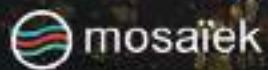




LENT

Awaken





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Welcome to the Lent journey. During this experience, you are invited to a few awakenings. The purpose of this journey is to awaken to life. Life is God and life is with God.

We will focus on the awakening to self, longing, life, friendship and calling.

To assist you in this movement towards awakening, each day and week has specific rhythms that you can participate in, as and when possible. There is an old adage that says: Pray as you can, and as you can't. Experiment with these practices and find your own way.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide begins with a week of preparation, which starts on Ash Wednesday, and which serves to orientate you for the next 40 days. Each week starts on the Sunday, indicated as Day 1. At the beginning of the week, there are four elements: i) a poem; ii) a scripture reference; iii) an explanation of the spiritual practice for the week; and iv) a grace¹ for the week.

The devotion for each day could be read in the morning, with a reflection prayer² done at the end of the day. At the end of the week – on the Saturday morning – you are invited to do a repetition of one of the practices you did during that week. In the evening, you can do a review prayer³ to reflect on your experience. The danger of spiritual practices is that it could become a heavy burden that drains life from us.

It is important not to view spiritual practices as laws that we must obey, but rather as a means of grace, through which God comes to us. An attitude of experimentation and adventure is usually far more constructive than rigidity.

It is not the purpose of this journey to make you feel guilty if you couldn't do everything that was recommended. If you miss a day, simply pick it up again the following day.

¹**Grace:** A short prayer (a word or phrase, e.g. Jesus or Maranatha, that you pray continually in order to anchor yourself in God and to silence your thoughts.

²**Reflection Prayer:** Think back on the events of the day. Ask the Spirit to lead you in this. Choose one or two prominent events (positive or negative) that took place. Contemplate these prominent events in the presence of God and talk to him about it.

³**Review Prayer:** This prayer is exactly what the name suggests. It invites you to “re”-“view” the things you experienced during the week. Do an overview of your week and stand still at the experiences that draw your attention. Reflect on these with the accompanying questions that are supplied at the end of each week.



Awaken

A S H W E D N E S D A Y

PREPARATION WEEK



ASH WEDNESDAY

- *Malcolm Guite*

Receive this cross of ash upon your brow
Brought from the burning of Palm Sunday's cross;
The forests of the world are burning now
And you make late repentance for the loss.
But all the trees of God would clap their hands,
The very stones themselves would shout and sing,
If you could covenant to love these lands
And recognize in Christ their lord and king.
He sees the slow destruction of those trees,
He weeps to see the ancient places burn,
And still you make what purchases you please
And still to dust and ashes you return.
But Hope could rise from ashes even now
Beginning with this sign upon your brow.



ASH WEDNESDAY

“...for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19) NIV

From early on in the Bible, ash has been used as a symbol on the spiritual journey, and is mentioned especially in the scriptures of the Old Testament: “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:6 NIV) When a person was grieving or in mourning, they would place ash on their foreheads and rip their clothing.

It is interesting that we wear the sign of hope and salvation, namely the cross, on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. On the Lent journey, the cross serves as a sign of suffering, and it is on this journey of suffering that we join Jesus.

The theologian, Walter Brueggeman, helps us come to a richer understanding. Firstly, Ash Wednesday reminds me that I am only human. We sometimes forget that we were formed out of “dust”, from the nothingness; that we belong to the earth and that we, as humans, cannot create life, but that we are dependent on God for the breath of life. The very life inside of us is dependent on God’s life giving breath. All the voices that tempt us to power, success, control and prosperity, creates in us the mistaken impression that we are far more independent and self-reliant than we truly are.

In this dust filled existence, I am invited to awaken to my humanity. But I am also invited to awaken to the road of the cross with Jesus.

I am dust. And to dust I will return.

Reflection

How often do you consider your mortality?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to choose Your life.



THURSDAY

“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.” (Luk. 9:23 – 24 NIV)

Have you ever noticed how Jesus invites us to join Him in His suffering?

Right from the start, Jesus tells us that it’s not an easy decision to follow Him, we will have to give up on and lose out on a lot of things. He invites us to take up our cross. He never promises that it will be easy, but He does promise that it will be fulfilling.

The world says, “ Make a name for yourself! Be somebody!” But Jesus invites us to another way of living: a life of sacrifice, love, obedience, suffering, death and resurrection. The things that keep us from a life with Him, are the things that need to die. This does not mean that we are to be masochists! No, it means friendship with the One who leads us, whether on a road of death or on a road of resurrection, because He knows them both.

Reflection

What does “taking up your cross and following Jesus” look like for you? What do you need to distance yourself from in order to choose life?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to choose Your life.



FRIDAY

“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matt. 6:17 – 18 NIV)

Through the centuries, anyone who has ever had an impact on their generation for the sake of Christ, has fasted. This usually entails abstaining from food for a predetermined length of time. Jesus certainly assumed that His followers would partake in this practice as part of their relationship with God. He said, “When you fast...” not, “If you fast...”.

Fasting is celebrating. It serves as an opportunity to deepen in God’s overwhelming goodness and love for us. When fasting, we nourish ourselves with God’s words in scripture. We learn that we do not live by bread alone, but from every word spoken by God. When Jesus commands us not to look melancholic while fasting, He is not inviting us to mislead others. He, Himself, learned through experience that fasting brings with it those invisible gifts that only God can give.

Reflection

What are you fasting from during Lent?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to choose Your life.



SATURDAY

Saturday Morning:

- Ask the Lord to remind you of the week's experiences. Reflect on what comes to you. Trust your experience.
- Reread the scripture of the week. Review your notes. Return to the experience in the week that has stayed with you, or stands out to you. Reread the devotion and exercise. Speak to God about your experience.

Saturday Evening:

- Where did I experience God's presence?
- How has connection with myself, others and Him deepened as a result of my preparation during Lent?

NOTES



A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing notes, separated by a solid vertical line on the left.



Awaken
TO MYSELF

WEEK 1



SUNDAY

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17)

One essential moment on our journey with God is waking up to who we truly are. Not knowing who we are, and Whose we are, has tragic consequences. On the one hand, when we are uncertain about our identity, the inferiority virus spreads throughout our lives. We think thoughts like, ‘I am no good’, ‘I can’t do anything right’, ‘I am of no use to anyone’, ‘I can’t accept myself’, and the list goes on. On the other hand, in our uncertainty about our identity, we can go to the other extreme. We climb lofty pedestals and manufacture glittering images of ourselves as successful, adequate, and always competent. Nothing scares us more than anyone seeing us behind this facade. We over-identify with our strengths, struggle to acknowledge any weakness, and believe that we can do all things.

In our quest for identity, the crucified and risen Lord meets us right where we are. In His humanity, He also needed to know who He was. Throughout His life, as we follow Him through the gospels, He needed a freshly confirmed sense of identity. In contrast to how we usually go finding our identity, Jesus listened to his Abba Father’s voice, trusted that voice, and claimed its truth for His life. As our verse for the week makes clear: He came to know that he was the Father’s beloved Son on whom the delight and the Spirit of God rested. The good news for us is that Jesus, the unique Beloved Son, also helps us discover who we truly are. Our hope this week, is that we will awaken to the good news He brings about our God-given identity.



WHO AM I?

by Deitrich Bonhoeffer

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a Squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really 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,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
Yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,
Tossing in expectations 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 contemptible 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!

**MONDAY**

In our quest for identity, the crucified and risen Christ meets us right where we are. Like us, He also needed to know who He was. He was not immune to the human quest for identity. Reflecting on the insistence of the four Gospels in this regard, Anglican theologian Thomas Smail observes: “Jesus needed, not once, but again and again at each stage of His mission and each crisis in His living and dying, a freshly confirmed knowledge of His own identity.” However, in stark contrast to ourselves, when Jesus needed to know who He was, He listened to His Father’s voice, trusted that voice and claimed its truth for His own life. Recall that decisive moment when Jesus is baptized in the River Jordan by his cousin John. Thirty formative years of hidden preparation have come to an end; His public ministry is about to begin. As Jesus emerges from the water, He hears a voice from heaven. Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke all draw our attention to what He hears.

Jesus underlines how important it is for us to know who we are. Because of His inward assurance that He is the Beloved of God, He is consistently His own person, able to pour Himself out in extravagant self-giving, and is finally free to lay His life down in complete self-surrender upon the cross. Secure in His interactive relationship with Abba Father, He resists the wilderness temptations to forge an identity based on the illusions of success, popularity or power. Not once throughout his life does He need to prove Himself, win the approval of contemporaries, or be involved in any manipulative power games. Knowing who He is, Jesus invests Himself single-mindedly in the realization of His Father’s kingdom vision for our broken world.

Reflection

Each time today that you look in the mirror, say aloud, ‘You are someone in whom God dwells and delights’.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart and mind to who I really am.



TUESDAY

Throughout the Scriptures, there are numerous verses that underline the fact of our belovedness. When joined together to form what I like to call “a personal beloved charter,” they can induce us to see ourselves through the eyes of the Holy One and to feel about ourselves the way God feels. With hearts and minds we begin to grasp that every one of us represents God’s unfolding creation; that the Holy One is continuously attentive to what we are experiencing; and that there are eternal purposes that God has for our lives. Carefully creating such a charter, committing it to memory through regular repetition, in the faith that the Spirit of God is whispering these words in our hidden depths, is one way of recovering the truth of who we are.

Allowing words and images like these to percolate within, indicates our willingness to let God be God in our lives, it affects the way we see ourselves and alerts our hearts to the divine Whisper telling us who we are—not that we will always be able to wholeheartedly receive the truth of our belovedness.

Reflection

Remember one recent experience of being unconditionally loved. As you remember this person’s love, put your hand on your heart, and remind yourself that God loves infinitely more deeply.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart and mind to who I really am.



WEDNESDAY

Learning to love ourselves, as God continually does, further realizes the truth of our belovedness.

How do we care for ourselves practically? Usually, it involves giving honest attention to the various aspects of our inner and outer lives, taking time to listen to our needs, longings and unresolved struggles. With regard to the latter, we can be daring enough to ask for help, seek support and allow others to serve us. With the insight of those who know us well, we can acknowledge our gifts and abilities, and perhaps investigate means of developing them further. Where we have gone wrong, we can open our hearts to the mercy of the Crucified One, learn to forgive ourselves and make amends toward those whom we have wronged. We can explore ways of restoring energy and strength to our souls and bodies, particularly in times of stressful and demanding work.

“So then in order that your humanity may be entire and complete, let your bosom, which receives all, find room for yourself also. So remember to restore yourself to yourself... As an ordinary mortal I have an even greater need to “restore myself to myself!” There is no other option for the sake of my sanity. I have to stop more frequently and smell the flowers.” St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Reflection

Imagine yourself standing with Jesus in the River Jordan as He heard His Father’s voice saying, ‘You are my Beloved Son’. Listen then to what the Father says to you as you stand with Jesus.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart and mind to who I really am.

**THURSDAY**

Being the beloved is not a private trip. Rather, it encourages us to acknowledge our joint belonging in the human family, reach out in real relationship toward our neighbor, and bring God's blessing wherever we go. Mysteriously, it is as we see others as brothers and sisters, and affirm our common belovedness, that there grows within our hearts a fuller appreciation of just how much we are loved by God. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, alludes to this mystery in his letter to the early Christ-followers: "Beloved . . . if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:11-12).

Christ, our ever-present Mentor, wants to teach us how to help others claim their belovedness. Pursue His footsteps from the beginning of His gospel ministry until its end. See Him bless the children. Watch Him listen to the Samaritan woman. Listen as He affirms His disciples. Watch Him feed the hungry. Notice Him befriend the rejected. Wherever He went, people knew they were valued. Today He requests that we relate to others as He would if He were in our place. He does not leave us to do this unaided. Should we intentionally obey his wishes, in dependence on His indwelling Spirit, we can count on Him showing us how to best bear the beams of His love toward those we meet.

Reflection

Memorise one verse of Scripture – 1 John 3:1. Share with God your thoughts and feelings about this verse.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart and mind to who I really am.

**FRIDAY**

In their reflections on the identity quest, well-known Christ-followers from diverse backgrounds affirm the truth of our belovedness. When asked if he could summarize the essence of his beliefs after a lifetime of theological exploration, theologian Karl Barth answered with the words of a childhood hymn: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Recovery of life at its best, begins when we experience ourselves to be the beloved children of God. Only then can we safely embark on the perilous inward journey, to face our inner shadows and darkness, secure in the knowledge that nothing we uncover can ever render us unlovable to God. Conscious of our belovedness, we can reach out to others with a fresh transparency, honestly acknowledging our real thoughts and feelings, since we are no longer dependent on their approval or imprisoned by their expectations. With our personal worth no longer bound to achievement, we are free to either succeed or fail. We begin to taste “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

Reflection

Do one thing today that expresses God’s love and compassion for yourself.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart and mind to who I really am.



SATURDAY

Saturday Morning:

- Ask the Lord to remind you of the week's experiences. Reflect on what comes to you. Trust your experience.
- Reread the scripture of the week. Review your notes. Return to the experience in the week that has stayed with you, or stands out to you. Reread the devotion and exercise. Speak to God about your experience.

Saturday Evening:

- Where did I experience God's presence?
- How has connection with myself, others and Him deepened as a result of my preparation during Lent?



Lined area for writing notes, consisting of 25 horizontal dotted lines.



Awaken
T O L I F E

WEEK 2



SUNDAY

“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” (Acts 17:22 – 28 NIV)

Paul finds himself in the city of Athens, considered the mecca of many of the religions of that time. He starts his speech by connecting with their culture and customs (Acts 17:23 NIV), but then invites them to interpret their customs and experiences differently (Acts 17:24 NIV).

Everything they have, their very lives, come from God the creator. Not only did He give them everything, but He even gives them their lives (Acts 17:25 NIV). He is both the Giver and Maintainer of the gift of life they have received.

A conviction and awareness of this will bring about a search for Him, and you will find Him and experience Him (Acts 17:27). Your life will become larger and you will experience true life.

You are invited to awaken to this life.



Call yourself alive? Look, I promise you
that for the first time you'll feel your pores opening
like fish mouths, and you'll actually be able to hear
your blood surging though all those lanes,
and you'll feel light gliding across the cornea
like the train of a dress. For the first time
you'll be aware of gravity
like a thorn in your heel,
and your shoulder blades will ache for want of wings.
Call yourself alive? I promise you
you'll be deafened by dust falling on the furniture,
you'll feel your eyebrows turning into two gashes,
and every memory you have – will begin
a Genesis.

Nina Cassian

Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times
Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2004, p48
translated from the Romanian by Brenda Walker & Andrea Deletant

This poem challenges you to become alive to the fullness of life.
An awakening to the fullness of life.

"Call yourself alive?"-twice. This is the challenge. Experience life to the fullest: your pores, your blood flowing, light, gravity...
Like an enlightenment.
"Genesis" - You will feel/be like a new creation/start.

**MONDAY**

What is the biggest gift you've ever received? Could there ever be anything bigger than the gift of life? If you weren't alive, you wouldn't exist and there wouldn't be anything to receive. Your life and the fact that you exist, is a gift. James says that we were created and brought to life through His will (James 1:17 NIV).

You are because He wanted you to be. You are His idea. Not your father or your mother's. Not an accident. They were simply the channels and means through which you came into life. There is something larger behind it all. He is. Not only did He give you life, but He keeps intact daily. Acts 17:25 clearly states that: "... he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else." This means that we are not simply left to our own devices. He is there for us, He cares.

Reflection

Take a moment to look at everything you have. Everything that makes your life possible. Your family, your friends, the health you enjoy, food, clothes, car... Can you see that it all comes from Him? He gave it to you. They are all gifts. Can you thank Him?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to life with You.



TUESDAY

Throughout the Scriptures, there are numerous verses that underline the fact of our belovedness. When joined together to form what I like to call “a personal beloved charter,” they can induce us to see ourselves through the eyes of the Holy One and to feel about ourselves the way God feels. With hearts and minds we begin to grasp that every one of us represents God’s unfolding creation; that the Holy One is continuously attentive to what we are experiencing; and that there are eternal purposes that God has for our lives. Carefully creating such a charter, committing it to memory through regular repetition, in the faith that the Spirit of God is whispering these words in our hidden depths, is one way of recovering the truth of who we are.

Allowing words and images like these to percolate within, indicates our willingness to let God be God in our lives, it affects the way we see ourselves and alerts our hearts to the divine Whisper telling us who we are—not that we will always be able to wholeheartedly receive the truth of our belovedness.

Reflection

Remember one recent experience of being unconditionally loved. As you remember this person’s love, put your hand on your heart, and remind yourself that God loves infinitely more deeply.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart and mind to who I really am.



WEDNESDAY

Physiologically speaking, breathing is one of the most important signs of life. When someone dies, we say that that person took their last breath. The control system for breathing is, evolutionary speaking, controlled by a very old part of the brain, namely the reptilian brain (brainstem). It functions involuntarily. You don't need to decide or remember to breathe.

You can, however, take note of your breath and decide to stop breathing. It is one of very few involuntary functions that we can decide to influence. Studies have shown that by merely focussing on one's breath, one can activate one's parasympathetic nervous system, a system which aids in relaxation. It is said that most of our sympathetic nervous system is over active. When you focus on your breathing, the newer part of the brain, the neocortex, is activated. This causes a deep unification within your being as your old and new brains are united. Becoming aware of your breathing is therefore something physical and basic.

Breathing, however, is not only physical and psychological, but also spiritual. In the story of creation, it states that humans only became alive once God breathed the breath of life into them (Genesis 2:7). That might be why so much emphasis is placed on the role of breath within the Judeo Christian tradition.

Your breath is also spirit. He gives you each breath you take (Acts 17:23), even if you're not aware of it. An awareness of this brings an awareness of Him in your life.

Reflection

You are invited to set aside a few minutes to focus on your breathing. Do not attempt to change or deepen your breath, simply observe it. Say the words 'thank you' along with each exhale.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to life with You.



THURSDAY

We come into this human life as incomplete beings. Take a moment to think about that. A small baby cannot yet think, speak or love. In order to experience life in its fullness, that baby needs to grow and become someone they were not as an infant. It is fair to say that humans are beings in the process of becoming.

We are “HUMAN BEINGS” and not “HUMAN DOINGS”, but actually, we are “HUMAN BECOMINGS”. This process of becoming never ends. The moment we cease to become (grow), we miss what we could become and be.

As Christians, we want to become like Jesus. This proves that we want to share in His life. That is life. The church father, Irenaeus said that: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” This is why one of the most popular metaphors for life is a journey. We are on a journey to become more human, more ourselves and more like Him. This is how we experience true life.

Reflection

Take some time to look back on how you've discovered life through the different facets and dimensions that have crossed your path. Things like loving, forgiving, sacrifice, etc. Speak to Him about it and also share your desire to grow with Him.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to life with You.

**FRIDAY**

What do you see as the good life? You have ideas about the good life, even if you're not aware of them. We dream of our ships coming in and giving us everything we truly need. Mark 1:15 states clearly that Jesus' first sermon centres around the fact that we need to revise our ideas of a life in full in light of the fact that we can now live our lives with Him.

John 17:3 gives us a definition of eternal life, namely that we might know the one true God and Jesus Christ. We are therefore already living. The Epicurean people from Acts 17:18, believed that it was up to us to make the best of our lives. The Stoics believed that we were merely pawns and that everything was predestined. A human was simply to accept what he/she was given. The Platonists greatly separated the visible from the invisible, the mortal body from the immortal soul. For them, life was about getting rid of the lusts and drives of the flesh and focusing on the invisible eternal. Life in full would someday dawn.

We are given a different comprehension of life. Life is in Jesus. Life is Jesus. Life in full is life with Jesus. For a few moments, consider your own ideas of life. It might be easier to do this if you consider how you spend your time, your money and what you daydream about.

Reflection

Take some time to come into contact with your ideas of life. Are you invited to change your ideas? Speak to Him about it and ask Him to help you.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to life with You.



SATURDAY

Saturday Morning:

- Ask the Lord to remind you of the week's experiences. Reflect on what comes to you. Trust your experience.
- Reread the scripture of the week. Review your notes. Return to the experience in the week that has stayed with you, or stands out to you. Reread the devotion and exercise. Speak to God about your experience.

Saturday Evening:

- Where did I experience God's presence?
- How has connection with myself, others and Him deepened as a result of my preparation during Lent?



Awaken
TO FRIENDSHIP

WEEK 3



SUNDAY

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other." John 15:12-17

The words above, spoken by Jesus, reminds us that God longs to live in intimate friendship with each one of us. This is the mind-blowing, extravagant, and grace-filled good news that Jesus brought into the world. Many people today speak of having a 'personal relationship' with the Lord. There is nothing wrong with this. However, we need to clarify just what kind of relationship God wants with us. As we read the New Testament, we see that God desires a relationship of close connection, deep belonging, and mutual belonging. Or to summarize it in just one word: friendship.

The time of Lent presents us with a wonderful opportunity to awaken to this good news. It makes all the difference to the way we pray and live. No longer do we need to stand on ceremony when we speak to God. Now we can share our hearts openly and honestly in the knowledge that we have a Divine Friend who cares for us and listens to us. Each day we can face our challenges and crises knowing that we are not alone. Living as God's friend sets us free to live confidently and boldly, even when we go through times of great suffering and darkness. Will you, during these Lenten days, give God the chance to convince you just how much He desires your friendship?



JESUS... BEST FRIEND BY DAVID FLEMMING

Jesus... Best Friend,
may Your soul give life to me,
may Your flesh be food for me,
may You warm my hardened heart.

Jesus... Best Friend,
may Your tears now wash me clean,
may Your passion keep me strong,
may You listen to my plea.

Jesus... Best Friend,
may Your wound take in my hurts,
may Your gaze be fixed on me,
may I not betray Your love.

Jesus... Best Friend,
may You call me at death's door,
may You hold me close to You,
may You place me with God's saints,
may I ever sing Your praise. Amen.

**MONDAY**

The deeds of Jesus wrap flesh around His words. Throughout His life He consistently reached out in friendship to those around Him. In His company, people from all walks of life felt accepted and welcomed. Whether it was a well-to-do public official like Zacchaeus, lepers living in forced isolation or children simply wanting a lap to sit on, everyone seemed at home in His presence. These people's contact often took place around mealtimes, which, in the Middle East, was a particularly intimate form of association.

South African theologian, Albert Nolan, reflecting on the impact these mealtimes would have had on those who sat at the table with Jesus, writes: "Because Jesus was looked upon as a man of God and a prophet, they would have interpreted His gesture of friendship as God's approval of them. They were now acceptable to God." Jesus lives out the Holy One's all-inclusive love that enfolds each one of us.

Reflection

Memorise John 15:5 for this week and let God speak to you through it.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart to Your invitation into friendship.



TUESDAY

Right where we are at this moment, in the midst of whatever loneliness we may be facing, God meets us and holds out a hand of friendship. At the heart of the Christian faith lies an extravagant, grace-filled, and mind-blowing offer. God passionately longs to be friends with us. This is what Jesus, through His life, death, resurrection, and ascended presence throughout the universe, makes possible for every human being. All he asks, is that we accept this offer of Divine Friendship.

We are not on earth by accident, or mistake, or chance. There are no illegitimate children in this world. We are here because God wants us here. We have been desired into life. Our very existence embodies God's passionate longing for our friendship. Perhaps our aching for intimacy echoes the ache in God's heart as God grieves our resistance to the Divine Friendship for which our hearts have been shaped. Could it also be that our loneliness without a face, described in the first chapter, is God's way of drawing us toward Divine Friendship? The Bible tells us we are not meant to be alone (See Genesis 2:18). Because we have been made in the image of a relational God, we are divinely designed for relationship. We have been made by love, in love, to love. We are wired for friendship, both human and divine.

Reflection

Thank God today, specifically, for those in your friendship circle who give you a glimpse of God's faithful friendship.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart to your invitation into friendship.

**WEDNESDAY**

On the night before His execution, Jesus gave His disciples the simple yet profound illustration of the vine and the branches. (See John 15:1-8.) “I am the vine,” He says to His followers; “you are the branches” (John 15:5). As His followers, they are to “abide” in Him. The Greek word used here for “remain” is found numerous times in John’s Gospel. Jesus not only wants them to serve as His disciples; He wants them to live with Him in intimate friendship. This becomes even clearer when a few moments later He says to them, “I do not call you servants any longer... but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I heard from my Father” (John 15:15).

This image of the vine and branches reveals the remarkable depths of intimacy of the Divine Friendship into which we are invited. Jesus wants His followers to remain, dwell, live, and abide in Him. At the beginning of the Gospel of John, two disciples ask Jesus, “Where are you staying?” (John 1:38). They want to make their home with Jesus. We, too, are invited to make our home in Him and to let Him make His home in us.

Reflection

Take a few moments to be alone. Put an empty chair next to yours. Imagine Jesus your Divine Friend sitting with you. Share whatever is on your heart and mind with Him. Listen to what He may say to you.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart to your invitation into friendship.



THURSDAY

God deeply desires friendship with each one of us. To make that possible, God sends Jesus among us as the way into this friendship. As we come to abide in, remain in, and dwell in this Jesus, who lives now as the risen Christ beyond crucifixion, He leads us into the intimate heart of God. The Gospel writers show us this daring offer, and the real-life experiences of Christ-followers throughout the ages have confirmed the truth, that by abiding in Jesus, we experience intimacy with God. What does “abiding in Jesus” involve?

It involves turning each day to Jesus, listening to His voice, sharing our hearts with Him, nourishing ourselves on His words, following His commands, inviting Him into everything we do, and joining Him in giving life to others. It probably also entails pruning away those parts of our lives contaminated by selfishness and greed. As we walk with Jesus, He and His Father come to be with us and make their home with us. (See John 14:23.) We begin to live together in the intimacy of the Divine Friendship.

Reflection

Make contact today with someone who is going through a difficult time. Seek to reflect God’s caring friendship in how you listen to them.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart to Your invitation into friendship.

**FRIDAY**

Growing our friendship with Jesus is essential, because through our relationship with Him we encounter God as well. As we walk with Jesus, we find that God is always with us. As we listen to Him, we hear God speaking to us. As we follow Him, He leads us into God's river of life at its deepest. The kingdom of God is all around us, right where we are, freely available and accessible to us through Jesus. The glorious invitation of the Christian message becomes clear - learn to live each day with simple confidence as one of Jesus' friends and He will, through His companionship, impart an eternal and indestructible kind of life to each one of us. In order to enter into such a relationship, we must first decide to become a friend of Jesus. We don't just drift into friendship with Him. Being His friend, like being anyone's friend, requires a definite, specific choice. We have to consciously decide to turn to Him, to open our lives to His presence, and to entrust ourselves to Him. However, this is only the beginning of the journey. To grow in friendship with Jesus takes time; friendship deepens gradually through many stages along the way. But it has to begin somewhere.

Reflection

Do one thing today, at work or at home, that expresses your intention to live as God's friend.

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart to Your invitation into friendship.



SATURDAY

Saturday Morning:

- Ask the Lord to remind you of the week's experiences. Reflect on what comes to you. Trust your experience.
- Reread the scripture of the week. Review your notes. Return to the experience in the week that has stayed with you, or stands out to you. Reread the devotion and exercise. Speak to God about your experience.

Saturday Evening:

- Where did I experience God's presence?
- How has connection with myself, others and Him deepened as a result of my preparation during Lent?



Awaken
TO DESIRES

WEEK 4



SUNDAY

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. (Matthew 6:31-33)

Once upon a time, a pilgrim set out on the long journey in search of peace, joy and love. The pilgrim walked for many weary miles, and time passed.

Gradually, the young, lively steps became slower and more laboured. The pilgrim’s journey passed through landscapes that were not always happy ones.

Through war. Through sickness. Through quarrels and rejections and separations.

A land where, it seemed, the more people possessed, the more warlike they became – the more they had to defend, the more they needed to attack each other.

Longing for peace, they prepared for war. Longing for love, they surrounded themselves with walls of distrust and barriers of fear. Longing for life, they were walking deeper into death.

But one morning, the pilgrim came to a little cottage at the wayside. Something about this little cottage attracted the pilgrim. It was as though it was lit up from the inside. Full of curiosity, the pilgrim went inside. And inside the cottage was a little shop, and behind the counter stood a shopkeeper. It was hard to judge the age – hard even to say for sure whether it was a man or a woman. There was an air of timelessness about the place.

‘What would you like?’ asked the shopkeeper in a kindly voice.

‘What do you stock here?’ asked the pilgrim.

‘Oh, we have all the things here that you most long for,’ replied the shopkeeper.



'Just tell me what you desire.' The pilgrim hardly knew where to begin. So many desires came rushing to mind at once.

'I want peace – in my own family, in my native land and in the whole world.

I want to make something good of my life.

I want those who are sick to be well again and those who are lonely to have friends.

I want those who are hungry to have enough to eat.

I want every child born on this planet today to have a chance to be educated.

I want everyone on earth to live in freedom.

I want this world to be a kingdom of love.'

There was a pause while the pilgrim reviewed this shopping list.

Gently, the shopkeeper broke in. 'I'm sorry,' came the quiet reply. 'I should have explained. We don't supply the fruits here. We only supply the seeds.'

- *Source Unknown*

Reflection

What seeds of longing are planted in your heart?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to articulate the longings of my heart.



Lord, help me now to unclutter my life,
to organize myself in the direction of simplicity.
Lord, teach me to listen to my heart;
teach me to welcome change, instead of fearing it.
Lord, I give You these stirrings inside me,
I give You my discontent,
I give You my restlessness,
I give You my doubt,
I give You my despair,
I give You all the longings I hold inside.
Help me to listen to these signs of change, of growth;
to listen seriously and follow where they lead
through the breath taking empty space of an open door.

From Celtic Daily Prayer



MONDAY

Augustine wrote: “The whole life of a good Christian is holy longing. What you desire, you can’t yet see. But the desire gives you the ability to be fulfilled when you see it...”

We all have a deep inner longing for happiness. We long to be fulfilled. Having a sense of meaning in one’s life contributes greatly to whether a person flourishes or not. Whether we find it in our faith, our life goals or our long term dreams, we are all in search of it. The problem is that all these things that contribute to our sense of meaning and significance don’t save us from all the things that rob us of our joy: disappointment, loss, disintegration of relationships, illness and death.

One translation of Jesus’ first beatitude is: “Happy are those who know their need for God.” When we admit our needs and longings, we take our first step towards wisdom and a deeper relationship with God. Within our deepest longings, the Holy Spirit leads us to God and His longing for us. He satiates our search.

Reflection

What people, things or places do you use to satiate your longing for happiness?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to articulate the longings of my heart.



TUESDAY

Jesus made use of regular human experiences teach us about Himself. He used the fact that we become hungry and thirsty to teach us about our spiritual hunger and thirst: our longings and desires.

We often become hungry and thirsty. We eat and drink, only to find ourselves hungry and thirsty again a couple of hours later. It's a cycle we cannot escape. Our bodies constantly crave food and drink. The same is true of our spiritual lives. We cannot pray once and expect our spiritual longings to be satiated forever. We can't have faith in Jesus for just one day and expect to be always be content. Our hunger and thirst must be satisfied daily.

Certain invitations on our journey with God remind us to heed our spiritual hunger and thirst. One of these is the Eucharist. Jesus invites us to partake in the Eucharist continually. The Eucharist reminds us of our spiritual hunger and thirst, and that it must be satiated daily. To live in daily relationship with Him satiates like nothing else. Jesus is truly the bread of life. Allow Him to satisfy the deepest desires in your life.

Reflection

What daily practice helps you satiate your spiritual hunger and thirst?

Grace

Lord, awaken my heart and mind to who I really am.



WEDNESDAY

Once upon a time, there was a seagull who was not satisfied with being a seagull. He looked at his life and those of his fellow seagulls, and found it insignificant. "A seagull is only eating, flying and fighting!"

He doesn't know what he wants, he only knows that he is hopelessly restless and that he wants to break free. He tries flying higher and faster, anything that could set him free from the limits of being a seagull. He falls many times, almost killing himself in the process, but he keeps on trying. Always in search of something better, something more. At the end of his life he is old, run down, dissatisfied and deeply unhappy.

This story serves as a metaphor of the human heart. It describes our search of, and longing for, a deep, rich and fulfilling life. We long for love, for intimacy, for friendship; we chase after admiration, success and fame; we want to be seen, be known, taken note of and we strive after health and beautiful bodies. We want to leave our mark in life. But at the end of the day, not one of these things will satisfy that deep desire within us.

We all need to reach that point where we realise that no person or thing could ever satisfy that desire. No, we need God. Paul gives this reason: "My God will supply all your needs." What you need is to turn to Him – that consciousness, that realisation that in this life, nothing and no one can fulfil that deep, big and incomprehensible need and desire. Except for Him.

When I find Him I realised: it is Him that I have spent my entire life searching for.

Reflection

What are you looking for?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to articulate the longings of my heart.



THURSDAY

God created each of us with a great capacity for deep longing... and each of us interpret that longing or desire in a different way.

For some of us, that longing is interpreted as a search for the ideal partner. For others, it's the perfect house and car. For others still, it's achieving a position in their career. But we get to a point where we feel: it's not enough. I have the house. I have the job. I have the wife and kids. It's not enough. Something is missing. It's empty.

Behind every longing is a deeper longing that we must come into contact with. Paul says in Ephesians 5:5: "... you can be sure that using people or religion or things just for what you can get out of them... the usual variations of idolatry, you can be sure, it will get you nowhere, surely nowhere near the Kingdom of God."

He says that there is a place in my life, a longing in my life, that is reserved only for God and His Kingdom. God is my source. Nothing and no one, save God, can release me from that desire. That is where my happiness lies. That is where my security lies. That is where my life lies. It doesn't mean that God doesn't use other people to meet my needs, or that he doesn't meet my needs through things. But He is the source. He is the origin, and that changes everything when it comes to meeting my needs: if I know that it all comes from God. He made me with these needs and desires inside of me. And now I look to Him for their fulfillment.

Reflection

Which of the desires of your heart feed your relationship with God?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to articulate the longings of my heart.

**FRIDAY**

In the Our Father, Jesus teaches us to turn to God and ask Him: “Give us this day our daily bread...” (Matt. 6:11). He knows that I have needs and desires: physical, psychological, social and spiritual. Later He elaborates on God’s provision in all our desires. He assures us that God will give us everything we truly need.

Working with our needs and desires is a lifelong journey. We need to deal with them, work through them and discern in order to properly order them in our lives. The Bible is not against desire, but is against the desire of anything above God. Does the Word not teach that we are not to have any other gods? An idol is a longing or desire that is placed above God in my life.

The invitation here is a purification of my desires. It’s a discovery of my true desires and how they are ordered in my life. This forms part of the inner journey. I come to realise that the more I give my desires a disordered, unhealthy place in my life, the more unfulfilled I become. It is the cycle of addiction, as I will never find complete fulfillment.

God fulfils my every desire. Only he can satisfy the deep longings of my heart.

Reflection

Compile a list of the desires of your heart. Reflect on the order of importance each desire has in your life. Reorder them with God and speak to Him about it.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to articulate the longings of my heart.



SATURDAY

Saturday Morning:

- Ask the Lord to remind you of the week's experiences. Reflect on what comes to you. Trust your experience.
- Reread the scripture of the week. Review your notes. Return to the experience in the week that has stayed with you, or stands out to you. Reread the devotion and exercise. Speak to God about your experience.

Saturday Evening:

- Where did I experience God's presence?
- How has connection with myself, others and Him deepened as a result of my preparation during Lent?



Awaken
TO CALLING

WEEK 5



SUNDAY

“The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.” (Gen. 12:1 – 4 NIV)

- Just as God called Abram, each of us are called to perform a certain task.
- To hear the voice speaking to you and to understand what it is saying, is a journey.
- To say yes to this calling, means saying no to a lot of other opportunities. The reward, however, is very great. The price of disobedience, is also great.

Through the stories and awakenings of great spirits, you are invited to awaken and commit to your own calling this week. You are invited to listen to today’s sermon on the subject, to read each day’s scripture and to live each day with the proposed question.



VARIATION ON A THEME

by Rilke

A certain day became a presence to me;
there it was, confronting me--a sky, air, light:
a being. And before it started to descend
from the height of noon, it leaned over
and struck my shoulder as if with
the flat of a sword, granting me
honor and a task, The day's blow
rang out, metallic--or it was I, a bell awakened,
and what I heard was my whole self
saying and singing what it knew: I can.

- Denise Levertov

Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times
Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2004, p45

This poem is about an awakening to your own possibilities.

"A certain day" - Awakening happens at a certain time and place.

"it started to descend from..." - it is like something dawning on you.

"and struck my shoulder as if with the flat of a sword" - It opens up new possibilities, being entitled, like being knighted.
An awakening to "I can."

**MONDAY**

You are called. Why am I here?

In an old Jewish tale, it is said that God had a meeting with each of us before our birth. On this occasion, He asked you whether you would be willing to come to earth and perform a certain task that He had for you. For many of us, the task might seem small and trivial, like raising a child. In preparation for this task, He gives us parents, circumstances and many experiences. Some of these experiences are painful, but necessary. On that occasion, you answered “yes” and He assigned an angel to accompany you on your life’s journey. (Read Matt. 18:10). The angel placed his finger on your lips – which is where the dent in your top lip comes from – and at that very moment, you forgot everything about the meeting and agreement. Your main task in life now is to remember and to obey.

So many of the lessons on this subject echoes in Jesus’ teachings. He calls us: “Follow me!” We need to wake up to this; we are here with a specific purpose. This is why nothing that happens to us is insignificant. He causes all things to work together for good.

How can we remember and wake up to hear His call? Perhaps one of the first steps is to become aware of the movements within us when we hear the stories of others who were called by God and see how they give their lives for someone or something greater than themselves.

Reflection

What part of this story stirs your imagination? Could you perhaps share this story with someone today?

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to my life-work.



TUESDAY

Who am I?

Nietzsche asserts that one of the ways to remember why you were placed on this earth, is to go back into your past and to pay close attention to the times in which you experienced the most fulfillment. You can then draw a line to form a relation between these experiences.

He suggests that we pose the following questions to ourselves: What has truly brought you a deep sense of happiness thus far? What lifts your spirit, takes it over and simultaneously, fills your spirit with peace? In his words: "Assemble these revealed objects in a row before you and perhaps they will reveal a law by their nature and their order: The fundamental law of their very self."

23 MARCH

Reflection

You are invited to reflect on your life. Ask Him to remind you of all the important happenings that relate to who you are, and to bring them to mind as you reflect on your life. For some who do this exercise, there is an aha moment when they realise what characteristics form part of their true Self.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to my life-work.



WEDNESDAY

What should I let go off?

To hear the voice calling, and to say yes to it, means saying no to a lot of other good and wonderful opportunities in life. Happiness is not found on the road of as many as possible experiences, but rather on the road of focussed experiences.

Former UN secretary general, Dag Hammarskjöld, writes about how he said yes. From that moment on, his life was filled with meaning and he was convinced that he was here on earth for a purpose. He says: "Until you have excluded all the superficial and fleeting possibilities of being and doing with... you toy out of curiosity or wonder or greed, and what hinder you from casting anchor in the experience of the mystery of your life, and the consciousness of the talent entrusted to you which is your I."

Even though we keep searching and experimenting to come to our true selves, we need to cast anchor somewhere in order to find a place where we can begin to live and serve.

24 MARCH

Reflection

You are invited to let go of the things that you need to let go of, the ways of being and doing that keep you from, or make you ineffective at, serving.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to my life-work.



THURSDAY

What do I attach myself to?

We live in a time where we want to keep our options open, we don't want to tie ourselves down through commitment. It seems that the big ideas in our culture, namely personal happiness, independence, multiple experiences and comfort, leads to life in full.

Jesus invites us to let our ideas of life go, and He promises us a wonderful life. If you grow to love Him, His ideas and what His life was about, you will decide to commit. Love is commitment. We think we want comfort and ease, but something in our being longs for someone and something greater, something better than ourselves which requires total sacrifice and commitment.

The psychiatrist and father of contemplative therapy, Gerald May, says: "All my life I have longed to say yes, to give myself completely, to some Ultimate Someone or Something."

25 MARCH

Reflection

You are invited to come into contact with the longing inside of you to surrender and commit, by speaking to God about it.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to my life-work.

**FRIDAY**

How can I ignite the fire inside of me?

Martin Luther King once said that your life's mission (calling) needs to have length, depth and height. Length – something you can improve on across the span of your lifetime. Depth – something that touches the lives of others. Height – by satisfying your soul's longing for a better world.

Still it happens that the fire in us, the passion, the awakening to our calling, fades and even dies. Peter encourages us to fasten it to ourselves (Peter 1). There are so many things that happen to us that could extinguish the fire within us. Success is one of these. A professor friend of mine received the honour of becoming the dean of a faculty. She turned it down because she felt that the immediate success and fame could take her away from that which was most important to her in her life: direct contact with, and accompaniment of students in their preparation for their own life's mission. She would've had to manage and guide the lecturers.

To keep the fire burning for a lifetime, asks a form of saying no. You are invited to keep having discussions that fuel the fires of passion within you. To keep spending energy where it is most needed. To keep going to the places where you can endure the pain. To keep doing what you're not afraid of, and to keep exposing yourself to the best examples of how it's done in your field.

Reflection

You are invited to reflect upon the fire inside of you and to discuss it with Him. See if there is something you are invited to do. Something to add fuel to your fire.

Grace

Lord, I ask for the grace to awaken to my life-work.



SATURDAY

Saturday Morning:

- Ask the Lord to remind you of the week's experiences. Reflect on what comes to you. Trust your experience.
- Reread the scripture of the week. Review your notes. Return to the experience in the week that has stayed with you, or stands out to you. Reread the devotion and exercise. Speak to God about your experience.

Saturday Evening:

- Where did I experience God's presence?
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