

# BECOMING



A Lenten Journey through the biblical symbols  
and images of spiritual growth and transformation

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## Welcome to the Lenten Journey of Becoming

Lent is not just a season about “giving things up.” Lent always has “becoming” in mind. Who will we BE when we meet Jesus with palms on the path into Jerusalem, when we gather with him around the Table, when we witness him on the Cross, and when we discover that the tomb is empty?

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures give us myriad pictures, symbols, and concepts to help us understand what this process of BECOMING is like and where it leads. This devotional is designed to explore these images so that we become more acclimated to what the Spirit of God is doing in us, among us, and through us.

Each week spotlights a different dimension of our becoming. There are devotional entries for Monday-Saturday. Sunday, we hope you will focus on the practice of gathering with your faith community and perhaps prime your heart with the introduction page for the new week.

The key to any devotional is to pay more attention to what the Holy Spirit is doing in you than the words on the page. This is why we begin each day with centering prayer and prompt you to ask questions of both yourself and God. So take your time and sense the BECOMING Spirit at work in you over these next 40 days.

Our prayer is that this devotional would help to shape your expectations for your walk with Jesus, open your eyes to some of the ways God is moving in your life, and encourage you to endure the discomforts of transformation as you glimpse the Abundant Life God has in store for you.

Week 1: “Un-Becoming”

Week 2: “Becoming ME”

Week 3: “Becoming US”

Week 4: “Becoming Christ”

Week 5: “Becoming New”

Week 6: “Becoming FOR”

Holy Week: “Becoming ALIVE”

# WEEK 1: UN-BECOMING

It is fashionable to criticize younger generations for being obsessed with image: angling phones, posing, photoshopping, and otherwise curating their “lives” to display online for all to see. But this is, in a sense, just another form of the human project that seeks to “put our best foot forward” and “dress to impress,” which can all be ways of redirecting our resources to creating an outer facade to the neglect of our whole being.

But God only exists in reality. God only meets us in our real lives. Everything else is a barrier, a distraction, smoke and mirrors that actually keep us from the abundant life that Jesus claims to desire for us and make available to us.

And so before we talk about what we are “Becoming,” Lent begins with a kind of “un-Becoming.” As we journey towards Jesus, naked and dying on a cross, we recognize our own need to have much of that to which we give our effort, attention, and time stripped away, pared down, and deconstructed. Without all of these things, we might feel...well...unbecoming – unacceptable, inappropriate, and unfit for polite society. But this is nothing compared to what we most desperately need and most deeply desire: to encounter God in reality.

## Weekly Practice: Confession

This week, our practice is confession. At its heart, confession is being open and honest about things we feel some urge to hide. It is to agree with God about what is true. The ashes of Ash Wednesday are one way: to acknowledge, in the words of Alan Jones, that “We are all future dead people.” The key is to let yourself un-Become—to confess whatever it is you use to hide, misdirect, or pretend (for yourself or others) that you are something other than who you really are. You don’t always have to confess everything to everyone. Consider opening up with someone you trust, who loves you, and who has your best interest at heart.

## Wednesday, March 5 - Ash Wednesday

Take a couple minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*From dust, you were created.*

**Read:** Genesis 2:4-9

*Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* It's a lovely scene: God the gentle artisan sculpting and in-spiring human life. Practically, though, it presents us with quite the paradox. Because we don't like being dust...dirt...clay...anything helpless and unformed. In fact, we take a great deal of time forming ourselves and our public images to impress or at least seem acceptable. And yet, God – as one song sings – “makes beautiful things out of the dust.” Lent begins with an invitation to un-become all the things we've worked and fought so hard not to be: unformed, helpless dust. Why would we do such a thing? Only faith: faith that it is in God that we become fully human, fully ourselves, fully alive.

**Ask:** How do I avoid feeling like dust? What about my dust-ness makes me most uncomfortable (ie. mortality, need, dependence, etc.)?

**Practice:** Today, find a church that gives ashes. Receive them on your forehead, and remember that you are dust, God's favorite creative medium.

**Pray:** Breath of Life, give me the faith to be...simply...dust; to let down my guard and my image so that you can form and mold and inspire life in me. Amen.

## Thursday, March 6 - Eve

Take a couple minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*From dust, you were created.*

**Read:** Genesis 2:18-25, 3:20

*The man named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all living.* The rabbis note that “adam” isn't a name at first. The word here has connotations of “dust/dirt/clay/human.” It's a noun. They also point out that “eve” is a verb. The word in Hebrew here has connotations of “action/being.” When Adam sees Eve, he says, “This is flesh of my

flesh! Bone of my bone!" Together, they combine to make a human being. A living noun. Dirt that can act.

**Ask:** Who helps you do things? Who are you bound to?

**Practice:** Contact someone who helps or has helped you become.

**Pray:** Creator God, you formed us from dust and breathed life into us. Thank you for those who walk alongside us, who help shape us into who we are meant to be. Open our hearts to recognize the gifts of companionship and mutual support. May we be living beings, fully present and fully alive, nurturing and creating alongside others. Amen.

### Friday, March 7 - Nakedness

Take a couple minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*God searches and knows me.*

**Read:** Job 1:1-22

*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there.* Naked dreams are pretty common, I'm told. It often points to a momentary or chronic anxiety, fear, or vulnerability at work in our souls. To be naked is to be exposed, seen, and unguarded. Naturally, we tend to avoid this as we learn to protect ourselves. But in the depths of intimacy and trust, nakedness becomes essential: we need to be seen and known just as we are. When we are fully seen AND fully loved, we can be "naked and unashamed." One of the images of Good News in the Bible is that God wants to clothe us with beautiful garments (Isaiah 61:3, 2 Corinthians 5:2-4, etc.). But this requires us to disrobe in the presence of God, to be seen and known...and LOVED fully, so that we can be free.

**Ask:** Who makes you feel both seen and loved? What does this image of nakedness stir in you?

**Practice:** Confess something you are prone to hide with a trusted companion.

**Pray:** Divine Seamstress, I offer you the clothes I'm hiding behind, trusting that I can be loved for who I am, and that you are ready to clothe me in garments of freedom. Amen.

## Saturday, March 8 - Circumcision

Take a couple minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*I trust you, O God.*

**Read:** Deuteronomy 30:1-6

*The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.* Yes, we're talking about circumcision, a topic many of us would rather not think about for many reasons. (I recommend you search for "circumcision in the bible" if you need to look it up.) But it IS a key image in the Bible for God's people, and Deuteronomy 30 gives voice to how this ancient ritual can teach us about discipleship. The outward sign of circumcision on the male body points to the need for a "circumcision of the heart" (see also Romans. 2:29). In Lent, we are reminded that when it comes to approaching God, "less is more." In the case of the Israelites, this may have meant the removal of the exile experience, shame, and the habits that led them away from God. What is it that you need God to remove from you?

**Ask:** What gets in the way of loving God and experiencing full life?

**Practice:** Go at least one day without something you think may be distracting you from the love of God that brings you life. Consider removing this for longer or even for the whole of Lent.

**Pray:** Loving Surgeon, remove from me anything that keeps me from a love of you and the fullness of life you have for me. Amen.

## WEEK 2: BECOMING ME

When we use the term “human nature,” it is often to explain our faults, shortcomings, and sin. But that’s not where the Bible starts. The Scriptures begin with a picture of humans as being made “in the image of God.” And this inherent value and blessing continues even after sin enters the story (see Genesis 9:6).

It might be said, then, that part of God’s transforming work in our lives is aimed at helping me Become...well...Me again. The theologian Reinhold Niebuhr suggested that our sin is always about either trying to be something more than human (God) or caving to a life that is less than human (animal). Sin distorts, deteriorates, and distracts us from the good, image-bearing humanity with which we were made

And so this second week of Lent, we will look at images and stories of “Becoming Me”: rediscovering the glorious mysteries that we are, and tuning into the deeper image of God or Divine Spark that resides in each of us by sheer fact of being human. What can be shed that is getting in the way of me being fully me? What good and beautiful gifts have I been ignoring or forgotten?

### Weekly Practice: Body Scan

This week, our practice is the Body Scan. Whether we get lost in our heads or succumb to base instincts, part of Becoming Me will be reconnecting our parts: body, mind, spirit, soul...whichever other ways you break yourself down. In this body scan, take 1-5 minutes to be aware of what is going on with you and in you. You can work from head-to-toe, breathing deeply, and paying attention to each part of your body. Notice aches, strength, restlessness, freedom, tension, and calm. Where are you carrying your stress right now? Where in your body can you find hope? What surprises you as you tune into this breath-infused dirt that God creates and calls “My Image”?



## Monday, March 10 - Masterpieces

Take a couple minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Created for good.*

**Read:** Ephesians 2:8-10

*For we are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* What makes a masterpiece? Not a single color or brush or even one brush stroke. It is the Master Artist who can bring all of these together to inspire awe, recognition, or the whole range of emotion. As you become you, God will take your stories (even the painful ones), your personality (quirks and all), and your capacities, and bring them together in a masterpiece of Grace. To become you, you (and I) must realize that every part of us has a part in the image the Master is piecing together.

**Ask:** What parts of your life seem least worthy or appropriate for the Masterpiece God is making of you?

**Practice:** Schedule a time to experience a masterpiece (of music, painting, etc.). Take time to notice both the parts and the whole and how they are all impacting your experience.

**Pray:** Masterful Maker, give me the faith to accept, embrace, and offer my whole life to the masterpiece you are making of me. Amen.

## Tuesday, March 11 - The Refiner's Fire

Take a couple minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*More precious than silver.*

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:3-9

*For you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* If I were silver, I don't think I'd enjoy the process of refinement. The feeling of extreme heat while all of the "impurities" all tangled up in me slowly untangle to the surface for all to see. I hope I'd accept the process though, for precious metals are stronger and shinier when all that isn't truly *them* is scraped away. Our "impurities" aren't about what doesn't fit some moral or social code. They are those things that have entangled themselves in us to obscure who we really are as fully beloved children made to fully love God and others. The "salvation of your soul" is what happens when you become fully you, who God has created you to be,

through-in Father Richard Rohr's terms—the refining fires of “great love and great suffering.”

**Ask:** How is God refining you right now through great love and/or great suffering? What is coming out? What does this salvation feel like?

**Practice:** Spend 5 minutes in silence. Silence can be a “refining” experience. Notice what comes to your mind and happens in your body. Write down your observations. Pray for God to refine those things that are distracting you from an abundant life of faith, hope, and love.

**Pray:** Refining Fire, give me the courage to endure great love and great suffering as you make me stronger and shinier. Amen.

### Wednesday, March 12 - Getting Found

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Rejoice, for I am found.*

**Read:** Luke 15:1-7

*Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.* Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who leaves behind ninety-nine sheep to find the one that is lost. This parable speaks of God's relentless love and pursuit of each of us, no matter how far we stray. In the eyes of the world, one lost sheep might not seem significant, but in the heart of God, every soul matters.

**Ask:** When have you felt lost? How has God pursued and found you?

**Practice:** Reach out to someone, maybe a shut-in from the church, who might feel lost or forgotten today. Remind them they are seen and valued.

**Pray:** Loving Shepherd, you seek us when we wander, calling us back into your embrace. Thank you for never giving up on us, for celebrating when we are found. Help us to extend that same love and care to others, to notice those who feel unseen, and to remind them of their worth. Amen.

### Thursday, March 13 - Branches

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*I am connected.*

**Read:** John 15:1-5

*I am the vine; you are the branches.* In one of his “I am” statements, Jesus today states that he is the vine and we are the branches and that God is pruning off branches that bear no fruit. It is good to note that branches just don’t visit the rest of the plant, they are a part of the plant; bound to it. We cannot hope to produce fruit by just visiting Jesus one day a week. This must be a daily abiding as a branch can’t just visit the vine when it feels like it.

**Ask:** What does it mean for you to abide in Christ daily? What parts of your life might need pruning so you can bear more fruit?

**Practice:** Set aside intentional time today to abide in Jesus – whether through prayer, Scripture, or acts of love. Notice how staying connected to the Vine shapes your day.

**Pray:** Vine of Life, keep me connected to you. Help me not to drift away but to remain rooted in your love and truth. Prune what is not bearing fruit in my life so that I may grow in you. May my actions, thoughts, and words reflect the nourishment I receive from abiding in you. Amen.

Friday, March 14 - Wings like Eagles

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today’s breath prayer:  
*Comfort, comfort my people.*

**Read:** Isaiah 40:31

*But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.* There are a lot of spiritual practices that can help you soar like an eagle. Each practice can be like a feather in your wings. One such practice is the *Lectio Divina* or “holy reading.” It’s a simple practice in three easy steps. Read a passage of scripture. Re-read the passage and see what grabs you. Pray on that passage. That’s the practice! It’s a simple yet powerful way to engage with scripture and deepen your relationship with God.

**Ask:** What practice helps you feel connected to God? How might engaging with Scripture in a new way help you rise above life’s challenges?

**Practice:** Try *Lectio Divina* with Isaiah 40. Read it slowly, notice what speaks to you, and spend time in prayer reflecting on its message.

**Pray:** That part is up to you today.

Saturday, March 15 - Restored Vessels

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*We do not lose heart.*

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

*We have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.* Kintsugi is a Japanese art form that repairs broken pottery by gluing the pieces back together with golden lacquer. Rather than hiding the cracks, the golden glue accentuates the broken lines and brings out a new beauty from what was once just shattered shards. When we are honest with ourselves, we know our lives are full of cracks. We sin, we hurt others, we fail to be what we aspire to be, and all this can lead to shame and disappointment in ourselves. Yet imperfect clay jars are the exact kind of vessel into which God places his precious gospel. Our imperfections, failings, and brokenness do not need to make us lose heart, which prevents us from doing the necessary repentance and reconciliation and cuts us off from God's grace. Yes, we are like cracked and broken clay jars, but God knows how to do *kintsugi*.

**Ask:** In what ways have my failings and my sin caused hurt to others and disappointment in myself? Rather than losing heart, how might this help me to be open to the grace-filled work of death and resurrection?

**Practice:** Look up some images of Japanese *kintsugi*. Pick one image, re-read 2 Corinthians 4, and use the image to practice *Visio Divina* – divine vision. Spend some time in prayer allowing God to speak to you through the combination of image and text.

**Pray:** God, I am a clay pot and often feel crushed, perplexed, and forsaken because of my brokenness. May you fill me with the hope of *kintsugi*, as a symbol of your redeeming work in my shattered life. Amen.

## WEEK 3: BECOMING US

For good reason, American culture pays a lot of attention to the individual. Individualism is an important corrective to systems that shamed, restricted, or advantaged people merely for their family history, class, race, or other collective identity. We want people to be treated for who they are. But we can—and do—take individualism too far.

In Genesis 1 and 2, both creation stories emphasize that humanity is multiple and diverse. In healthy and unhealthy ways, we are always inextricably linked to communities and ecosystems bigger than ourselves. As we consider God's work in our lives and spiritual transformation, we dare not think only in individualistic terms. God isn't just transforming ME. God is creating US. In this process, we become more aware of our interconnectedness and seek to join God in refashioning, reattaching, and redeeming those links. And finally, we embrace a new link: to the Church, the people of God, the Body of Christ.

In this third week of Lent, our images are not merely of MY growth, but of what it looks like as we "Become US." How does grace reposition us within something bigger than ourselves? How are we interconnected and interdependent with God, others, and creation itself?

### Weekly Practice: Making Contact

Throughout this week, seek to "make contact" with others. This may involve writing a note or sending a text to someone you haven't seen in awhile, carving out an extended period of time to reconnect with a friend or family member, spending time outdoors contemplating your connections with creations, etc. This practice should draw you OUT of your individual spiritual processes and towards connection.

## Monday, March 17 - Chosen Stones

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*I am chosen and precious in God's sight.*

**Read:** 1 Peter 2:1-10

*Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight.* Imagine being a stone—perhaps a bit jagged around the edges with a few cracks, probably not material for a palace meant to shout imperial power and perfection, nor a mansion intended to convey comfort and status. But then, imagine yourself—jagged edges, cracks, and all—becoming part of a building meant to proclaim to the world that the Creator of the Universe is near, with, and welcoming. No matter who has rejected you or looked at you with a smirk, God has chosen you to be a part of something bigger, a community that lets the world know that God is Love. You are becoming a living stone in a community temple for Immanuel: God with Us.

**Ask:** What do you feel a part of? What bigger purpose are you participating in?

**Practice:** Find a stone. Hold it. Feel its textures, weight, and stability. Imagine yourself as a chosen and precious part of God's living temple: the Jesus Community.

**Pray:** Emmanuel, let my life in some way be part of welcoming others into your welcoming arms of love. Amen.

## Tuesday, March 18 - Body of Christ

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*I am part of the body of Christ.*

**Read:** 1 Cor 12: 21-27

Let's try another Lectio Divina on this passage.

**Ask:** What stands out? What part of the body am I? What part of the body of Christ am I furthest from?

**Practice:** Try *Lectio Divina* with 1 Corinthians 12:21-27. Read it slowly. Notice what speaks to you. Spend time in prayer reflecting on its message.

**Pray:** That part is up to you today.

### Wednesday, March 19 - A New Humanity

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*I am a part.*

**Read:** Ephesians 2:11-18

*That [God] might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace.* In Ephesians, Paul is very clear that God's work involves bringing different things into reunion as a part of the reunion of heaven and earth (1:10). Part of our becoming is being woven into what Scot McKnight calls "a fellowship of different": a New Humanity. A major part of our transformation involves learning to receive, share, honor, and bear with people who are different than us in light of what we have in common: our belovedness in God's eyes.

**Ask:** Where do you interact with "differents"? What are the challenges of growing in this way?

**Practice:** Reach out to someone from whom you feel different. Find a time to connect over coffee, lunch, etc. where you make an effort to get to know them and see them through God's eyes.

**Pray:** Human God, as you have brought heaven and earth together in yourself, break down my resistance to your gathering, reuniting forces of love. Amen.

### Thursday, March 20 - Priestly Kingdom

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Blessed to be a blessing.*

**Read:** Exodus 19:1-6

*Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.* The basic idea of a "priest" is to be a "go-between" or a "bridge" between one party and another, specifically between God and people. This was humanity's job from the beginning: to image God to creation while offering up the creation to God. Fittingly, it is what God calls the burgeoning people of Israel to be as they begin heading to their Promised Land. And it is the vocation echoed to the early churches (1 Peter 2:9). The purpose of God's people isn't just to "be blessed"; we are blessed to "be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). Our churches haven't always succeeded in this. But how does it change our view of community to

remember that it is not an institution “for US,” but rather an “US for the world”?

**Ask:** How is my church reflecting God to the world these days? What messages might the world want me to take up with God in prayer?

**Practice:** Pray for people you know who may not have a relationship with God or a loving community. As you pray, ask God to show you how you might be able to be an answer to your own prayer in action for those same people.

**Pray:** Generous God, make my church a more priestly presence in our neighborhood and beyond, giving a vibrant reflection of your love and wisdom to those around us. Amen.

### Friday, March 21 - Mountain of the Lord

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today’s breath prayer:  
*Let me seek the Lord.*

**Read:** Isaiah 2:3-5

*Many people will come and say...* There are so many scholars and theologians, devotionals and podcasts that seek to deepen our relationship with God. It can be overwhelming to choose where to focus. Yet, it is a gift that we study Scripture and pursue life in Christ together. We need one another to see things we might miss, to encourage each other, and to walk this journey in community.

**Ask:** Who in your life helps you seek God? How can you be that person for someone else?

**Practice:** Engage in a spiritual conversation with someone today. Ask them what they’ve been learning about God or share something that has deepened your faith. Or check out a podcast like *The Confessional* by Nadia Bolz-Weber, *The Bible for Normal People*, or ask your pastor what he might recommend for you.

**Pray:** God of wisdom and guidance, lead me up your holy mountain. Help me to seek you not just in solitude but in community. Open my heart to learn from others and to share my journey with those around me. May we walk in your light together. Amen.



## Saturday, March 22 - Bridesmaids

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating this week's breath prayer: *We wait for you, O Lord.*

**Read:** Matthew 25:1-13

*Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.* We are part of a waiting community. On this, we can agree and find a basis for fellowship: God's work is not done—in us or in the world. We may have trouble locating the root of the problems or good solutions, but regardless, we are a waiting people. No community is “there” yet. There is no “perfect” church or even an ideal/model community of Jesus-followers. We can expect to clash, muddle, and bump into one another sometimes. But that just reminds us of who we are: people who know that Christ is coming, that God is not finished with us yet.

**Ask:** What are you waiting for? What makes waiting hard?

**Practice:** Let your waiting opportunities lead to fellowship today. Whether in traffic, at the grocery store, or in the drive-thru—remember that you (and everyone else in front of an behind you) are waiting people, reliant on God's grace. Keep awake as you wait. Perhaps you can bless or be blessed even in this waiting period.

**Pray:** Patient God, bind us in our common waiting, our common hope, our common anticipation of your healing, reconciling, and renewing work. Amen.

## WEEK 4: BECOMING CHRIST

Though separated in our bibles, the New Testament includes a two-part series called Luke-Acts. In Luke, we follow Jesus around as he preaches good news, heals, speaks truth to power, and generally embodies the love of God wherever he goes. In the “Acts of the Apostles,” we follow the apostles around as they preach the good news, heal, speak truth to power, and generally embody the love of God wherever they go. This points to something that gets played out in the rest of the New Testament and the early Church: in some mystical and practical sense, followers of Jesus become like and actually embody the presence of Christ in the world.

In this fourth week of Lent, we hone in on the goal of God’s transforming work in our lives that we might reflect what fully loved and fully loving human beings look like: Jesus. This isn’t about physical appearance, masculinity, or other unique bodily or cultural distinctives. It’s about participating in the fullness of Christ’s humanity and divinity. As we “Become Christ,” we live as Christ lived: embodying and enacting the love of God in the world.

### Weekly Practice: Journaling/Serving

During this week, look for opportunities to embody and enact God’s love as we see Jesus doing. Each morning, spend a few minutes in a journal, calendar, etc. scanning through your day ahead. Consider at least 3 opportunities you will have to serve and bless someone else—people you will naturally encounter, open time you may have to reach out to someone, or people you can bless with resources. At the end of your day, return to your journal and reflect on those opportunities you had to serve, both planned and unplanned.

## Monday, March 24 - Renewed in Christ's Image

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Make me like Christ.*

**Read:** Colossians 3:1-17

*And [you] have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. You could read Colossians 3 and pull out a bunch of good behaviors and actions that you should be doing or doing better...and be pretty overwhelmed. But that would miss the heart of the text: that this is what *God is doing* in you, renewing your created self in the image of the Creator. It works from the inside out and from God's action to yours. The actions are guides for the renewed self—like teaching a child to walk, eat at the table, and throw a baseball. "This is what life as Christ looks like. This is what you can do now!" The process is not merely about doing things, but becoming someone...namely, yourself in the image of Christ.*

**Ask:** Where do I see signs of God's renewing work in my life? Which of these instructions are most helpful in guiding my new life today?

**Practice:** Try a centering prayer that tunes you into your deepest self. You might set a timer for 30 second intervals. Begin with 30 seconds of noticing your body, then 30 seconds of noticing your thoughts, 30 seconds of noticing your feelings, 30 seconds of tuning into your will and desire, then 30 seconds seeing what might be even deeper than that. With each phase, you are going deeper and deeper to what some have called the "soul," the Self, or the Ground of your being—where your spirit and the Spirit of Christ meet.

**Pray:** Creator and Renewer, renew me from the inside out, so that my life more and more resembles the Life of Jesus, embodied Love. Amen.

## Tuesday, March 25 - Put on Christ

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Christ, clothe me.*

**Read:** Romans 13:11-14

*Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* As Paul writes these words to the Romans, the church is struggling with major differences over culture, diet, liturgy, and power. Each group is trying to leverage whatever they

can to be heard. In the middle of one of Scripture's most sweeping explorations of what it looks like to practically "love your neighbor," Paul tells them to "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Like Jesus taught us and showed us, our transformation involves marinating in the prayer, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done." What changes when you, like getting dressed in the morning, "put on" the One who eats with sinners, draws near the sick, washes feet, and dies so that all may live?

**Ask:** As you look back on the past day, what spiritual outfit did others see you wearing? As you look ahead at the day to come, what will change if you "put on the Lord Jesus Christ"?

**Practice:** Whenever you get dressed or adjust your clothes today, imagine "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice what it does to you on the inside and how it changes your experience and actions.

**Pray:** Lord Jesus Christ, clothe me in yourself. Embolden me to enter the day in your presence, and when others see me, let them see you. Amen.

### Wednesday, March 26 - Cheerful Givers

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*God make me a cheerful giver.*

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 9: 6-11

*Whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* There is a biblical practice of tithing – giving 10% of your earnings to support the work of the church. Yet, statistics show that the average person only gives 3-4% of their income, according to the United Church of Christ Pension Boards. How we spend our time, talent, and treasure matters. This is spiritual work – how the hungry get fed, the naked clothed, and the sick visited. Maybe today is the day to make a plan for giving. Not all 10% needs to go to the church; perhaps some goes to a local women's shelter, a food bank, or an organization that aligns with your values. What matters is that giving is intentional and makes a mark for good in the world.

**Ask:** Along with the church, who needs my gifts of time, talent, and treasure?

**Practice:** Make a plan to tithe and give of your time and talents to the church and a local agency that is doing meaningful work.

**Pray:** Generous God, you have blessed me abundantly. Help me to give freely—not out of obligation, but out of joy. Shape my heart to reflect your generosity, so that my gifts – whether financial, time, or talent – may be a source of blessing to others. May my giving sow seeds of love and justice in the world. Amen.

#### Thursday, March 27 - In This World

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:

*I am a light of the world.*

**Read:** 1 John 4:7-21

*As {Christ} is, so are we in this world.* As we look closely, I hope it is clear what John says here: while the Jesus who walked in the dust of Galilee no longer walks this earth as a single human, God is not left without the embodied presence of Christ in this world. It's us. What a weighty thought! Such a calling drives me right where the apostle John tells us to go: abiding in the love of Christ, basking in the light, and letting love permeate heart, mind, and action. Our calling is not a solitary one. It is always lived out in rich bonds of community with God and our siblings in Christ. In this world, WE are Christ.

**Ask:** Where do I go...What do I do...How do I respond...in light of this proclamation that I am as Jesus in this world?

**Practice:** As you might soak in a hot tub for refreshment, give yourself at least 10 minutes today to simply "abide in God's love." Speak in prayer if you like, but no words are necessary. Just be.

**Pray:** Love, I bathe in you, soak you in, abide in you. For I do want my life to be as Christ in this world: an embodiment of Divine Love. Amen.

#### Friday, March 28 - Crucified with God

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:

*I am crucified.*

**Read:** Galatians 2:19-21

*I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.* We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ.

Together as the church, we are the body of Christ and the covenant

promise for the forgiveness of sins. Yet the hands and feet of Christ have holes in them. Pain is a guarantee in this way of life. It's a guarantee in life anyway; yet, when we are "with Christ," this pain produces something bigger than just us: community, purpose, acceptance, and more.

**Ask:** Where does it hurt? What needs my attention today?

**Practice:** Offer care to someone who is hurting today – whether through a kind word, a listening ear, or a simple act of service. Recognize Christ's presence in both your wounds and in the healing you extend to others.

**Pray:** Crucified Christ, you know suffering, yet through it, you bring life. Help me to embrace the pain that leads to growth, the sacrifice that leads to love, and the wounds that lead to healing. May I walk this path with faith, knowing that you are present in both the suffering and the redemption. Amen.

### Saturday, March 29 - Student-Teachers

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Make me like you, O Christ.*

**Read:** Luke 6:39-42

*Every disciple who is fully qualified will be like the teacher.* In our society, students are to be able to answer questions that correspond to the content a teacher has provided for them. You can see the difference in what Jesus says about his students (disciples). When we "learn" from Jesus, we do not just get right answers, we *become like* our teacher. Jesus is teaching us to be student-teachers, who humbly learn and grow even as we serve and teach. In this humility, compassion, and patience, we become like our Teacher.

**Ask:** If I asked you what God was teaching you lately, would you give me an answer...or show me what you've become? What have you become lately?

**Practice:** Ask someone who cares about you and can be honest with you 1) how they see Jesus in you, 2) to help you see a "plank" that might be lodged in your eye so that you can become more like your Teacher.

**Pray:** Teacher, through your words, through others in my life, and through my life experiences, teach me to become like you. Amen.

## WEEK 5: BECOMING NEW

Overall, “NEW” has pretty positive connotations. But not always. New updates to your phone’s operating system, a new billing system you have to learn in the office, and new fashions coming out just to make your closet “so last season.” “NEW” is almost a synonym for “unfamiliar.” In our society, “NEW” can feel relentless. NEW can feel disorienting, humbling, and overwhelming because it keeps us from being able to control, predict, or master.

This all is what spiritual growth can feel like too. “NEW” is a common image for how God is working in the world: “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?” proclaims God through the prophet Isaiah (43:19). The Jesus of Revelation echoes, “See, I am making all things new” (21:5). Yes, spiritual transformation is going to feel unfamiliar, uncontrollable, and sometimes overwhelming! Thankfully, we are BECOMING NEW by our Creator who knows us best, our Redeemer who works with us gracefully, our Lover who only does what is best for us. This is the God who is making us—and all things—NEW.

### Weekly Practice: Adventure

Over the course of this week, try new things. Perhaps you’ve been invited to try something new by a friend: Say yes. Maybe there’s a place you’ve been thinking about exploring: Go. If there’s a spiritual practice you’ve heard about but never attempted: Now’s the time. (For all of these, use discernment, of course. Don’t just try ANYTHING!) If you feel disoriented, incompetent, or clumsy...that’s ok! Say a prayer and dive in, trusting that God’s NEW is waiting for you in these places of faith.

## Monday, March 31 - Trees

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Lead me in peace.*

**Read:** Isaiah 55:12

*The mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song.* This passage has been made into a wonderful song sung at church camp and churches. Augustine once wrote that, "Singing is praying twice." Let's try something new. We've done a few Lectio Divinas and a Visio Divina. Now for a new take. This is called the Audio Divina. Scan the radio or wherever you get your music. Cycle through the songs or scan the radio until one grabs you. Listen to the song and pray on a lyric or a chord progression that sticks out. Let music enrich your spirit.

**Ask:** Why is this song speaking to me? Why is it touching my spirit?

**Practice:** Take time today to engage in *Audio Divina*. Let a song find you, listen with an open heart, and reflect on how God might be speaking through the music.

**Pray:** God of melody and harmony, open my ears to hear your voice in unexpected places. Let the songs of this world remind me of your joy, your peace, and your presence. May my heart sing in tune with your love today. Amen.

## Tuesday, April 1 - New Creation

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*You make all things new.*

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.* This is a nice, clear sentence. In the original Greek, however, it's more sudden, more abrupt. Something like: "If anyone is in Christ-NEW CREATION!" That is how New Creation can be. Strolling along, half-asleep, stuck in cycles of worry and lists of to-dos, then BAM! NEW CREATION! The people around us are no longer scenery, but walking images of God to love and bless. An ordinary meal becomes a sacrament of gratitude and connection with others. A struggle that has been weighing us down



becomes a testimony to God's faithfulness. New Creation is always bursting upon us, and we are always becoming new. Pay attention.

**Ask:** What feels dusty, dull, and obsolete in my life? What might God be making new?

**Practice:** Write on your hand, leave a note in your car, or put something in your pocket to remind you that New Creation is bursting out all around. When you remember, refresh your vision of your current situation. See it through New Creation eyes and act accordingly.

**Pray:** Divine Renewer, as you renew our minds and hearts, renew our actions and habits, and even our relationships and world. Amen.

### Wednesday, April 2 - The New Self

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*You are making me new.*

**Read:** Ephesians 4:17-32

*To clothe yourselves with the new self.* When something from his past comes up, writer and speaker Rob Bell likes to reply, "Oh yeah, that was 8 Robs ago." I think most of us can identify with this. It's not avoiding accountability, but acknowledging the need to be continually renewed. What I love about the Scripture, though, is how practical the Apostle Paul gets. We don't just *stop* doing "bad" things. We *begin* practicing truth-speaking, sharing, encouraging, kindness, and forgiveness. Becoming a "new self" is a dance of God's work in our lives and our practice of new ways of being human. Working together, we will one day be able to say of our selfishness, pride, and fear, "Oh that? That was 14 (Your Name Here)s ago."

**Ask:** How would the New You live today?

**Practice:** Pick one old habit today. Choose something "new" to replace it with. Look for every opportunity you can to—with God's help—put that new self into practice today.

**Pray:** Life-Giver, keep working out this new life in me. Don't give up on me, and keep me from giving up on either of us. Keep making me new! Amen.

## Thursday, April 3 - Metamorphosis

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Be transformed.*

**Read:** Romans 12:1-21

*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* The Christian Peacemaker Shane Claiborne remembers how his mother desperately desired that he would go to church and make good friends. He did start going to church. But what happened at church was that he met Jesus, and Jesus introduced him to all the wrong kinds of people: the unpopular, the kids from broken homes, the struggling, the rough, the broken, the poor, and sinners. Sometimes our vision of the Christian life is merely an extension of our well-adjusted middle-class values. The Apostle Paul, following the example of Jesus, knows that the Christian life is about more than mere self-improvement. It calls for sacrifice, it calls for risk, it calls for going where we do not want to go and doing what we do not want to do. It's about being a living sacrifice, not just following the ways of the world, but having our heart, soul, mind, and strength transformed to the values of the Kingdom by an encounter with the living Christ.

**Ask:** What areas of my life need to be transformed through sacrifice for Jesus' sake?

**Practice:** Take a risk this week: Do good to someone you don't like; show hospitality to someone you don't know; forgive someone you don't want to.

**Pray:** God of the cross, you overcame my evil through your good. Fill my heart and transform my mind so that I might also live in this evil world as a person of your love. Amen.

## Friday, April 4 - Fruit of the Spirit

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Bear fruit in me.*

**Read:** Galatians 5:22-24

*If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.* New life isn't manufactured. New life is cultivated. The Spirit bears FRUIT in us. God

doesn't mass-produce trinkets-of-the-Spirit. Forty days of Lent is a good start, but the Fruit of the Spirit takes a lifetime of cultivation. God is patient to bring the growth...in time...when it is ready. We simply cultivate the soil of our souls, creating a receptivity to the water, nourishment, and sunlight of God's graces, and prepare the harvest of God's love, joy, peace... and so on for the enjoyment and shalom of all.

**Ask:** By looking at the soil of my soul, what Spirit-ual fruit is coming up out of the ground in this season?

**Practice:** You're already on the right track by spending time with this devotional, but choose one more way to nourish your soul today, something that makes you more receptive to God's work in you.

**Pray:** Fruitful Spirit, nourish the seeds you have planted in me, and let the harvest be plentiful not only for myself, but for those around me. Amen.

### Saturday, April 5 - Heart Transplant

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Give me a new heart.*

**Read:** Ezekiel 36:22-31

*I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* Stone protects. It's invulnerable. Prick it with a knife or needle and it will probably be just fine. So we develop stone hearts. Through stories of hurt, abuse, rejection, and disappointment, our hearts harden, protecting us from the risks of faith, hope, and love. Hearts of flesh are vulnerable. But as researcher and storyteller Brené Brown teaches us in her book *Daring Greatly*, "Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences."

**Ask:** What has made your heart stony? What is that protecting you from? What is it keeping you from?

**Practice:** We have myriad medical exams for our hearts. Set aside 10 minutes to simply pay attention to the health of your own heart today. Where is it hard, soft, closed, open, wounded, strong...?

**Pray:** Great Physician, perform this heart transplant gently and with skill. Help me to trust you as I open myself to life's hurts in the hope of joy. Amen.

## WEEK 6: BECOMING FOR

St. Augustine used a visceral image to describe the state of humanity in a world filled with violence, injustice, and deaths of many kinds: *Incurvatus in se*. It means to be turned inward upon oneself. The image is almost that of someone in the fetal position. The image is gripping because it points not only to our self-interest, but to our fear. For the Apostle John, the opposite of Love isn't Hate, but Fear (see 1 John 4:18).

Transformation, then, is like unfurling and opening ourselves as though we have just been hiding from danger, curled up in a small space, thinking only of our own survival. It opens us up and we are able to live for more: for God, for others, for the world—not out of compulsion or obligation, but out of a freedom to share, contribute, and serve. This is where our transformation is moving...and has always been moving since God made us in the Divine Image to cultivate and care for the earth. As we move along in our Lenten journey, approaching the Cross, it is for our good that we would look outward toward a greater purpose for our lives.

### Weekly Practice: Ask to Help

One of the most important questions we can ask is, "How can I help?" It resists our dual compulsions to avoid and/or control when things seem messy. This week, look for opportunities to ask this question. Hopefully, you can ask it out loud to someone else. You might also ask it of God and be led to bless someone else in secret. Each day, look for opportunities to be FOR someone else.

## Monday, April 7 - Temple of Holy Spirit

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Dwell in me, God of Love.*

**Read:** 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?* Beneath some of the specific ethical applications Paul makes in this text sits one of the grandest theological claims ever made: that human beings carry around God in our bodies. As Jesus was (John 2:21), so we are mobile encounters with God. As God's whole plan in Christ was to bring Divine Love to us, so our bodies are constantly opportunities to bring Divine Love to...well, anyone. For God's dwelling in us is not merely for our benefit, but so that others can encounter and experience God, New Creation, amazing grace not just in our church buildings, but wherever they may be.

**Ask:** What changes when I am aware that I am a mobile temple of the Holy Spirit?

**Practice:** Speak words of grace and encouragement to however many people you can today. Let someone know that you (and God) are FOR them in the midst of life's struggles.

**Pray:** Spirit within me, shine through my words, my actions, my very presence so that  (Name)  may know your love for them. Amen.

## Tuesday, April 8 - Clay Pots

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.* (lyrics from Daniel Iverson's hymn, "Spirit of the Living God")

**Read:** Isaiah 29:15-16

*Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?* In an effort to counteract heavy-handed attempts to force people into rigid social norms and roles, it is common to learn in our society that we can be whatever we want! And it is true that society should not dictate our plans and purposes to us. But we would be wise to remember this image: clay in the potter's hands. We are being made into vessels that can hold the Divine within us and all those Fruits of the Spirit that are growing in us. Whatever our

age or gender, job or skills, passions or quirks, God is making us into someone who can uniquely offer Divine Life to the world. Whatever else we are, that's what we can become with God.

**Ask:** How is God forming you? What is contained in you for the good of the world?

**Practice:** Consider what skills, experiences, or resources you have at your disposal. Thank God for them and find a way to use one of them to bless someone else. Listen to the Caedmon's Call song, "Hands of the Potter" if you need some inspiration!

**Pray:** Lord, if I'm the clay then lay me down on your spinning wheel. Shape me into something you can fill with something real. Amen. (Lyrics from Caedmon Call's "Hands of the Potter")

### Wednesday, April 9 – Instruments of Righteousness

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Present your body.*

**Read:** Romans 6:5-14

*Present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.* Think of all the things your body has done, can do, and does. Arms that can draw a weeping child into an embrace. Hands that can knead together ingredients that will become warm bread. Feet that can run and dance. Lips that can smile, pray, and teach. Each body has different abilities and limitations, but to be human is to be embodied, to have "instruments" that can be used for many purposes. Paul tells us to present the parts of our bodies as "instruments of righteousness/justice." Of course, we know that any work we put our body to may start out clumsily. And so, as in anything, it requires training for our bodies to more naturally be employed to love, serve, bless, and lift up others. But this physical training is as much the process of spiritual transformation as any prayer, Scripture, or song.

**Ask:** What am I using my body for? What can I use my body for?

**Practice:** Pick 3 body parts. Use each of them as an "instrument of righteousness" today in some way. As you enact these blessings toward others, marvel at what a miraculous gift we have in our bodies, no matter our limits.

## Thursday, April 10 – Light of the World

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Let your light shine.*

**Read:** Matthew 5:13-16

*You are the light of the world.* Very rarely do I notice the light shining around me—perhaps after a series of dreary days or coming out of a dark movie theater. But mainly, light allows me to move around and marvel at what is around me. So Jesus calls us the “light of the world,” and declares “let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” All of this language is straight out of Genesis 1-2. When we live in creative, life-giving ways, our light reveals the Father-Creator-Lover of their souls.

**Ask:** How is my life revealing (or hiding) the God of Love?

**Practice:** Bless someone secretly today. Your act of love itself will be the light that shines not on you, but on the One who created and loves the one you bless.

**Prayer:** Light of the World, as you have illuminated the God of Love to me, may my life be a radiant spotlight on the One who loves us all.  
Amen.

## Friday, April 11 – Salt of the Earth

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer: *Season the earth.*

**Read:** Matthew 5:13-16

*You are the salt of the earth.* When was the last time you had a wonderful meal and remarked, “Boy that steak/asparagus/potato really brought out the flavor of the salt!”? That would be weird, right? It is the salt that brings out the flavors of the other food! If we are looking around for the world to bless us, we might be missing the point. How are WE bringing out the wonderful gifts and graces of the world God has made?

**Ask:** What delicious flavors of God's creation can I draw out today?

**Practice:** Mark out your day today into meal courses (ie. Work, Family, School, etc.). Ask God to show you how you can bring out the best in

those “courses” without drawing too much attention to yourself. (You might focus on encouraging or complimenting others, taking on behind-the-scenes work, or ask someone how you can help with a project.)

### Saturday, April 12 – City on a Hill

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today’s breath prayer: *Be our north star, O God.*

**Read:** Matthew 5:13-16

*A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.* Part of God’s vision and reason for choosing a people is that they would be a sort of “North Star” for humanity (see Isaiah 2:2-3). Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes, “The city on a hill is constructed to be a visible orientation point for others.” Key to this, though, is that no part of this involves self-promotion, coercion, or gaudy piety. The city CANNOT be hidden. Jesus says this is who his disciples ARE. It is lives that our formed from the inside-out, communities that actually live out the Way of Jesus who help the world to orient itself to the wisdom and grace that characterize God and that bring human beings into our fullness. To live into Jesus’ grand vision for our lives in Matthew 5:13-16 is not to take God’s mission into our own hands, but to BE with God so that we simply ARE the light, salt, and city that invites the world into the abundant Life of Love God made us for.

**Ask:** If someone followed me around, what would they learn about God and God’s purpose for human life?

**Practice:** The Examen is a prayer developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Work your way through this adapted version of Ignatius’ prayer: 1) Reflect on this past day/week and thank God for the ways you have been blessed. 2) Notice those moments and situations when you feel like you were shining with God’s love FOR others. 3) Notice those times when you lost your purpose and lived “incurvatus in se” (turned inward on yourself). 4) Talk to God: ask for forgiveness, thank God for the good, wonder about the causes of each. 5) Ask God to open you up in the coming week to be more FOR the world God so loves.



# HOLY WEEK - BECOMING ALIVE

The most basic idea in the word “Holy” is something being “set apart.” Holy Week is a week Christians “set apart” for very specific reasons. It is our way of making absolutely sure that at least once each year we are immersed in the core story of our faith: the Passion of Christ, the Paschal Mystery, the Via Dolorosa (Way of Suffering). Curiously, Jesus shuns the spotlight throughout much of his earthly ministry. But in Holy Week, Jesus rides into town and makes a spectacle, as if to say, “This is who I am. This is who God is. This is the Way.”

Our Holy Week devotionals will focus on the movements of Holy Week as well as some images that get right to the heart of the Way Jesus is laying out for us. We want to emphasize, however, that this devotional pales in comparison with the value of joining a community—if possible—to participate in the Holy Week journey. Transformation, as we have seen, is an embodied process. The Holy Week services at most churches are some of the most richly embodied and tangible opportunities to connect with the Story of Jesus. So please “set apart” this week by doing whatever you can to participate in the Story with a community of disciples.

## Practice: Show Up

There is no way we can live with 100% attentiveness all the time. But there are times to “flip on the switch.” During Holy Week, seek to be as fully present as possible to the stories, rituals, and gatherings of this special week. Give yourself extra time to read and contemplate the stories of Jesus’ last week on his way to the Cross; say “no” to other things so you can gather with your church; aim to view and interpret the world through the lens of this Jesus story. Show up, be present, inhabit this week with all the attention you are able.

## Monday, April 14 - The Journey to the Cross

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Open the gates.*

**Read:** Matthew 21:1-17

*Look, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey.* If the Way of Jesus is the way to transformation, then let us first notice that Jesus enters the gates of Jerusalem. The Gospels make clear that Jesus knew what awaited him in this "final" confrontation. And yet, he mounts the donkey (or colt) and rides right through the gates toward the Cross. As we move through our own faith journeys, we cannot—in the end—avoid confrontations with death, loss, and fear. At some point, we must join Jesus on the donkey to humbly face the death that leads to Life.

**Ask:** What in my life have I been avoiding throughout my own spiritual journey? What would it mean for me to enter into this fear?

**Practice:** Practice a Lectio Divina with the Palm Sunday story. Visualize yourself as you read slowly through the story. Seek to identify with Jesus. What is your donkey (humility)? What is your Jerusalem (fear)? What rejection, loss, or suffering are you facing (Cross)?

**Pray:** Humble King, give me courage to enter my fears, confront loss, and walk your path to Life. Amen.

## Tuesday, April 15 - The Grain of Wheat

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Those who lose their life will save it.*

**Read:** John 12:20-28

*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.* Imagine a farmer who never planted, but put all her efforts into preserving her seeds. We wouldn't call her a farmer, and she would be serving a lost cause. For seeds are wholly intended to break open and burst with new life. How much of our own energy is directed at preserving the familiar status quo of our lives? Hopefully, in this Lenten journey, you have felt God moving inside of you, felt that there is more life ready to burst out into the

world. All there is left is to be broken open in the nurturing soil of God's grace.

**Ask:** What am I trying to preserve? What new life needs to burst out?

**Practice:** Spend some time around trees, indoor plants, or other vegetation. Meditate on the seed they were and what would have been lost if that seed had not been planted, broken open, and nurtured into life.

**Pray:** Divine Farmer, you faithfully break us open so that we can grow and flourish. Soften my resistance to that beautiful yet painful process so that I can become more alive. Amen.

### Wednesday, April 16 - Deserts to Rivers

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Waters will spring up in the desert.*

**Read:** Isaiah 35:1-10 (compare with Isaiah 34)

*The burning sands shall become a pool.* The Cuyahoga River was one of the most polluted rivers throughout the 1950s and 60s and infamously caught fire multiple times due to industrial waste. We modern people don't have to try too hard to relate to the biblical images of judgment found in Isaiah 34:9 that speaks of "streams being turned to pitch." But today is different. Now there is a national park throughout the Cuyahoga Valley. It is a place of respite and recreation. Bald eagles soar, grey fox play, and switchgrass grows. The river that was once a symbol of desolation now teems with smallmouth bass and steelhead trout. New life is possible.

**Ask:** What tangible signs of new life can point me to the hope of God's New Creation?

**Practice:** Go for a walk in a metro park (or even make a trip to Cuyahoga National Park). Notice signs of new life that point us to the new life to come, and that through Jesus is here now.

**Pray:** Lord of life, you make all things new. Fill us anew with your divine life. Amen.

## Maundy Thursday, April 17 - The Bread

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating this week's breath prayer:  
*Take, bless, break, give.*

**Read:** Matthew 26:26-29

*Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it, and gave it to the disciples.* Taken into Jesus' hands, blessed, broken, and given. This is the process we have been exploring throughout Lent. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus connects his own body to the bread. And even less wonder that Christians through the centuries have found broken bread to be a mystical point of communion with Christ. In this Last Supper, Jesus gives us an embodied spiritual practice that invites the community of disciples forever into these patterns of faith, grace, suffering, and sharing. When we gather around our tables, eat and drink together, we are teleported back into the currents of BECOMING in Christ's hands.

**Ask:** How do meals draw us back into Spirit-ual currents of transformation?

**Practice:** Share a meal with family, friends, or whoever will join you. The meal should be simple and slow. Seek to be mindful of each bite; look your meal partners in the eyes and ask good questions; be intentional whenever you pass something to one of your partners; sense the presence of Christ.

**Pray:** Bread of Life, take me, bless me, break me, and give me. Amen.

## Good Friday, April 18 - The Cross

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating today's breath prayer:  
*Behold the man upon the cross.*

**Read:** Matthew 27:1-61

*Truly this man was God's son.* The Cross is the crux of our spiritual transformation. First, it is an intersection: God's love and human sin, a human life offered to God and Divine life offered to humanity. Second, it is a transfiguration. The man suffering on the cross is the glowing man of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17) and the Risen Christ (Matthew 28)--something we would never intuit or expect without the eyes of faith. The Cross changes everything about how we see the world, which

weaves Divine grace within human history and reverses our expectations and assumptions about who is blessed and cursed, who is chosen and rejected, what a “king” looks like, and what kind of God we have. To bear witness to cross is one of the most reliable places for transformation, renewal, and becoming.

**Ask:** How does a Crucified God shift mind, body, and soul?

**Practice:** Spend as much time as you can soaking in this story and letting it shift your spirit. Join a community for a crosswalk or Good Friday service to contemplate the cross in community.

**Pray:** Crucified God, take all of my expectations, assumptions, and prejudices, and give me eyes that can see You on the Cross of Golgotha as well as on the crosses we construct today. Amen.

### Holy Saturday, April 19 - Dry Bones

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and repeating this week’s breath prayer:  
*Trust in the slow work of God.*

**Read:** Ezekiel 37:1-14

*He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.”* The in-between. Of all the days of Holy Week, this one may hit us closest to home. We live between death and resurrection, loss and renewal, already and not-yet. It is no coincidence that this was a Sabbath Day for Jesus’ disciples and the Jewish community. On the seventh day, God rested, God’s work finished. Our expectations for our spiritual growth should not be upwardly mobile, constant communion, or endless effort. Sometimes, we rest in the tomb in between, wondering if dry bones can live. Most of the time in these valleys, there are things happening beyond our control or even awareness, things that only the Lord God knows. There must be space for us to let go and trust God to make the next move. This is faith. Jesus did not raise himself. He cast himself completely on God. Saturday reminds us of the poignant words of the mystic Teilhard de Chardin: “Trust in the slow work of God.”

**Ask:** What happens in me when I’m simply not doing, just trusting?

**Practice:** Either take today off to rest and do nothing or go about your normal business. Trust that God is still God. You might check out Teilhard de Chardin’s full poem: “Patient Trust.”

**Pray:** Patient God, as I live in the in between, help me to trust in your slow work, knowing that the work you have begun in me, you will bring to completion on the Day of Christ. Amen.

Easter Sunday, April 20 - Resurrection

Take a couple of minutes to center yourself in the presence of God, alternating between silence and exclaiming today's breath prayer:  
*Christ is risen! Alleluia!*

**Read:** Matthew 28:1-10

*"Do not be afraid."* We have been clear: the process of BECOMING is not comfortable, controllable, or predictable. Least of all, Resurrection. In her book *Trauma and Grace*, Serene Jones goes so far as to call Resurrection "traumatic." Indeed, if even dead people don't stay dead, EVERYTHING is up in the air! "Do not be afraid," says the angel. "Do not be afraid," says the Risen Christ himself. For all the struggle and birth pangs of spiritual growth, listen to these words today: "Do not be afraid!" You are never in better hands than when you have given yourself to the One who has BECOME one of us and has now BECOME alive, once and for all. Our journey of BECOMING involves the whole Story: Life and Death and Resurrection. As the Easter hymn proclaims, "Made like him, like him we rise! Alleluia! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. Alleluia!" Celebrate today...and for the 50 days of Eastertide! For Christ is risen...and so are you!

**Ask:** What am I afraid of? Can I trust God to raise me up?

**Practice:** If possible, join a community of disciples and sing all the "Alleluias!"

**Pray:** Risen Christ, as we have trusted you enough to follow you to the Cross, unite us with you in Resurrection Life. Amen.

## **EASTERTIDE**

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

The season of Eastertide lasts 50 days. This is a time to marinate in the new life we have been seeking and preparing for throughout the season of Lent. As you enjoy Eastertide, consider the ideas, practices, and stories that you found most helpful during the 40 days of Lent.

What will be beneficial to you moving forward as you continue to BECOME who God is making you in Christ?

The journey of BECOMING is lifelong. Thanks be to God that the Risen Christ leaves us with these words:

*Surely I am with you always, until the end of the age!*

Matthew 28:20