Living Compass

Living Well Through Lent 2025



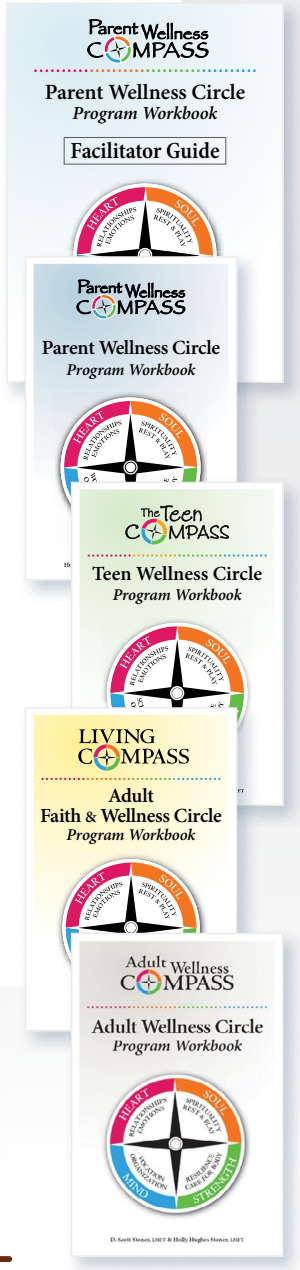
Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind

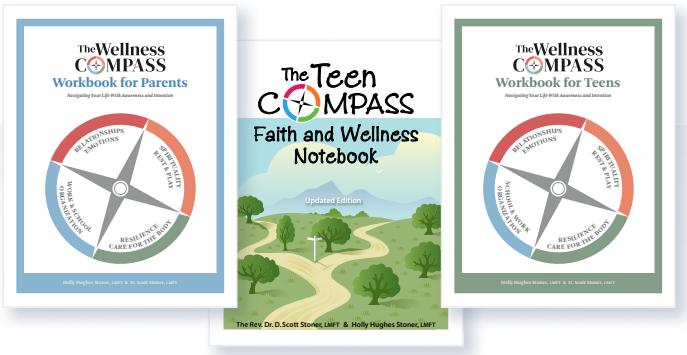
A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

The Living Compass
Spirituality & Wellness Initiative

In addition to our Advent and Lent devotionals (in English and Spanish), Living Compass offers a number of resources (faith-based and secular) and trainings designed to outfit individuals, families, congregations, and organizations for the journey toward wellness and wholeness. Recognizing that we have a variety of resources that can be used in many creative ways, we offer several ways to learn about, experience, and to become more familiar with them.

We invite you to visit our website: livingcompass.org. There you will find more detailed information about our resources, including books, workbooks, facilitator guides for many of our programs, Wellness Circles, Community Wellness Advocate Certificate Trainings, as well as individual training and consultation options. You can also sign up for the Living Compass newsletter, which is the best way to learn about upcoming trainings, highlighted resources, and other opportunities.





To learn more about our resources and our Community Wellness Advocate training, please contact our Program Director Carolyn Karl at Carolyn@livingcompass.org

Living Well Through Lent

2025



Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind

Living Compass

We wish to express deep gratitude to our friends Ab and Nancy Nicholas and the Nicholas Family Foundation. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to make this resource possible.

LIVING COMPASS

Outfitting individuals, families, congregations, and communities with tools and training to navigate life with awareness and intention.

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- Download this publication as a free PDF file.
- Sign up to receive a daily email of each reflection at no cost.
- Access all past daily reflections.
- Download our Lent Facilitator Guide as a free PDF file.
- Listen to the Living Compass podcast, which features two six-minute episodes per week during Lent that focus on *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*. Find on our website or by searching for "Living Compass" on any podcast app.
- Find all of these resources and more on our website: livingcompass.org
- Questions? Email us: info@livingcompass.org

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About the Writers

The Rev. Molly Bosscher was called back to Grand Rapids, Michigan, after 26 years away serving churches in Florida and Virginia. She has always loved church. Drawn first as a child to the Kool-Aid, graham crackers, and cookies offered in Sunday School, she stayed because the love of God continued to compel her, calling her into strange and beautiful adventures. Molly loves being outside, reading, dancing, and spending time with her friends and family, especially her two young adult sons.

Robbin Brent is the director of publications and resource development for Living Compass, a spiritual director, writer, certified teacher in the Enneagram in the Narrative tradition, and founder of Wisdom Way of Knowing. She leads spiritual retreats and programs, facilitates gatherings of contemplative leaders, and is a graduate of Shalem Institute's Transforming Community and Spiritual Guidance programs. She loves spending time with her family, hiking, reading and writing, and sipping early morning coffee while beholding the wildlife that graces her backyard.

The Rev. Canon Randy Kyle Callender, born in Philadelphia to a close-knit Barbadian family, has been deeply rooted in the Episcopal Church from his youth. After earning his Communications degree from Cheyney University and Masters of Divinity from Episcopal Divinity School, he made history as the first African American male priest ordained in the Diocese of Pennsylvania in twenty-five years. Currently serving as Canon for Mission in the Diocese of Maryland, Randy's passion for building relationships and fostering inclusivity guides his ministry and teaching. He also finds joy in spending time with family and watching movies.

The Rt. Rev. Brian Lee Cole has served as the fifth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee since 2017, accompanying 47 parishes and worshipping communities. A Missouri native with deep connections to Appalachian culture, he previously served parishes in North Carolina and Kentucky. The son of an English teacher, Brian cherishes his early morning poetry readings, writing, and contemplative silence. His passion for literature, jazz, and hiking provides a wellspring of inspiration for his ministry and teaching work. He shares his life with his wife Susan, a yoga instructor and poet, son Jess, and their dog, Jerry Lee.

The Rt. Rev. Shannon Rogers Duckworth made history as the first woman to serve as Bishop of Louisiana, and was consecrated its 12th Bishop in November 2022. A Mississippi native with degrees from Millsaps College and The General Theological Seminary, she previously served as canon to the ordinary of the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana. Shannon finds joy in connecting with children, often sitting cross-legged among PreK students during chapel, and cherishes her early memories as one of the first female acolytes in her childhood church. She and her husband James are parents to two sons, Nicholas and Tucker.

The Rev. Jenifer Gamber serves as Rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Arlington, Virginia, bringing her passion for Christian formation and community building to the role. Ordained in 2018 after a lifetime of lay ministry, she is the author of several influential books for Episcopal youth and families, including *My Faith, My Life* and *Common Prayer for Children and Families*. When not leading her congregation or writing, Jenifer finds joy in walking her beloved Westie, Ruby, and sharing meals with her husband Ed and their two adult children. She lives on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

The Rev. Gary B. Manning has served as Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, since 2004. After careers in insurance and church administration, he earned his M.Div. from Virginia Theological Seminary, and continues to bring his passion for spiritual growth and leadership development to the communities he serves. Gary draws inspiration from long-distance cycling, completing the RAGBRAI ride across Iowa four times, and from his 2019 pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. He delights in being an aspiring bluegrass musician, a father, grandfather, and husband to Tabitha.

The Rev. Abigail W. Moon is a horrible gardener yet loves to try new things and see what happens! When she was little, Abi wanted to be Mother Teresa or a doctor when she grew up and after taking organic chemistry decided she was would be a teacher and then continued teaching when she became a priest. She, her husband, and their fluffy dog named Max continue to discover new things each day in Boston, where she serves as a priest at Trinity Episcopal Church in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative—has served his community for more than 40 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, psychotherapist, wellness coach, and author. In addition to his coaching and psychotherapy work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. He is the host of the Living Compass Spirituality and Wellness podcast. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 47 years and together they are the co-creators of the Wellness Compass Initiative and co-hosts of the Wellness Compass podcast. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, soccer, and spending time with family.

Introduction

Lent is a time for introspection and self-reflection, a time to reflect on the core of what it means to live a Christian life in the midst of great change and uncertainty. As we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit over the next forty days, we have a powerful opportunity to make our faith the central compass that guides that life, helping us to receive and share God's transformative love.

We are delighted that you have chosen to use this devotional as a companion for this holy season. And we are honored to include the voices and deep reflections on *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit* from eight featured writers.

In addition to expanding on each writer's reflections throughout the week, each Monday we introduce a weekly theme related to one fruit. The themes begin with faithfulness for the first week in Lent, progress through peace, joy, generosity, and patience, culminating in love during Holy Week. Each Wednesday, we offer a contemplative spiritual practice to help us navigate the spiritual journey with more awareness and intention. These practices, which can also be found in the back of this devotional on pp. 80–84, complement our weekly exploration of the fruits of the Spirit.

As important as are the daily readings, the personal reflections and insights that emerge in response to the readings are what matters most. We encourage you to record them, either in the spaces provided, or in a separate journal. When possible, talk with others or join a group where you can discuss your thoughts.

During Lent, I will be releasing two six-minute episodes each week on the Living Compass Spirituality and Wellness podcast to expand on the theme of *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*. You can listen at "LivingCompass.org/podcast" or in your favorite podcast app. You also will have the opportunity to receive the reflections from this devotional in a daily email. Visit us at LivingCompass.org/Lent to learn more or to sign up.

I want to thank Robbin Brent for the companion Facilitator Guide (available as a free downloadable PDF), and for the inspiring collection of Bible verses, quotes, prayers, and spiritual practices that she once again

included in the back. Refer to them regularly to deepen and enrich your Lenten practice. I also want to thank Robbin for writing the Wednesday and Friday reflections for weeks one through five. And I appreciate Gary Manning for writing most of the Saturday reflections. Finally, I extend a deep expression of gratitude to Carolyn Karl for all she does to oversee the wide distribution of this resource.

It has been a joy to write the daily reflections for this devotional, inspired by our eight guest writers. We at Living Compass are grateful and honored to accompany you on the journey through Lent toward Easter.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner



Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Ministry Initiative

Living Compass—working with The Rev. Pedro Lopez and Estela Lopez from the Episcopal Diocese of Texas—has also published: *Vivir una buena Cuaresma en el 2025: Cultivando el fruto del Espíritu Santo en el corazón, el alma, las fuerzas y la mente*—a Spanish Lent guide with completely original content. To learn more or to order, contact us: info@livingcompass.org.





The *Living Compass Podcast*, a year-round offering, provides additional enrichment opportunities during Lent by releasing three weekly episodes that focus on our theme of *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*. Each episode, about six minutes long, can be found at LivingCompass.org/podcast or by searching for "Living Compass" in your favorite podcast app.

RETREAT ON 2 FEET
CONTEMPLATIVE WALKING & WELLBEING

Retreat on 2 Feet is our new contemplative walking and well-being initiative. We created this experience to introduce the spiritual practice of contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, as a way to enhance spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being. While many of our offerings focus on walking, those with mobility challenges can also participate because the primary movement we focus on is the inner, contemplative path.

For more information, visit LivingCompass.org

The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.
—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5



The Living Compass Model for Well-Being offers us guidance in four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Just like a mobile or kinesthetic art, these dimensions are interconnected.

Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) will have an impact on the other areas. Each of the four compass points focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness. The invitation is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*.

Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy connections with others.
- **Emotions.** The capacity to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy manner.

Soul

- **Spirituality.** The development and practice of a strong personal faith and meaningful purpose.
- **Rest and Play.** The balance between work and renewal through rest and recreation.

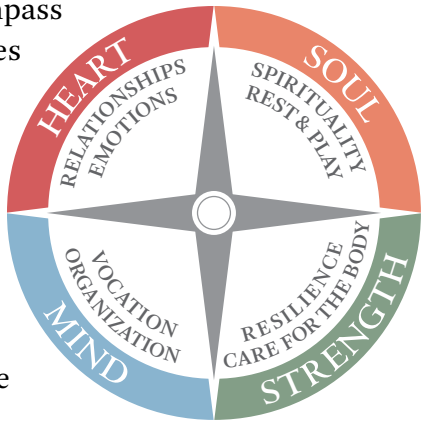
Strength

- **Care for the Body.** Cultivating healthy habits and practices for our physical well-being.
- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with life's adversities.

Mind

- **Organization.** Effective management of belongings, finances, and time.
- **Vocation.** Making the most of employment, education, and volunteering opportunities.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of faith and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make faith the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that *health*, *healing*, *wholeness*, and *holy* all come from the same root word *hal* or *haelen*.



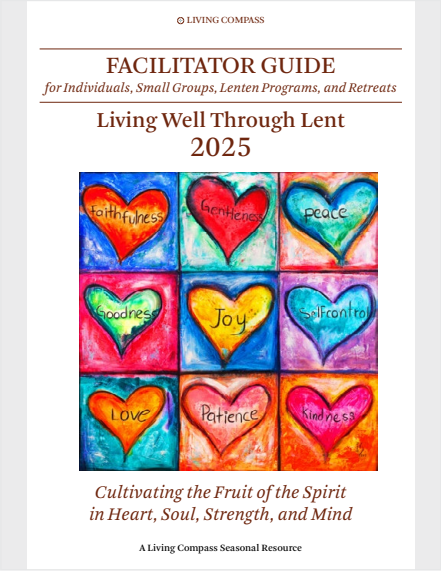
The Living Compass

Ways to Use Living Well Through Lent 2025

This guide can be used in several ways:

- For personal reflection, with space provided to record your thoughts and insights.
- In groups gathering weekly—in homes, at a local coffee shop, or at church—to discuss the daily reflections.
- As a congregational resource during Lent.
- For half- or full-day Lenten retreats, where participants can use the daily readings, practices, and other resources as starting points for deeper reflection.

We've created a Facilitator Guide to provide support and guidance for leading discussions and retreats (free downloadable PDF at LivingCompass.org).



The season of Lent invites us to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, creating space for God's transformative work within us. As you embark on this journey, we encourage you to approach the devotional with an open heart and mind. However you use this guide, may it support you in practicing your faith in ways that are deeply renewing.

The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Lent 2025

Lent Year C	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Ash Wednesday Mar 05, 2025	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12	Psalm 51:1-17	2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
First Sunday in Lent March 09, 2025	Deuteronomy 26:1-11	Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16	Romans 10:8b-13	Luke 4:1-13
Second Sunday in Lent March 16, 2025	Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18	Psalm 27	Philippians 3:17-4:1	Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)
Third Sunday in Lent March 23, 2025	Isaiah 55:1-9	Psalm 63:1-8	1 Corinthians 10:1-13	Luke 13:1-9
Fourth Sunday in Lent March 30, 2025	Joshua 5:9-12	Psalm 32	2 Corinthians 5:16-21	Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32
Fifth Sunday in Lent April 6, 2025	Isaiah 43:16-21	Psalm 126	Philippians 3:4b-14	John 12:1-8
Liturgy of the Palms April 13, 2025		Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29		Luke 19:28-40

Holy Week Year C	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Monday of Holy Week April 14, 2025	Isaiah 42:1-9	Psalm 36:5-11	Hebrews 9:11-15	John 12:1-11
Tuesday of Holy Week April 15, 2025	Isaiah 49:1-7	Psalm 71:1-14	1 Corinthians 1:18-31	John 12:20-36
Wednesday of Holy Week April 16, 2025	Isaiah 50:4-9a	Psalm 70	Hebrews 12:1-3	John 13:21-32
Maundy Thursday April 17, 2025	Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14	Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Good Friday April 18, 2025	Isaiah 52:13-53:12	Psalm 22	Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9	John 18:1-19:42
Holy Saturday April 19, 2025	Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24	Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16	1 Peter 4:1-8	Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42
Easter Sunday April 20, 2025	Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24	1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43	John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Ash Wednesday

March 5, 2025

Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down

Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.
—From the Ash Wednesday liturgy

The children's song "Ring Around the Rosie" is memorable as much for its words as the actions that go with it. Holding hands and moving in a circle, we either all fall down or all jump up, as we sing:

Ring around the Rosie
Pocket full of posies
Ashes, ashes,
We all fall down!

Ash Wednesday is memorable in a similar way. The profound words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return," combined with the act of receiving the sign of the cross on our foreheads, means we are sure to carry this powerful message with us through the remainder of Lent.

Humility is at the heart of Ash Wednesday. To observe a holy Lent is to practice humility. It means softening our hearts and opening them to new learning and growth. It is to make changes (or repent) in order to live more fully into the life that God intends for us.

While humility is not one of the nine fruit of the Spirit spelled out in Galatians 5 that we will be focusing on in this devotional, it is foundational ground for the fruits of love, peace, joy, kindness, patience, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Life has a way of humbling us at times, of causing us to fall down. Ash Wednesday is an invitation to embrace our fragility and vulnerability. As people of faith, falling down is not something to fear, for we fall knowing that our faith and our God will help us rise up in new and unforeseen ways.

Ash Wednesday reminds us also of our mortality, that life is short. Many churches offer a wonderful benediction that speaks to this, based on words from Henri-Frédéric Amiel:

> *Life is short,*
> *And we do not have much time*
> *to gladden the hearts of those who*
> *make the journey with us.*
> *So … be swift to love,*
> *and make haste to be kind.*
> *And the blessing of God,*
> *who made us,*
> *who loves us,*
> *and who travels with us*
> *be with you now and forever.*

This benediction inspires us to be "swift to love and make haste to be kind." Love and kindness, it just so happens, are two fruits of the Spirit we will be focusing on cultivating through this devotional during Lent.

The ashes of humility and contemplating our mortality can become fertile soil for deepening our spiritual lives and enhancing the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

I pray that it will be so for all of us this Lent.

Making it Personal: How might practicing humility help you cultivate the fruits of the spirit this Lent? What areas of your life might benefit from "softening" and opening to new growth?

Thursday, March 6, 2025

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

—Galatians 5:22–23

The passage above from Galatians provides the foundation for our Lent devotional this year. Whether we stay consistent with the original passage and refer to the "fruit" of the Spirit or speak of the "fruits" of the Spirit, these nine spiritual qualities are the bedrock of living a Christian life.

Each week, we will delve into one of these fruits of the Spirit. Next week, our focus will be on faithfulness. In the following weeks, leading up to Holy Week, we will explore peace, joy, generosity, patience, and love. The remaining three fruits: gentleness, kindness, and self-control, will be interwoven throughout our devotional, ensuring a continuous focus on all nine fruits of the Spirit.

A core teaching of our Living Compass Spirituality and Wellness Initiative is "Whatever we pay attention to is what will grow." As we commit to observing Lent this year by paying attention to these nine fruits of the Spirit over the next six weeks, we will seek to grow each of these attributes in our lives, relationships, and the wider community.

Just as you would tend a garden, we invite you to "water" these fruits during Lent by setting aside time each day for reading, prayer, journaling, and sharing with others. Paying attention in these ways will surely help the Spirit grow these fruits in us.

Making it Personal: What do you think of the idea that "Whatever we pay attention to is what will grow"? How do you intend to pay attention to cultivating and growing the fruits of Spirit in you this Lent?

Friday, March 7, 2025

Preparing the Soil

The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life.

—Wendell Berry

Before a gardener or farmer plants seeds, they first prepare the soil. Jesus knew this as he told the Parable of the Sower to remind us that the quality of the soil of our lives determines whether seeds are able to take root and thrive.

People often choose to either give something up or take something on for Lent. Giving something up, like sugar, alcohol, busyness, gossiping, etc., is analogous to removing rocks or weeds from the soil of our spiritual lives. We all have habits that make it more difficult for spiritual fruit to take deeper root in our lives. Making a conscious choice to change these habits can be an important turning point in preparing our spiritual soil.

On the other hand, taking something on for Lent can be compared to adding good nutrients to our soil. Making a commitment to pray or meditate every day, reading Scripture regularly, or connecting more deeply with a faith community are positive ways we can enrich the ground of our spiritual lives.

While John the Baptist's words to "prepare the Way of the Lord" are most commonly heard during Advent, they serve as timely advice for us now this Lent as we prepare to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Making it Personal: Are you giving something up this Lent? Taking something new on? How else might you prepare for cultivating the fruit of the Spirit more intentionally in your life during the season of Lent and beyond?

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Walking The Pilgrim Way of Lent

Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone.
—Richard Rodgers, from the play *Carousel*

During my (Gary) 2019 pilgrimage across Spain, I encountered paths worn several feet below the natural grade of the surrounding landscape. These were sections of the Camino where the footsteps of countless pilgrims had, for more than a thousand years, gradually cut a way through the wilderness. I was literally walking in the footsteps of the faithful—adding my steps to the millions of footsteps that had preceded me, while doing my part to keep the path clear for those who will come after me.

We have begun the annual spiritual pilgrimage that the Church calls Lent. We began the journey with ashes, and in a few weeks we will stand before an empty tomb. Along the way, through the pages of this devotional, we will be reflecting together on how this annual journey assists us in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in our daily lives. This is both a familiar journey and one that is new every time we undertake it.

The truth is, at least from a Christian perspective, the spiritual journey is never a completely solitary one. We benefit from the wisdom of those who have gone before us. We are supported by those who are along the way with us. As the writer of Hebrews so beautifully states, we are "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses." For me, this awareness is a great comfort during times of joy and sorrow; in times of celebration and of loss. We may be "by ourselves," but we never walk alone!

Making it Personal: How will you walk through Lent this year, and with whom? Who are the people—past and present—that make up your "great cloud of witnesses" during this Lenten journey?

The First Sunday in Lent

March 9, 2025

The Soil of Faithfulness

Brian Cole

Do not begin by trying to grow asparagus. Care and tend for the soil where asparagus will flourish. The good asparagus will come.

Susan, my wife, is a gardener. For the first several years of our marriage, we lived on a large family property next door to her sister. Together, Susan and her sister tended a vegetable garden.

When we lived in such proximity to the garden, one my sister-in-law had cultivated for decades, I learned the significance of feeding the soil. If the soil is healthy, then the good growth is a kind of afterthought. The objective is not asparagus. Do not begin by trying to grow asparagus. Care and tend for the soil where asparagus will flourish. The good asparagus will come.

This is where time and preparation matter. You do not grow healthy fruits and vegetables overnight. Healthy food, good fruit, comes from a slow process. For a time, it will appear that nothing is happening. But in that nothing time, many things, unseen, are happening.

In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. For forty days, in the wilderness, the devil tempts him. Forty days seems like a long time until you place it against the rest of Jesus' life before the Spirit led him into the wilderness.

For all the time prior to the forty days in the wilderness, only good soil was growing in Jesus. The Scriptures were also good food. Jesus was fully one with the Spirit of God. Jesus was not preparing for the wilderness; Jesus was fully with God, the good and whole soil growing.

When the testing in the wilderness arrived, Jesus responded from the depth of a cultivated life. The testing gave witness to the complete depth of God's Story and God's Word fully in Jesus.

In cultivating a life of faithfulness, a life where good fruit grows in us, we are not called to be satisfied with appearances. I do not want simply to appear to be joyful, to have discovered a way to fake patience. I want those to be fruits growing from a deep soil in me.

Consider that your life is a garden, a place set apart for growth. The objective is not asparagus, but patience and joy and gentleness and self-control. If those fruits are to be real, they will take time.

You grow good fruit by cultivating the soil of your life. By trusting that you are worth the effort—to rise early to pray, to embrace your human limits, to seek a quiet place where nothing appears to be happening.

In the nothing season, when the fruit of the Spirit is quietly growing in you, God is preparing you to be a person of depth, grounded in the Real.

Monday, March 10, 2025

Cultivating Faithfulness

In cultivating a life of faithfulness, a life where good fruit grows in us, we are not called to be satisfied with appearances. I do not want simply to appear to be joyful, to have discovered a way to fake patience. I want those to be fruits growing from a deep soil in me.

—Brian Cole

For the first full week of Lent, we will focus on the fruit of faithfulness. We start with this fruit because faithfulness provides the rich soil from which all other fruits of the Spirit grow.

An online search for synonyms for the word *faithful* yields the following: *trustworthy, consistent, persevering, honest, resolute, steadfast, true, sincere, dependable,* and *conscientious*. Who doesn't aspire to live a life described in this way?

In yesterday's reflection, Brian Cole reminded us that faithfulness is not something that can be done for appearance. It cannot be faked. Faithfulness, like a well-tended garden, requires a depth of commitment and character over time.

And faithfulness does not protect us from adversity but prepares us for it, as we see in the story of Jesus facing temptation in the wilderness. Just as Jesus' preparation wasn't for the wilderness specifically, but came from being "fully with God," our faithfulness grows from that same deep connection.

At many churches in the service for adult baptism, the person being baptized promises to live a life of faith with the words, "I will, with God's help." As we commit to a life of faithfulness this Lent and beyond, may we also affirm that with God's help, this is our shared journey.

Making it Personal: What words would you use to describe faithfulness? Who has modeled faithfulness for you? How did they do that? What help do you need from others and from God now to cultivate greater faithfulness?

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Being Faithful in Small Ways

Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.
—Luke 16:10

To be faithful is to be consistent in small and big ways over time. To call a friend faithful means that the friend has been there for us through many ups and downs, through some of the most significant moments of our lives, as well as many of the mundane ones.

Much of the work of faithfulness happens without anyone noticing. There is a saying that you can best judge a person's character by knowing how they act when no one is around, when there is absolutely nothing to be gained by their actions. As Brian Cole wrote, faithfulness is not about appearances but about being deeply grounded in the Real.

Jesus taught that whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much. This is good news because it means we don't have to focus on big heroic acts of faithfulness, but instead can focus on the "little" things, such as how we speak to everyone we meet, the choices we make to nurture our spiritual lives, and the small act of compassion we might offer to someone in need today. Over time, such small acts of faithfulness create not just a series of kind acts, but a soil of faithfulness from which all the fruits of the Spirit can continue to thrive.

Making it Personal: Consider a small act of faithfulness that someone, maybe even a stranger, has done for you recently. With this in mind, is there a small act of faithfulness that you wish to do for someone today? What do you think of the idea that "whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much"?

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Walking in Faith

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.
—Matthew 22:37

Each Wednesday during Lent, we will explore a contemplative spiritual practice to help integrate and deepen our journey. These practices, which can also be found in the back of this devotional on pp. 80–84, offer ways to embody and express the fruit of the Spirit we're cultivating each week.

The practice of walking meditation has deep roots in many spiritual traditions. Just as a path forms gradually with each footstep, faithfulness grows through consistent practice and steady presence.

Choose a place where you can walk slowly and intentionally for a brief time, perhaps a garden path, a quiet street, or even a room in your home. If walking isn't accessible for you, find a comfortable place to sit and focus on the inner walk of faith. Before you begin, select a question about faithfulness to hold gently in your heart, such as "How am I being called to deepen my faithfulness?" or "Where do I see God's faithfulness in my life?"

As you walk (or sit), notice how your body moves, how your breath flows, how your senses engage with your surroundings. Pay attention to what emerges—thoughts, feelings, memories, or plans. There's no wrong way to practice—the key is to remain present to your experience.

This practice can open us to wisdom about faithfulness in all dimensions of our lives. Like the small acts of faithfulness we reflected on yesterday, each step becomes a tiny act of devotion.

Making it Personal: When might you set aside time for this walking practice? What question about faithfulness would you like to hold as you walk, or sit? How might a regular contemplative practice help cultivate the soil of faithfulness in your life?

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Faithfulness and Listening

God speaks in the silence of the heart.
Listening is the beginning of prayer.
—Mother Teresa

If we pause to think of someone who has been a faithful friend, teacher, pastor, colleague, or family member, it is very likely that one of their defining attributes is being a good listener.

Mother Teresa tells us that listening is the beginning of prayer. I believe that listening is also the beginning of faithfulness. Being faithful to God and others is grounded in deep listening, a practice that requires us to set aside our desires and egos to focus fully on God or another person.

When we practice deep listening, our responses will arise from what the other truly needs, rather than from any quick assumptions or judgments *we* might make about what *we* think they need.

If the idea of practicing faithfulness seems overwhelming, start with the simple act of becoming a better listener. Practice being still and listening to God with new ears and an open heart. Practice being present to others, especially with those you have found challenging to listen to in the past. This journey of listening and faithfulness is not just about how deeply we can be present to God and to one another, but can also be a path to personal growth and enlightenment.

Making It Personal: What helps you to be still and to be a good listener? How might you deepen your ability to listen to God? Is there someone in your life with whom you want to practice being a better listener right now?

Friday, March 14, 2025

Woven Together

For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many,
are one body, so it is with Christ.
—1 Corinthians 12:12

We often discover life's deepest truths in ordinary circumstances. Those times when we realize that everything is connected. A morning meditation that leaves us more patient with our family. A kind word from a friend that opens our hearts to God. A time of peaceful silence that reveals connections we hadn't noticed before.

Faithfulness works this way too. When we practice being faithful in one area of our lives, other areas begin to flourish. The time we spend in prayer might help us listen more attentively to others. Being reliable in our commitments can build trust in our relationships. Taking care of our physical health often creates space for spiritual growth.

The four dimensions we focus on in Living Compass—heart, soul, strength, and mind—remind us that we are whole beings. We don't need to compartmentalize our faith or try to perfect one area before moving to another. Instead, we can trust that any step toward faithfulness ripples outward, touching all aspects of our lives.

This interconnection is both a comfort and an invitation. A comfort because we don't have to do everything at once, and an invitation because every small act of faithfulness can contribute to our overall sense of wellness and wholeness.

Making it Personal: Where have you noticed connections between different areas of your life? How has being faithful in one area spontaneously enriched another? What small act of faithfulness could you practice today?

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Beginning Again

Prayer is a small fire lit to keep cold hands warm. Prayer is a practice that flourishes both with faith and doubt. Prayer is asking, and prayer is sitting. Prayer is the breath. Prayer is not an answer, always, because not all questions can be answered.

—Pádraig Ó Tuama

Earlier this week we were reminded that "much of the work of faithfulness happens without anyone noticing." This idea of keeping at it, even when no one notices, isn't a popular one in an "influencer culture" where everything is packaged and posted online as a way of advertising one's various successes and accomplishments.

The gift of Lent is also the challenge of Lent. Lent unfolds at its own pace. We cannot rush it. We have to live it one day at a time. As we learned last Sunday from Brian Cole, faithfulness grows when we tend to the soil of our lives.

One place where we can begin to understand faithfulness is in our own practice of prayer, and this is where the quote from Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama speaks to this gentle understanding. We don't need to be flashy or perfect in our prayers. We don't have to get "results." Sometimes faithfulness is as simple as breathing and sitting—being present to ourselves, to others, and to God. As we discovered yesterday, these simple practices connect in surprising ways, strengthening every area of our life of faith.

We are now over a week into our Lenten pilgrimage. It doesn't matter if you've already slipped a little on those Lenten vows you made back on Ash Wednesday. You can begin again today, and in that beginning, you can restart cultivating faithfulness in your life. In fact, beginning again is what faithfulness is all about!

Making it Personal: How do you want to keep the "small fire of prayer" burning in your heart? What support do you need from your spiritual community? What practices help you begin again when you've drifted from your intentions?

The Second Sunday in Lent

March 16, 2025

The Work of Peace

Abigail W. Moon

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
—Jill Jackson

The song, *Let There be Peace on Earth,* was first sung at a youth retreat in 1955. Jill Jackson, the composer, deeply desired not only peace in the global community but also within herself. Composing this simple song after her own mental health struggles, the lyrics speak to finding peace within and alongside those beside us.

We live in a world of unrest, violence, and pain, and—if we are being honest—that world has existed since the garden of Eden. Choices that harm ourselves and others distract us from living in harmony with our greater community.

As a person who dislikes conflict, I recently found myself in a heated conversation with a colleague. We both disagreed and there was no common ground to be found. Pain and fracture seemed to be the only outcome of our discussion. I left hurt, sad, and wounded because of the anger and pain of our discussion on both sides. When I got home, I found the bag of daffodil bulbs that had yet to be planted in my yard, so I picked up my gardening gloves and got to work.

Planting in the midst of all the emotions gave me something concrete that I could do as I listened to both my heart and brain wrestling over how to stay in relationship while disagreeing with my colleague. Digging in the dirt gave me a space to find a place for this pain and anger to be transformed with time into something that could bring about beauty and new life. I wasn't burying my emotions, rather holding them and letting them go so that the experience could bear new fruit.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." He did not say peace-making would be easy work. Peace work begins within tension and can cause more tension as peace is created. In order to be a part of peace, we have to lean toward each other and the common goal of working together to restore community.

The seasons of creation often remind me of the constant renewal and beginning again. Often, I find myself humming simple songs in the midst of stressful times, refocusing my attention to the words and tune, and finding a different sense of peace about the situation and what can be done.

What practices have you adopted that recenter and refocus you to be a peacemaker within yourself, and within your community?

Monday, March 17, 2025

Cultivating Peace

We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God.

—Thomas Merton

Cultivating peace is a two-step process for people of faith. The above quote from Thomas Merton reminds us that peace begins with cultivating peace within ourselves, but it doesn't stop there. The peace that we cultivate in ourselves, with God's help, is something we are called to bring into the world.

Yesterday's reflection by Abi Moon included a poignant story of experiencing conflict with a colleague. In her response, we see how we can choose to reshape the conflict within ourselves. When we do this we can re-engage from a place of peace and centeredness rather than from a place of needing to get even or win an argument.

As with all the fruits of the Spirit, peace is a choice, a decision that starts from deep within the soil of our hearts and then radiates out. We can only offer peace to the world after we have first cultivated it in ourselves. When we seek God's help in removing the weeds of self-righteousness and pride within us, we are on the path to cultivating peace in all aspects of our lives.

Making It Personal: Consider a particular relationship or situation where you desire a greater sense of peace. Take a moment to bring that situation to mind and then take some time to pray for guidance on how you can ask for God's help in removing any barriers to peace you may be experiencing.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Peace and Self-Control

Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
—Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist and a Holocaust survivor. Despite the horrors of his experience, he found a way to cultivate peace within himself and share it with others. His book *Man's Search for Meaning* was one of the bestselling books of the 20th century.

We live in a world full of reactivity, one where there is little space for practicing listening, understanding, and nurturing peace. If we are not careful, this reactivity surrounding us has the potential to infect us and our relationships.

The Frankl quote above reminds us of the difference between reacting and responding. Putting space between something that stimulates or triggers us gives us the capacity to respond rather than react. This is a perfect example of self-control, one of the other fruits of the Spirit.

Try taking a breath, or ten, the next time you want to react immediately to something or someone that irritates or upsets you. Take time to pray, to journal, and reflect. Creating the space you need to form a response provides a greater chance of creating peace rather than escalating conflict.

Making It Personal: How does the quote from Viktor Frankl speak to you? What helps you to honor the space to respond rather than merely reacting? Do you see a connection between Frankl's quote and cultivating peace that could be helpful to you?

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

A Practice of Peace

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds
are steadfast, because they trust in you.
—Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

Peace often feels elusive in our busy, overconnected world. Today we'll explore a simple practice called Receive & Release. This prayer practice can help us cultivate peace through the natural rhythm of our breath.

Find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down, where you can be both alert and relaxed. Take a few slow breaths to settle yourself. Then, as you breathe in, silently say "receive peace," and as you breathe out, say "release tension." Let your breath find its natural rhythm.

You might notice how your mind wanders to memories, worries, or plans. This is a very common experience. Just as waves constantly move on the ocean's surface while deeper waters remain calm, our thoughts may continue while we cultivate peace in our depths. Each time you notice your mind has wandered, gently return to the rhythm of receiving peace and releasing tension.

After a few minutes, you might choose a specific situation in your life where you desire more peace. As you breathe in, receive God's peace for this situation As you breathe out, release whatever stands in the way of that peace—perhaps worry, judgement, or the need to control.

This simple practice can open us to peace in all dimensions of our lives. Like the space between stimulus and response we explored yesterday, each breath creates a small sanctuary where we can choose peace over reaction. End your practice by briefly resting in silence, noticing what has shifted within you.

Making it Personal: When might you set aside time for this breathing practice? Where do you already experience a sense of peace in your day? What situation in your life needs this gentle rhythm of receiving peace and releasing tension? How might regular practice help you cultivate peace in your daily life?

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Peace work begins within tension and can cause more tension as peace is created. In order to be a part of peace, we have to lean toward each other and the common goal of working together to restore community.

—Abi Moon, from Sunday's reflection

If we find ourselves avoiding a difficult conversation we know we need to have with someone, then we understand what Abi Moon's words mean. What likely keeps us from having a difficult conversation is often the fear that we might make things worse or at least more uncomfortable by starting the conversation. This may be true—initial efforts at peacemaking may cause more tension before a deeper peace is possible.

Jesus never avoided hard conversations. Instead he spoke the truth with love, a model for all of us regarding peacemaking. Speaking in love, whether expressing hurt feelings or offering apology, is essential. Prefacing a challenging conversation by expressing our true desire to create peace and healing can set a context of love that will likely make the conversation flow more easily.

Many Christians express their desire to "be a blessing" to others. As Jesus exemplified, one concrete way we can indeed be a blessing to others is by committing to the essential yet challenging work of being peacemakers.

Making it Personal: Where is God inviting you to be a peacemaker right now? Is there a meaningful conversation you want to have with someone, maybe one you have been avoiding? If so, how can you preface and ground that conversation in love?

Friday, March 21, 2025

Rooted and Grounded

Peace is the pervasive sense of contentment that comes from being rooted in God while being fully aware of one's own nothingness. It is a state that endures beyond the ups and downs of life, beyond the emotions of joy and sorrow. At the deepest level one knows that all is well, that everything is just right despite all appearances to the contrary.

—Thomas Keating

Throughout this week, we've explored how peace begins within, how it grows in the space between stimulus and response, and how peacemaking requires courage. Today we're invited by Thomas Keating to consider an even deeper dimension of peace: one that remains steady regardless of external circumstances.

This kind of peace doesn't deny life's challenges but transcends them. It's the peace that allows a hospice nurse to remain present and compassionate in the face of suffering. It's the calm that enables a mediator to hold space for opposing viewpoints. It's the steadiness that helps a parent stay grounded while supporting a struggling child.

When we are rooted in God's peace, we discover a profound truth: peace isn't just the absence of conflict, but the presence of something greater. A disagreement becomes an opportunity for understanding. A challenging situation becomes an invitation to practice presence.

This peace flows through all areas of our lives, turning anxiety into trust, conflict into growth, and fear into love. Like the breath practice we explored on Wednesday, it teaches us to receive God's peace and release what stands in its way. We learn that being "rooted in God" means finding our center in something deeper than the constantly shifting circumstances of our lives.

Making it Personal: Where do you most need to experience this enduring peace right now? How might viewing peace as something that transcends circumstances change your approach to difficult situations? What helps you stay grounded in God's peace when external conditions are challenging?

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Practicing Peace

Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. Every breath we take, every step we take, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment.
—Thích Nhất Hạnh

One of the challenges for many of us in our everyday lives is our false assumption that our spirituality is something wholly separate from everything else. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is, the only way we have of experiencing "the spiritual" is in the here and now where there are tasks to do, relationships to tend, and life to live. To be sure, there will be days when everything just clicks along perfectly. There will also be plenty of days where life's "weather" dumps all sorts of precipitation on us. And sadly, all of us will have days of difficulty, pain, and loss.

As it happens, practicing peaceableness can only take place amidst the challenges, distractions, joys and pains of daily life. Further, we will never learn to be peacemakers without rubbing elbows with all of "those people" who rub us the wrong way. In the prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, there is a powerful line: "Grant that we may not so much seek … to be understood as to understand." Learning to understand is the beginning of walking in the path of peace.

Making it Personal: How do you practice peace? Where in your life do you need deeper understanding of a person or situation, and how would a deeper understanding help you find peace or be more peaceable?

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 23, 2025

The Patient Gardener

Randy Callender

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."

—Luke 13:6–9

Have you ever felt stuck, like you're putting in all the effort but not seeing any results? This feeling can be especially disheartening and scary when it comes to finding joy in our lives. This dilemma reminds me of Jesus' parable about a barren fig tree in Luke 13:1–9. In the story, a tree hasn't produced fruit for three years and the owner is ready to cut it down. But before he does, the gardener asks for more time, promising to nurture it with extra care in hopes that the tree will eventually bear fruit. This story taught me a valuable lesson: joy often needs to be cultivated with care and patience. Just like the gardener in Luke, we need to give ourselves time and put in the effort to nurture joy. It might not come instantly, but with patience and care, it can grow.

Twelve years ago, I learned this lesson personally when I moved to a new city for a job opportunity. Initially, I was excited about the change, but soon I felt isolated and disconnected. My daily routine became monotonous, and joy seemed as elusive as fruit on a barren tree. One day, feeling particularly low, I decided to meet someone from the local church for coffee. That conversation became a turning point, leading to new friendships and opportunities to serve in the community. Through these relationships, I discovered how joy can grow in astonishing ways. It took time, but nurturing those connections brought the fulfillment I had been missing.

Cultivating joy, I've learned, is a gradual process built through small, meaningful actions. Whether it's sharing a meal, learning a new skill from someone else, volunteering, or simply listening to another's story, these moments are like the fertilizer and water that nourish our inner garden. When we focus on what's working—the small signs of growth, the serendipitous connections, the simple pleasures—we begin to recognize joy's presence, even in ordinary moments.

Sometimes we complicate joy by thinking it requires grand gestures or perfect circumstances. But like the patient gardener, we only need to tend the soil of our daily lives with care and attention. Joy grows in the small acts of giving and receiving, in the connections we make, in the simple act of being fully present, to ourselves and others. By focusing on the blessings and provision of God, we can cultivate a heart of gratitude and joy.

This perspective not only helps us find deep and lasting happiness, it also teaches us to appreciate the small steps we take toward a more joyful life.

Monday, March 24, 2025

Cultivating Joy

Cultivating joy is a gradual process, built through small, meaningful actions.
—Randy Callender

Yesterday's reflection helps us begin our focus on this week's theme: cultivating the fruit of joy in our lives.

Randy shared a story about feeling a lack of joy after moving to a new city. He realized that, like a gardener, if he wanted to see some new growth and some new fruit, he would have to cultivate it. So he began reaching out to others and slowly began to do things that would eventually create the joy he was seeking. We tend to think of the joy of big moments and forget that most often it can be found in the small day-to-day habits and choices we create.

I remember watching the Olympics last summer and hearing Simone Biles being interviewed. She said she had stepped away from gymnastics a few years prior because she was no longer enjoying it, and her mental health was suffering. Only when she rediscovered the joy of her workouts could she begin to train again. She said she had to stop focusing on outcomes and learn to find joy in the day-to-day training process.

Big occasions and important outcomes are nice. But life is lived mostly in the quiet times of small choices. As we focus on cultivating joy this week, these small choices and actions are a good place to direct our attention.

Making It Personal: What small moments or choices are bringing you joy right now? If you are seeking more joy, what is one small, meaningful action you could take this week to help cultivate it?

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Choosing Joy

Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.
—Henri Nouwen

A few years ago our now eight-year-old grandson was visiting and he found an unused paint stick (the kind you use to stir a new can of paint) in a drawer. He was thrilled by it, and together we made up a game that entertained us both for quite some time. The challenge was to imagine how many different things the stick could be, and then act out each one.

Predictably, he first saw the stick as a sword or light saber, and pretended to be a Jedi knight. Soon we were transforming that simple wooden paint stick into a diving board, a teeter totter, pencil, baseball bat, javelin, rocket, stick person, airplane wing, slide, and flag pole. We lost track of time as we reveled in our silliness.

Joy is like that. Sometimes we have to improvise and find it in the most surprising places. So as we focus this week on cultivating joy in our lives, let's not wait for joy to come to us. Instead, let's look for moments to notice it or create it. You may not have a paint stick handy, but there are no doubt other simple ways you can cultivate joy.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a simple, unexpected experience of joy that you either created or experienced recently? Is there something simple you can do or see this week for yourself or with another that will cultivate joy?

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Discovering Joy's Presence

Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.

—1 Peter 1:8

In our search for joy, we sometimes overlook its subtle presence in our daily lives. The Examen of Joy is a spiritual practice that can help us notice and celebrate these experiences, training our hearts to attune to joy's profound gifts.

Find a comfortable, quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Begin by taking a few settling breaths and becoming aware of God's loving presence. Then, gently review your day, asking yourself: When did I feel most alive with joy? It might have been during an everyday occurrence—a child's laugh, a task completed, a kind exchange, a glimpse of beauty.

Next, consider: When did joy feel distant or difficult? Rather than judging, simply hold whatever comes up with compassion. Notice what each might teach you about what nurtures or hinders joy in your life. Sometimes the absence of joy awakens us to its soft stirring in ways we might otherwise miss.

Now look more closely at one joyful experience. What made it joyful? Was it connection with another person? A sense of accomplishment? The beauty of nature? A quiet time of prayer? Notice how it lives in your body, mind, and spirit. Pay attention to the particular tone of this joy—each instance has its own unique qualities.

Close by giving thanks for these insights about joy, while releasing any expectations or judgements into God's care. Like the gradual process we explored on Monday, this practice helps us recognize and receive joy in the many ways it can show up in our daily lives.

Making it Personal: When could you take time and pause for this practice of looking back on your day for signs of joy? What recent encounter with joy might you want to explore more deeply? How might paying regular attention to joy's presence change how you move through your days?

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Joy in My Heart

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart.
—George William Cooke, *I've Got the Joy*

At the risk of having this song now stuck in your head for the next few hours, we want to remind you of some of the lyrics, which are very popular with children of all ages:

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart, (Where?)
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

I've got the peace that passeth understanding,
Down in my heart, (Where?)
Down in my heart, …

I've got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus,
Down in my heart, (Where?)
Down in my heart, …

It's hard to sing this song without feeling joyful, and maybe that's the point.

There are a few other nuggets of wisdom about joy in this song. First, joy is not something found "out there" but is found deep inside. Where? Deep in our hearts! The second verse reminds us that joy and peace are deeply connected. And the third verse reminds us that as people of faith, the source of our joy is God's love is manifested in Jesus.

May this song help us cultivate some joy in our hearts today, and may it connect us more deeply with God's peace and love.

Making It Personal: Music is often a source and expression of joy. Is there a song that brings you joy? What do you think of the idea that joy is not so much found "out there" but within us and in our connection with God's peace and love?

Friday, March 28, 2025

The Joy That Sets Us Free

Joy is an abiding sense of well-being based on the experience of a conscious relationship with God. It is the sign of liberation from the false self and the growing awareness of the true self. Flowing from joy comes the freedom to accept the present moment and its content without trying to change it.

—Thomas Keating

Throughout this week, we've explored joy in many forms—as fruit needing nurture, as daily choice, as contemplative practice, as a song in our hearts. Today, with Keating's help, we'll explore how joy flows from our deepening relationship with God and leads to a profound kind of freedom.

This understanding of joy is very different from what our culture often presents. Rather than depending on perfect circumstances or constant happiness, true joy emerges from knowing who we really are in God's eyes. It's the kind of joy that allows us to accept the present moment without trying to change it—a radical notion in our achievement-obsessed world.

We glimpse this liberating joy in common examples: a recovering addict celebrating sobriety one day at a time. A parent delighting in their child's unique personality rather than trying to shape them into someone else. A new retiree discovering new purpose beyond their former career identity. These aren't necessarily easy situations, but they illustrate the freedom that comes when we let go of our false selves and embrace who God created us to be.

Joy flows constantly through our lives, inviting us to let go of what isn't truly us and embrace the freedom of being fully ourselves in God's infinitely loving eyes.

Making it Personal: Where do you notice this liberating joy in your life? How might viewing joy as flowing from your relationship with God, rather than from external circumstances, change your experience? When have you felt the freedom of accepting a moment exactly as it is?

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Gratitude and Joy

The root of joy is gratefulness … It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful.
—David Steindl-Rast, Benedictine monk

Earlier this year, while I (Gary) was visiting my then 88-year-old mom, we were talking about her two-mile-per day walking regime. She was telling me about all the people she's met through the years as a result of being out and about—usually first thing in the morning. Because this is a neighborhood without sidewalks (a matter of concern for my sister and me, but not for her), mom often comments on how people look out for her and are considerate in the way they drive past.

Over the almost thirty years she's been living there, she's acquired the nickname "The Walking Lady." She's made some friends, helped some people along the way, and generally kept up with others in the neighborhood who live alone like she does.

Mom told me that during her walks she offers prayers for everyone she knows who are sick and alone, recites some of her favorite Bible verses, and sings hymns that have given her comfort through the years. She told me that part of what brings her joy on these daily walks is simply being grateful that at her age she is still able to be up and about at all!

"There's always something to be grateful for," she said. "All it takes is a willingness to look in the right places."

In his reflection last Sunday, Randy Callender wrote, "Sometimes we complicate joy by thinking it requires grand gestures or perfect circumstances." Maybe the reason we complicate joy is because we are looking in the wrong places to find it. Maybe finding joy is as simple as giving thanks for the wonder of life and the mystery of love. Starting now.

Making it Personal: Like "The Walking Lady," how might you combine gratitude with your daily routines? Where might you find joy if you looked "in the right places" today? What simple wonder might you notice and appreciate right now?

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 30, 2025

An Unexpected Gift

Shannon Duckworth

Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.
—Luke 6:38

I could not pedal another inch. Or, at least that's what I told myself as I stood on the side of the road next to my bike, looking at the impossibly steep hill that stood between me and the finish of that day's ride. Although only a mile long, it might as well have been the side of a mountain. As the minutes passed, I felt my already sagging spirit deflate.

I was standing on the side of the road next to Scott Stoner, Executive Director of Living Compass. We, along with 20 or so fellow cyclists, spent a week that summer in the mountains of Vermont. The days were long but filled with beauty, laughter, and prayer. But, that day, I believe we had the same thought: Not another inch.

When all hope seemed lost, a woman pulled up next to us in a small pickup truck. An idea came to mind! I jumped off my bike and knocked on her car window. "Do you mind if we hop in the back of your truck? We just need a ride to the top of that hill." She looked a little bemused but quickly said, "Sure! Hop in."

There has never been a ride so sweet. I can still remember the utter joy I felt in the light of her generosity.

Generosity embodies a virtue that transcends more than material giving. In the grand scheme of things, it was only a mile-long truck ride. But it meant *everything.* I believe that generosity calls us to a spirit of abundance, a mindset of selflessness, and a willingness to share one's resources, time, and talents with others. At its core, generosity is an expression of love and compassion, enriching both the giver and the receiver in immeasurable ways.

As we strive to live generous lives, we may always look to find ways to offer something as simple as listening attentively or giving words of encouragement. Or we might be called to just show up. For we know that when two or three are gathered, God will be there. Sometimes we are the givers and sometimes we are the ones on the receiving end of these gifts, but in whatever role, we are called to open our hearts with grace and humility.

I often wonder if that kind woman ever thinks about the two exhausted cyclists she ferried to the top of that hill. I wonder if she knows how much her generosity meant to us. I pray that she does. And I can only hope that when faced with an equally unexpected opportunity to extend generosity, I too will say, "Sure! Hop in!"

Monday, March 31, 2025

Cultivating Generosity

At its core, generosity is an expression of love and compassion, enriching both the giver and the receiver in immeasurable ways.
—Shannon Duckworth

Cultivating generosity is our focus for this week, and we are grateful for Shannon Duckworth's reflection yesterday to start our thinking on this vital fruit of the Spirit.

The root word for generosity is *gene*, meaning "give birth." Like birth itself, generosity creates new possibilities. A financial gift can spark fresh beginnings. A word of encouragement can uplift a person's spirit. A simple deed can be the catalyst for reviving hope or creating unexpected connections. Shannon's story about a stranger giving a ride up a steep hill illustrates how even small acts of kindness can open into moments of grace.

The beauty of cultivating generosity lies in how it blesses both the one who gives and the one who receives. As we share what we have—whether material goods, time, or presence—our own spiritual life deepens and grows. This mutual enrichment reveals something of how God's love moves among us, flowing through every act of giving.

Making it Personal: What is your response to the quote from Shannon Duckworth? When have you benefitted from someone else's act of generosity? Can you think of a time that you were enriched when you practiced generosity?

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Ground Generosity in God's Generosity

For all things come from you,
and of your own have we given you.
—1 Chronicles 29:14

This verse is familiar to many Christians because it is often repeated when the offering is collected during Sunday worship. The words remind us that what is being offered is already God's and that we are simply stewards of the gifts that God has already given us.

This understanding of generosity helps us recognize that when we share with others, we are participating in God's own generous nature. All that exists—our resources, abilities, and very lives—flows from God's generous love.

This faith-based perspective stands in contrast to the attitude that claims, "All of this is mine and I don't have to share it if I don't want to." The myth of the self-made individual is strong in our culture and while we certainly want to celebrate and honor hard work, as people of faith, we must always remember that all of life is a gift from God.

If all is a gift from God, and everyone we meet is created in the image of God, then we can't help but want to practice generosity. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because God first loved us." And so, we too practice generosity because God first practiced generosity with us.

When we embrace this understanding, it transforms not only how we give but how we receive. Every gift becomes an opportunity to participate in the endless flow of God's generosity. Every act of sharing becomes a way of saying "thank you" for all we have been given.

Making it Personal: Do you fully believe what is expressed in the verse above from 1 Chronicles? How does your belief impact your being generous? When has receiving a gift helped you understand God's generosity more deeply?

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

A Practice of Openness

It is in giving that we receive.
—St. Francis of Assisi

The practice of Centering Prayer invites us into a profound paradox: by giving our complete attention to God, we receive more than we could imagine. Like opening our hands to release what we hold too tightly, this practice can help us cultivate a generous spirit.

To begin, find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take a few slow breaths. From this still place, choose a sacred word that represents your intention to be generous—perhaps "open," "give," "share," or "release." As you continue to breathe, silently introduce your sacred word as a symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

When you notice your mind straying with thoughts, feelings, or sensations—whether pleasant or challenging—simply return to your sacred word. This gentle returning is itself an act of generosity; you are giving your full attention to God's presence.

Many find this practice challenging at first. Our minds naturally want to plan, solve, or worry. Yet each time we notice our wandering and gently return to our breath and sacred word, we practice letting go of our need to control. We learn to trust that in releasing our grip on our thoughts and concerns, we open ourselves to receive what God wants to offer us in this moment.

End by slowing opening your eyes and then see if you can carry this spirit of openness into your day. You might find that this practice naturally flows into greater generosity with others.

Making it Personal: When might you set aside time for this practice of openness? What sacred word draws you? How might regular centering prayer help you cultivate a more generous approach to life? What challenges to being present have you noticed in your own practice?

Thursday, April 3, 2025

An Abundance Mindset

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
—John 10:10

There is a way of thinking referred to as a "scarcity mindset" that leads one to think and act as if there is not enough to go around, so each person has to be sure to get what is theirs and hold on to it tightly. As we explored in Tuesday's reflection, if our thinking is more of a me-and-mine-first scarcity attitude, then it's likely that we will be less generous with others.

An "abundance mindset" is, by contrast, one where in God's economy there is always enough for all. There is always enough love, forgiveness, joy, peace, and patience to go around when we have a faith-based mindset of abundance. This is the mindset Jesus refers to when he said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Scripture often refers to Jesus as the Light of the world. Using the metaphor of light, as in the light of a candle, no candle flame is ever diminished when sharing its light with another candle. We are each called, in the same way, to share the light of God's generosity in a way that gives witness to the abundance mindset of God's extravagant love and generosity.

Making it Personal: Do you ever recognize a scarcity mindset in yourself? If so, what might help you transform that into an abundance mindset? What is your response to the metaphor of a candle sharing its light with others? How might you practice generosity this week?

Friday, April 4, 2025

Gifts Flowing Both Ways

Generosity is not in giving me that which I need more than you do, but it is in giving me that which you need more than I do.
—Kahlil Gibran

Throughout this week, we've explored generosity as transformation, as stewardship, as spiritual practice, and as holy gift. Today we discover another truth: authentic generosity often surprises us by flowing in unexpected directions.

Just as yesterday's candle flame spreads light without diminishing its own brightness, true generosity creates a circle of giving and receiving that enriches everyone involved. The driver in Sunday's reflection offered a simple ride in her truck, but in doing so, she received the joy of helping others and became part of a story that continues to inspire.

Sometimes we hesitate to receive others' generosity, thinking we should be self-sufficient. Yet receiving graciously is itself a generous act—we give others the gift of giving. When we open ourselves to both giving and receiving, we participate in the sacred dance of God's love flowing through all of life.

We see this divine reciprocity in many forms: a friend accepts a meal during illness with gratitude, allowing the preparer to express love and care through food. A mentor receives a heartfelt "thank you" from a former student, completing the circle of what was given years before. In many churches, those who serve in its many ministries often speak of receiving more joy than they give.

This flow of generosity points toward a deep truth: we are all connected in a web of giving and receiving. Each act of generosity, however small, strengthens these connections and makes visible God's grace moving among us.

Making it Personal: When has receiving generously blessed both you and the giver? What might change if you viewed generosity as a flow rather than a transaction? How might you participate in this sacred dance of giving and receiving today?

Saturday, April 5, 2025

The Generosity of God

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, [they are] a new creation.
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
—2 Corinthians 5:17

One of the reasons many of us struggle with cultivating generosity is that we unknowingly believe we have to constantly earn God's love. We behave as if God will somehow withhold that love if we aren't constantly making ourselves worthy of receiving it. The fact is, if we believe God is stingy with God's love, then how will we ever learn to loosen our grip enough to share out of our abundance with other people?

The verse from 2 Corinthians above was one of the first Bible verses I (Gary) committed to memory as a child. Through the years, when I have doubted my own worthiness, it has been a comfort to me, reminding me that God is always, always, always making all things new—including me. Talk about holy generosity!

One of my favorite hymns begins with the line, "There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea." The hymn goes on to talk about how God is constantly giving of God's own Self to renew and redeem all of creation. For me, the verse that summarizes everything I need to know about God's generosity is this:

> *For the love of God is broader than the measure of the mind;*
> *And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.*
> *If our love were but more faithful, we should take him at his word;*
> *And our life would be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.*

One of the ways we "train ourselves to be generous" is by taking the time to remember that we are awash—every moment of every day—in the ocean of Divine Love that is making all things new … including us.

Making it Personal: What are the places in your life where you've experienced God generously making "all things new"?

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

April 6, 2025

Patience's Sweet Invitation

Molly Bosscher

Time is God's way of keeping everything from happening all at once.
—Anonymous

If Patience were a person, she would always be inviting us to do things. She'd invite us for brownies, for dinner, for a hike, for a weekend in the city, for drinks, a manicure, to play darts, to go hunting, camping, shopping—anything, she's always asking. And best of all, she never demands; she just asks sweetly.

Of course, I say no to most of her invitations. I'm stuck in traffic? I get anxious and then angry. I take my phone out, even though phones are banned while driving, so that I can calm my impatience and "choose" not to gun it when the car next to me tries to pull in front of me.

Or winter in the upper Midwest? It's another invitation from sweet Patience. But me? I complain again and again, mostly to myself (as people from the Midwest are more hardy than me). I silently nurse my impatience and dream about summer, when I complain about the heat and wait impatiently for humidity to subside.

Or continuing to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in my life? I want all of them all fully manifested *now.*

My impatience means I'm not paying attention.

She asks for our attention. Patience asks us to be fully present in this very moment. She asks us to forgo the future, to refuse to indulge the nostalgia for the past. Patience asks us to lay aside our troubles, to remember that "who of us by worrying can add one hour to our lives?" Patience asks us to take our time, to be slow, and to be present.

Because when we pay attention, everything changes. Traffic? It becomes an opportunity to transition between work and home, to shed the busy

day and leave it behind us. I've heard of someone from DC who drove their long commute in silence twice a day. I think we might call that "prayer."

The winter or even the unbearable heat of summer? It's a chance to lie low, to read, to sleep, and to live an unhurried life, less bound by consumer capitalism. Patience offers us a space outside the urgent.

Patience invites us to get lost in the wonder of traffic patterns, of the small changes of winter into spring. Patience invites us to pay attention to the small choices we make, paying closer attention to what needs watering and what needs weeding in our lives. She invites us to walk *with* and not to judge, to *listen* and not to fix our friends, family, and children. Patience invites us to cultivate slowness on purpose and to evade efficiency as often as we can.

She invites us to accept her invitations as often as we can, as she sweetly and kindly offers us opportunities. Patience, like the season of Lent, invites us to slow down and renew our spiritual lives before rushing ahead to the celebration of Easter. If you're having a hard time, that doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. Patience knows that some things just take a minute.

Monday, April 7, 2025

Cultivating Patience

Patience asks us to be fully present in this very moment. Patience asks us to lay aside our troubles, to remember that "who of us by worrying can add one hour to our lives?" Patience asks us to take our time, to be slow, and to be present.

—Molly Bosscher

Throughout this devotional, we have encouraged approaching the fruits of the Spirit with patience, knowing that growth and change often take more time than we expect. This week, our focus turns to patience itself, exploring how it connects with all the fruits of the Spirit.

Most of us have struggled with being patient at one time or another in our lives. Gratefully, Molly Bosscher has given us some constructive and concrete ideas of how we can cultivate patience.

In Molly's words above, we see that patience asks us to be fully present in the very moment and to lay aside our worries, trusting that in time things will work out one way or another. Patience invites us to pay full attention to the present moment, to inhabit it fully, rather than fretting and anxiously looking ahead to what is next. It really is as simple—and as hard—as this.

As we focus on being more fully present and laying aside our worries, let us begin by practicing patience with ourselves.

Making It Personal: Read the quote above from Molly Bosscher and notice what speaks to you most. Is it being more fully present in the moment? Laying aside worries? Slowing down? Trusting?

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Impatience and Stress

Is everything as urgent as your stress would imply?
—Carrie Latet

There is a reciprocal relationship between stress and impatience. When we are stressed, it can lead to our being more impatient—with ourselves and others. Likewise, being impatient can make us feel even more stressed, which can, in turn, drain our energy. It can be a vicious cycle.

Molly Bosscher wrote on Sunday that "patience offers us a space outside the urgent." The space she refers to is both a gift and a fruit of the Spirit. It is a space where we can allow ourselves to slow down and take a few deep breaths, remembering to take comfort in any number of biblical passages, including Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God."

There is an old joke about a person who prayed to God for more patience, and in reply what they received were more opportunities to practice. This simple joke reminds us that there are no shortage of opportunities in life to practice patience with ourselves, with others, and even with God and God's timing. Having patience takes practice, and being patient with ourselves as we practice is essential.

Making It Personal: In your life, do you see a connection between stress and impatience? Does your faith help you create a space to be still and perhaps more patient? How is that?

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

A Practice of Patience

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.
—Psalm 37:7

The Welcoming Prayer teaches us the gentle art of patience—meeting and embracing each moment exactly as it is rather than rushing toward what might be. Like the stillness the psalm invites us to enter, this contemplative prayer practice helps us wait with quiet attention.

Begin by settling into a comfortable position and bringing to mind a situation where you feel impatient or unsettled. Rather than trying to fix or change the situation, simply welcome it. You might say silently, "Welcome, frustration" or "Welcome, uncertainty"—whatever you are experiencing in this moment.

At first, many find this welcoming counterintuitive. Our natural impulse is to resist what makes us uncomfortable. Yet, paradoxically, welcoming our impatience often help it loosen its grip. Like a tightly clenched fist that relaxes when we stop trying to hold on, our resistance often softens when we stop fighting it.

As you sit with what arises, notice where you feel this in your body. Welcome these physical sensations too. Perhaps tension in your shoulders, a clenched jaw, butterflies in your stomach, or heat in your face. Then, ever so gently, begin to let go of your need for the situation to be different. This isn't resignation, but rather a deep trust that God is present in our yielding.

This practice reminds us that patience grows not by forcing it, but by practicing presence to what is. End by resting quietly, trusting that each time you welcome what is, you strengthen your capacity for patience.

Making it Personal: When might you pause for this welcoming practice? What situation in your life needs this gentle acceptance? What happens when you welcome rather than resist your impatience? How might regular practice help you cultivate more patience in daily life?

Thursday, April 10

Gentleness, Peace, and Patience

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. … And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
—Philippians 4:5, 7

When we think of strength, we typically think of power, assertiveness, and toughness. While these attributes describe particular aspects of strength, there are other qualities of strength. The New Testament reading from this past Sunday talks about one type of strength that directly applies to practicing patience: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone."

One sure way to let our gentleness be known to everyone is by being patient with others. Patience and gentleness tend to go together. When we are impatient or irritable with others, we come across as the opposite of gentle, often acting in ways that are rude and abrasive. True emotional and spiritual strength is expressed through patience and gentleness.

The same passage from Philippians also talks about the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. This is another reminder that God's peace transcends our usual patterns of thought and practice, and is much more than simply the absence of conflict. This understanding of peace can be helpful as we practice patience with others. Being patient with others is much more than simply not being impatient with them. It means being gentle, loving, and kind, and in doing so, modeling the more profound understanding of the peace and patience to which God calls us.

Making It Personal: Think of a time when you responded with impatience and rudeness toward someone. Now think of a time when you responded with patience and gentleness. What was the difference for you between the two exchanges? For the other person? What helps your ability to be gentle and patient more often?

Friday, April 11, 2025

Waiting with Love

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

—Luke 15:20

The father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son teaches us something profound about patience. He doesn't just wait passively for his son's return—he watches with hope, stays ready with compassion, holds space with love. His patience flows from deep within, from a heart that refuses to give up on relationship.

This kind of patience asks something different of us than merely gritting our teeth and enduring. As we've explored this week, it invites us to remain present to what is while holding space for what might be. The father in the story didn't know when or if his son would return, yet he remained faithful to the possibility of reunion. We might recognize this type of waiting in our own lives: parents watching for signs of maturity in their teenagers, teachers nurturing potential in struggling students, holding space for someone working through grief.

Sometimes our impatience comes from trying to control outcomes rather than trusting the slow work of love. We've seen how patient attention can transform our experience of traffic, weather, and daily irritations. But what about the deeper waitings of our lives: waiting for healing in a relationship, waiting for clarity about a decision, waiting for peace in our hearts?

The father in the parable shows us that true patience is inseparable from love. When we wait with love—for ourselves, for others, for God's presence to be revealed—we participate in the kind of patience that can transform both us and those for whom we wait.

Making it Personal: Where in your life are you being invited to wait with love rather than anxiety? What helps you stay present to possibility while accepting what is? When have you experienced the fruit of patient waiting? How might viewing patience as an expression of love change your experience of waiting?

Saturday, April 12, 2025

Abiding as Patience

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

—John 15:4–5

When I (Gary) was in Spain a few years ago, I became fascinated with "old growth vineyards." I learned that some of the grapevine trunks I saw there were well over 70 years old. I honestly didn't know grapevines could live that long!

After I got back home, I happened to find an interview with a vineyard owner from one of the wine regions I had walked through. When asked about his own growing philosophy he said, "If you want a productive vine in 80 years, you need to plant it now. You also have to have a plan to take care of it beyond your lifetime. Every day you tend the newly planted vine, you are making wine for a generation you will never know, because you are tending the vine's potential. Those future generations will reap the fruit of your labor, just as you've enjoyed the wine from the vines you did not plant, did not tend, and did not harvest. Make no mistake, the future always arrives suddenly, one day at a time."

Now, I'm not sure the vineyard owner would use the word "abide" to describe his work, but I believe he is embodying something of what it means to do just that. He is also embodying patience.

Perhaps the Good News we need to hear is that abiding in Jesus is where patience really begins. So, abide with abandon. Practice patient persistence. Plant a few seeds for eternity. And remember: "the future always arrives suddenly, one day at a time."

Making it Personal: What are some practices you could implement in your daily life to help you learn to abide? How would your cultivation of patience benefit from a bit more patience with yourself?

Palm Sunday

April 13, 2025

Love Casts out Fear

Jenifer Gamber

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.
—1 John 4:18

Palm Sunday. A day of jarring reversals. We gather in worship, taking our place with the people who 2,000 years ago welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, the holy city and dwelling place of God. We wave palm branches crying, "Hosanna, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord." The mood of welcome and celebration at Jesus' triumphal entry quickly gives way to terror. Our cries of "Hosanna" turn into "crucify him" as we acknowledge our failure to follow Jesus in our own lives. We are confronted by the horror of Jesus' death upon the cross and our own part in his death.

Jesus walked courageously to face his death in defense of the truth—the truth of the brokenness of the world, the truth of worldly power that oppresses others, and most of all the truth of God's deep healing love for all creation. God's love through Jesus' life, death and resurrection transformed a place of fear and death into a place of hope. Do we have the courage to live the vulnerable and authentic life of love that marks the call for all Christians?

To live courageously is to live from knowing we belong to God and are loved by God. Jesus knew to whom he belonged. He lived fully as God's beloved son and it showed. Jesus was life itself and brought that life to those he met. Jesus raised the dead, cured the sick, gave sight to the blind, and fed the hungry. His actions proclaimed the nearness of God. His life threatened the way of death. We, too, belong to God. We, too, belong to a kingdom yet to be known in this world.

Author Brené Brown writes about true belonging in this way: "True belonging is … belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a

part of something and standing alone in the wilderness" (*The Quest for True Belonging*, p 40).

By walking the way of life and love, his place of true belonging, Jesus walked as his authentic self, love incarnate, toward suffering and death. Living any other way than as our true selves is also a journey toward a more profound death. Each of us has experienced those moments—perhaps days, months or even years—of living false lives, of not belonging to ourselves but imprisoned by forces of the world. Unable to love. I know I have.

It took courage to be honest with myself, with my family, and most of all with God, that I was not living as God's beloved. It took the strength of community to do the hard work of helping me to remember to whom I belonged, and to make amends. It is easy, as did the crowd at Jesus' trial, to divert attention away from my own brokenness and instead blame, deride, and mock others. But that is not the way of love; it is the way of cowardice. Living as our true selves, belonging to God, we are free to love.

In today's reading, Jesus stood with all humanity, yet alone in the wilderness, silent before Pilate, silent before the crowd. Yet, not silent before the powers of death. Love overcame death. In Jesus' courage and vulnerability, can we find courage to belong to the way of love, the way of life?

April 14, 2024

Walking the Way of Love

By walking the way of life and love, his place of true belonging, Jesus walked as his authentic self, love incarnate, toward suffering and death.
—Jenifer Gamber

In her Palm Sunday reflection, Jenifer Gamber provided a perfect way to orient our journey through Holy Week. Love is the fruit of the Spirit that we will focus on this week, and it is the culmination of all the other fruits of the Spirit that we have explored together throughout Lent.

The Christian understanding of love is twofold. First, we humble and empty ourselves to fully receive God's love and to fill ourselves with this gift. As Thomas Keating reminds us, this is not simply emotional love, but what he calls *agape*—"self-giving love as opposed to self-seeking love." Then, we focus on how we are called to share God's love in the world.

Our culture often focuses on love as a feeling. As people of faith, love is more than a feeling; it is a decision. Jesus models love as a decision in all of the choices he makes this week. Through his example, Thomas Keating goes on to describe how "the growth of charity leads to self-surrender to God and to the compassionate love of others."

As we begin our journey through Holy Week, we invite you to reflect on both aspects of Christian love, the receiving and sharing of it. We also invite you to make a decision to walk with Jesus in the "way of life and love."

Making it Personal: Where are you being called to practice humility, to empty yourself of ego and pride to make room to receive God's love and to let it fill you? And in what way are you being called not simply to receive God's love, but to give it away?

April 15, 2024

In His Steps

Charity is rather a participation in God's unconditional love. … The continual tender and loving awareness of the presence of God is its reward.

—Thomas Keating

Yesterday, we wrote that love is not primarily a feeling, but a decision. This means that love is an act of the will and is something we decide to practice, which is a much more expansive understanding of love than merely thinking of it as a feeling.

The love Jesus demonstrates during Holy Week shows us what this deeper love looks like. Each choice he makes flows from his complete surrender to and participation in God's unconditional love. His actions reveal a love that transcends emotion—love that gives without counting the cost, forgives without condition, and remains faithful even in the face of betrayal.

Every step Jesus takes this week teaches us about the nature of divine love. From his entrance into Jerusalem through the events that will unfold in the coming days, we see a love that reaches both giver and receiver. When he could have retreated to safety, he chooses to remain present. When his disciples fall asleep in the garden, he continues to pray. When Peter denies him, he response with compassion rather than condemnation.

These moments are not just historical events, but holy invitations to participate more fully in God's love. As we journey with Jesus this week, we are called to practice this deeper love in our own lives—choosing presence over absence, mercy over judgement, service over self-interest.

Making it Personal: Where in your life are you being called to move beyond emotional love to love as decision and action? What helps you stay grounded in God's love when facing difficult choices. How might this Holy Week deepen your understanding of Christ's self-giving love?

April 16, 2024

The Power of Love

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious
or boastful or arrogant or rude.
—1 Corinthians 13:4–5

Holy Week began with the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem for the final week of his earthly life. Because many of us know the story of his entering the city while riding on a donkey so well, we may fail to realize the shocking nature of such an entrance.

If Caesar, Herod, or a similar Roman official had been entering Jerusalem during the time of Jesus, their entrance would have been markedly different. They would have arrived in an ornate chariot pulled by a large team of mighty horses, surrounded by a grand military presence on foot and on horseback, completely outfitted with the best weapons of their day.

The two different kinds of entrances point to two very different sources of power. Jesus' entrance is grounded in the power of love, vulnerability, and humility. The Roman officials' entrance is grounded in the power of force, fear, protection, and control.

As Holy Week unfolds, Jesus consistently demonstrates this alternative form of power. When faced with betrayal in the garden, he meets violence with peace. When questioned about his authority, he speaks of a kingdom built on love rather than force. Even on the cross, he offers words of forgiveness rather than condemnation.

Jesus refuses to let his followers defend him with weapons or violence. This isn't weakness, but a revelation of love's true power—the ability to remain faithful even in the face of death. As you reflect on his choices, consider and reflect on your own life right now.

Making it Personal: When are you choosing to act like Jesus did, acting from a place of love, vulnerability, and humility? When are you choosing to act from a place of fear, protection, and control?

Maundy Thursday

April 17, 2025

Love Has a Look

Gary Manning

I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. … If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.
—John 13:15, 17

I have a friend who has consistently reminded me that, "Love has a look to it." In other words, we know we are loved, not by the things people say to us, but in the ways they behave toward us day in and day out. My friend is constantly telling anyone who will listen that expressing love to those around us involves time, effort, and sometimes, inconvenience.

On this special day, Christians remember the way Jesus showed love and concern for his closest friends. At what would be his last meal with them, Jesus took a towel, wrapped it around his waist, got a basin and some water, and washed his disciples' feet. This action wasn't simply a matter of practicality, it was also an act of loving service.

I can't imagine Jesus sped through the process. I have to think he took his time. He gave each person around the table the gift of his full attention. Can you imagine what the experience must have been like for Jesus' friends?

Embodying love in our own lives can be as straightforward as offering simple acts of kindness, or taking the time to give another person the gift of our full attention. This is what living the life of faith is all about. We can afford to risk loving others because we have been loved by the God who refused to stay far away, but who got up close and personal with humanity. This is the God who created the universe, and who still took the time to wash feet.

Making it Personal: Who are the people in your life who have demonstrated love to you? How did they do it? What does it mean to you to serve others?

Good Friday

April 18, 2025

Love's Tenacity

Gary Manning

[Love] bears all things, … endures all things.
—1 Corinthians 13:7

My maternal grandparents were married for well over fifty years. Because they were people of a time and place—poor, hardscrabble share-cropping farmers in rural Louisiana at the beginning of the twentieth century—their expressions of love towards each other probably wouldn't be recognized by anyone whose vision of love comes from the Hallmark Channel. Sometimes they raised their voices at each other. Sometimes they seemed more aggravated than enamored with each other. Sometimes they just seemed worn out. But when my grandmother died, my grandfather never quite recovered. They had been partners who had traversed the difficulties and hardships of their life by counting on each other. In short, their resilient love had endured.

Good Friday means many things to folks, but at the center of what Christians commemorate on this day is the embodiment of God's love. Jesus chooses to so fully enter into the injustice and suffering of this world that we can forever know God's love is with us, even in those moments when we feel most isolated and alone. God's love bears cruelty and pain. And God's love endures. This is a tenacious love which will not succumb to any of our culture's notions that love is somehow simple or easy.

Every year, Good Friday reminds us of the unyielding depth of God's love—a love that will not relent; a love that will not surrender; a love that holds the entire world securely, and forever, within its loving embrace.

Making it Personal: Some of us who are reading this are experiencing suffering of some sort in our lives right now. How does the love manifested in Jesus' death on the cross help you, or how has it helped you, to "bear all things," and "endure all things"?

Holy Saturday

April 19, 2025

Love's Patient Hope

Gary Manning

[Love] believes all things, hopes all things.
—1 Corinthians 13:7

Holy Saturday is when the Church remembers Jesus in the tomb. For plenty of us, though, today is a day of busy preparation for the celebration of Easter tomorrow. Because we "know how the story ends," it's virtually impossible for us to identify with what this day must have been like for Jesus' disciples. That said, I'm guessing many folks reading these words are well acquainted with the feelings of loss and grief that flood our days in the aftermath of a loved one's death.

As a priest, I've helped plenty of families plan funeral liturgies. Some of the most moving moments of those planning sessions have been when family members started sharing stories of their loved one's life. Inevitably amidst the tears there is also laughter. On more than one occasion, I've had a family member say to me, "Who knew planning a funeral could feel so hopeful?"

After all, Holy Saturday is not Hopeless Saturday. While Holy Saturday urges us, implores us, and compels us to pause and remember the fragility of life, today also offers us the life-giving and life-altering promise that death does not have the final word over us. We have hope, not because we choose to ignore the facts of life. We have hope because we trust that God will open a way forward, even when we cannot see one, or are unable to open a way forward for ourselves. We have hope because God's love is stronger than death, and fiercer than any tomb.

Making it Personal: How do you maintain hope when you have experienced a crisis or loss that makes it hard to see a way forward?

Easter Sunday

April 20, 2025

Love Is Come Again

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' "This is my message for you."

—Matthew 28:5–7

Our journey of thoughtful self-reflection on cultivating the fruits of the Spirit these past six and a half weeks now leads us to be able to proclaim today:

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

A story is told of a young girl who had overheard the adults in her life talking about how beautiful the season of Spring was. She knew it had to with something outdoors, and so she went outside several times to look for this thing called Spring that everyone was talking about.

Feeling frustrated, she went to her parents and said, "I hear everyone talking about Spring, but I can't see it anywhere." Her parents asked her what she had seen when she went outside to look for Spring. She responded, "I saw the grass turning green, new flowers coming up, lots of beautiful singing birds, and buds on the trees." Her parents replied," Those are all the signs of Spring, and so you have seen Spring now!"

This story applies to our own longings to not just believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but to see the signs of it. And as we have learned on our journey through Lent this year, whenever we are cultivating and manifesting the fruits of the Spirit—peace, joy, love, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, patience, gentleness, and self-control—we are seeing signs of Jesus' resurrection.

Our hope and prayer is that we may all continue to both see these fruits of the Spirit and cultivate these fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

The last verse of *The Green Blade Rises*, a beautiful Easter hymn, reminds us that all of this is possible because of the One who is always cultivating the fruits of resurrection in the "fields of our hearts."

When our hearts are saddened, grieving, or in pain,
By Your touch You call us back to life again;
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.
—John M. C. Crum

It has been an honor to provide this resource to you and to walk with you through Lent to Easter. In the name of the Risen Christ, may we all know in our hearts and souls that "Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green."

Scripture, Quotes, Prayers & Practices for Lent

Scripture

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,
abounding in love and faithfulness.

—Exodus 34:6 (NIV)

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon
you, and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon
you, and give you peace.

—Numbers 6:24–26

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

—Nehemiah 8:10

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul.

—Psalm 23:1–3 (KJV)

For You alone my soul waits in silence:
my hope is from the Beloved.
Enfolding me with strength and steadfast love,
my faith shall remain firm. [Amen.]

—from Psalm 62, Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he
will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to
those who turn to him in their hearts.

—Psalm 85:8

The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

—Psalm 103:17

But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

—Jeremiah 17:7–8 (NIV)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

—Lamentations 3:22–23

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.

—Matthew 11:28–29

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

—John 14:27

For God so LOVED the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

—John 3:16

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

—John 15:5 (NIV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—Romans 15:13

As servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: … by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; …

—2 Corinthians 6:4–7, Reading for Ash Wednesday

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

—Galatians 5:22–23

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

—Ephesians 4:2–3

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us.

—Ephesians 5:2 (NKJV)

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. … And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:5, 7

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

—1 Thessalonians 5:8

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony

—Colossians 3:12–14

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. … But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

—James 3:13,17–18

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

—1 John 4:7–9

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

—1 John 4:18–19

Quotes

Divine love is not an attitude that one puts on like a cloak. It is rather the right way to respond to reality. It is the right relationship to being, including our own being. And that relationship is primarily one of receiving. No one has any degree of divine love except what one has received. An important part of the response to divine love, once it has been received, is to pass it on to our neighbor in a way that is appropriate in the present moment.

—Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me show love,
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not
so much seek to be consoled as to console
Not so much to be understood as to understand
Not so much to be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we awake to eternal life.

—St. Francis of Assisi

Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions. I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.

—Henri Nouwen

The mystery will not be solved, the power of the mystery will not be denied, for the transcendent presence of the holy surrounds us, will always surround us, and the greatness of the Spirit will endure forever. Be not afraid or anxious. The threshold on which you stand is the mystery of an infinite love, and an intimate love, a love that beckons you into its peace, that welcomes you with a limitless compassion. Be not afraid or anxious. Close your eyes. Open your heart. And you will know what I mean.

—Steven Charleston

Teach me patience beyond work—
and, beyond patience, the blest
Sabbath of Thy unresting love
which lights all things and gives rest.

—Wendell Berry, *Given: Poems*

Choose joy. Choose it like a child chooses the shoe to put on the right foot, the crayon to paint a sky. Choose it at first consciously, effortfully, pressing against the weight of a world heavy with reasons for sorrow, restless with need for action. Feel the sorrow, take the action, but keep pressing the weight of joy against it all, until it becomes mindless, automated, like gravity pulling the stream down its course; until it becomes an inner law of nature. If Viktor Frankl can exclaim "yes to life, in spite of everything!"—and what an everything he lived through—then so can any one of us amid the rubble of our plans, so trifling by comparison. Joy is not a function of a life free of friction and frustration, but a function of focus—an inner elevation by the fulcrum of choice.

—Maria Popova

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

—Mother Teresa

Make our hearts leap with joy, and fill our mouths with songs of praise, that we may announce glad tidings of peace, and welcome the Christ in our midst.

—prayer excerpt from *Daily Prayer for All Seasons*

It takes courage to be kind.

—Maya Angelou

To welcome and to let go is one of the most radically loving, faith-filled gestures we can make in each moment of each day. It is an open-hearted embrace of all that is in ourselves and in the world.

—Mary Mrozowski, creator of the Welcoming Prayer

Your life and my life flow into each other as wave flows into wave, and unless there is peace and joy and freedom for you, there can be no real peace or joy or freedom for me.

—Frederick Buechner

Our greatest strength lies in the gentleness and tenderness of our heart.

—Rumi

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

—Julian of Norwich

Love and kindness are never wasted. They always make a difference. They bless the one who receives them, and they bless you, the giver.

—Barbara De Angelis

Peace is the work of justice indirectly, in so far as justice removes the obstacles to peace; but it is the work of charity (love) directly, since charity, according to its very notion, causes peace.

—Thomas Aquinas

The spirituality of waiting is not simply our waiting for God. It is also participating in God's own waiting for us and in that way coming to share in the deepest purity of love, which is God's love.

—Henri Nouwen

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
for hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love for love would be love of the wrong thing;
there is yet faith.
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought;
so the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

—T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.

—Isaac Penington, 1661

Prayers

Holy Spirit of God,
Who is present in our inmost being,
fill us with your gifts.
Lead us into silence, quietness and peace.
Heal the wounds of a lifetime.
Take away those desires that are earthly created
and grant Your gift of wisdom,
Your goodness, Your truth …
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ,
who expresses in infinite ways
the Silence that is sheer 'isness.'
Amen.

—Thomas Keating

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth;
lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust;
lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

—Universal Prayer for Peace

Sometimes I laugh when I pray. I hope you do too.
So often prayer is such a serious business
With so many deep needs and heartfelt petitions
But there are those moments, those rare and happy times
When the thanksgivings start to flow
Like a mountain stream rushing over rocks
Life running through sunlight.
And I cannot help but smile
Smile at the beauty of it all, smile at grace so abundant.
May the Spirit give you reason to laugh today.
May your prayers turn to delight.
May your thanks be said with a smile.
May your life run through sunlight
Prayer and laughter the same.

—Steven Charleston, from *Spirit Wheel*

Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God,
Teach me true generosity.
Teach me to serve you as you
deserve.
To give without counting the cost,
To fight heedless of wounds,
To labor without seeking rest,
To sacrifice myself without
thought of any reward
Save the knowledge that I have
done your will.
Amen.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Prayer for Generosity*

God of joy and exultation,
you strengthen what is weak;
you enrich the poor
and give hope to those who live in fear.
Look upon our needs this day.
Make us grateful for the good news of salvation
and keep us faithful in your service
until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives for ever and ever. Amen.

—Prayers of the People, Revised Common Lectionary

May I be at peace.
May my heart remain open.
May I be aware of my true nature.
May I be healed.
May I be a source of healing to others.
May I dwell in the Breath of God.
[Amen.]

—St. Teresa of Ávila

For the peace from above,
For the loving-kindness of God,
And for the salvation of our souls,
Let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy. [Amen.]

—*Book of Common Prayer,* p. 383

The world is struggling mightily, and many are losing faith and hope. God we know that You have all the strength the world needs. We pray that You will encircle us in your deep peace, abiding hope, and eternal love. "The world is too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love." Amen.

—Robbin Brent, quote by William Sloane Coffin

May the peace of God, Which passeth all understanding, Keep your heart and mind in the knowledge and love of God. [Amen.]

—*Book of Common Prayer,* p. 339

May today there be peace within. Together We Pray: O Gracious, gentle Spirit of Love, Your energy permeates the Universe, Igniting Earth with Your Goodness, Truth and Beauty. Open our minds and hearts To a deeper awareness Of our interconnectedness with You, Each other and all creation. May we experience Your unique presence Within the sacred web of creation. [Amen.]

—Author Unknown, from *The Spirit of God is Always with Us at This Time, in This Place*

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.
[Amen.]

—Theresa of Lisieux

Lord, help me to live this day, quietly, easily. To lean upon Thy great strength, trustfully, restfully. To wait for the unfolding of Thy will, patiently, serenely. To meet others, peacefully, joyously. To face tomorrow, confidently, courageously. [Amen.]

—Saint Francis of Assisi

Merciful Jesus, you are my guide, the joy of my heart, the author of my hope, and the object of my love. I come seeking refreshment and peace. Show me your mercy, relieve my fears and anxieties, and grant me a quiet mind and an expectant heart, that by the assurance of your presence I may learn to abide in you, who is my Lord and my God. Amen.

—Grace Cathedral

God be in our heads, and in our understanding;
God be in our eyes, and in our looking;
God be in our mouths, and in our speaking;
God be in our hearts, and in our thinking;
God be at our ends, and at our departing. Amen.

—Anonymous

Compassionate God, support and strengthen all those who reach out in love, concern, and prayer for the sick and distressed. In their acts of compassion, may they know that they are your instruments. In their concerns and fears may they know your peace. In their prayer may they know your steadfast love. May they not grow weary or faint-hearted, for your mercy's sake. Amen.

—Book of Common Prayer

Contemplative Practices

Contemplative Walk

Walking as a contemplative practice is an ancient tradition, as is expressed by both Augustine: "It is solved by walking," and Friedrich Nietzsche: "All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking." You can learn more about contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, on our website: LivingCompass.org/ro2f.

The invitation to take a contemplative walk is both for those who are able to walk, as well as for those who are not able to walk. Perhaps you are sick, or confined to a place for other reasons, or you cannot physically walk. If this is true for you, try this practice with your eyes closed, or while watching a video or gazing at photographs of places in nature that inspire you. There are many ways to take a contemplative walk as you focus on the inner walk of faith. Here are three simple ideas to help you get started. Note that any of these can be done solo, with another person, or with a small group.

- **Choose a question, situation, or challenge you wish to ponder and wonder about, perhaps related to cultivating one of the fruits of the Spirit.** As you walk, open your heart, mind, and soul to the wisdom of the Spirit as you consider, silently or aloud, "I wonder what I might do or say about _____?" "I wonder what God might guide me to do or say about _____?" Allow yourself to be curious. Don't force an answer or resolution; simply walk and reflect on possible insights you may not previously have been able to see.
- **Walk with a Scripture verse.** The daily reflections in this devotional offer many choices, as well as the collection on pp. 69–72.
- **Walk in nature.** Walk slowly, noticing the wonder of God's creation, perhaps pausing from time to time to pay attention to how nature itself demonstrates the fruits of the Spirit—the patience of a growing seed, the generosity of a flowering tree, the faithfulness of the returning sun.

Loving-Kindness Prayer Practice

As we cultivate love and other fruits of the Spirit, we can offer this prayer:

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you be safe.

May you live with ease.

May you know God's peace.

May you share God's joy.

Each time you say this prayer, first think of those you love. Then, as you repeat the prayer, you may want to bring in those you find challenging to love right now, and those you have never met. Be sure to pray for yourself.

Receive & Release Practice

This practice focuses on two words: *receive* and *release*. Here are some simple instructions for getting started.

- First, find a comfortable sitting position and begin to take deep, slow breaths.
- After you have relaxed and settled into the gentle rhythm of your breathing, begin to say the word *receive* silently in your mind each time you inhale, and the word *release* as you exhale. So, it's *receive* as you inhale, and *release* as you exhale. These two words will also help to focus your mind whenever it begins to wander.
- As you repeat the word *receive*, imagine yourself receiving the fruits of the Spirit that God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now.
- As you repeat the word *release*, imagine yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time.
- Start by doing this practice for three to five minutes (it can be helpful to set a quiet timer at the beginning).
- If you have a particular prayer concern, you can use this practice to assist you in finding peace and guidance regarding your concern. Bring the concern to mind as you begin the "Receive, Release" practice. You may even find that you are given a different word or phrase that comes to mind to use in place of *receive* or *release*. You might, for example, find yourself mindfully repeating "patience," "peace," "joy," or "kindness," on your in-breath and perhaps something like "control," "anger," "fear," or "judgment" on the out-breath.

Rosebush Examen for Children* (of all ages)

In this approach to learning the Examen, the authors suggested asking children to picture a rosebush. However we found that metaphor really helpful for ourselves and others either new to the practice, or too tired at the end of a long day to remember all the steps in their proper order. Perhaps it might be helpful for you too.

Here are the instructions: Picture a rosebush, which has roses, thorns, and buds. Then think of them this way: • Roses = joyful thing or things from the day where you experienced or shared the fruits of the Spirit. • Thorns = a painful or challenging experience where you struggled to maintain patience, peace, or another fruit. • Buds = possibilities for growth in cultivating the fruits of the Spirit.

What roses, thorns, and buds did your day or week hold?

*From *New Directions for Holy Questions* by Claire Brown and Anita Peebles, shared in *Seasons of Wonder* by Bonnie Smith Whitehouse, pp. 181–182

Examen Practice

A way of paying attention as we listen for God. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God's presence. Then:

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, when you experienced or shared love, joy, peace, or other fruits of the Spirit, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God's purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God's purpose for your life, when cultivating the fruits of the Spirit felt challenging, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God's plan and purpose for you tomorrow, growing in faithfulness and other fruits, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

—For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality's website: bit.ly/38De8gc

Welcoming Prayer Practice

As we focus on cultivating the fruit of the Spirit this Lent, this practice has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional patterns, and limiting comfort zones. Using it can help move us through challenging or painful experiences, times of disturbed emotion or anguish, and even moments where unhelpful control tendencies and self-inflation takes us over.

Three steps for the Welcoming Prayer Practice:

1. **Focus or "sink in"** to become aware and physically present to the particular experience or upset without analyzing or judging yourself or the situation. Don't try to change anything at this stage—just stay present.
2. **Welcome and lightly name** the response that is being triggered by the difficult situation, such as *fear* or *anger* or *pain*. Acknowledge the response as sensation, and recognize that in this moment, if the experience is not being rejected or repressed, it can be endured. Ever so gently, begin to say "welcome," such as "welcome fear," "welcome resentment," etc. Though this step is counter-intuitive and the impulse is most likely to try to push away the unpleasant emotion, Cynthia Bourgeault explains: "By welcoming it instead, you create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. By embracing the thing you once defended yourself against or ran from, you are actually disarming it, removing its power to hurt you or chase you back into your smaller self." This practice of patient, generous welcome helps cultivate the very fruits of the Spirit we seek to grow.
3. **Transition to a "letting go,"** whereby the intensity of the situation can recede. This enables the natural fluidity of sensation to come and then go.

—For more on the Welcome Prayer/Practice, go to: https://bit.ly/2Sqtj0R

Centering Prayer Practice

A way to sit with God without using language. It is to consent to the Divine Presence within. Dwelling in God who dwells in us. The present moment is where we meet God and where we have an opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love and to cultivate the fruits that flow from that love.

The Four Guidelines (from Thomas Keating, Contemplative Outreach):

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (You can pray for God to give you an image/word that is just what you need at this time. This might be one of the fruits of the Spirit you particularly wish to cultivate.)
2. Sit comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and then silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

   *includes body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.



The *Living Compass Podcast*, a year-round offering, provides additional enrichment opportunities during Lent by releasing three weekly episodes that focus on our theme of *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*. Each episode, about six minutes long, can be found at LivingCompass.org/podcast or by searching for "Living Compass" in your favorite podcast app.

RETREAT ON 2 FEET
CONTEMPLATIVE WALKING & WELLBEING

Retreat on 2 Feet is our new contemplative walking and well-being initiative. We created this experience to introduce the spiritual practice of contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, as a way to enhance spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being. While many of our offerings focus on walking, those with mobility challenges can also participate because the primary movement we focus on is the inner, contemplative path.

For more information, visit LivingCompass.org

Living Well Through Lent 2025

Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind

Living Compass is honored to join you on your journey through Lent. This 84-page devotional, designed for both individual and group use, offers daily reflections and "making-it-personal" questions that encourage deeper exploration of this season's theme. We've also included a collection of prayers, Scripture, quotes, and spiritual practices focused on cultivating the fruit of the Spirit.

Our hope is that this devotional will provide a foundation for seeking a richer experience of Lent, an experience that helps prepare us for the true meaning of Easter.

Includes reflections from:

- The Rev. Molly Bosscher
- Robbin Brent
- The Rev. Canon Randy K. Callender
- The Rt. Rev. Brian Lee Cole
- The Rt. Rev. Shannon Rogers Duckworth
- The Rev. Jenifer Gamber
- The Rev. Gary B. Manning
- The Rev. Abigail W. Moon
- The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner

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