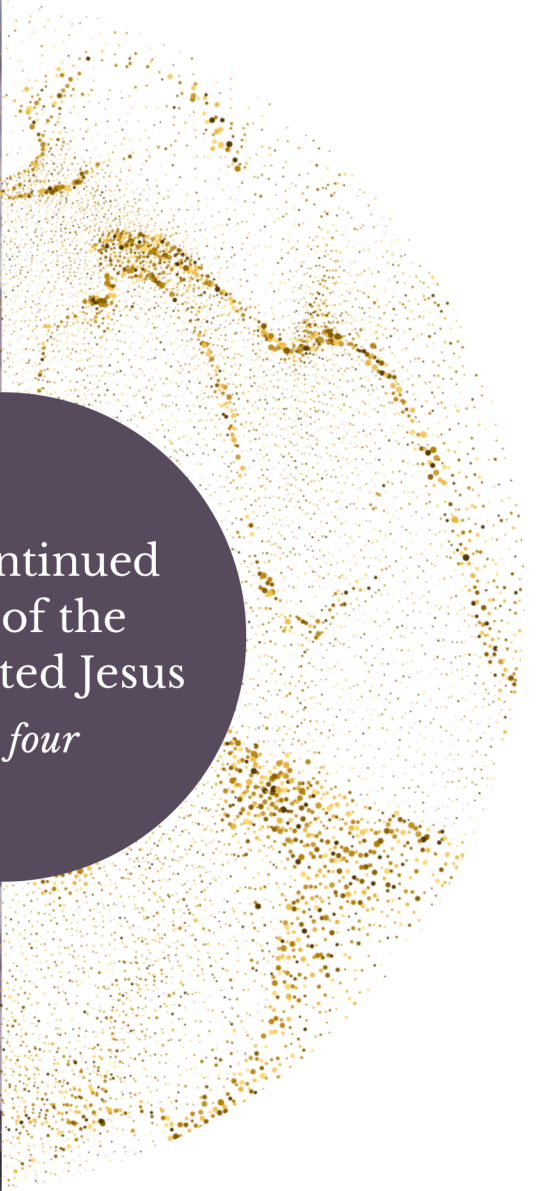




The Continued
Work of the
Resurrected Jesus
week four



Reading Romans 8:31-39

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? **33** Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. **34** Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? **36** As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)

**Reflection**

The late 80's and early 90's ushered in a splash of neon colors, crazy print sweaters and parachute pants – sometimes all in the same outfit! It was also a time when public displays of Christian faith became trendy in many circles, so WWJD bracelets were worn, “Jesus fish” and catchy bumper stickers adorned cars, and Christian slogans on t-shirts were all the rage. I admit to being caught up in the middle of all these trends. With particular fondness I recall my ten-year old self wearing a navy blue t-shirt with obnoxiously large hot pink block lettering on the front that said “I M 4 U.” On the back, the text from Romans 8:31-32 was written out in a thick, bright font.

More than thirty years later, I am still realizing the implications of the Creator of the universe being “for me.” Do I truly believe this? Do I live like this? What does that even mean? Thankfully, our passage gives us some guidance. First, we see that God will go to any length to reach us, to provide for us, even when all seems lost. He didn't even spare His own Son, Paul writes, how can we doubt His care and provision now? We often predict people's future actions based on our past experience with them, and rightly so. Romans 8 challenges us to this with God as well – to look at His track record of providing for us in the past, thereby drawing confidence that whatever hardships may come to us now or down the road, God is just as invested in us as He always has been.

We also know through this passage that God is our great Defender. People can be brutal with one another. Conflicts, mistakes, and misunderstandings can be escalated to the point that relationships are broken, sometimes permanently. But we never need to fear that with God. He knows our hearts, understands our intentions, and loves us in spite of our shortcomings. We don't have to answer to anyone but Him, and through Him we are made righteous, whole, and complete.

Finally, in Romans 8 we are assured that God is always with us. His love for us is greater than any mistake, any accuser, any catastrophe we may face. And with Him – through Him – we are able to overcome whatever challenges we may face.

While Reading...

1 PAUSE AND READ AGAIN
If you are able, read the passage out loud.

2 CONSIDER
What are some words or phrases that stand out to you as you read this passage?

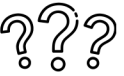
3 PAUSE AND PRAY
Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you as you read.



Questions to Consider with God

What does it mean to you, that God is "for you" as verse 31 states?

How would you behave differently today, if you absolutely believed that our all-powerful God was with you, and for you personally?



Creative Reflection

We invite you to listen to the song, *Our God*, by Chris Tomlin that centers around these verses. The lyrics are provided on this page. Take time to thank God that He is with you and for you today.

Water You turned into wine
Opened the eyes of the blind
There's no one like you
None like you

Into the darkness You shine
Out of the ashes we rise
There's No one like you
None like you

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
God You are higher than any other
Our God is Healer, awesome in power
Our God, Our God

Into the darkness you shine
Out of the ashes we Rise
No one like you
None like you

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
God You are higher than any other
Our God is Healer, awesome in power
Our God, Our God

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
God You are higher than any other
Our God is Healer, awesome in power
Our God, Our God

And if Our God is for us,
then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us,
then what can stand against?

And if Our God is for us,
then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us,
then what can stand against?

Then what can stand against?

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
God You are higher than any other
Our God is Healer, awesome in power
Our God, Our God

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
God You are higher than any other
Our God is Healer, awesome in power
Our God, Our God

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And if our God is with us,
then what can stand against?

Then what can stand against?
Then what can stand against?

Our God by Chris Tomlin

Reading 1 Peter 2:8-22

8 “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for. **9** But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. **12** Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. **13** Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, **14** or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. **15** For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. **16** Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. **17** Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

18 Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. **19** For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. **20** But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. **21** To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. **22** “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” (NIV)

Reflection

This is a challenging chapter. Peter speaks to slaves and to members of unjust governments and implores them to submit to their masters for the sake of the Lord. If I were writing this letter, probably I would have written instructions and plans for ways to revolt and overthrow these corrupt leaders. Isn’t the message of Jesus one of freedom?

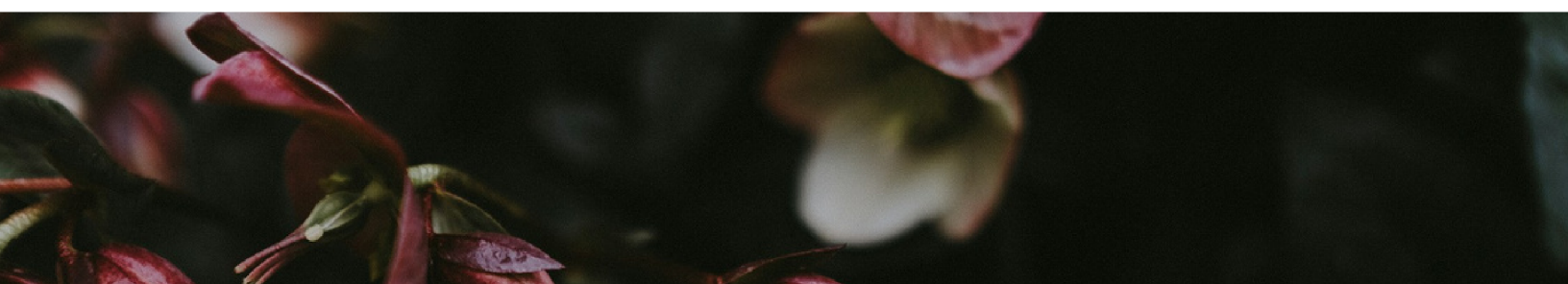
However, this is not what Peter is led to write. And in fact, Peter actually is leading a revolution, and one fuller and more impactful than any revolution of force. It is revolutionary to say that no matter your circumstances in life, love those around you as Christ loved you. In words reminiscent of Jesus’ commandment to love your enemy as yourself, Peter spells out who your enemy might be, and what loving them could look like. And it’s uncomfortable. I imagine Peter felt this uncomfortable when Jesus said to love his enemy. Both Peter and Jesus grew up under the oppression of the Roman Empire. They knew unjust governments and they came from a people that knew the history of slavery intimately. Jesus’ very life began with fleeing the order of infanticide to become a refugee in Egypt and then was killed by corrupt religious and political leaders as a man. Jesus knew corruption and yet he lived a life of peace. Peter had walked with Jesus and I believe it is from his observations of Jesus’ life that he could not only live this way, but also write these revolutionary words.

While Reading...

1 PAUSE AND READ AGAIN
If you are able, read the passage out loud.

2 CONSIDER
What are some words or phrases that stand out to you as you read this passage?

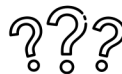
3 PAUSE AND PRAY
Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you as you read.



Peter understood that as people of the Gospel, of the Resurrection, that God invites us into living lives that reflect the nature of Jesus no matter our circumstances. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and we're called to express the radical love of the cross through our treatment of others. To the slaves of this time, this commandment gave rare freedom and purpose; while much of their life was controlled, they could choose their response and even demonstrate God through serving their masters. They too are heirs of the priesthood and given the remarkable gift of the Spirit to withstand evil under any circumstance. This radical way of living brings an expansive, never-ending freedom that cannot be quelled by any oppressive government or master.

Question to Consider with God

Reflect on a time you've felt unjustly treated. How might God be inviting you to respond with radical love or understanding towards that person?



Creative Reflection

Injustice is as rampant today as it was in Jesus' time. And with our smartphones, we live with the knowledge of it practically 24/7. Take a moment to pray for a people group suffering under oppression. Pray for their strength and their freedom; pray for the end of their suffering. And pray that they too would know God's invitation to become his children and live as resurrected people.

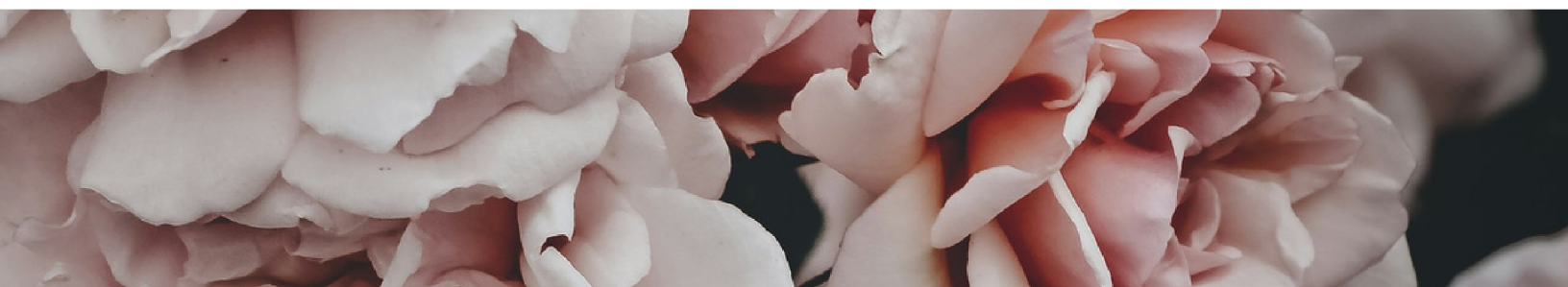


Reading Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin. **16** Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (NIV)

Festoon this passage...

- 1 PAUSE TO BE STILL**
Take a few deep breaths and calm your body and mind before you read the passage.
- 2 CONSIDER**
What images, questions, or musings come to your mind as you read the passage?
- 3 REWRITE THE PASSAGE**
Rewrite each line of passage in your own words.

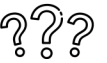


Reflection

Hebrews 4:14-16 is a magnificent passage that exemplifies our life in the resurrected Christ. Sometimes it can be difficult to grasp how God sees us or what saving work Jesus did for us, and this scripture explains a lot. We can now come to God with boldness, expecting to find help and tenderness from him, because of the suffering Jesus endured and his victory over sin and death. It can be hard to relate to Jesus; sometimes it doesn't feel like we have victory over sin, or death, or weakness, or temptation. But maybe we can grasp that Jesus relates to us, and maybe each time we approach God with our needs, we might gain a deeper understanding of the truth of our victory in Christ.

Questions to Consider with God

What's one of your weaknesses which seems like Jesus wouldn't empathize with?



What would it be like if Jesus welcomed your approach to God's throne of grace to get help with your needs?

Creative Reflection

This passage provides us with the assurance that we can "approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." It is remarkable that Jesus invites us to come before God and receive all we need!

I invite you to spend time in imaginative prayer. Find a comfortable place and try to encourage your body to relax. Let your breathing slow. When you are ready, use your imagination to place yourself in the throne room of God. Spend time cultivating an image of the space in your mind. When you are ready, approach the throne where God is seated and meet Jesus. What is it like to be in this space? How does Jesus interact with you? What do you notice about God? What emotions stir in you?

Spend as much time as you need with the Father and the Son in this space.



*Let us then
approach
God's throne
of grace with
confidence...*

Reading Matthew 28:16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. **18** Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (NIV)

Reflection

These eleven. Jesus sent them. No reservations. What got them through the final interview to qualify to become disciple makers?

It wasn't that they were first at the tomb Sunday morning. The whole reason the eleven knew to meet Jesus in Galilee was because the women who went to the tomb met Jesus there, and he told them to tell the apostles to go to Galilee. (Matthew 28:8-10)

It wasn't because of their great faith. "When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted" (v 17). We read earlier about how Thomas gets the unfair reputation of being a doubter, but he wasn't the only one who had a hard time believing at first that Jesus really was alive.

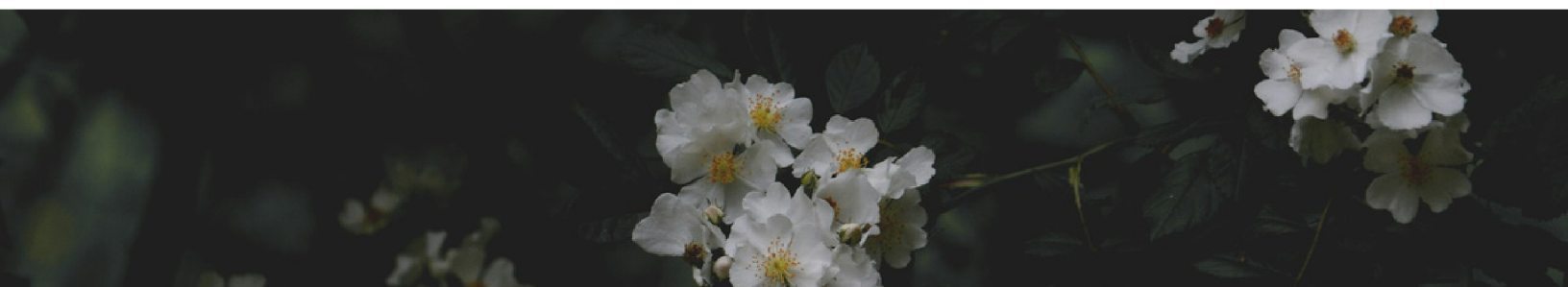
I wonder if the first glimpse of Jesus for these astonished friends was from a distance, because the next reassuring words we read are: "Jesus came to them" (v18). He knows that our anxiety and apprehension intensifies when we feel far away; sometimes it even makes it hard for us to move. We don't intuitively walk toward what we are afraid of. So Jesus walked over to be in their space. He wanted them to know that they were still his guys in this.

Then he told them what was next and commissioned them to be a part of it:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (v 19-20). Their commissioning was not because of how they did in an interview or because of their exemplary faith. It was because the One who had been given all authority, in heaven and on earth, would be with them always, to the very end of the age (v 20). The continued work of the resurrected Jesus, indeed.

While Reading...

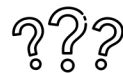
- 1 PICTURE THE SCENE**
What are the sights, sounds, smells, textures that surround you when you envision yourself in this scene?
- 2 READ THE PASSAGE AGAIN**
Read the passage again while immersing yourself in the scene.
- 3 BECOME A DISCIPLE**
Place yourself in the place of one of Jesus' disciples. What is it like to hear this commission?



Questions to Consider with God

Is there a place in your life where you would like to ask Jesus to draw near?

Talk to God about what your role might be in this season for helping someone to learn to live like Jesus, to help them become a disciple. If you already know who that person is, ask God for wisdom to do it well. If not, ask God to connect you with someone you can do that with.



Creative Reflection

We often hear these last verses in Matthew 28 referred to as "The Great Commission." (Your Bible may even include that title.) It is almost always spoken about as something that is on us, the church, to accomplish. How does remembering that Jesus is in it with us help you set aside your fear or insecurity about being able to handle this big responsibility of making disciples?

Use the space below to journal your thoughts or write a prayer, acknowledging your gratitude for the promise that Jesus is with you.



Reading Hebrews 10:19-25

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, **25** not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (NIV)

Reflection

"I love God, but I don't need the Church." The words come like a wound. A wound shot through his body. And we feel it in our own.

How often do we hear these words spoken from the lips of those who would follow Christ? Have we been injured by the Church, disillusioned by the Church, abandoned by the Church? Or has our Western bent toward individualism convinced us that Christian fellowship is nothing more than a politicized institution

we can do without - when all the self-help gospels we need are readily available on the bookstore shelf? Or perhaps we imagine that the Church is nothing more than a place to make new friends, to find a partner, to receive food, shelter, and clothing when we have none. A place to find intellectual stimulation, to have a spa day, a mental health retreat, or the encouragement we need when life becomes too painful and we don't know where else to turn. But when we do not feel ourselves in need of these things, some may ask, "What is the point of church?"

Yes, there are times in every Christian's journey when it may be entirely appropriate and necessary to walk away from a local congregation to seek worship and fellowship elsewhere. But if we follow Christ, live in Christ, we can no more escape the Church itself than we can escape the human species—nor should we want to. To live in Christ is to live in his body, and his body, on one miraculous level, is his Church. A body we are born into. A mystical body that transcends time and space. A body that will be fully revealed in its perfected manifold glories in the life to come. A body we are called to embody in tangible, material ways in the here and now. And so the writer of Hebrews compels us to persevere, not to give up meeting or forsake our assemblies, but to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. What we translate as spur here is the Greek *paroxysmon*, and its sense is one of provocation, unpleasant as it might be, aptly imaged in English by the spur of a rider driven against a horse. Here we realize, with a start, that we cannot blame the failings of our modern churches or the seductions of our cultural pressures for the temptation to slip away. That temptation has been with us from the Church's inception, it is born of our fallen natures, and God must come, again and again, to call us back. Then the deeper truth awakens—that perfection is a process, that holiness requires hearing, that which God speaks to us through our brothers and sisters is just as needful as the words whispered in the stillness of our solitudes, and sometimes what we hear will hurt.

While Reading..

1 PAUSE AND READ AGAIN

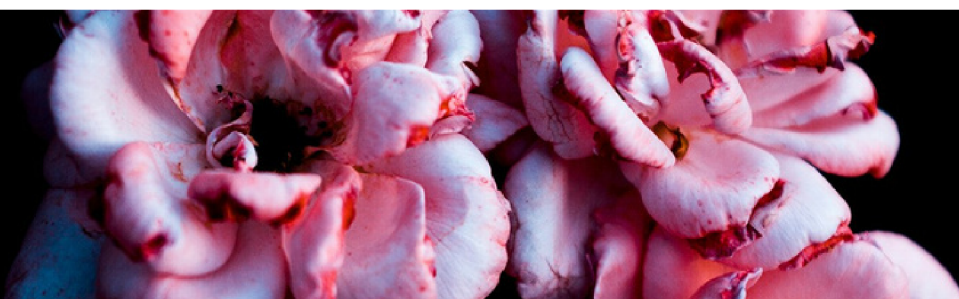
If you are able, read the passage out loud.

2 CONSIDER

What are some words or phrases that stand out to you as you read this passage?

3 PAUSE AND PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you as you read.



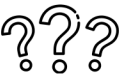
Life in the body of Christ is more than a spa day, and for the truly devoted, even a spa day comes with pain. Those who seek healing know they cannot avoid the hurt. In this present world, life in any human community involves suffering. Sooner or later, we will fail one another. And when we fail, Christ teaches us not to flee but to forgive. Giving and receiving forgiveness, this can hurt. And the truths of the corrections we so need to hear—they too may hurt. When we do not count this cost, when we come looking only for the secondary or tertiary effects of life in the body—all those good and pleasant things that the churches of the world can and should provide—eventually, we may miss both the effects and their source. The source of life in the body is his body, his own very flesh, the curtain through which a new and living way is opened for us. If we peer long enough, we see a deep mystery of our faith unfolding. When we draw near to one another as we draw near to God, what is gathered opens—Christ's body opens the path to God—and we are privileged to embody that opening, the window of hope. The hope of our salvation. The hope of resurrection. Hope that wakes in our flesh, shapes our spirits, reforms us daily, in all our turnings, however large or small, toward one another, and toward our God. It is a hope we must live and carry through the world.

We need the Church because we need God. We love the Church because we love God. What love we carry out into the world we do not carry alone. We need and love this body that is you and I and we, us and them bound into a whole, bearing all that we have done to one another, given and received, become through endless bright becomings—in him. And, yes, we have wounded one another. I wish it were not so. But there are other wounds. There—in his hands, his feet, his side. He carried them in his body into that other life, the life beyond the cross, beyond the tomb. And if we look into those wounds, what we find is a space so deep and high and wide—wide enough for you and me and us—it will house this whole wide world. I have looked, and looked, and looked, and what I see—it is the face of joy.

Questions to Consider with God

Consider a time when someone in your local church injured you, or a time when you injured another. What might God be speaking to you through that hurt? How might God's speaking bring healing?

In what ways does God become clearer or more vivid to you during times of communal worship? What role do your brothers and sisters in the Church play in your sense of God's nearness and love, in your desire to share that love with the world?



Creative Reflection

Make a list or draw a picture of the spaces and places of your life. Where might the curtain of Christ's body be opening to you in new and unexpected ways?

This week, make space in your calendar for a fellow believer who is lonely, burdened, or struggling in some way. Invite them out for coffee, tea, a meal, a quiet walk, or simply give them a call. Create a space of listening where they are free to speak. Let them know that you love them, and thank them for being a unique window to God.

Examine your week with God. Use the following prompts to reflect on the previous week with God.

Reveal

Ask God to open your eyes to where God was present throughout the week.

Ask God to deepen your awareness of yourself: your actions, your attitudes, your emotions.



Relish

What gifts did you receive this week? What are you thankful for from the past week?



Replay

Replay the events of the week with God.

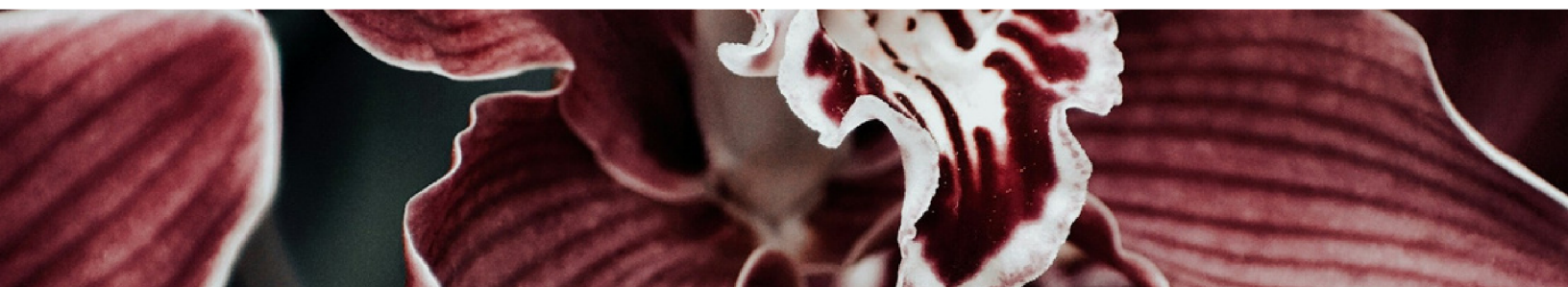
Pay attention to the moments when you experienced strong emotions. Notice where God was present.



Remorse

With grace and compassion, reflect with God over the difficulties of the week.

What actions or attitudes did not allow you to be a light in the world?



Resurrection

Ask God to give you direction on how to walk in resurrected life in the week ahead.



How is Jesus
still working in
your life?



“Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

Revelation 5:1-14