pushing forward.

Jesus does this same thing throughout the four Gospels. Jesus is always working with people where they are and challenging them to take a few more steps of faith.

To Nicodemus, the Jewish teacher who comes by night to speak with him, Jesus holds out the challenge of spiritual rebirth.

To Pharisees bound up in the letter of the law, he offers miracles on the Sabbath as a challenge to their way of understanding how God can act.

To the woman caught in adultery, Jesus does not hurl the expected condemnation, but rather challenges her to go and sin no more.

When Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well, she asks Jesus where it is that one should worship God—is it on Mount Gerizim as the Samaritans claim or at the Temple in Jerusalem as the Jews claim? Jesus challenges the woman to look beyond the place of worship to the heart of worship by telling her that true worship takes place in spirit and truth. The location is not as important as the content of your heart as you come before God.

Sometimes Jesus challenges the people he meets to take big steps of faith.

## *A Season of Healing*

To the rich young man who claims to flawlessly follow God's law without fail, Jesus offers the big step of faith in asking the man to sell all he has and come and follow him. This is too much for the man who walks away dejected. He couldn't take the next step and stop trusting in his wealth. Yet, each of Jesus' disciples had followed a similar call to leave all to become disciples.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus meets people where they are and then encourages them to take a few more steps of faith. The only persons he seems to speak against are the ones who are smug in their religiosity. That never impresses Jesus.

Where is Jesus challenging you now? What are the next steps on your spiritual journey? Are you being challenged to read the Bible, pray, or attend worship more frequently? Are you being challenged to more fully live out your Christian beliefs in your business or family life? What is God laying on your heart?

I can't answer these questions for you. But God can. Pray that God will show you what the next steps are for your life. Then be open to how God is leading you.

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*

# Day 333

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**A**mma Syncletica was a nun in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century. She said, “Sailors beginning a voyage set the sails and look for a favorable wind, and later they meet a contrary wind. Just because the wind has turned, they do not throw the cargo overboard or abandon ship; they wait a while and struggle against the storm until they can set a direct course again. When we run into headwinds, let us put up the cross for our sail, and we shall voyage through the world in safety.”

# Day 334

The following prayer is ascribed to Thomas More (1478-1535), who may or may not have been the author. We do know that More told the trial which sentenced him to death that he hoped to share the joys of heaven with those who condemned him. More reminded the judges that Saints Stephen and Paul are together in heaven though Paul held the cloaks for those who put Stephen to death. So it is safe to say the sentiment fits with More. The prayer is to pray well for those who will evil to happen to you:

“Almighty God, have mercy on [insert name] and [insert name] and on all that bear me evil will, and would me harm, and their faults and mine together, by such easy, tender, merciful means as Thine infinite wisdom best can divine, vouchsafe to amend and redress, and make us saved souls in heaven together where we may ever live and love together with thee and thy blessed saints, O glorious Trinity, for the bitter passion of our sweet saviour Christ, amen.”

“Forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another, I am trusting that God is a better justice-maker than I am. By forgiving, I release my own right to get even and leave all issues of fairness of God to work out. I leave in God’s hands the scales that must balance justice and mercy.”

~Philip Yancey (1949- )



# Day 335

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Geddes MacGregor in *The Rhythm of God* tells of a priest who, when asked, 'How many people were at the early celebration of the Eucharist last Wednesday morning?' replied, 'There were three old ladies, the janitor, several thousand archangels, a large number of seraphim, and several million of the triumphant saints of God.' Such a 'cloud of witnesses' answers a deep human urge to be part of something larger, to not stand alone, to give our little lives meaning. One drop of water, left alone, evaporates quickly. But one drop of water in the immense sea endures."

# Day 336

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“It is no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it, I can’t. And it is no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it, I can’t. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like this. And if the Spirit could come into me, then I could live a life like His.”

~William Temple (1881-1944)

# Day 337

The Rev. Bill Kolb writes, “I was reminded of something I was taught at seminary by a great theologian—a native of Meridian, Mississippi—the Rev. Albert T. Mollegen, or “Molly,” as we all called him. One day in class he was answering a question about a particularly difficult passage from St. Matthew’s Gospel, “...Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” We students were having a tough time imagining that Jesus had called us to be perfect, perfect just as God is perfect. Molly told us something that has helped me ever since. What is meant by this instruction about our lives is more clearly expressed this way: “Be perfect within your potential for perfection just as God is perfect within God’s potential for perfection.”

Now I know that I do not have the potential, in this life, for perfection. I am human, therefore imperfect. So the standard against which I need to measure myself is most certainly not God—we know that God IS perfect. The standard against which I should measure myself is, at best, my potential for excellence but never perfection. We all have the potential for excellence. It is when we think we can be perfect that we get into trouble.”

# Day 338

James Keifer's brief biography for former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple (1881-1944) tells of an inspirational moment in a revival service: "In 1931, at the end of the Oxford Mission (what is known in many Protestant circles as a Revival Meeting), he led a congregation in the University Church, St Mary the Virgin, in the singing of the hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." Just before the last stanza, he stopped them and asked them to read the words to themselves. "Now," he said, if you mean them with all your heart, sing them as loud as you can. If you don't mean them at all, keep silent. If you mean them even a little and want to mean them more, sing them very softly." The organ played, and two thousand voices whispered:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

"For many who participated, it was a never-forgotten experience."

# Day 339

The hymn “It Is Well With My Soul” was written after series of crushingly tragic events in the life of its author, Horatio Spafford. His only son died in 1871. Close on the heels of that death came his financial ruin in the great Chicago Fire. Two years later, he was to travel to Europe with his family on the S.S. Ville du Havre, but business delayed him and the family went first. In making the Atlantic crossing, the Ville du Havre collided with another boat and quickly sank taking Spafford’s four daughters with it. Anna, his wife, survived the sinking and sent him a two word telegram, “Saved alone.” Spafford sailed to reunite with his grieving wife, and as his ship passed near the spot where his daughters had died, he penned these words:

“When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Refrain:

It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

*A Season of Healing*

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!

My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:

If Jordan above me shall roll,  
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,  
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,

The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!  
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,

The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul."

# Day 340

“Remember” is strong word, even if we attach weak meaning to it these days. When something has been dismembered, to re-member is to put the members back together. To put this crudely, to reattach a severed arm is also to remember and it is from this that we get our current word connected with memory. The severed arm analogy is probably not overstating the case as the grief in the death of someone close to you is initially, just as wrenching. Losing a child, a spouse, or someone similarly close is as difficult as losing part of your own body.

It is in remembering someone we love to God that this very real pain of grief can begin to lessen. In re-membering, we are brought back together in some way. This is no where more true than in the worship of Holy Communion. In communion, we commune with God and through God with all those with whom God is in communion. So it is natural that through our common worship of God we are closest to the faithful departed.

Saint Monica prayed her son Augustine (of Hippo) to faith. He was pretty wild, but she kept trusting God and in time he converted. Monica told Augustine that he could do what ever he wanted with her body when she died for it was of no consequence. She only asked that he remember her before the altar. I think she knew that it is through God, who knew and continues to know our loved ones that we have the closest connection, so it is so very appropriate to remember those you love in the context of worship.

*A Season of Healing*

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# Day 341

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“God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.”

~Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

“Be such a man, and live such a life,  
that if every man were such as you,  
and every life a life like yours,  
this earth would be God’s Paradise.”

~Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

*A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*



## Day 342

Vincent Donovan was a Roman Catholic missionary among the Masai people of East Africa. In his book, *Christianity Rediscovered*, he writes of the challenges of translating the Gospel into the Masai language. He did his best to learn the Masai language and to tell the Masai people of Christ in their own words. One Masai elder listened to the missionary each week for many months and came to accept the Christian faith. Then he challenged the missionary on the word faith itself. He told Donovan that the word he used in Masai for faith means literally, “to agree to.” The Masai elder explained that faith does not just mean to agree to something. It is much more demanding, much more personal than that. The elder explained that faith that only means “to agree to” something is like a white hunter who comes and kills a lion with a gun. The man stands a great distance from the lion and pulls a trigger. Only his eyes and his finger take part in killing the lion. The man is in little danger and is hardly involved in the kill. The Masai elder said, “This is not faith.” For one to really have faith, to truly believe” he said, “is like a lion hunting its prey. The lion’s nose, ears and eyes all search out the Savannah for the prey. The lion’s legs give him the speed to catch the prey. The lion throws all of his body into a terrible death leap and the killing blow from her front paw. As the prey falls, the lion wraps her front legs around the prey and pulls it to her and makes the prey part of her as she devours it.” The elder finished, “This is the way a lion kills. This is the way people are to believe. This is what faith is.”

The Masai elder was right. If you want your faith to stand the test of all that life has to dish out, then you will need a more active faith. Trust God. Let God in to more and more of your life to go from mere acceptance to a lion-like faith.

# Day 343

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Nobel Peace Prize winner the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.”

Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (Matthew 25:45).

# Day 344

“My Loving Lord,  
it’s so hard to love the world sometimes  
and to love it the way Jesus did seems impossible.  
Help me to be inspired by his love and  
guided by his example.  
Most of all, I want to accept that I can’t do it alone,  
and that trying is an arrogance of self-centeredness.  
I need you, dear God, to give me support in this journey.  
Show me how to unlock my heart  
so that I am less selfish.  
Let me be less fearful of the pain and darkness  
that will be transformed by you into Easter joy. Amen.”

~Anonymous

“I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction  
that I had nowhere else to go.”

~Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

“The Church will come out of her doldrums when we find out that salvation  
is not a light bulb only, that it is not an insurance policy against hell only, but  
that it is a gateway into God, that God is all that we would have and can  
desire.”

~A.W. Tozer (1897-1963), *Attributes of God*

# Day 345

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Susannah Wesley taught her young son, John Wesley, the following definition of sin: “If you would judge of the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of pleasure, then take this simple rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, and takes off the relish of spiritual things—that to you is sin.”

## Day 346

The more you give, the more you receive. This simple principle is not universal. Bernie May, in her book “Learning to Trust” tells of Eunice Pike who has worked in southwest Mexico with the Mazatec Indians:

“During this time she has discovered some interesting things about these beautiful people. For instance, the people seldom wish someone well. Not only that, they are hesitant to teach one another or to share the gospel with each other. If asked, ‘Who taught you to bake bread?’ the village baker answers, ‘I just know,’ meaning he has acquired the knowledge without anyone’s help. Eunice says this odd behavior stems from the Indians’ concept of ‘limited good.’ They believe there is only so much good, so much knowledge, so much love to go around. To teach another means you might drain yourself of knowledge. To love a second child means you have to love the first child less. To wish someone well—‘Have a good day’—means you have just given away some of your own happiness, which cannot be reacquired.”

Thankfully, life does not have to be a zero sum game in which someone has to lose a certain amount of love for someone else to gain a comparable amount of love. In fact, we know that it is in sharing love that we gain more love.

“If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you.”

~Jesus (Luke 6:38 in the New Living Translation)

# Day 347

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Two great pastors of 19th century London were Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker. A misunderstanding arose between them when Parker made a remark about how poor was the condition of the children who were being admitted to Spurgeon's orphanage. This would have been fine, but like all gossip, the news traveled faster than the speed of accuracy so that Spurgeon was told the comment concerned children in the orphanage. As many of us can do, Spurgeon did not check the facts. Instead he blasted his fellow pastor from the pulpit the following week. The sermon made the news, and the newspaper accounts of Spurgeon's attack became the talk of London.

The following Sunday, curious Londoners packed Parker's parish hoping to hear him harangue Spurgeon. Parker is reported to have said, "I understand Dr. Spurgeon is not in his pulpit today, and this is the Sunday they use to take an offering for the orphanage. I suggest we take a love offering here instead."

The crowd responded generously and news reports said that ushers had to empty the collection plates three times to take in all that was given.

Spurgeon responded by going to see his fellow pastor in person to say, "You know, Parker, you have practiced grace on me. You have given me not what I deserved, you have given me what I needed."

# Day 348

“[Faith] is not a well-fluffed nest, or a well-defended castle high on a hill. It is more like a rope bridge over a scenic gorge, sturdy but swinging back and forth, with plenty of light and plenty of air but precious little to hang on to except the stories you have heard. All you have to do is believe in the bridge more than you believe in the gorge.”

~ Barbara Brown Taylor (1951- )

“Fear knocked at the door.

Faith answered.

No one was there.”

~English Proverb

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# Day 349

“You are God’s viceroy, God’s representative.  
You are God’s stand-in, a God Carrier.  
You are precious; God depends on you.

God believes in you and has no one but you  
To do the things that only you can do for God.

Become what you are.”

~Desmond Tutu (1931- )

“We ourselves feel that what we are doing  
is just a drop in the ocean.  
But the ocean would be less  
because of that missing drop.”

~Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)



# Day 350

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Jean Frederick Oberlin (1740-1846) was the minister for whom Ohio's Oberlin College would later be named. He spent his ministry on the border of Alsace and Lorraine along Germany and France. Oberlin told the story of being caught in a severe snowstorm while travelling on foot in winter. He lost his way in the snow. Not knowing which way to go, he sat down. He feared he would freeze to death, but didn't know what to do. Oberlin would later tell how at that very moment of despair a man came along in a wagon and rescued him. He took him to the next village and made sure he would be cared for.

As the man prepared to journey on, Oberlin said, "Tell me your name so that I may at least have you in grateful remembrance before God." The man, who by now had recognized Oberlin, replied, "You are a minister. Please tell me the name of the Good Samaritan."

Oberlin said, "I cannot do that, for it is not given in the Scriptures."

The real life example of the Good Samaritan told the famed pastor, "Until you can tell me his name, please permit me to withhold mine."

# Day 351

Andor Foldes (1913-1992) was a Hungarian-born American pianist known for his interpretations of Viennese classical composers. Foldes performed a Mozart concerto with the Budapest Philharmonic at his public debut when he was 8 years old.

Foldes enjoyed telling of how one act of encouragement early in his career has made all the difference to his life. When he was sixteen and living in Budapest, Foldes was sinking into depression due to tensions with his piano tutor. During the course of that troubled year, however, one of the most loved pianists of the day came to Budapest to play. Emil von Sauer was not only famous because of his abilities at the piano, but he bore the honor of being Franz Liszt's last remaining student. Sauer had heard of Foldes' talent and requested that young pianist play for him.

Foldes played Schumann, Beethoven and Bach's most difficult pieces to impress the reknowned pianist. As Foldes finished, Sauer came to the piano bench and leaned over to kiss Foldes' forehead. "My son," he said, "when I was your age I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, 'Take good care of this kiss—it comes from Beethoven, who gave it me after hearing me play.' I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it."

What a gift! Could you play this role in someone's life? Who needs the blessing of praise which only you can bestow?

# Day 352

“A man content to go to heaven alone will never go to heaven.”

~Boethius (480-525)

Early in his ministry, Billy Graham went to a small town Baptist church to preach a revival. He needed to mail a letter and so asked a boy on the street where he could find the post office. The boy gave him the directions and Graham, wanting to be concerned about the souls of all he met told him, “If you’ll come to the Baptist Church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven.”

Graham loves to tell of the boy’s reply, “I don’t think I’ll be there. You don’t even know your way to the post office.”

“If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had expected to see there; and third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there.”

~John Newton (1725-1807) author of the hymn "Amazing Grace"

# Day 353

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Saint Aelred (1110-1167) wrote of the three loves enjoined on people by Christ (love of God, love of self, and love of neighbour) in his *The Mirror of Charity*: "... the three kinds of love ... are so bound to one another that unless we love God we cannot love our neighbour and, unless we love ourselves, we cannot love our neighbour as ourselves. ... Each one of these three kinds of love depends on the others, and in each one of the three we find the other two. We cannot have one unless we have all three, and if we lose one we lose them all."

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# Day 354

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“For it is not physical solitude that actually separates one from other men, not physical isolation, but spiritual isolation. It is not the desert island nor the strong wilderness that cuts you from the people you love. It is the wilderness in the mind, the desert wastes in the heart through which one wanders lost and a stranger. When one is a stranger to oneself then one is estranged from others too. If one is out of touch with oneself, then one cannot touch others.”

~Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906-2001)

“We need to find God and God cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence.”

~Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)

“Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.”

~adapted from Psalm 46:10 by Don Postema, *Space for God*

# Day 355

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“I asked for strength, that I might achieve,  
I was made weak, that I might learn to humbly obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things,  
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy,  
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,  
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,  
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing I asked for—  
but everything I hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my  
unspoken prayers were answered.

I am, among all men,  
most richly blessed.”

~Anonymous Confederate Soldier

# Day 356

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“In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: it goes on.”

~Robert Frost (1874-1963)

“The pain passes, but the beauty remains.”

~Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

~*The Talmud*, commentary on Micah 6:8

# Day 357

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Jesus, the Lord of Life, embraces death in order to defeat death. I know it seems all twisted around for wounds to heal, but can any but a wounded healer heal a heart? How can someone who has known no pain or sorrow understand it when you are hurt, lost, alone, grieving? The God who stands far off in heaven peeking down at the world would know nothing of our sorrow, our loneliness, or our fears. It is this Jesus we see lifted up on the cross who knows suffering and it is this Jesus who can redeem pain. This Jesus is the wounded healer.



# Day 358

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“Years ago a wise woman instructed me to keep short accounts with the Lord as a path to grow in God’s ways. By bringing my sins before him on a regular basis, I stayed current in my relationship with him, not allowing offenses to mount up inside me. Then as I consistently sought the Lord for counsel through his Word, prayer, confession, and fellowship, I was free to become more familiar with the sound of his nurturing voice, which protected me from disparaging influences like the adversary’s screeches. My friend’s advice has held me in good spiritual stead.”

~Patsy Clairmont, *Mending Your Heart in a Broken World*

# Day 359

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“The Christian creeds used to seem like a ‘grocery list’ to me, and I found them very difficult to incorporate into my fledgling faith, as I made my way back to church after twenty years away. But now I see them as an admirably compact form of storytelling, and this makes me glad, for story places the creeds in the realm of the daily. It is in ordinary life that our stories unfold, tales of conceiving, bearing and giving birth, or trial and death and rising to new life out of the ashes of the old. Stories of annunciation, incarnation, resurrection, and the spirit, the giver of life, who has spoken through the prophets and enlivens our faith. As wondrous as these mysteries are, Christianity is inescapably down-to-earth and incarnational—I say ‘inescapably,’ as most of us, at one time or another, try to avoid the implications of incarnational faith. The Christian religion asks us to place our trust not in ideas, and certainly not in ideologies, but in a God who was vulnerable enough to become human and die, and who desires to be present to us in our everyday circumstances. And because we are human, it is in the realm of the daily and the mundane that we must find our way to God.”

~Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries*

# Day 360

“The fruits of the Spirit get less and less showy as we go on. Faithfulness means continuing quietly with the job we have been given, in the situation where we have been placed; not yielding to the restless desire for change. It means tending the lamp quietly for God without wondering how much longer it has got to go on. Steady, unsensational driving, taking good care of the car. A lot of the road to heaven has to be taken at thirty miles per hour. It means keeping everything in your charge in good order for love’s sake, rubbing up the silver, polishing the glass even though you know the Master will not be looking round the pantry next weekend. If your life is really part of the apparatus of the Spirit, that is the sort of life it must be. You have got to be the sort of cat who can be left alone with the canary; the sort of dog who follows, hungry and thirsty but tail up to the end of the day.

Faithfulness and Goodness—they are doggy qualities. Fancy that as a Fruit of the Spirit! But then the Spirit is Love, and doggy love is a very good sort of love, humble and selfless and enduring.”

~Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) *The Fruits of the Spirit*

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# Day 361

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An elderly widow, found herself able to do less, yet still wishing to serve God using the gifts she had been given. The woman prayed about this and realized that her ability to play the piano could benefit others. The very next day the widow placed a small ad in the Oakland Tribune: “Pianist will play hymns by phone daily for those who are sick and despondent—the service is free.” The ad gave her phone number.

The service soon had takers. When people called, she would ask, “What hymn would you like to hear?” Within a few months her playing had brought cheer to several hundred people. Many of them freely poured out their hearts to her, and she was able to help and encourage them.

What gift do you have that could benefit others? What is preventing you from sharing it with them? Are there some steps you could take toward sharing the gifts God has given you?

# Day 362

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“God uses  
what you have  
to fill a need which  
you never could have filled.

God uses  
where you are  
to take you where  
you never could have gone.

God uses  
what you can do  
to accomplish what  
you never could have done.

God uses  
who you are  
to let you become who  
you never could have been.”

~Philip Clarke Brewer in Tim Hansel’s book, *Holy Sweat*

“I used to ask God if He would come and help me. Then I asked if I could come and help Him. Finally I ended by asking God to do His own work through me.”

~J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)

# Day 363

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You may be wounded and feel that you have nothing to offer God. Yet it is your wounds you have to offer. By getting in touch with your own emotional scars, you can find the empathy and compassion to reach out to others. You do this not by dumping all your hurts on someone, but by being fully present with him or her in the pain, loss, loneliness, despair, grief or whatever else they battle. You have some sense of what they need for The Holy Spirit can use your own woundedness to guide you.

In his book *The Wounded Healer* Henri Nouwen asks: “In short: Who can take away suffering without entering it?”

“The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there....

“On the other hand, it would be very easy to misuse the concept of the wounded healer by defending a form of spiritual exhibitionism. A minister who talks in the pulpit about his own personal problems is of no help to the congregation...Making one’s own wounds a source of healing, therefore, does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains but for a constant willingness to see one’s own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share.”

# Day 364

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“It helps, now and then, to step back  
and take the long view.  
The kingdom is not only  
beyond our efforts,  
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime  
only a tiny fraction of  
the magnificent enterprise  
that is God’s work.  
Nothing we do is complete,  
which is another way of saying  
that the kingdom always  
lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.  
No confession brings perfection.  
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.  
No program accomplishes the church’s mission.  
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:  
We plant seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,

*A Season of Healing*

knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will  
need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects  
beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything  
and there is a sense of liberation  
in realizing that.

This enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,  
a step along the way,  
an opportunity for God's grace  
to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,  
but that is the difference between  
the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders,  
ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen."

~Oscar Romero (1917-1980)



# Day 365

Three hundred sixty five days into a journey that will last the rest of your life—even if you didn’t read each day in turn, but pushed ahead reading to the end, you are still much farther down the path than when you first picked up this book. Our path has been winding, taking in themes of forgiveness, love, and healing as well as grief. You have not taken this voyage alone. The Holy Spirit has been with you. Hopefully, you have picked up some of the suggested habits, such as journaling or daily scripture reading. For, as promised in the preface, real grief continues.

The loss you experienced that led to your reading this book was significant enough that a mere year of readings will not be enough salve to heal the wound completely. Yet, if you have worked on forgiveness along this journey, you will have done much to heal from the inside. And if you picked up on the theme of service woven into the readings, then you have already begun to give of yourself to others and in the process you have received. Knowing that your journey is ongoing, now may be the time to take another grieving person by the hand, offer a listening ear and an experienced eye for the path ahead of this other hurting soul. And in walking the path with another who is bearing a loss all his or her own, you may well find the path ahead in your own journey toward wholeness.

“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

~2 Corinthians 4:18



## *About the Author*

The Rev. Frank Logue is the founding pastor of King of Peace Episcopal Church in Kingsland, Georgia. Born in Montgomery, Alabama, where he lived for six years, Frank grew up in Marietta, Georgia. A 1984 graduate of Georgia Southern University, Frank worked as a newspaper photographer for two small daily newspapers in Georgia—the *Warner Robins Daily Sun* and the *Rome News-Tribune*. Frank, and his wife Victoria, went full-time freelance, writing books and magazine articles. Their seven books include *Georgia Outdoors* and *The Appalachian Trail Backpacker*. Frank also worked as a Contributing Editor for *Shutterbug* magazine.



The Logues' hiking experience includes hiking the entire 2,150-mile Appalachian Trail together in one six-month hike in 1988. The couple have also traveled extensively in the United States and abroad.

In 1995, Frank responded to a deeply felt, too long ignored call to the ministry. A discernment process within the Episcopal Church confirmed that

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call to full-time ministry. Frank entered the Virginia Theological Seminary in the fall of 1997. While there, Frank worked as a seminarian at two area churches, including assisting with the creation of a new church—Church of the Spirit in Alexandria, Virginia. He also took part in summer internships with the Anglican Church in Tanzania and St. Elizabeths Hospital, a large mental hospital in Washington, D.C.

In May of 2000, Frank was graduated with honors from seminary and he and Victoria bought a home in Camden County and moved down with their then nine-year-old daughter, Griffin. The Logues continue to enjoy the outdoors and travel. Victoria most recently served as the editor of *Georgia's Coastal Illustrated*, and is continuing to write. Griffin is a freshman at Columbus State University.

Frank's earlier collections of sermons and essays, *Peace, Peace, Unfailing Love*, *A Reason to Hope*, and *Eyewitness Gospel* were also published by King of Peace Episcopal Church. As with the previous volumes, proceeds from the sale of this book benefit the church and its community through the Discretionary Fund which provides direct assistance to those in need.

## *A Year-Long Journey Toward Wholeness*