

From Isolation to Invitation

***A two-week guide for retreat in a time of
quarantine***

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Introduction

How does isolation sound to you?

Intimidating?

Exciting?

Refreshing?

Boring?

Terrifying?

Depressing?

Hopeful?

Invigorating?

Humbling?

I was recently talking with a friend about the story of Jesus calming the storm. The disciples were, understandably, afraid. They were desperately working to right the problem, to rescue themselves and their boat, whilst Jesus slept. As we were talking about this contrast between their fear and Jesus' calmness upon waking, the question came into my head, "What could he see that they couldn't?" And I ask the same question today of this unchanging, ever-present, all-powerful God, who is not panicked as we enter this storm.

We hope this guide will give you a chance to explore some of the feelings, thoughts, tensions and griefs that come in an uncertain time in the presence of this all-seeing, compassionate God.

This guide was written for people who are self-isolating but healthy. If you fall ill, you might not have the mental, emotional or physical capacity to engage with the guide. If you find it encouraging and helpful to continue please do. Pay attention to your body, soul and spirit. Feel free to rest and let God find you in whatever way he chooses.

Something to hold us

There is so much we can learn about isolation from the monks who went into the desert in ancient times. Many of them quickly became listless and anxious when they were on their own, and realized this was because they were used to being told what to do. They craved structure, and without a city or family to provide it, they needed to create it for themselves. The structure they created was called a "Rule of Life".

During this time of isolation you may find it helpful to build structure, a Rule of Life, for yourself as well. Take some time to read through [Genesis 1](#) and notice the structures that God integrated into all of creation. There was evening and morning, day and night, work and rest and creativity. These rhythms and routines were part of what God saw to be good.

We're all different when it comes to how much structure we need and want on a daily basis, but during this time of isolation it's worth thinking through the amount and type of structure will be most helpful to you during this period.

This guide is laid out with three sections each day as anchor points for the next two weeks. They are:

- A morning awareness prayer, to help you notice with God what is going on within you and what you need for the day
- A midday reflection, to help you engage with God around an invitation found in scripture
- An evening examen, to help you notice how God has been with you during this particular day.

Use as much or as little of the material as you find helpful. If you are quarantined with housemates or family, consider doing this together. Children especially look forward to structures and rituals.

By all means, watch your favourite TV shows, listen to podcasts and music, get your work done, and read the books you've been intending to read. Pay attention to what is life-giving and what is draining.

Here are some things to consider during this time:

- How will you begin and end each day? What kind of ritual or routine could you incorporate into these two weeks?
- If you have work to do, when will you do it and where?
- How will you make time for play or creativity?
- When and how will you exercise and take care of your body? [Here is one option.](#)
- What sort of pauses in your day will remind you of God's presence? Anything in addition to the reflections and prayers here?
- How could you intentionally reach out to others?
- If you have children with you, how can you allow for time together and time alone for each of you?
- Do you know of others in isolation who might like to join you? If so, consider when and how you could connect (Zoom or Skype. Daily, every other day, each morning and evening, etc.).
- What limits or boundaries would you like to set around technology, media, and social media during this time?

- Is there something you can set aside specifically to look forward to in the evenings - a reward of sorts for making it through the day?

This temporary rule of life you're creating should be helpful to you, not a burden. We were created for both structure and flexibility, so feel free to make changes as you go. Similarly, discuss with God how firm you should be with yourself in keeping the rule. Remember: the structure is for you, not you for the structure.

We have set up a [Facebook](#) Group as a place of connection with others as you go along this journey. Check it out for resources, suggestions and links. If you are looking for music we have made a [Spotify Playlist](#) you might enjoy.

May you be at rest in the hands of our good God, who knows you, sees you, and loves you. May this time of isolation become a gift that will continue to bless you and others for a long time to come.

Day 1: If God Is With Us...

Morning prayer:

Take a few moments with God to read [Psalm 139](#). As you let the images wash over you, pay attention to what the Psalm says about God, and what it says about you. When you come to the end, take some time to pray through verses 23-24. Ask the following questions of your heart and of God, and journal if you like:

- What is the state of my heart?
- Where do I feel tension in my body?
- What am I thinking about?
- What am I feeling?
- Who am I worried about?
- What things have I left undone as I enter into this time of isolation?
- How do I feel about these undone things?

Take some time with God to present these concerns to him and to invite him to meet you in the midst of them.

What do you want to say to him?

What does he want to say back to you?

Midday reflection¹:

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

1 John 4:16 ESV

God does not just have love, God IS love. Take some time today to imagine the love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let the words of 1 Corinthians 13 wash over you, and soak into your soul. How is God (Father, Son and Spirit) patient, kind, humble, truthful, enduring within himself?

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs. Love takes no pleasure in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

¹ Reflection by Jenny Walley

*Love never fails.
1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

Now imagine God inviting you to take part in this nature. You are not just called to be patient, kind, humble, truthful, enduring. You actually live in HIS patience, kindness, humility, truth and endurance, and are invited to let these things flow out from you.

If this is the God who is with you, what can you release to him?

Worship in Song: Derek Rice has put together a worship set to remind us that God is with us, and we can listen for his voice.

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 2: He Knows Our Frame

Morning prayer:

Physically make fists with your hands, and ask God to show you what tensions you are holding as you begin your day. Talk to him about this tension.

Loosen your grip, open your hands, and turn your palms downward. As you do this, offer your concerns, frustrations, anger and resentment to God. Holding your palms down signifies your surrender; you cannot grab those things again.

Now, turn your hands upward and ask the Lord what he wants to fill them with today.

As you hold your hands up, pay attention to what your soul desires with God.

Midday reflection:

*Compassionate Father,
who knows our weaknesses and needs,
help us to see your love and compassion for us,
and give us grace to rest in your gentle care,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who walked always in your love and in the grace of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

Compassion for our weakness²

On Ash Wednesday, I found myself reflecting on the well-known scripture, “Remember that we are dust.” I have always thought of this phrase as a command to put me in my place... “remember that you came from nothing and will return to nothing.”

On this particular day, I read Psalm 103, one of the places where this phrase is found. I was surprised and deeply moved when I realized what this passage actually says:

*As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;*

² Reflection by Jenny Walley

*for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
Psalm 103:13-14 NIV*

How that changes the phrase!

Take some time to read [Psalm 103](#). Notice what words and phrases about God stand out to you.

In what ways does your “dust-ness” need to rest in the grace and compassion of your heavenly Father today?

Take some time to write, draw, or otherwise capture what comes to mind as you ask this question.

Now take some time to do just that...to rest in what is true.

*When we are weak, we are
strong. When our eyes close
on the world, then somewhere
within us the bush
burns. When we are poor
and aware of the inadequacy
of our table, it is to that,
uninvited, the guest comes*

R. S. Thomas

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you

encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 3: On Loss and Worship

Morning Prayer:

Naming losses

At the time of writing, I am sitting with my children as they grieve the loss of our trip to visit their grandparents in America. I know that we will be able to reschedule at a later time, but for them, it is catastrophic. As I enter into their grief about this, my temptation is to say something like, “It’s okay. At least we have a roof over our heads,” or something else to minimize their sadness.

But I check myself and choose instead to be present to them in their disappointment. As I sit with them, I realize that this is how our Father holds me in my own losses. He can see the end from the beginning, and knows how it will end, but I don’t.

Loss and grief are topics most of us are not comfortable with. We prefer when they are far away and touch other people’s lives. However, when our lives are impacted by quarantine, an illness, or the need to prevent the spread of it we are forced to look at what we’ve lost because of it. As this virus spreads around the world the amount of loss and grief continue to accumulate.

Just as I was tempted to brush off my children’s sadness over not being able to visit their grandparents there is a temptation to brush off the grief of other losses. The wedding you weren’t able to attend. The conference or trip that’s been cancelled. The creative project you had to leave unfinished. The school trip, or year end projects you’ve been working on that you’ll not get to present. A work or school farewell party that won’t happen this year.

What about the relational loss or tension? Your work or school environment, people you brushed up against daily that you won’t see in the same way for awhile? If you live alone, you have lost contact with friends and acquaintances . If you live with others, you have lost your independence and some precious time alone.

What about the loss of control (or the illusion of it) over your time and energy? The loss of structure? Your roles or identity?

Take some time to name and write down these losses in the presence of God.

Have a read of [Psalm 3](#), and let this be your prayer this morning.

Midday Reflection³:

The Psalmists were not shy about expressing the whole range of emotions to God. In fact, there are more lament Psalms than any other genre. In these laments, the Psalmists engaged their pain, questions and anger within the framework of their covenant relationship and submission to God.

There are a few key movements within the lament Psalms. Let's look at Psalm 44 as an example of these movements:

- **Direct address to God:** (Psalm 44:1)
- **Protest:** They tell God what is wrong. (Psalm 44:9-22)
- **Petition:** They tell God what they want Him to do about it. (Psalm 44:23-26)
- **Praise:** They express trust in God today, based on His character and His action in the past, even if they can't yet see the outcome. (Psalm 44:1-8)

Writing a lament

As you think about the losses you named this morning, what would it look like to write a lament to God? If you would find it helpful, take some time with the four movements above and write out your thoughts within this framework. Don't try to force any of the movements, but have a dialog with God as to what he might want to show you about himself or yourself.

"The reason the darkness may be faced and lived is that even in the darkness, there is One to address. The One to address in the darkness is not simply a part of the darkness (John 1:1-5). Because this One has promised to be in the darkness with us, we find the darkness strangely transformed, not by the power of easy light, but by the power of relentless solidarity. Out of the "Fear not" of that One spoken in the darkness, we are marvelously given new life, we know not how."

(Walter Brueggemann 2001, Spirituality of the Psalms, xiii)

Tammy Lundell, who is quarantined in Italy at the time of this writing (March 2020), put this worship set together to help us move through the movements from grief to praise. You can listen to her here: [Exploring grief and loss through worship](#).

³ Reflection by Jenny Walley

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 4: Gratitude

Morning Prayer:

Right now, wherever you are, take time to become aware of your surroundings. Listen to the birdsong out your window. Notice the weather outside, the drink in your hand. Become aware that God, who is perfect love, is with you, right here, right now.

Brother Lawrence, a monk who lived in France in the 1600s, took seriously Paul's call to pray without ceasing, and found a way to invite God into every task he did. He was assigned to the kitchen, and he purposed in his heart to do every task for the love of God. He surrendered every motive, every thought, feeling and action to the love of God. And his example invites us to a life lived in this way.

Today, take time to invite God in to each activity of your day. Whether working or resting, watching TV, preparing food or washing up, notice him with you, and pay attention.

Midday Reflection:

*Lavish God,
giver of good and perfect gifts,
help us to see and be grateful for each gift you have provided us,
that we might not be weighed down by disappointment, trouble, and mundanity,
but lifted up by the good you are always doing,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with the Father and Holy Spirit ever rejoice in giving and receiving one
another.
Amen.*

The gift of gratitude⁴

Like many of us, I have a bad habit of focusing on the negative and skimming over the good. Studies show we're more likely to remember criticism than affirmation, and it puzzles me how we stubbornly hold on to the negative and are so quick to release the good. We have it backwards. For some reason the mean comments and harsh

⁴ Adapted from Chapter 18: "The gift of gratitude" from *The Gifts I Never Knew I Had: Reflections on Ordinary Treasures*, Tanya Lyons (2019)

judgments stick like glue, but it takes effort to keep what's good in the front and centre.

One practice that has helped me keep my attention where it's most helpful is gratitude. Simply defined as the quality of being thankful, gratitude is a willingness to approach the world with an attitude of appreciation rather than displeasure or annoyance or bitterness. Gratitude can change the tone and atmosphere of a conversation or gathering. The benefits of gratitude include stronger social connections, better sleep, decreased anxiety, and increased joy.

For years I misunderstood where gratitude came from. I thought it would appear when circumstances were ideal and there wasn't any need for change or growth. I thought gratitude was an overflow from a life of ease and abundance, which left me waiting for a big break before I expressed gratitude to those who'd helped me achieve my goals. I didn't realize gratitude isn't something that happens to me; it's something I can choose. Gratitude happens as I recognize and am thankful for what's good and positive and beautiful, no matter what else is in the picture. Happiness is a feeling, but gratitude is an action. Gratitude doesn't require an ideal situation before it springs up. I can be unhappy and grateful at the same time. I can be lonely and grateful, angry and grateful, discouraged and grateful—you name it.

Gratitude doesn't ask me to deny what's awful or painful or wasted. It doesn't ask me to paint life with a false positivity. Gratitude doesn't tell me to give up, shut down, or accept an unacceptable situation. But because gratitude can find good even in the midst of what's awful, it provides a way to live in the tension of a world that is both wonderful and heart-breaking. I can express gratitude even while I seek change, or feel frustrated, or work to achieve unmet goals. I don't have to wait for success or utopia before I say thanks. Cynicism paints life with a dark brush, refusing to acknowledge any hint of beauty or goodness, but gratitude notices sparkles in the rubble and streaks of colour in the storm clouds.

Gratitude draws my attention to what I have even as I acknowledge what's missing or broken. Gratitude refuses to let what's bad or wrong have the final word. In that way, gratitude requires very little at all. Like a delighted grandmother who remarks, "How lovely, my dear!" no matter what you say or do, gratitude doesn't demand perfection before it speaks. Gratitude, like kindness and hope, can show up anywhere, at any time. Gratitude is a place of refuge and comfort I can turn to in times of frustration, disappointment, loneliness, or fear. There's freedom in saying, "I choose to be grateful for today and for the good I see, even if there's work to be done and much I didn't choose."

If you're not sure how to build your gratitude muscles, you can begin by looking at your childhood. Think of all the people who helped you before you asked. Make a gratitude list for the doctor who delivered you, the nurse who held you, or the teachers who helped you learn to read and write and do math—even the bus drivers

who got you to school, and the janitors who ensured it was kept clean. You may not remember their names, but without them you wouldn't be where you are. Next, move on to your youth. What would you say to the coaches who inspired you to achieve a goal, the musicians who wrote your favourite songs, or the boss who gave you your first job? What about the friends and family who laughed at your jokes and loved you through your bad moods? Your list could get very, very long—for you have been given a lot.

Eventually you'll get to today. Today may be a great or a horrible day, but you can start wherever you are. At times I walk through my house and look at what fills it. I'm grateful for the farmers who grow the coffee I drink, for the workers who take away my garbage. I remember meals around my table, or the friend I was with when I bought my butter dish. I look at cookies my neighbour dropped off, the quilt my grandma made. I'm grateful for the mailman who carries letters to my door each day, for the friend who sends a card, and for my job that pays the bills. As I remember what I've been given, I practice saying thank you. Expressing gratitude changes something in me, and it changes the people I thank. When I express gratitude to someone for something, I shatter the lie that I'm on my own and no one cares for me. I have been given so much; I have benefitted from the beauty others offer to the world.

I don't need everything on my wish list before I exercise gratitude. I can express gratitude today for the enough I have right now; I don't have to wait for something more. Gratitude adds value to every cup of coffee, every sunny day, my favourite song, a comfortable bed, a meal with friends, or a clean pair of socks. Noticing these things, instead of letting them pass by, reminds me I'm blessed—I'm rich—and I've been given more than I realize. Gratitude is free to anyone who wants to learn it, and as we grow in gratitude, it changes us into people who carry hope and kindness with us into every place we go.

Activity

Spend some time creating a gratitude list for your life by considering different blocks of time in your life.

Childhood: For 10 minutes jot down as many people, experiences, events, books, clubs, activities, lessons, etc. as you can think of which brought something good into your life.

Youth/Young Adulthood: Take 10 minutes to list as many of the people, experiences, events and lessons from your youth and young adulthood which helped you to grow and which contributed in some way to who you are now.

The present: Take 10 minutes to list the things you are grateful for today. You might want to walk around your home to look at and touch various objects you have. As you

consider each item, think about where it came from, how it got into your possession, and how it's served you, entertained you, or supported you in this season.

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 5: Who Is My Neighbour?

Morning Prayer:

*We respond to your invitation, O God. As we are, we come.
We offer to you the hostilities that shape us, the hostilities we carry, the hostilities
that carry us. In these matters, move us from hostility to hospitality.
Be our guard, for we guard ourselves too much. Be our protector, that we need not
overprotect ourselves.
Create in us a space, a room, a place—free and friendly space where the stranger
may be welcomed
—that we may be at home in our own house
—that we may be healed of hurts we carry in the soul
—that we may know brother and sisterhood
—that we may know kindness
—that we may laugh easily
—that we may know beauty
Nudge, guide, entice, prod. Move us to live within your will. To the end that within
this flesh, within this house in which we live, we may be at home with you, our
neighbor, with ourselves.
Thus we pray, remembering Christ who says, "I stand at the door and knock."
Create in us a place of hospitality. Amen.
---John Stott*

Midday Reflection:

*God of mercy,
who sees us in our fallen state with compassion,
give us hearts that desire to be a neighbor and care for those around us,
that we would become like you and live in a world that is characterized by love,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who demonstrated love to the utmost
and lives with you and the Holy Spirit in perfect relationship.
Amen.*

Who is my neighbour?

Read [Luke 10:25-37](#) slowly a couple of times and as you read, imagine the events unfold in front of you.

Let's look at some of the relationships near and far away from us.

Who are the people in my home? My neighbourhood?

Do I know their joys and struggles?

What is one way that I can practically move toward them in this time of isolation?

What about the wider world? What is the state of people's thoughts, feelings, actions around the world? What brokenness is becoming apparent?

What life does God want to speak into this? How might he be inviting me to participate in speaking life over the situation in the world?

Ask God now to open your eyes to those in your own neighbourhood. Who else is isolated? Who needs practical help? A listening ear? Just a kind word? What can you do to connect with the people in your neighbourhood and to love them well?

Now look at those in your own home again. What is the invitation for you to speak life over those with whom you live? To love them with your words and your actions? As you stand with Jesus, what does he want to show you about those who are right in front of you?

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

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When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 6: Do Not Worry...Really?

Morning Prayer:

Notice where, in the past few days you have felt ill at ease. What tensions are rising up? Do you have physical pain or knots in your stomach? Are your thoughts racing from one catastrophe to another? Do you feel unexplained listlessness, despair or confusion?

What do you do when you feel anxious? We have become so used to suppressing and ignoring our anxiety that we don't pay attention to it until our body forces us to take note. Now that you are in isolation and your distractions are no longer working you may feel the tension rising up.

This morning, you are invited to look at your anxiety with God, and to see what He wants to show you in the midst of it. Don't get caught up in answering every question, but let them be a starting point for a conversation with God. You may not be feeling it in this moment, but when you do, come back to this.

At the moment of anxiety, when you feel your pulse begin to race, your soul feels uneasy, you're aware that all is just not right, stop and ask yourself:

- What was happening before I became uneasy? Was I in a conversation, reading something, daydreaming? Was I with people or alone? What was I thinking about? What was I doing? What was I feeling?
- Is this sense of uneasiness due to the Spirit prompting me to move in a different direction, or is it truly anxiety? The Spirit will not lead me into confusion, shame, or defensiveness, or an emotion that leads me away from Him.

Take some time to explore what the anxious feeling is attached to. Anxiety can be elusive, because it's often a vague sensation about a situation or circumstance. As soon as you can name something concrete that you're feeling, it loses power. When you make it you can talk about it with God or others. For example, you may feel anxious after reading an email from a family member and as you explore with God, you discover you have fears related to your health or that of your family. Once you identify this you can speak about it with practical, concrete words rather than a feeling of unsettledness.

Here are some ways you can bring fear to light in the presence of God, and let him meet you in it:

- Name how you feel. "God, I feel fearful of _____ because..."

- Let it be a conversation with God. Invite God into the scenarios that run through your mind. Ask him to walk through each scenario with you in your imagination. Ask Him to show you if there is anything he wants to set you free from.
- As you play out the scenarios above in your mind, notice where God is with you in it.
- Take a few moments to rest with God in the truth He has just shown you. You may want to write or draw something to capture it, you may want to sing, walk or take a few deep breaths. Just let God seal in the truth He has spoken.
- If the anxiety was attached to an upcoming event, you may wish to reflect with God after the event and think about how it went, and see if there is anything else He wants to say to you about it.

Midday Reflection:

*God of calm,
who knows the end from the beginning,
give grace to us who are bound by time and do not know how things will be,
and call us to remain present to our anxiety yet also present to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who cried out to you in his anxiety and was ministered to by your Spirit.
Amen.*

Do not worry

It can be easy for phrases in the Bible to become so familiar that they almost lose their meaning. When Jesus tells us “do not worry” and asks us to be like the flowers of the fields and the birds of the air, the words can glide past us like a pre-printed greeting card.

In the painting below, we see the images of birds and flowers in the background, contrasted with the painter’s friend, Fiona Morrison, during her last chemotherapy session. There is a deliberate contrast between the birds and flowers and a situation where it is all-but-impossible not to worry. There is no resolution to this dissonance; we are invited to embrace it as it is.

Take some time to sit with the painting, and click on this link to hear Fiona tell [her story](#).



Do Not Worry, ID Campbell 2017, Oil on Canvas with Embroidery, 30" x 40"

As you then hold your own concerns and questions before this compassionate God, allow his presence to meet you right in the middle of the untidiness of them.

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 7: The Gift of Boredom

Morning Prayer:

Repeat the fist, palms and open hands exercise from Day 2. Notice, without judgment, what has changed this week. Are you holding more or less tightly to things, or holding on to different things?

Physically make fists with your hands, and ask God to show you what tensions you are holding as you enter into this time. As you hold on to these things, ask the above questions again.

Loosen your grip, and hold your hands open, palms down. If you are able, offer your concerns, frustrations, anger and resentment to God. Hold your palms down to signify that you cannot grab those things again.

Now, turn your hands upward and ask the Lord what he wants to fill them with today. As you hold your hands up, pay attention to what your soul desires with God.

Midday Reflection:

*Joyous Lord,
whose first act in the world was one of creation,
help us not to succumb to frustration,
but discover what opportunities it presents,
that we might join in your creative character and be like our Father,
who with Jesus and the Holy Ghost dance together with joy.
Amen.*

Boredom as an invitation⁵

“I’m bored.”

When I was growing up, it was the regular complaint of children and teenagers everywhere. Perhaps now, in an age of smartphones, streaming video, and social media, it’s not heard so often, but when we are placed in isolation, it’s possible that boredom may raise its head again.

Is that entirely a bad thing?

⁵ Reflection by Matthew Green

Someone once quipped that while necessity is the mother of invention, boredom is the weird uncle. “Find something to do,” was a mother’s frequent response to the claim of boredom. With nothing to occupy us, we may need to create something to fill the void, and creativity is an expression of the very God in whose image we were, well, created.

Boredom is an invitation to devise something new, to generate beauty that wasn’t there before. It is an overture to play and explore and find joy in something different. It calls us to search for new activities, new combinations, new expressions. And it presents the opportunity to do all of this with the Holy Spirit beside us.

If you find yourself bored in this isolation, is this perhaps an opportunity from God to explore your creativity? Is there a simple project you could do that might fill some time and generate a bit of levity in this space? Some suggestions:

- Write a series of haikus or limericks
- What can you make from a bunch of toothpicks?
- Make up some new dance steps
- When was the last time you made paper airplanes?
- Create a series of simple comic strips
- Write new lyrics to a song you know
- Break out crayons or pencils and draw something
- Build something out of a cardboard box

Whatever you choose to do, try to avoid judgement at your creativity. Explore and see what happens without demanding that it be perfect. Creativity is about process, not results.

Additionally, remember that the Spirit is there with you. As you create, spend the time listening, talking, and playing with God together. What is it like to talk to Jesus as you create and fill space? Can you be present to the Lord as you explore and play?

An additional reflection

Boredom, like most feelings, can also be a window into our souls. It is a signal that something is missing, or at least that our hearts believe something is missing. It is a sense of frustration that we aren’t getting what we expected or feel like we deserve.

All of those emotions offer up multiple opportunities to explore our deep hearts with God and examine our automatic habits of feeling and doing. Consider asking Jesus

about what those emotions mean and what he might be inviting you to shift in your perspective, your activity, your awareness, or your capacity to wait.

- Lord, what do I believe I am missing?
- Do I expect more than I need? More than you desire to give me?
- In what ways am I not trusting you to satisfy me?
- Am I rejecting or failing to see something you are offering?
- Have I become entitled to activity or busyness?
- Am I so used to having others fulfil my desires that I have trouble recognizing them or meeting them myself?
- Is this space a way of stretching me to become stronger? More patient? Better able to wait?

Is God inviting you to simply sit in your boredom, or to fix it? What does he say to you if you ask him?

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 8: The Gift of Your Own Company

Morning Prayer:

In 1 Corinthians 13 we learn what love is like by looking at how God loves us. The more we know God the better we are able to rest in his perfect love. This passage describes who he is and how he holds us. As you sit with your thoughts and emotions, what might he invite you to release to him today?

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 ESV

Midday Reflection:

*God who is love,
who desired us into existence,
give us eyes to see the value that you have for each of us as individuals,
that we would find security in our belovedness,
and find freedom to give ourselves well to the world and one another,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with the Father and Holy Spirit loved us from before the foundation of the
world.
Amen.*

The gift of your own company⁶

I have noticed that many of us have a bad habit of taking the people we're closest to for granted. We check our phones while they talk. We forget to say please and thank you to them. We don't laugh at their jokes. We reserve kindness, respect, and courtesy for strangers and we overlook the people who are closest to us. We may drift from familiarity to disrespect without noticing. When we take someone for granted, we stop trying to go deeper. We don't pursue; we aren't curious. We believe we know all there is to know, and it feels awful to be taken for granted.

⁶ Adapted from Chapter 9: "The gift of your own company" from *The Gifts I Never Knew I Had*, Tanya Lyons (2019)

One person it's easy to take for granted is ourselves. We're used to walking around in our own skin. Our life is ordinary, and we don't expect much. We tune out our own voice like background music. We critique our looks, our words, and our thoughts. We speak to and think about ourselves in ways reserved for our worst enemy. With habits like these, is it any surprise we stay busy so we don't have to be alone with ourselves? Many of us have lost sight of how wonderful we are and what a gift it is to spend time with ourselves.

If you're someone who finds it hard to appreciate yourself, look no further than your friends. For reasons unknown, they think you're interesting, fun to be with, and worthy of time and energy. Our friends celebrate our victories and have compassion for our sorrows. They're curious about our ideas and dreams, and they listen to our concerns. What do they see in us that we have a hard time recognizing in ourselves? Perhaps it's simply this: we can't delight in what we don't see. It's possible to go through life as a stranger to ourselves, blind to our own beauty and strength. Sometimes there's a disconnect between what we hope others will see in us and what we see in ourselves. We want people to hang out with us, but we don't enjoy our own company. What's up with that? Either we've done a great job fooling our friends about who we are, or we need to adjust the way we see ourselves.

I've heard married couples talk about the importance of keeping a relationship alive through paying attention to each other; asking rather than assuming; and always expecting change and growth. When you see your spouse as complex and dynamic you realize it's a privilege to share life with them. What if you saw yourself in the same way?

If you're not living in awe and wonder at the amazing gift of you, there's work to be done. After all, you're unique and incredible, unlike anyone who's ever lived. Your laugh is delightful. Your enthusiasm is contagious. Your quirks are charming. You've suffered and been pushed down, but you've gotten back up. You've loved with generosity, taken risks, and created beauty. No one brings to the table what you bring. You're impressive. You have so much to offer: friendship, love, humour, and support. But your value doesn't depend on what you do for others. You are someone worth knowing, and one of your tasks in life is learning to appreciate and enjoy yourself. Enjoy, not just tolerate. Caring for yourself is a way to say thank you to God for the gift of you. Don't take yourself for granted. Don't underestimate how interesting and wonderful you are; there's more to you than what's on the surface. You have a voice that's worth hearing, and being able to spend your entire life with you is a gift you don't want to waste.

Activity: (Re)discover the gift of yourself and your own company

Spend some time imagining what it would be like to meet yourself today for the first time. Consider the following questions:

- What do you notice about you?

- What questions would you like to ask about your life, ideas, experiences, and opinions?
- What stories would you want to hear about the life you've lived up to this point?
- As you spend time with this person, what do you discover about them? What about them surprises you or impresses you?

Another way to (re)discover who you are is by making a timeline of your life. Take a large piece of paper and sketch out the key events of your life: decisions, moves, jobs, losses, accomplishments, and challenges. You could use a straight line, a curvy road, or something else to represent your journey. Once you've written down the big events take another look and consider:

- Who played key roles in your life at different times?
- What propelled you from one season to the next, and what held you back?
- Where have you taken big leaps forward, gone backwards, or been stuck?
- What are some highlights and low spots?
- What questions do you have about where you've come from and where you want to go?
- What themes, dreams or hopes are woven throughout your story?
- What would it look like for you to honour and appreciate the incredible person you are?

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 9: Beauty Project

Morning Prayer:

Turn everything off, close your eyes, sit at the window, and listen.

What do you hear outside of yourself? Birdsong? Wind? Rain?

What do you not hear, that you normally would? Traffic? Airplanes? Sidewalk chatter?

What new sounds can you hear that you normally wouldn't?

What do you hear inside of yourself? Your breathing? Your foot tapping? Your tummy rumbling?

What thoughts do you hear? Are they calm or chaotic? Driving you to action or drawing you to rest?

What beauty is God speaking over you? Can you hear his song?

Take a few moments to rest with God, and to commit your ears to hear what he wants to say today.

Midday Reflection:

*Ageless one,
who never tires of your creation,
but finds joy and beauty throughout,
give us eyes and ears that truly take in the wonders you have made,
that we would be made glad and rejoice in you and your workmanship,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives with you and the Holy Spirit in continuous delight.
Amen.*

So much beauty⁷

Read [Psalm 8](#), and notice what it says about God, and what it says about us. What phrases stand out to you? Take some time to let these images wash over you, then write, draw or sing praise to him.

⁷ Reflection by Jenny Walley. Adapted from various prayer exercises on noticing beauty.

Choose one of the following genres of beauty:

- Nature (if you aren't able to go outside have a look at [this](#).)
- A piece of Instrumental music (Bach's [Sleepers Awake](#), Vivaldi's [Four Seasons](#), [Phaeme Gow](#), Piano music, anything that you find beautiful and moving)
- Architecture ([Here](#) are a few unique pieces)
- A piece of art ([Here](#) you can find 12 museums you can visit online)
- Someone you love (a spouse, a friend, a child)

Spend 15 minutes engaging with the thing of beauty. Just look at/listen to it (or think about a person, if they are not with you), and let it move you. Don't try to evaluate immediately, simply observe what you see, hear, feel. What do you notice about its beauty?

Reflect for 10-15 minutes about what you notice and how you are moved. You may want to journal your thoughts and observations.

Spend another 15-20 minutes with the piece of beauty. As you re-engage with it, ask God to show you what he sees, feels, and thinks of it. Is there anything he wants to say to you? How will you respond?

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, asking him to search your heart and show you:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you can think of that you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. And thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

What feelings came up that were difficult? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries still cling to you? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might want to say to you about them.

Ask God to replay the tape of your day with you, to show you how he was with you. Stop with him, and rest in his presence.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow? Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 10: The Hem of His Garment

Morning Prayer:

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV

Notice your body today. Where do you feel tension, pain, discomfort? Where do you feel good, healthy, strong? Take a few minutes to relax your body. Roll your shoulders, tighten and release your toes, fingers, hands, feet, any muscles that feel tense. When you feel sufficiently aware of your body, begin to acknowledge to yourself and to God the words below.

I have a body that is here. My body has limitations. I am not infinite. I cannot grant everybody's wishes. I am grateful for the truth that I am not God. Only God can meet all the needs that surround me. Thank you, Lord, for being there in my weakness and for meeting my needs as well as the needs of those around me.

Now, notice the roles that you play in life: In your family, at work, church, organizations and hobbies. As you list these roles, notice how attached you are to each of them. Acknowledge to yourself and to God the words below.

I have been given roles to play and tasks to accomplish, but at the deepest core of my being, God does not view me through the lens of roles, culture or denomination (i.e. mother, sister, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, doctor, shop owner, or something else). I am now clothed with Christ's righteousness, with full pardon from guilt and full acceptance from God. I am precious in God's eyes. God calls me His beloved. And by the Spirit, at the core of my personality, I have put on His fruits of love, compassion, humility, kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, patience, self-control, peace and goodness. That is who I truly am in Christ.

Take some time with God to notice what you struggle to believe in the words you've just said. May he meet you today with a deeper acceptance of the truth of who you are.

Amen.

Midday Reflection:

*Great physician,
who formed us and knows our workings,
each of us bears weaknesses and hurts - bleedings that will not cease.
Bring healing to our broken bodies and hearts,
and give us the patience and support to bear under our infirmities
when you are still working through them,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God.
Amen.*



The Hem of His Garment, I.D. Campbell 2017, Oil on Canvas, 30" x 40"

This painting recreates the moment when a woman, desperate for physical and social healing, seizes the moment at hand and reaches out to Jesus. Iain chose to paint this woman, not just meekly touching, but hanging on to Jesus.

The models for this painting all work in The Wild Olive Tree café, situated inside St George's Tron Church of Scotland. The model portraying the woman who was healed was chosen because of her story of restoration and her [testimony](#) of what Jesus had done for her.

Take some time to look at the painting, listen to Asha's testimony, and marvel at our good God who meets us no matter what our brokenness looks like.

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 11: Come to Me

Morning prayer:

Take some time to become aware of your breath. Breathe deeply and consider the following questions:

- What am I thinking about?
- What emotions am I feeling?
- How does my body feel?
- Lord, how are you with me right now?
- Is there a verse or a phrase you (God) want me to remember today?

As you breathe, let the rhythm of your breath become a prayer.

Breathe in, "You are with me," Breathe out "I am not alone."

Breathe in, "Lord Jesus Christ," Breathe out, "I receive your love."

Breathe in, "Prince of Peace," Breathe out, "I rest in you."

Whatever truth you need to hear today, let that become your breath prayer.

Father, I trust you today to hold the people I love, to attend to the things I have left undone, and to meet me in my place of worry, doubt or fear. I turn my eyes and ears toward you and I look for how you want to love me today. Amen.

Midday Reflection:

*Steadfast Jesus,
who was always working as you saw the Father work,
keep us connected to you and in remembrance that the Spirit is present,
that we would not take on life alone and in our own strength,
but work with you and the desires you have for us,
who with the Father and Spirit enjoy perfect union and invite us to join.
Amen.*

Simply come⁸

Today you are invited simply to come. May you hear the invitation of Jesus to lay down your burden.

⁸ Reflection by Jenny Walley and Ellen Burany

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

It was common for a rabbi to invite an apprentice to take on his "yoke." The picture of being yoked as two oxen signified submission to a master teacher. Jesus' listeners were aware of this imagery but would have been surprised the invitation was made to all who would respond to it. Other rabbis would only invite elite students to take on the yoke of a rabbi, as the success or failure of the student would reflect on the rabbi.

Equally surprising is the description of the yoke as something which is easy and light. Pulling a yoke is grueling work, yet as we submit and surrender to Christ in humility, we discover the ease of wearing a yoke which fits perfectly. We are not alone; the Lord himself is partnered with us. His commands are not burdensome, because they are the way to life.

As we submit to our gentle and humble Rabbi Jesus, we begin to let go of our expectations of ourselves and others, as well as our need to prove our worth. We let him teach us this way of gentleness and humility and it leads to life. As we learn from him we live his commands from the very core of our being, letting God himself transform us into his image.

Today, let's respond to his invitation to come to him. Read through verses 29 and 30 (written below), line by line, and imagine you are having a conversation with Jesus. Read each line and respond with what's in your heart. For example, when he says, "Come to me," you may realize you're hesitant to come, or you might be apprehensive about where he'll take you, or you might be pleased to draw close to him. It's okay to be honest in your response and there's no right or wrong answer. Continue the back and forth through the lines of the passage below.

Come to me

All of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens

And I will give you rest

Take my yoke upon you

Let me teach you

Because I am humble and gentle
And you will find rest for your souls
For my yoke fits perfectly
And the burden I give you is light.

Spend some time to be quiet and let God's truth sink in.

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 12: Blessing the World

Morning Prayer:

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:4-8 (NIV)

God has invited us to join him in his plan to reconcile the whole of creation to himself. Gordon T. Smith in his book, *Courage and Calling*, suggests that each of us sees the brokenness of the world a little bit differently, and that what we see is an invitation to go with God as a healing agent to that brokenness. This may be mending souls through counseling, caring physically for the broken as a nurse, challenging the system as an activist, or speaking truth into situations through art. The important thing is paying attention to how God is inviting us to partner with him to bring healing and reconciliation.

Sit with God this morning, and ask:

- What gifts, creativity and longing for the wholeness of creation has God given you throughout your life?
- How might God invite you to offer these things to him for the sake of the world?
- What does this look like for you in the situation where you are now?

Now think with God about a few people who are close to you. What gifts, creativity and passion can you see in them? Take some time today to encourage these people about the value of their gifts.

Midday Reflection:

*Ever-present Spirit,
who is always working to redeem all things to yourself,
call us to remember that you are present throughout the world,
that we would not miss your beauty and redeeming work,*

*but find you active, healing and calling all people to join in your loving work,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with you and the Father are as close as our own breath.
Amen.*

When God meets culture⁹

Read [Acts 17:16-28](#).

Where might you find the altar to the “unknown God” in your culture?

Choose one of the following aspects of culture:

- Film or TV show
- Popular music
- Pop-culture magazine

Spend at least 15-20 minutes intentionally watching, listening or reading while paying attention to the underlying cultural narrative.

Next, reflect for 10-15 minutes on the following questions. If you’re with someone else, reflect together.

- What do you see, hear, feel?
- What do you notice?
- What are the dominant attitudes, worldview, or cultural traits you see reflected in it?
- How would you describe the tone or attitude of the piece?
- What underlying questions are being raised?
- What redemptive elements do you see?

Listen to the song, watch the show, or look at the magazine again. Ask God what he sees, hears, and thinks about it.

- Is there anything he wants to say to you through it?
- In the same way Paul used the altar to the “unknown God” and a piece of poetry to connect with the people of Athens, how could God reveal something of himself through the questions that are being asked?

⁹ Reflection by Jenny Walley

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 13: Owe Nothing but Love

Morning Prayer:

You are not alone. You were created in love and for love. While this time of isolation may have been a dark season of loneliness, loss, sadness, or disconnection you have never been outside of the love and embrace of God.

During this season you have been separated from people you love and care for, but you have been held up by the love of friends and strangers. Take some time to think about the significant people in your life: family, friends, colleagues. Think about acquaintances, neighbours, and people who serve you. Picture the smiley lady at the post office, the school kids who walk past your window, the cashier at the grocery store, and the bus driver who hums when he drives. Whether you know them by name or by face the people who surround you are precious to God and connected to you in important ways.

Thank the Lord for the ways he has carried these people and you during this season. Ask him how you could pray for them right now. How could you connect with some of these people today?

Midday Reflection:

*Holy Trinity,
whose love for one another overflows into the world,
guide us to love like you have loved us,
that we might care about those you have placed in our path
and value people as beings made in your image,
becoming a small reflection of your Trinitarian communion,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives with the Father and Holy Spirit,
one God in perfect love.
Amen.*

Tolerance and duty¹⁰

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one

¹⁰ Reflection by Jenny Walley

*command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor.
Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
Romans 13:8-10 NIV*

There are two extremes to which we often take the concept of love: one is tolerance, where we can believe whatever we want, but at the same time no one is allowed to disagree. The other is duty, where we assume if we have followed the rules and ticked the boxes, we have done our duty of love. God's love is so much more than either of these. His call to love is a call to lay down my own agenda to move toward another.

Think about these questions with God:

- Are there situations or relationships in my life where I am approaching love from a place of duty?
- Are there situations or relationships in my life where I am approaching love from a place of tolerance?
- What would it look like to lay down my agenda to reflect God's love instead?

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

Day 14: Gathering Gifts

Morning Prayer:

As you come to the end of these two weeks of isolation you may be preparing to go back to normal life or you may be preparing for further isolation. Regardless of what's next for you, take some time to reflect on the gifts of the past two weeks during your prayer time this morning.

Think back to the start of your isolation. What feelings, thoughts and tensions did you experience at that time? How does that compare with how you feel today?

As you think about the past weeks, which parts of the “rule of life” you’ve developed have been life-giving for you? Which parts have drained your energy? Are there any changes you’d like to make as you move forward?

What does God want to show you about how he has been with you these past weeks?

Midday Reflection:

*Our Immanuel,
who has been, is and will always be with us,
reveal how you have been present with us in these weeks
that we may gain the gifts of greater confidence and trust
in your faithful presence with us as we step into our future,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with the Father and the Holy Spirit
take delight in being present with us in all things, at all times and everywhere.
Amen.*

Gathering gifts¹¹

Read [I Samuel 7:10-14](#). After God enabled the Israelites to defeat the Philistines, Samuel set up a stone, naming it *Ebenezer*, to enable them to remember how God, in his goodness and faithfulness, had been their helper. The people would from then on have a reminder of what God had done. This would not only give God glory, but it would also draw a forgetful people to remember with gratitude the kind of God they really worshipped. This isn't all there is to glean, though! What God had done for Israel changed the whole trajectory of their future! God's movement in their lives at

¹¹ Reflection by Ellen Burany

that time brought relief, restoration and peace into their years ahead. God's work of the past impacted their future.

Consider this: There is work that the Lord has done in your soul over these past weeks. Not only does God want you to remember what he's done in you as you move into the days ahead, but it might be helpful to recognize that this work he has done might just be the beginning of some new ways of being and living that significantly impact your life as well as your relationships with God and others for years to come.

You've begun to mine some of the gifts of this experience, now let's take some time to mine even more by looking back as well as looking toward the future concerning the invitations of God.

Reflect on the following questions with God, asking his Spirit to reveal what he desires.

What has the Lord done in your heart during these weeks? What has he reminded you of? Revealed to you? Shifted in your perspective? Changed in you?

Spend some time giving thanks to God for what he has done in you.

Now, ask the Lord to reveal to you his invitations concerning your future.

Although not all of these may be an invitation right now, are there any new ways of being or shifts God is inviting you to make or continue, through his help and power, as you move ahead:

- in your relationship with Him?
- in your relationships with those close to you?
- in the way(s) you relate with yourself?
- in other relationships?
- in your perspective?
- in the way you do life or how you focus?
- in your view of and/or approach to your work and those you work with?

As you end this time, consider finding an actual stone and writing a word or drawing a picture or symbol on it on one side that reminds you of what the Lord has done in you during this time and on the other side the Lord's invitation is to you as you walk into the days ahead.

An evening prayer of examen on the day:

Each evening before going to bed, take some time to sit with God, reviewing the day and considering the following questions:

What has been good today?

Take some time to write down everything you are thankful for...the taste of your morning coffee, something that made you laugh, a conversation you had, something you read, anything. Thank God for these moments.

What has been hard?

When did you feel disconnected? What feelings came up that were uncomfortable? What unresolved thoughts do you have? What anxieties, fears or worries did you encounter? Speak these out to God, and listen for what he might say to you about them.

Ask God to show you how he was with you in the good and the hard today. Thank him for His presence and receive His grace.

What does it look like to trust him for tomorrow?

***Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ,
Amen***

The Contributors

Ellen Burany is a spiritual director in Southern California who focuses on the care and spiritual formation of leaders as she works with [Novo](#). She is passionate about helping leaders walk deeply God and integrate their relationships with him into every part of their lives and ministries. She holds an MA in Spiritual Formation and Soul Care from Talbot School of Theology at Biola University. After years of waiting, she is basking in the wonder and beauty of being a mother to her newly adopted daughter, Gianna (and trying to get some sleep once again!).

[Iain Campbell](#) is a Glasgow based portrait painter and is an Affiliate Artist of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts. His work focuses on bold portraits, exploring life in the face of adversity. He is artist-in-residence at St. George's Tron Church of Scotland in Glasgow, where he is working on a three-year project: painting the Gospel of Luke in a contemporary, Glasgow context.

[Matthew Green](#) holds a doctorate in pastoral theology from the University of Toronto, where he focused on the neuroscience of emotion in the spiritual life. He also has taught mathematics and physics, runs a graphic design and gag gift business, designs and sells sculpture kits, and probably neglects all of this far more than he should because sometimes a computer game just sounds like more fun. He took on a discipline of writing collects (a formal prayer) during a Lenten season and has returned to it regularly as seen in these meditations. He wrote the collects found in each of the midday reflections.

Tammy Lundell is a missionary originally from Chicago, Illinois, but living her life in Genoa, Italy. She serves the body of Christ as a spiritual director, worship leader, humorist, not-very-dedicated-writer, friend, sister, wife, daughter... At the time of writing Tammy was in full lockdown with the rest of Italy (and many other parts of Europe) trying to discover a "temporary normal" rhythm for life and ministry in quarantine. You can read her spiritual reflections at www.LundellsinEurope.com.

Tanya Lyons is a Canadian recently moved to Glasgow, Scotland, and serves full-time with Youth With A Mission's Centre for Christian Formation and Discipleship. She received her MA in Christian Formation and Discipleship from the University of the Nations. Tanya swing dances as often as possible, loves black coffee, geocaching, reading books and talking about them.

Derek Rice has been a song writer, worship leader and spiritual life coach with [Novo](#) for over 15 years, helping people connect with God and live out their vocational calling. He is passionate to see communities and churches find their collective voice of worship as they uniquely celebrate God's restoration, lament the injustices of our world and together declare with prophetic imagination, God's dream for the new

creation in Christ. Derek is a husband and dad of two daughters and lives in community in San Diego, California.

Jenny Walley, the lead on this project, is a spiritual director and retreat facilitator in Glasgow, Scotland. She received her MA in Spiritual Formation from Talbot Seminary in California. For the last 15 years, Jenny has worked with [Novo](#), helping ministers and lay people create space for God to enter into every part of their lives. Her greatest achievement (still a work in progress) is being loved by her husband and raising her three young children, who teach her more about love (and her need for Jesus) than all of her past experience combined.