



The Awakening Prayer & Meditation Guide



SUNDAY

Feel free to begin looking over this section this afternoon or evening. We will read it together in small groups tonight.
8:00pm JHM Lobby

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Awakening! This is your prayer and meditation guide for your spiritual formation this week. What is spiritual formation? It's that part of discipleship that is especially aware of how every part of our lives—how we eat, sleep, play, and work is somehow forming the way we think and love.

The Christian life is a movement between corporate worship and private prayer, between community and solitude. It is impossible to have one without the other. This week we will be considering both. We will look at all of life through the vocabulary of corporate worship gatherings, what some churches call the *liturgy*. Whether or not you come from a church that can be defined as "liturgical," all churches somehow, some way invite Christians to do the work of:

- ① **GATHERING** together to pray and worship in God's presence.
- Listening to the ② **WORD** of God and at some point in the year, partaking of the **MEAL**, the body and blood of Christ.
- ③ **RESPONDING** to the Word of God in prayer and worship and also in
- ④ **MINISTRY** through service, bearing God's love and truth, his very presence everywhere we go.

Our worship and prayer practices this week will take us in and out of this corporate pattern of gathering, Word, meal, response, and ministry, and even further into your own private prayerful

relationship with God in **solitude** and **silence** along with the goodness of **community** through rich conversations with your peers in small groups. To deepen our understanding of this journey, we will read Henri Nouwen's "Moving from Solitude, to Community, to Ministry" along with meditating on Scripture. By the end of the week you will have had many opportunities to not just think about these ideas but to experience solitude, community, and ministry.

lit·ur·gy 'lidərjē/ *noun*

"The work of the people."

Make sure you keep a journal, a bible and this reflection guide available throughout the week.

Guidelines as you continue your story with God this week

You are invited to:

- ...ask questions
- ...be confused
- ...be skeptical (but not cynical...there's a difference)
- ...be restless and impatient
- ...be stubborn
- ...say "no"
- ...disagree with each other
- ...make this week your own (we get out of things what we put into them)
- ...risk and fail
- ...be foolish
- ...be weak
- ...be angry
- ...stay the same
- ...be different, to pray, think, feel, love, act in a way that is all your own.
- ...speak on behalf of yourself and not your friends, family, church (This is your week. Focus on your story, your journey).

You are also invited to:

- ...trust
- ...love

...give your leaders honest feedback. Let us know how we can serve and love you better.
 ...wait for trust and love, to be patient and not to force or fake love and trust
 ...say “yes”
 ...listen to the Spirit on behalf of yourself, to pray for your own growth
 ...listen to the Spirit on behalf of others, to pray for other’s growth
 ...be gentle with yourself
 ...be gentle with others
 ...be wise
 ...be careful
 ...dream
 ...hope
 ...be transformed, to change and grow
 ...fall in love

AWAKENING

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
 and Christ will shine on you.”

Ephesians 5:14

Coming to Christ through prayer, worship, by being in fellowship with other Christians, by loving and serving in the Spirit of Christ—when we attend to these things, it is as if we are awakening from a dream. The closer we move toward God, the more tangible and real his love, his life, and presence will become, and the way we used to live without God will further fade away.

In order to awaken to Jesus’ love and life, we must become like a little child. Jesus says,

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” Matthew 19:14

No matter where you are in your faith, the journey of a Christian is a continual process of awakening to Jesus’ love. When it comes to our life in God, we are all children; we are always beginners before God.

If you feel far and distant from God today, that is fine. The Spirit is present and available to help you awaken. The question is if you have “eyes to see and ears to hear” his love. Are you interested in giving your life—your story—over to Jesus so that you can let the story of your life be written and directed by him?

If you have been “walking in the Spirit” for some time and feel close to God today, then there is still much more of him for you to experience, to grow in and learn to love. This is God who we are approaching after all. It is audacious for us to try and perceive and talk about God. Perhaps one reason why Jesus wanted the children to come to him is that children still know how to be in awe and wonder at the world around them. Children can still say, “Wow!” The Christian story should fill us with fear and trembling and awe.

“Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.”

G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

GOD’S STORY

God’s story, the Gospel, is quite outrageous. Let’s rehearse it: God came to earth in the form of Jesus, a man who claimed to be the Messiah, the Savior of the entire cosmos? Jesus, this Savior, is both fully God and also fully human? And Jesus is the Son of God the Father? And then there is a third person in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit? There are three persons in the Trinity, and yet these three persons are together as One being? And this Spirit, this God, he abides inside the hearts and minds of a

Christian in a love relationship? The Spirit transforms and empowers us to be like Jesus, to think, act, and to love like Jesus? And prayer and worship? These are ways that Christians actually talk to God? And God also speaks back to Christians through the power of the Spirit?

Wow.

These are enormous, seemingly incredible, audacious ideas. If you've ever tried to communicate the parts of this story to someone outside of the Christian church, you might have felt your face warm into a blush as you realized that what you hold to be true about the universe sounds crazy. And you are not alone in this experience.

Regarding the overall sense of the Christian story: C.S. Lewis said that based on what Jesus said and did, Jesus must be either a lunatic, liar, or he must be the Lord of the universe.

Regarding prayer: the comedian Lilly Tomlin said, "Why is it that when we talk to God we're said to be praying, but when God talks to us we're schizophrenic?"

Regarding the cosmic story of creation: our God is the creator of the entire cosmos. Our God designed the very fabric of creation from its substructure of protons, neutrons, and electrons—what some quantum physicists are calling quarks and leptons—from these smallest particles to the billions of stars in the galaxies. Putting this into perspective: there are some 10 billion galaxies in the observable universe and there are an assumed 100 billion stars in each of those galaxies. That means that our Creator intricately designed 1 billion trillion stars. We are claiming that this God loves us and is intimately interested in each detail of our lives?

This story of God, this Gospel, will either seem ridiculous and foolish, or if we have faith, it will

become the most true, good, beautiful, and real way we know of understanding the world.

Application. This is the question of *your* story this week as you consider worship and the arts: how does the story of your life reveal God's story? How are you already a part of God's story? How can you further grow into God's story? How does God want to tell his story through you? How will you allow God to tell his through you?

Small Group Discussion Questions

8:00pm (JHM Lobby)

What did you think Awakening meant when you signed up for this week? After reading through this introduction and getting started today, how has your understanding of 'awakening' changed? What is the most outrageous thing about God's story to you?

MONDAY

8:00 am *SOLITUDE*

(Grove/Dim)

Begin with a short period of silence and then read Ephesians 2:1-10 slowly and carefully at least twice. Consider what God has 'gifted' you specifically with. What has he created inside of you? Who is Christ particularly, uniquely, beautifully within you? Verse 10 says we are his "handiwork," his "workmanship." In the Greek it reads that we are his *poiēma*, his craft, his **story**, fabric, artwork, song, dance, painting, sculpture.... So how has God fashioned you already? Write out a list of all your strengths, your gifts, those things you love doing. Now go back through this list prayerfully to give thanks. Rehearse this in your heart: "Lord Jesus, I give you thanks for making me to _____." As you do this, be attentive to the gift(s) that especially bring you joy.

8:30am Community (Grove/Dim)



GATHERING – The Disciplines of Our Eyes, Seeing

Awakening has everything to do with opening our eyes and seeing what we were previously blind to. Consider that each day is an opportunity for a newer, deeper awakening to Jesus' love. His mercies are renewed each morning.

²² The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;

²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.' Lamentations 3

Every time you gather for worship, what do you see? Can you see an expression of God's mercy in the people who come together or are you blind to this goodness?

The next time you are in a worship service, look around. All these people could be somewhere else doing some other thing, but instead they have come into this place to open their hearts and minds to God, and they intend to do this together. It is encouraging to be familiar with at least a few of those you worship with, but you do not need to know everyone you worship with intimately. This gathering of Christians has its own communal intimacy, its own beautiful significance.

Why do all these different people of different ages and ethnicities gather together? We gather to be near God. Again, this is the audacious claim of the Christian story: we really believe that God is present in our midst. We believe that God reveals himself to us in worship, prayer, fellowship with each other, the Lord's Supper, and the Scriptures.

'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.' Luke 17:20-21

One way to define the purpose of prayer and worship, is to say that by approaching God we are identifying what is Real. The arts—music, poetry, painting, dance—all can be powerful tools to help us in this approach. When used appropriately, the arts can help us awaken to God and his kingdom. God is the most true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy being that exists (Philippians 4:8). When we sing, dance, and pray to him, we are directing our hearts and our minds—our loves and our thinking patterns toward him. Through the arts we can enter into and participate in God's kingdom, his Reality, his story.

All of our life is given to us from God and flows out of God. So we begin a worship service, indeed we begin each day by acknowledging the presence of God in our lives. We begin with an *invocation*.

When we invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are not asking God to come down from the heavens. We are not inviting the Spirit to suddenly step out of a void and be present with us as if God was lost and now he is found. Through invocation we acknowledge the presence of the Spirit who is already more present in our midst than we are even to ourselves.

in·vo·ca·tion

invə'kāSH(ə)n/
noun

A brief prayer near the opening of worship in which the congregation calls on God, particularly God's Spirit, to be present and give blessing while we worship.

STORY

This week we are discussing our life with God as a story. We are discovering how our stories fit into God's story throughout the history of salvation—

throughout the story of the Gospel, the “good news” of Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of every story we identify the characters, setting, and conflict. The characters are you and God, and of course all the other people you are mindful of. The setting is his kingdom, his reality. The conflict is anything that keeps you from living your story in and through God’s story. Conflict is anything that keeps you from God. In a practical way, we often find ourselves disconnected from God, distracted, and preoccupied with the various things around us. This is a question about your eyes: what are you paying attention to? We spend our energy looking at the thing we love. This week you will have ample opportunities to set your eyes on Jesus and the things of his kingdom. Think of invocation as a practice of re-entering the Gospel story and being mindful of our main hero, the central character of our story.

When we pray the prayer of invocation, we are asking *who is the main protagonist, the hero of this story?*

In 1 Corinthians 14:25 St. Paul instructs us each to bring a gift when we gather for worship. The purpose of sharing our gifts is so that an unbeliever might be able to say, “God is really among you.” This is what we are claiming when we gather to worship. That Jesus, the Lord of the cosmos listens to our prayers. He also speaks to us, is our friend, and he is really among us.

When we invoke God, we turn our attention, our minds and our hearts to acknowledge that the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is in our midst. The Creator of the entire cosmos is amongst us. Invocation is no small prayer.

Your Story, Your Gift, Your Ministry

The way God acts as our Creator gets even more specific and ongoing. He didn’t just make you in your mother’s womb and then abandon you. He is interested in being actively involved in the rest of

The Gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the news that man is a sinner, to use the old word, that he is evil in the imagination of his heart, that when he looks in the mirror all in a lather what he sees is at least eight parts thicken, phony, slob. That is the tragedy. But it is also the news that he is loved anyway, cherished, forgiven, bleeding to be sure, but also bled for. That is the comedy. And yet, so what? So what if even in his sin the slob is loved and forgiven when the very mark and substance of his sin and of his slobbery is that he keeps turning down the love and forgiveness because he either doesn’t believe them or doesn’t want them or just doesn’t give a damn? In answer, the news of the Gospel is that extraordinary things happen to him just as in fairy tales extraordinary things happen. Henry Ward Beecher cheats on his wife, his God, himself, but manages to keep on bringing the Gospel to life for people anyway, maybe even for himself. Lear goes berserk on a heath but comes out of it for a few brief hours every inch a king. Zaccheus climbs up a sycamore tree a crook and climbs down a saint. Paul sets out a hatchet man for the Pharisees and comes back a fool for Christ. It is impossible for anybody to leave behind the darkness of the world he carries on his back like a snail, but for God all things are possible. That is the fairy tale. All together they are the truth.

Fredrick Beuchner, *The Gospel as Comedy, Tragedy, and Fairytale*

your story. When we say that God is writing a letter on your heart and that you are his workmanship, his poem, his story, his song, his craft, we are saying that God is putting something inside of you that is of himself.

Now consider the ending of our worship service, the **benediction**, when you are blessed and sent out of worship to do your own ministry, to serve and bless others. Here is the audacious claim of anyone who claims to serve God: by moving out to minister, you are assuming that you have been made by God as his special blessing to the world.

When you step out in ministry, you are claiming, *here I am! Look at me!* Yes, God has put something good, and beautiful, and true deep inside of you, that’s so vital and lovely that blessing and love simply flows out of you wherever you go. There is a story, a song, a poem that is implicit within you. To ‘do’ ministry, you simply need to be awake to and involved in God’s love. You simply walk into the room. Ministry comes out of your inner being. Ministry is not something you perform. You cannot force it or fake it. Ministry is what and who you are.

We can call this inner goodness your “implicit curriculum.” Others witness how the kingdom of God comes out of you in the way you posture

yourself, your smile, the tone of your voice, the sound of your laughter, the way that you love. The Spirit is writing a letter on the tablet of your heart, a poem, a song. Others will ‘read’ this letter as they interact with you. This is the primary way Jesus taught his disciples. When he said, “come follow me,” he was inviting them to travel long distances together, to eat and work together—to be friends. The kingdom of God, as the saying goes, is “more caught than taught.” It is an experience to engage. Or as we will examine tomorrow, it is a reality to be awakened to.

This week of preparation is designed to help you ‘externalize’ this curriculum, to externalize your story. You will be getting to know your story to affirm who you are so that you can share your story more easily with love and boldness.

Small Group Discussion Questions

What is your experience with invoking the presence of God? Have you ever asked God to be present with you? What was your experience with the presence of God?

What do you find yourself looking at, thinking about, pondering throughout the day?

How do you pray or worship—what arts help you direct your attention back to God and his story?

Do you truly believe you have goodness within you to give? A story to share?

8:00pm Community (JHM Lobby)

Let’s practice our discipline of silence again . As you wait in silence, rest and reflect on the day. Ask the Spirit to show you where he has been with you. We considered your eyes earlier, those things that you have been looking at, watching, pondering, meditating on. Has God shown you something new today about himself? About yourself?

Discuss your experience of sitting in silent reflection. Is this a helpful discipline or difficult?

*Share at least one new thing you discovered today about your story and one new thing about God’s story. How is your story connected to God’s?

TUESDAY

8:00 am SOLITUDE

(Grove/Dim)

Now that we’ve begun and you’ve had a day in the Awakening, revisit in prayer this question of your story, the gift you bring. Prepare with the discipline of silence. Attempt as best you can to sit in solitude and silence for three minutes. By ‘silence’ we mean not just quieting exterior noise but also interior noise.

As you sit quietly, notice the thoughts and emotions that begin to swell inside. Recognize and then dismiss these thoughts even if they are good thoughts. The intent now is to empty your heart and mind so it can be awakened to the Spirit and filled with Jesus. As you quiet the interior noise, be kind to yourself and don’t worry about your mistakes. No one can do this perfectly the first time. Allow yourself to discover rest.

After three minutes of silence, read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 slowly and carefully two or three times. Now move back into your inner silence and consider again this question of your story, of your gift. Here are some prompts for you to consider journaling in response to: Who are you? Who do you belong to? What gift do you have to give? What story do you want to share?

8:30am Community (Grove/Dim)

**Word, The Meal –
The Discipline of our
Ears, Hearing**



Hearing Begins with Silence

All music and speech function because of silence. Silence helps us listen. It frames and shapes the meaning of what we hear and take into our hearts and minds. Imagine trying to hear three people speak to you at once. Impossible. You need the

silence around the voice of just one person to make sense of what she is saying. Likewise in music we need both notes and rests. In paintings and photographs, negative space frames and features what the artist wants our eyes to focus on. Dancers do this with stillness and repose. Poets use line or stanza breaks and carefully thought out punctuation. They know the difference between an ‘en’ dash and an ‘em’ dash.

The great violinist and conductor, Isaac Stern said, “Music happens between the notes.” In that space between the notes, silence has meaning of its own. Silence speaks and reveals. Silence is a space. We cannot hear without it.

The next time you are in worship, pay attention to the silence as much as you are attentive to the sounds. How can silence help you prepare your heart to listen to the Word of God? How can silence prepare you to partake of the Lord’s Supper?

Now consider the story of your own life. How are you listening to God as he reveals himself inside of you? How much of God do you miss because your life is too noisy, too busy, or because you are simply listening to someone or something else than God?

Listening to Your Story

“What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for the building up.” 1 Corinthians 14:26

What is your hymn? What is your lesson or revelation? What song or story do you bring? What gift do you have to give?

This week we are exploring this question of *your* story. You will be ‘awakening’ to your story as it emerges from and is intertwined with God’s story. As you learn to understand your life in relation to God’s life, you can then begin to see what it means

to have a gift to share with others. Sharing your story—living and *being* your story, we can call this ‘ministry,’ an act of spiritual service.

THE REALITY OF GOD

Discovering how your story emerges from and shares in God’s story is not just a set of ideas. It is a reality to discover. In fact it is the ultimate, capital ‘R,’ Reality we were created to live in. As we learned yesterday, discovering this reality is very much like waking from a dream. Consider again St. Paul’s words:

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:14

It is essential to grasp that this new reality involves the participation of our whole being. As Jesus observes, the Great Commandment is to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12). If we are moving into a new reality, then every part of our lives will be engaged. Every part of our being learns to exist, to move and breathe in the story—in the reality of the kingdom of God.

Here are a few metaphors to help you understand what awakening is like: of course, there is the experience of awakening to love. Imagine you’ve met a girl or a boy in class you had never before seen. You have chances to interact with this person before and after class. At first you find this person somewhat interesting. Then you find each other at lunch and are laughing at each other’s jokes, asking him or her questions...personal questions. *What do you do for fun? What do you find interesting? What makes you smile? What makes you shed tears?*

You are immersing yourself in that person’s story. It’s not just a cerebral experience. It is an experience of your whole being. You are physically present with each other. Your mind is stimulated with more and more questions to ask. The more deep you go, the more *soulish* the exchanges. You go on a date and stay up late talking, and you find

that your capacity to linger in this person's story has increased. Your soul is comfortable and at rest. And then of course your heart is aflutter too. You experience an ache to stay up longer. You have trouble saying goodnight.

Love has awakened within you. You have awakened to the reality of this person, the way they think, feel, love, behave, hope, and dream.

In a somewhat similar way we awaken to the reality of a new piece of music. Imagine that you've heard the tune once, and now you are learning to sing and play it yourself. The first few passes through the music are exploratory. Your ear is getting familiar with the movement of the melody, and your mind is sorting through the logic of the song's structure. You keep rehearsing to the point where the song has now become comfortable and familiar. You can anticipate the difficult sections. You begin to look forward to the song's challenges.

To fully execute the song, you've started to move your body with the rhythm. Your posture has shifted. Your body has 'opened up' and is engaged with the song freely. Eventually, you have played the song so many times, you come to memorize the material. You've rehearsed the song so thoroughly that the song is now inside of you. When you perform it, you don't have to worry about the technicalities. You are free to bring your own voice, your sensibilities and emotions to interpret the piece.

The song has awakened inside you. It is now part of you. Previously you didn't know the creative possibilities that song had to offer you. Now the song has become a part of your musical vocabulary. You will take the experience of that song into the way you approach all other music. Perhaps you were previously intimidated by the piece of music, but now it is a 'space' that makes a new kind of sense to you. You are now a person who is capable of that composer, that era of music, that necessary skill set.

Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our lives are in danger. Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure. Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our actions quickly become empty gestures. The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention.

Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*

Consider how these experiences of falling in love and learning new music are similar to reading a thick novel, climbing a mountain, completing a difficult course of study, learning to cook a new dish, or even living fully into a new day.

All arenas of the arts ask both artists and audience to awaken to a different reality. The arts allow us to access fresh realms of possibility. This is why the arts are incredibly powerful in spiritual formation. The arts used appropriately in worship can help us awaken and be attentive to the Kingdom of God, to Jesus, his life, his truth, and his love—not just to the idea of God but the possibility of the tangible reality of his Kingdom.

This is likewise the vital necessity of taking in the Word of God and feasting on the Lord's Supper. Bible reading is essential to our faith because it is our primary revelation of God. The very beginning of the Psalms, our great prayer book, shows us the difference between two realities, the reality of God and the reality of wickedness:

¹ Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
³ They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper. Psalm 1

And the Lord's Supper, what some traditions call, communion, the Eucharist, or the Sacrament—the body and blood of Jesus—, this is the primary means through which we understand that the reality of God's kingdom has been made available to us. God became a human being and gave his life as a sacrifice. "This is the body of Christ broken *for you*.... This is the blood of Christ poured out *for you*...." His life is given *for you* to allow you access into God's kingdom. This access is not about some day when you die and go to heaven. It is access into the life of God today, to live in the reality of God's kingdom here "on earth as it is in heaven."

When we consider our ability to *listen* to God in the story of our lives, we are considering our ability to listen, to take in and receive God's Word, his body and blood—his very life. We are considering our capacity to be alive, to be awake to God.

Small Group Discussion Questions

Are you awake? What are you awake to? What do you pay attention to throughout the day? What are you preoccupied with? Another way to consider this question is by considering your desires. What do you want?

Are you awake to the best and the right things? If not, what is hindering you from being awake to the best things?

8:00pm Community (at the beach)

Begin with silence, rest and reflect on the day. Ask the Spirit to show you where he has been with you today.

What have you been awake to today?

What do you want to be awake to?

What is your prayer? What do you want to say to God?

Discuss your experience with silence again. Was it any easier? Any more fruitful? Still frustrating?

*Share at least one new thing you discovered today about your story and one new thing about God's story. How is your story connected to God's?

WEDNESDAY

8:00 am SOLITUDE (Grove/Dim)

This morning we will stretch a bit further by waiting in silence for four minutes. And you guessed it, we will attempt five minutes tomorrow. What is in another minute of silence? All of eternity. God can do many things in just a short bit of time, and he *is* doing many things in the midst of small spaces. We quiet our souls to rest in his love so that we can awaken to his Reality, his Kingdom, his voice, his love.

After you have sat in silence for four minutes, read Matthew 11:28-30 slowly and carefully at least two times. Here are some prompts for you to reflect on in your journal: how is rest necessary for your story? Are you able to rest or are you restless? Do you know Jesus as a gentle friend? Have you experienced his gentleness? How? When?

8:30am Community (Grove/Dim)

RESPONSE— The Discipline of our Mouths, Speaking



CALL & RESPONSE

God has come to earth. He has given us his Spirit, and he reaches out to us through his Scriptures. This is the 'call' of God, the call to all of humanity and all of the cosmos. And then more specifically, his Spirit is calling *you* in a unique way. The Spirit is writing a letter on the tablet of your heart. He is calling you to be a witness, a story, a song, a poem, a beautiful craft that puts on display the goodness, beauty, truth, and love of the Reality of his Kingdom. God is always calling, always inviting.

In the beginning in the garden in (Genesis 3):

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the

garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’

Jesus calls us in Matthew 11:

²⁸‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

And at the end of the Bible in Revelation 3:

²⁰Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

We listen to this call from God in the movement we considered yesterday through the preaching of the Word and through the Lord’s Supper. The question today is how we should respond. Higher liturgical churches (some Episcopalian, Orthodox, or Catholic) practice **antiphons**, or responsive readings with written prayers, the psalms and even chants. Yet all churches at some level utilize some kind of call and response. Today we will consider how we respond to God’s call with words of prayer and worship. Tomorrow we will consider how we respond in action and mission.

We can think of ‘call and response’ simply as our

an·ti·phon

ˈan(t)əˌfän/ *noun*

(in traditional Western Christian liturgy)
a short sentence sung or recited
before or after a psalm or canticle.

way of having a conversation with God. If God speaks to us, it makes sense that we should then speak back to him.

Yet, do we dare speak to God? What language can we use? How do we say it right? St. Augustine says,

St. Augustine’s Confessions. I.iv.

Most high, utterly good, utterly powerful, most omnipotent, most merciful and most just, deeply hidden yet most intimately present, perfection of both beauty and strength, stable and yet incomprehensible, immutable yet and changing all things, never new, yet never old, making everything new and ‘leading’ the proud ‘to be old without their knowledge’ (Job 9:5, Old Latin version); always active, always in repose, gathering to yourself yet not in need, supporting and filling and protecting, creating and nurturing and bringing to maturity, searching even though to you nothing is lacking: you love without burning, you are jealous in a way that is free of anxiety, you repent (Gen 6:6) without pain of regret.

“But in these words what have I said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness? What has anyone achieved in words when he speaks about you? Yet, woe to those who are silent about you because, though loquacious with verbosity, they have nothing to say.”

“woe to those who are silent about you.” We are instructed in Psalm 98:

- ⁴ Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
- ⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
- ⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

And in Psalm 96:

- ⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.

To ‘ascribe’ is to name, to say it well. And there is something about naming—of saying ‘it’ well—that brings us joy. In the process of learning, we reach a deeper level of understanding when we can put our own ideas into words. This is why we are encouraged in school to learn how to write essays and even poetry. E.M. Forster famously said, “How do I know what I know until I see what I say?” We discover and affirm our knowledge about a subject when we deepen and clarify our ability to describe it.

In the journey of learning to love someone, it is essential to share the right words with the one we love, to tell him/her about our affection. Once we have experienced something beautiful, true, and lovely, the natural response is to want to say something beautiful, true, and lovely in response. This is quality of a true relationship: we give and receive, and we receive and give.

The quality of our experience, the depth of our worship, the concrete nature of our experienced Reality all depends on the quality of the language we use to speak to God. The “terrible twos” of a toddler are due to a limitation of language. A two or a three-year-old throws a tantrum often because he is impatient with his limited ability to explain what he wants. How do you also suffer in your relationship with God because you have not yet learned to use the right words to speak to Him?

A Word of Caution:

The emphasis here is not on our ability to master language. The aim in worship is not to become great worshippers of God, *but to become worshippers of a great God*. Some worship ministries unwittingly nurture pride and self-righteousness in their worshippers. We can and should pursue truth and excellence in our worship, but only if it draws attention to God rather than us. At the end of a worship service, have people surrendered to God and confessed their dependence upon him? Or do worshippers leave swollen with enthusiasm about themselves? Are we left saying, *what a great preacher we have!* Or, *what a great God we have?*

Do we treasure the musicians we have, or do we leave saying, *surely God is in this place* (Genesis 28:16).

We do not seek to master prayer, but that prayer might master us. Likewise, we do not seek to master the Scriptures, but that the Scriptures might master us. And we apply ourselves to learning the worship arts, we grow, learn, and stretch ourselves; we practice our instruments, read books and study, write new music. We rehearse our liturgy. We do the “work of the people” in order to respond to God’s love to create more space for his love and presence in our lives.

“Worship is our *glad* response to the immense grace of the Triune God.”
--Marva Dawn

“I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with. . . . The Scotch catechism says that man’s chief end is ‘to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.’ But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.”
C.S. Lewis *Reflections on the Psalms*

Love is the definitive mark of healthy worship. It is not that we *have* to pray and worship God. We are not under obligation or duty. We are not earning his favor. It is that we *get* to respond freely with love to God’s love. We develop our language for worship because we desire to love him better and more richly. Like the woman who poured out an alabaster jar of her perfume (worth a year’s wages) on Jesus’ feet, we also need extravagant ways to respond with our lives.

The kings and wise men traveled long distances to bring Jesus expensive gifts at his nativity. And so we too bring our gifts, our words, our poems, and hymns to lay before him. Remember again though, that your whole life is also an entire gift, a letter, a story, an artwork, that you give to him. And so we open our lips so we can declare his praise.

WORSHIP IS SURRENDER

One final note: the proper response to the voice of the Lord is to fall down, to lie prostrate before him in fear and trembling, to cry out with Isaiah, “Woe is me! For I am a person of unclean lips!” Worship is ultimately a surrender. We sacrifice our reality for God’s Reality. We lay ourselves down and confess with Peter in John chapter 6, “where else can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

When we invoke God's presence—when we acknowledge and see his nearness, when we then listen and take in God's love and truth, our response is to surrender, to confess this Reality and grow in faith.

Romans 10:

⁸But what does it say?

'The word is near you,

on your lips and in your heart'

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Small Group Discussion Questions

When was the last time you experience joy from using language well, whether the language of prose or any other creative language through the arts?

Has God been calling to you this week?

How do you want to respond?

What is your response showing you about your life's story?

3:00pm Community

(MM Rotunda 2nd Floor)

Begin with silence, rest and reflect on the day. Ask the Spirit to show you where he has been with you today.

What have you been awake to today?

What do you want to be awake to?

What is your prayer? What do you want to ask God?

Share at least one new thing you discovered today about your story and one new thing about God's story. How is your story connected to God's? Now that you know each other better, as each person is sharing take time to encourage each person as they share. Describe how you are hearing God in and through their sharing.

THURSDAY

8:00 am *SOLITUDE* (Grove/Dim)

Today we begin in silence for five minutes.

Hopefully by now this practice will have become a bit more comfortable for you. Hopefully it has framed all the activity, all the music, sharing, reading, and play. As you begin your silence consider how you can trust it this morning. Identify a word or a short phrase that is especially meaningful to you this morning. It can be from your journal yesterday, a word from a conversation, a portion of Scripture. What word or phrase helps you think about God and his invitation to you this morning? Returning to this word or phrase throughout your five minutes. As your mind and heart wander, repeat your word slowly and carefully. Practice the word like you would practice a piece of music, but you are not working to attain anything other than rest and silence. If anything, it's only God who you should hope to impress, and he is glad even with your small efforts. You don't need to over think this. Simply let the word redirect your thoughts back to God.

After you have sat in silence for five minutes, read Psalm 40:1-5 slowly and carefully at least two times. Here are some prompts for you to reflect on in your journal: how are you with patience? Are you impatient about discovering your story? Are you impatient with a specific gift or talent? Your singing or your tech skills? Impatient with people? Friendships? With yourself? What would you like to say to God about your patience?

8:30am

Community

(Grove/Dim)



**Ministry— The Discipline of our Hands,
Serving and Giving**

When we think of ministry, of serving and giving to others, it is easy to focus on our own strength,

our talent and powers. We have been considering *your* story all this week, yet we are interested in how your story is part of God's story.

In our celebrity obsessed culture this is a very important clarification we need to make. Yes, you are special, a valued child of God. Psalm 139 says that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Yet, God's interest is redeeming you, transforming you, and refining you, so that Jesus can put himself on display through you.

True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is of yourself less."

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Imagine if all your talents and skills were somehow able to fit into a brief case. All the time you've put into practice, all your hopes and desires for your gifts—how you want to serve, how you may share your story—all these are fit inside a container. Imagine that you are holding this important brief case. How do you hold it in your hands? Is your deepest significance inside that case? What would happen if the case were lost or broken? Do you clutch its handle with both hands? Is your grip so firm that all the blood has run out of your knuckles? Do you want to wrap your arms around the case and cling to it for dear life? Now imagine opening the case and parceling out your gift to those around you. Are you anxious about sharing yourself? Are you worried you'll get it wrong? Are you worried you'll spill your gift or that you'll run out of things to share?

Pause and reflect on these two passages:

⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

⁷but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

Philippians 2

²³Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. ²⁵What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Luke 9

So, now what do you do with your gifts? How should you hold that briefcase where your talents, skills, and gifts are stored?

This will seem foolish to our celebrity culture; this will seem upside down: to become helpful in ministry, we must become insignificant in every other way. In order to gain your life, you must lose it. We practice silence so we can hear the voice of God. And we die to ourselves; we empty ourselves so that Jesus' life and Spirit can flow through us.

To be Spirit-led and Spirit-filled, we must open our hands and lighten our grip. This is not just good for your ministry. This is good for your own health. Again, let's recall where we started: who is the protagonist, the hero of this story? Who is the Savior of the world? Who is our healer and teacher? Who is the best worship leader and preacher? Who is the best friend, guide,

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

companion?

The greatest gift we have to give is the ministry of presence. Can we bring our self near to the others we want to share with? Can we sit with them awhile and listen to their life before we presume we have something to say? Whether you are a worship leader, a teacher, an evangelist, or a social worker, death-of-self is practiced by first listening. We lay down our need to be significant, to lead the right song, to share the brightest idea, or even to fix the problem, and we love by waiting and listening.

“There is a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. It is an impatient, inattentive listening, that despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person. This is no fulfillment of our obligation, and it is certain that here too our attitude toward our brother only reflects our relationship to God. It is little wonder that we are no longer capable of the greatest service of listening that God has committed to us, that of hearing our brother’s confession, if we refuse to give ear to our brother on lesser subjects. Secular education today is aware that often a person can be helped merely by having someone who will listen to him seriously, and upon this insight it has constructed its own soul therapy, which has attracted great numbers of people, including Christians. But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*
From the chapter, “Ministry.”

Why are you called to serve? What gift do you truly have to give? What story do you have to share?

You have likely been intimidated at some point this week. You have found yourself thinking, *oh, I can’t do that*. That fear is good! A few of you may have not yet had that thought. In your youth you’ve thought, *oh, I can do anything*. In time you will be given many opportunities to both succeed and to fail. It is our failures that teach us the best. A distinctly Christian conception of ministry and service comes out of a deep awareness of our failures, our weaknesses and pain. Ministry requires us to be like Jesus—to empty ourselves.

If you have not yet finished Henri Nouwen’s essay, “Moving From Solitude to Community to Ministry,” make sure you have read the last section on the parable of the river in the desert. Then read this passage from 2 Corinthians below and prepare for discussion.

“But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me,⁷ even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,⁹ but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”
2 Corinthians

What counts in your life and mine is not successes but fruits. The fruits of your life you might not see yourself. The fruits of your life are born often in your pain and in your vulnerability and your losses. The fruits in your life only come after the plow has carved through your land. God wants you to be fruitful.

Henri Nouwen, “Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry.”

Small Group Discussion Questions

What does Nouwen’s parable of the river in the desert have to do with what the Apostle Paul is telling us about weakness in 2 Corinthians 12? After considering the gravity of ministry, after weighing this call to die to self—do you want to be involved in serving in any way? What attracts you to ministry? What scares you about ministry? Do you still want to share your gift?

...I can summarize my whole week with this word or phrase:

8:30am Community Share Time (JHM Lobby)

FRIDAY

8:00 am *SOLITUDE* (Grove/Dim)

Begin with silence. Use whatever length of time seems best to you today. Then spend the rest of your time walking through your experience of this week. Hopefully you have a journal full of reflections. At the very least you can scan your memory. You are invited to give thanks for your journey and to document it so that you can take this experience home with you. Perhaps you will want to review your words in a few weeks to affirm that yes, these things are true, and real, and beautiful. This all happened! This is how your story shares in God's story.

ben·e·dic·tion

benə' dikSH(ə)n/

noun

The utterance or bestowing of a blessing, especially at the end of a religious service.

From this week...

...my favorite thing to do has been:

...the person(s) I am thankful for are:

...the song I want to keep singing is:

...the passage of Scripture I will remember most:

...I experienced God's presence in this way:

...I heard God call and speak to me through:

...I will continue responding to God's call this way:

...I've learned that God's story is:

...I've discovered that my story is:

As we draw our time to a close, it is time for a proper sending, a benediction. Our exercise tonight is to take turns speaking a blessing on each member of your small group. Sit together in a good circle. Elect a person to start with. Take your time and prayerfully go around the circle offering words of encouragement to each other. As you have been reflecting on your story this week, let's now turn and add some language and perspective to each others' stories. Just as you spent time listening to God in silence, listen to God in each other's lives. Name that person's story. Describe it back to her. Be specific and detailed. Don't go on and on. Keep your blessing to the point. Make it clear and full of love. Finish by giving thanks to God for each other and for this week.

Fall in Love

Attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (1907-1991)

Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than
falling in Love
in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything.

It will decide
what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read,
whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in Love,
stay in love,
and it will decide everything.