

# **A Lenten Stroll – The Spiritual Journey**

*A self-guided spiritual event offered during the season of Lent 2023 at Scotia UMC, Scotia, NY.*

*Intended to deepen engagement and personal connection with Spirit/Source/God.*

Created by

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## **A Lenten Stroll – the Spiritual Journey**

Welcome!

You are entering a space in which you may spiritually encounter reflection, revelation, and resurrection!

Everyone's spiritual journey through life follows a unique path of its own. Yet, some general phases are in common to all spiritual journeys. While this event presents a linear movement through several phases, one's personal journey may engage with the some phases simultaneously; naturally move through some quickly and others very slowly; and yet may find some phases are repeated many times. Only birth and death (or resurrection) remain permanent book ends to a human's spiritual life journey.

This booklet is meant to be used as a guide to broad spiritual stages every person encounters. This event is designed to take you about an hour to move through. However, it may be a shorter or much longer time frame for your depending upon how deeply you want or are able to engage with the materials.

While silent meditations, reflections, and prayer are an integral part of this event, you may initially choose to skip some of this material. However, the hopeful expectation is you will be inspired to deepen your spiritual efforts by fully engaging with this event now or, if preferred, you may choose to absorb the booklet material later in private. Either way, it is yours to keep for personal use.

Please know you are never alone on your journey. At any point on your path, you may want to have another person travel with you for a bit. Your pastor is a person many turn to for support. In addition, a Spiritual Director is someone who is specifically trained to listen for the Spirit's movement in whatever life situations or spiritual challenges you need to share. It is an act of strength to reach out for spiritual companionship when you need it and it is an honor for the one you choose to trust with your journey.

May your sense of Spirit be broadened and deepened by this Lenten experience.

Peace and Love on Your Journey,

*Sherri Mackey*

The Journey Tender, LLC  
April 2023

## **BIRTH**

**“...The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God’s Son . . . Nothing is impossible for God.” Luke 1: 35,37 (CEB)**

Mary is told she will give birth to the child of God. From birth, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and One with God.

Jesus’ birth brings to our awareness the truth of the Spirit dwelling within from birth.

And, while Jesus’ birth is a miraculous gift to the world from God, it also connects us to the blessing of the miracle in our own birth when our human soul is also filled with the Spirit’s loving energy.

Like Jesus, we enter this human existence already ***whole, fully worthy, and surrounded by and filled with God’s infinite presence.***

Thus, as Jesus’ earthly spiritual journey began, so did ours.

The painting before you is called “Birth.” You may notice . . .

*The Great Creator who is both known and unknown to us, is nurturing a soul with Spirit at the point when the Soul embodies this life . . . at the precise moment when this human being is taking its first breath of air.*

*Pure loving energy flows from God as light to fill this new heart with perfect wholeness. The being is blessed with a living piece of the Divine . . . It is a gift of God within.*

*The Earth is just beginning to accept or embrace the child and the new life has not yet become rooted in and focused on human or earthly concerns.*

Jesus carried a divine inner light from birth. His life purpose became bringing word of this direct inner connection with the love and hope of God to a people who, in many ways, had become disconnected from God. They had become rooted in earthly matters rather than leading their lives from a divine spiritual focus. Jesus’ life and ministry became a catalyst for opening the closed and lost hearts of the world.

## QUESTION AND REFLECT:

At birth, since you too were given this beautiful and perfect intimate connection with God . . .

- Do you think you had any sense of this bond at the time of your birth or as a very young child? How might it have felt for you?
- What might be the purpose of God placing a divine spark or flame of Love within each of us? What of God's purpose might be true for just you?

Over time from birth, we develop into humans unique of mind, body, and spirit. The very act of living and growing as a person creates an unavoidable separation between us and the part of our Selves which is divinely connected. We tend to forget who and whose we are.

There are many ways to experience a reconnecting with God. Regardless of how you do so, the method should allow you to move out of an external focus into a spiritual awareness of your perfect Soul and Inner Self.

You are invited now to allow yourself to feel the presence of the Spirit with a brief meditation . . .

Read the next several paragraphs first to familiarize yourself with the flow of the meditation, then let yourself do what feels best.

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Consciously relax your body while taking three slow deep breaths.

When ready, turn your attention inward on yourself by noticing the feelings you are experiencing in this moment. Try to identify the thoughts which are giving rise to the specific emotions you are feeling. Observe how your thoughts and emotions appear interdependent and inseparable.

With an awareness of this close thought-emotion connection, consciously choose thoughts in this moment which result in only desirable feeling of great joy, bliss, calm, and peace. Visualize these feelings as if they are being emitted by a bright white flame burning within the center of your body. As you watch the flame, notice that as it grows larger as positive feelings grow

stronger. This is one experience of being immersed in God's pure and unconditional Love.

Rest in this place of amazing blissful and blessed connection for as long as you wish.

Know you may come back to this place of peace any time you choose by simply focusing your thoughts once again on the pure white flame within and letting the energy of God's Love flow through you.

When ready, take a slow deep breath in and out; bring your thoughts back to the room you are in; thank God for the gift of spiritual presence; and slowly open your eyes.

**THE GIFT:**

Spirit is the gift you always carry with you just as Jesus did from birth. May you remember this light burns bright within your heart space – it is present to you whenever your personal relationship with the divine is nurtured.

## **SURVIVAL**

**“When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.” *Matthew 2:16 (CEB)***

As soon as we are born onto this earth, we instinctually respond to the messages our senses receive from our brains with movement and sound. Surviving means doing what we can to remain alive since we are not born with the capacity to take care of our basic physical needs for ourselves. We follow our instincts looking for satisfaction for our feelings of hunger and cold by reaching out to our immediate environment. Ironically, our focus on the immediate and stark needs arising with our first breath marks the beginning of the process which separates us from our direct spiritual awareness of God.

For Jesus, his basic human physical needs were taken care of by his family, but as the passage above shows, his survival depended upon more than food, water, and protection from the natural elements.

Other humans, frequently motivated by power and fear, create circumstances which oppress, control, and harm those whom they judge different and unworthy. Herod’s fear of losing his authority caused him to use his power and authority in an attempt to kill Jesus as an infant. Herod was unsuccessful and Jesus survived childhood.

As Jesus grew, his survival within his family, community, and culture would become less focused on basic food, shelter, safety, and clothing and become more about learning and following the traditions, rules, structures, advice, beliefs, and expectations of his immediate environment. Although we don’t know many specifics from Jesus’ childhood, we do know he was conditioned to a Jewish way of life and traditionally he would have been learning Joseph’s carpentry trade so he could safely navigate his way through life within his culture and within the broader world.

Fortunately, for most of us, we do not have someone intentionally looking to have us killed as Jesus did. However, the same type of indoctrination into the larger

world and our immediate cultural environment which Jesus experienced has also happened with us as we grew up.

As social creatures, we fear isolation and rejection from our “group.” Thus, we learn to believe the “truths” told to us by others whom we assume have greater wisdom about us rather than, through a truly spiritual connection to the divine, finding trust and guidance in our own knowing of Self and Soul.

Without realizing the impact on our spiritual living, we eagerly accept others’ beliefs about every aspect of the world and about ourselves even if this conditioning hurts us, severely limits our potential, masks our unique giftedness, and blocks our ability to connect openly with God’s intent for us. We can all think of things we have done simply to satisfy another’s expectations of us even though we know our Souls would have been fed and our relationship with God grown by spending that same time and energy following our passions.

The painting before you is called “Survival.” You may notice . . .

*The figure at the center of the painting is still surrounded by God’s energy and presence but, the human experience is compelling him to turn away from Spirit with a dependence upon other humans for physical survival. This becomes the figures immediate priority. The focus of life is a turn downward facing towards earth with God no longer known or sought. The person is cocooned by earthly (i.e. human) concerns and reasoning, absorbing limiting belief systems and accepting behavioral restrictions the human world has imposed.*

*This represents a shallow existence lived only on the surface of life and void of a living spirituality.*

On the human spiritual path, being directed away from our Center wisdom is an unavoidable consequence of the human condition. Our life long spiritual journey will be the slow navigation of a path turning back to God by again exposing our inner flame.

### **QUESTION AND REFLECT:**

The Spirit is always with you . . . waiting to be noticed . . .

- How might Jesus have rejected or resisted direct human influence upon himself so he could remain in line with God and his purpose?
- Why might things in your everyday life be higher priorities than knowing or noticing God? What specific pressures do you experience compelling you to remain focused on only earthly concerns?
- What ideas about God might you have been conditioned to accept as “truth,” but which, if true, cause you to fear, stress, or feel anxious about the past or the future? Should fear arise when one’s beliefs are in alignment with the true nature of a God whose love is unconditional?
- In what ways might your words, actions, and behaviors condition others to form limiting beliefs about themselves and life such that they may not be able to trust themselves or to trust in a loving God? (Though unintentional, we frequently plant our own fears within others.)

Facing questions of Spirit while important to do is also very difficult. As imperfect human beings, spiritual growth is enhanced by bravely facing and gaining wisdom from our imperfections.

With tough questions, it is helpful to prepare space within for truths to arise through contemplation.

**Sit, relax, breathe deeply, and move inward into a quiet meditative state. Ask your inner Spirit what you need to release so your spiritual journey moves forward most fruitfully (or you can simply ask one of the questions above). Listen for an answer in the silence, but without expecting clarity or an immediate response.**

**What you need know may come from a random thought or vision which pops into your mind. An unexpected sound or emotion may catch your attention and lead your thoughts in a direction that holds the answer for you. Through meditation, you will have planted a seed by your question.**

**The truth for you will arise when it is time. Sit in a position of open attentive anticipation for as long as you wish.**

A consistent practice of contemplative meditation provides opportunity for truth and wisdom to arise when you are prepared to receive them and as you need to hear them.



Instead of sitting in reflective meditation, at this time, you may wish only to offer a simple prayer such as:

**Generous and Loving God, your grace is amazing. Thank you for those who have blessed my life with care, love, and guidance. Continue to open my eyes to the true meaning in life lessons so that I may leave behind that which has slowed my path and instead find realignment toward you. Amen.**

#### **THE GIFT:**

May you remember that you are both protected and healed while on this earth – physically by our caregivers and spiritually by God.

The irony of life as a human being is that, even though born of Spirit, we must take physical and emotional actions for our survival and on-going existence without God's interference. Instinctually, the fears we feel inform our actions and keep us rooted to the earth and to earthly solutions and sensory satisfaction.

Therefore, the gift we receive is patience from the Creator. God provides us with the space and time to learn survival so our Souls will be free to fully embrace all the Spirit brings to us.

## **EXPANSION**

**“Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.” *Romans 12:2***

Humans as a species are naturally curious about everything. We have grown and continued to greatly expand the quality and quantity of our knowledge with the development of many fields of study such as mathematics and science.

It is a gift to us that we have the ability to reason, comprehend, experiment, learn, and apply new knowledge. We can apply our intelligence to expanding our understanding of the physical human world and universe AND we can also apply our intelligence to expanding our faith and spiritual understanding. Both are important on our spiritual paths and, for both, the thought-emotion relationship remains relevant and influential.

Jesus’ message was strongly directed at shifting people’s perspectives from a mostly ego-centric focus for following God (i.e. how do I please God) to a more Spirit-channeling focus for living in relationship with God (i.e. how do I live as God’s Love in the world).

Even in his ministry, however, Jesus encountered new situations from which he learned and expanded both his understanding of humanity and of God’s love. An example of this was his encounter with the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) from whom he essentially learned about the inclusiveness of God’s love.

The painting before you is called “Earth Expansion.” You may notice . . .

*It is a simplistic representation of a human brain learning from the body of existing knowledge. It is fully encapsulated by Earth (or earthly concerns) which stands as a barrier between humanity and full connection with God.*

*Divine light continues to offer spiritual sustenance and remains available to us for when human erected barriers to Spirit begin to fall.*

While we may, in large part, resist or reject the spiritual light of God at certain times in our lives, it is far more likely that we are never fully closed off from divine inspiration and influence even though we may not be aware of the Spirit. Even

the act of resisting the Creator's presence is an acknowledgement of the strength of the pull towards a more intimate spirituality.

There are some who think that science/factual knowledge and religion/faith in God are mutually exclusive belief systems. Humans, the Creator Spirit, and the Universe are far too complex for us to dismiss any possibilities for how spirituality may exist or be expressed. We have free will to choose to engage directly with God or not. God's unconditional love does not judge when we reject engagement; when we turn away on our path; or when we choose a faith that does not involve a church. The Spirit Creator God rejoices whenever we put love of others and loving self-worth above all else. **Jesus' purpose was to bring this simple yet difficult message of Love to the world.**

### QUESTION AND REFLECT:

Considering such an understanding of the expansiveness of God; our desire as humans to explore, learn, and know all; and Jesus' divine message for humanity . . .

- In what ways have you worked to grow and expand your knowledge in your lifetime? What was your motivation to do so? What, if any, spiritual component influenced your choices?
- How has your relationship with God grown and changed over time and as you have learned more about the world?
- Are you currently compelled to continue learning in a general topic area or to grow your understanding of something which has caught your interest? From where, do you believe, your interest in this topic has arisen? Do you notice any pattern to the lifelong learning you have experienced on your path?

Early in our lives, we begin forming preferred values and views based upon conditioning. These perspectives will predominantly serve to allow other humans and human created institutions to effectively control our behaviors, our bodies, our freedoms, our futures, and even our choices and beliefs. In effect, the human ego-based concerns condition our minds so thoroughly that we seek answers from outside of ourselves, from "experts," and other human-centric sources. We effectively lose trust in ourselves; and, to varying degrees, we lose touch with our

sense of Self and our inherent Self-Worth. Fear can become the motivating energy behind how we experience life and how we make choices.

Yet, through the chaotic life distractions, God works with where we are at in any particular moment, gently nudging and quietly calling us towards greater truth and wisdom, and, ultimately, into deeper spiritual relationship with God.

Take a few moments now for silent connection and reflection through meditation or prayer.

**Let a thought come to mind of a topic or subject important to your work or career. Mentally and emotionally explore how your choices, actions, and beliefs around this topic have or are nurturing you in the direction of compassion and care for others. Allow yourself to feel the Love for others you are uniquely positioned to offer. Thank Spirit for this time together.**

In the coming days, try to make time to connect and reflect on how various other topics and activities you love are interwoven and integrated with your spiritual path. Taking a deeper spiritual dive into Self and your relationship with God on a routine basis will strengthen your understanding of Spirit and of your purpose.

#### **THE GIFT:**

We have received the gifts intellect and reasoning. We have the world and universe to explore and study, not simply to satisfy curiosity, but so that we may continue to live out our love of humanity and life. Jesus taught us about this love which is greater than ourselves. All paths lead to Love.

May you remember that to actively expand your knowledge, wisdom, gifts, and abilities, as your Spirit feels led, is to pave your spiritual path with the perfect resources to draw upon when living out your unique expression of Love to and within the world.

## **SPIRITUAL AWARENESS/AWAKENING**

**“Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don’t be surprised that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ God’s Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” *John 3: 6-8***

Jesus lived many years before his ministry started. Like each of us, he would have listened to others, asked questions, been curious, studied various topics, and expanded in knowledge and understanding of his community and of the world in which he lived. His understanding of the God of his ancestors was well developed for he had studied scripture, but he came to recognize that following the “laws” was an act of the flesh taken to appease or satisfy a God who existed outside of everyday life. However, Jesus experienced the Spirit as living within him. He felt and recognized the energizing, life affirming, and hope inducing power offered to all of us by God when we enter into a deep, intimate, and faithful relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus grew and nurtured his connection to God during the many times he went away from others to pray. His baptism was a the start of his commitment to the Holy Spirit as his guide, as the heart within him informing his words, actions, and emotions. Jesus was spiritually very aware and awake to the movement of God’s Spirit. This was a crucial message for his people to hear at the time for they were oppressed and looking for a savior.

The leader the people expected and watched for was a political or military leader. However, they got Jesus who turned their understanding of faith upside down and offered empowerment to every individual to lead for themselves. Jesus taught spirituality and of the truths and wisdom which arose from his conversations with the Spirit God (e.g. Matthew 5:1-11). Through a faithful spiritual bond to Source, one experiences the Love of God, and learns to express that same Love throughout one’s life.

Jesus used prayer as his primary way of awakening and becoming aware of what the Spirit was asking of him. We too can enter into prayer to grow in Spirit. However, there is no single way a person can use to turn inward to Spirit and to connect with your own heart and Self knowing. We can try to get absolute answers from the experiences of others, but their Truths will never be exactly our Truths. The wisdom each of us must learn is never exactly the same as another person, but is uniquely something only we need to know.

What we do know is that Jesus provided us with some universal truths and often applied them through parables to which his community could directly relate. If we are to learn from the truths Jesus shared, we need to keep in mind that the Spirit is not a static existence, but it is a living and ever-changing life energy flowing along with humanity's evolution. So, when we ask God for clarity around a truth which Jesus shared over two thousand years ago, we will likely hear an answer to which we can directly relate given today's culture and society.

The painting before is called "Awareness." You may notice . . .

*After having turned towards earth for safety, security, and intellectual growth, there is a turning back towards God. The eye is open wide – symbolic of acceptance of all that is being given.*

*There is no longer a focus on earthly concerns and, in this case, limiting beliefs and other barriers erected to God have been dropped.*

*This is a spiritual awakening within and a big step in the direction of full awareness of all that a relationship with Spirit brings.*

The spiritual journey you follow is directly related to your curiosity; your desire for Truth and Wisdom; the extent and toxicity of limiting beliefs you hold; your need to heal, grow, forgive; and love; and your sensitivity to the spiritual energy surrounding you. One needs to sincerely reach for a spiritual connection, expect nothing specific to occur, yet patiently and eagerly await God's response in whatever form it may come.

Moving into full awareness and awakening to the Spirit is not a "one and done" event, but rather it is a conscious, intentional growing process in which your heart and soul seek to open more and more to receive the Spirit. Opening occurs as we

work to tear down barriers and habits we have spent much of our lives erecting such as limiting beliefs about ourselves and others, anger and holding resentment, excessive focus on obtaining material things or gaining power, selfishness and greed, and taking actions which have harmed or oppressed other living creatures. If you feel distant, disconnected, or unable to sense God, you have barriers and blinders to be removed.

### **QUESTION AND REFLECT:**

We become more aware of God and awake to God's desires for us and the world through intentional connection. Through this process of meeting and seeking God, we strip away barriers and nurture the growth of God's love within.

- What works best for you when trying to connect to the Holy Spirit? (e.g. prayer, meditation, walking in nature, etc.) Note: You may have multiple ways to connect depending upon your state of mind and the specific circumstances you encounter. There may be ways you have yet to discover.
- How might you use prayer as a spiritual practice? Are you always honest with yourself and with God when you pray?
- Have you considered (tried) developing and using multiple spiritual practices to support your journey? Reflect upon which work for you and which ones do not. Why might this be? Spiritual practices are routine and consistent actions used to enhance and inform the spiritual journey.
- How does it feel within your body when you are deeply connecting spiritually? What barriers might prevent you from feeling God? What steps have you taken to remove these barriers?
- Are you able to experience connection when not consciously attempting to do so? Ponder what might be the circumstances when this naturally occurs.
- Other than feelings or emotions, how else might you be sensing or knowing God is loving, listening, and responding to you?
- Do you listen for or watch for messages from God even though you may not have asked for anything? Bring to mind small ways in which you see God at work in your life, in your community, and in the world?

Water nourishes and sustains life. It freshens and cleans the earth. On a basic level, it is necessary for our Existence and Survival.

In a spiritual sense, water can be used to symbolically dissolve and wash away all barriers between us and God.

**On the table before you sits a bowl of water, some small dissolvable paper pieces, and several markers.**

**Think of just one belief, behavior, thought, or situation operating upon your life which makes it difficult or impossible for you to feel intimately connected with and unconditionally loved by God.**

**Write on one of the small papers a word or short phrase which captures the essence of this barrier. Silently say to yourself . . . “I no longer need or want to be separated from God by this barrier.”**

**Hold the paper between the palms of your hands, close your eyes and imagine God’s healing energy is flowing through your palms into the paper.**

**Place the paper in the water. As you stir the water, imagine or feel the barrier you wrote is dissolving away as the paper disappears.**

**Offer a brief silent prayer of gratitude for God’s loving grace.**

#### **THE GIFT:**

**“You must be born anew.”** This line from the passage above is an answer to the question of “how” does one become aligned with God.

This answer has multiple interpretations. For many, it means one must undergo a single transformative experience becoming “born again” in Christ. Yet, as every imperfect human likely recognizes, we need reminders and lessons to help us along, such that our journey to sync up with God will never really be complete in this lifetime. In fact, one must be born anew in thousands of little and big ways along the path.

Through his ministry, Jesus taught new ways of looking at our lives, at God and at spirituality. He taught a new “Way” for the people to live a life spiritually



connected with God while also resisting oppression and tyranny. He brought wisdom and truth and, in so doing, he identified some important ways humanity had gotten off track or out of sync with the Holy Spirit and with God's intentions for us.

The gift is that God is gracious, loving, and patient towards us no matter where we are on our journeys; how long it takes to find our way; nor how we choose to navigate life on our return to Spirit. Most importantly, we must stay alert, aware, and vigilant for God's presence and persistently try to return and refocus our energy on Spirit.

## **SPIRITUAL LESSONS**

**“As for the seed that fell among thorny plants, these are the ones who, as they go about their lives, are choked by the concerns, riches, and pleasures of life, and their fruit never matures. The seed that fell on good soil are those who hear the word and commit themselves to it with a good and upright heart. Through their resolve, they bear fruit.” Luke 8:14-15 (CEB)**

Jesus is the one who dedicated his ministry to sowing the seeds of the Holy Spirit. Some heard his message because they were ready to do so, and others could not yet hear it.

If each one of us represents a specific soil type, recognize that over time we may become more or less enhanced. We do not remain unchanged. Therefore, the seeds that Jesus planted about the Holy Spirit, about the truths and wisdoms by which we are meant to live, and about the importance of Love fall upon our Soul soil. What we hear and how we respond will depend upon the quality of our soil at any point in time. Thus, we hear a different or new message which opens our hearts and eyes more each time we engage with a familiar scripture passage and each time we encounter God after facing down more barriers. God’s hope for us is that we will one day bear fruit.

Without awareness (or without the ears to hear and eyes to see), we will receive spiritual lessons many, many times until we awaken to the message we are meant to receive. This means we might repeat mistakes, make the same bad choices, and fail to love ourselves lots of times and continue to suffer consequences as a result.

The painting before you is called **“Choices.”** You may notice . . .

*The spiritual path leads up from the left heading in the direction of a person’s spiritual center, but then the path rotates or cycles around the center counter-clockwise.*

*As options arise on this path, a person is free to choose to go in a new direction or stay in the rotation. Once on a new path, more choices arise.*

*As in life, the ultimate outcome of any choice made cannot be seen clearly. Yet, one can make a choice with the attitude of awareness of one’s center*

*light and with a sense of the choices which sustain purpose and connection to God.*

*The cycling implies that choices may come around more than once, but our life lessons play a part in how those choices appear to us each time.*

Having a lesson repeated in life is a sign of God's grace and patience with our transformational messiness. It also means our Souls are slowly being prepared and, once we have hit a final "aha!" with a lesson, the test will, most likely, never be repeated.

For one's soul to fully develop, the path will have a personal purpose to it. It may not be as grand as it was for Jesus, but finding and fulfilling one's own purpose in this life will enlighten your spiritual journey and energize the work you do to get back to God.

#### **QUESTION AND REFLECT:**

- Can you think of several events (same or similar events) during your life which had you saying to yourself "not again!" or "why does this keep happening to me?" Do you see any similar causes across these events? As you reflect on these events, can you identify some of the lessons you have had to learn in order for these events to stop repeating?
- What choices have you made which ultimately led to undesirable outcomes? What did you have to do to begin making different choices? Would the same process you followed for learning to make a new choice in this situation be helpful when faced with other challenging situations?
- Define for yourself what it means to have a life purpose. Your unique purpose should give meaning to your spiritual life in a such way as to enhance your experiences, fuel inspiration, and bring you closer to God.
- What do you feel your purpose for this life might be? Is this something you have been able to carry out or has it remained a pipe dream?
- If you don't feel you have a purpose, what steps might you take to find or define a purposeful direction for yourself?

Recall that our thoughts and emotions are symbiotic and reflect or express our beliefs. However, we can choose our thoughts and beliefs about anything from God to ourselves. We can also choose to change any thoughts which prevent us

from experiencing a full and free life in connection with Spirit. This is a wisdom-filled use of the gift of free will.

So, how does one know the right choice to make in a given situation? The right choice in the long run will be the choice that most aligns with your purpose and which feels good. A decision regarding something that will impact your life well into the future should not give rise to anxiety, anger, or any number of other negative emotions. When you have a sense of peace with a choice, you are likely on the right path. Note: The factors you consider when making a decision are certainly important. However, they should not all hold equal weight. Ideally, making a choice that moves you in the direction of your authentic spirit-aligned and connected to the Holy Spirit in Love is the hope.

Try digging a little deeper . . .

**In a meditative or prayerful state, look back on a major decision you made in your life which you realized had been the wrong decision. At the time you made the decision, to what factors did you give the highest priority? Imagine exactly how you were feeling and experiencing this situation at the time. Were you under pressure, stressed, unhappy, worried, or disappointed by anything related to the decision before or after it was made?**

**If you can identify the specific factors that pushed the decision in the original incorrect direction, how might you have shifted your perspective, prioritized some factors higher, ignored pressures, changed goals or direction, or altered anything else so you would have felt and known the choice being made was in sync with your spiritual journey and purpose?**

**Spend a few minutes trying to bring fully to your awareness that there is power in choice and it gives energy to the elements to which we give importance when making a decision. Tie this awareness (i.e., wisdom) to empowered and blissful emotions. When done, take a deep breath and let go of any residual negativity.**

**THE GIFT:**

We have intellect, emotion, heart, soul, community, knowledge, history, experience, and God to help guide us through life. These are all gifts for our use when choosing the right path to take on our spiritual journey. Being able to clearly identify the spiritual signals and signs offered to us is wherein lies our biggest challenges and the greatest potential for spiritual wealth.

## **SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION**

**“But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don’t withhold your shirt either. Give to everyone who asks and don’t demand your things back from those who take them. Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you.” Luke 6:27-31**

In his ministry, Jesus taught what it means to be aware of the presence of the Spirit within you and seek alignment with God. Just as Jesus would regularly step away from others to spend time alone in prayer and meditation connecting with Spirit and listening for God’s nudge, we are invited to regularly do the same.

By nurturing a personal relationship with God, your heart changes. You begin to naturally engage with life in ways the scripture passage above describes.

You are moved to Love your brothers and sisters unconditionally and unwaveringly, just as God Loves every person. You become compelled to express this Love by your actions, your words, and your lived existence. When genuinely and intimately connected to God, your heart will naturally reflect God’s Love. You will be awakened to, alert for, and aware of the painful needs of humankind.

When you are unable to deny the clarity with which you see, it becomes necessary to serve as an open conduit of divine Love to all on Earth. Each of us will be called to serve a purpose for the Divine in our own unique and gifted ways.

The painting before you is called **“Expressing.”** You may notice . . .

*The figure is absorbing God’s Loving energy and passing it forward as God has directed us to do in the known world. This care of the world is represented as the figure’s arms encircling humanity, cradling it to protect it, support it, and to actively radiate divine love. Unlike in other spiritual journey phases, the figure is focused much less or not at all on personal concerns, but is consumed with spreading and sharing a Love from Spirit.*

*The figure is intent on expressing the Spirit’s compassionate and loving energy within the world in partnership with God. The person is empowered, confident, in sync with the Creator, and seeing with the heart of God.*

After guiding us on the importance of a close (i.e., familial) relationship with God and showing his faithfulness to the Father through prayer and trust, Jesus offered us examples, often through stories and parables, of actions and perspectives which a believer (i.e. one who is spiritually awake and aware) will embrace and reflect to others.

At this phase on a spiritual life journey, spirituality has become a way of life infiltrating and informing every choice, action, and word. Spirituality/religion is no longer a separate and distinct element to be balanced against all other life concerns (e.g., finances, health, etc.) as it is the guiding wisdom for everything.

### **QUESTION AND REFLECT:**

When your relationship with God is strong . . .

- What practices do you follow which grow and strengthen your close relationship with Spirit?
- Where do barriers between you and God still arise? (Note: Facing and removing the walls which prevent us from being freely connected to Spirit remains a constant challenge in life. No one can ever be completely free of all limitations while they are still flesh and blood. So, a crucial part of our work is remaining vigilant with knowing and managing how we authentically navigate this life.)
- What does it mean to have an intimate relationship and partnership with God? How does such a relationship feel to you?
- How do you openly and genuinely express, reflect, and share Love with the world? How do you do good in the world?
- Why do you engage in activities for others? What exactly is compelling you to act?

Take a moment in silent prayer or meditation . . .

**Contemplate the true nature of the driving force behind the ministries you do in the world. Are you driven by a sense of duty to do the specific things Jesus and other biblical prophets identified? Is your heart engaged with these works and do they hold meaning for you? How do they fill your heart?**

**Alternatively, does the ministry work you offer to the world feel flat, boring, or unfulfilling to you? Ask for clarity from Spirit about what giving work you are most gifted for handling.**

**In what ways of giving of yourself, do you already feel most passionate about doing?**

**Not all spiritual action is grand, so reflect upon the goodness, kindness, and love which even simple acts can generate. When you channel God's love, what changes do you observe in the world and within yourself? Sincerely release these questions from your mind and let go of any attachment you may have to specific answers and ideas.**

**Let your senses be alert while patiently waiting for the Creator to offer guidance. Recall the feeling of anticipation as you take a deep breath ready to move forward from this moment.**

Throughout your days, try to maintain a sense of anticipation and alertness to Spirit's movements. Direction from Spirit will often arise as a subtle knowing confidence we may easily miss when distracted and unaware.

#### **THE GIFT:**

To be able to live in deep connection with Spirit and to share God's unconditional love with others is the gift of a mature and nurtured spirituality. An overpowering sense of calm, peace, hope, joy, and trust pervade the soul. Bliss becomes possible in every moment.



## **RESURRECTION**

**“So don’t be ashamed of the testimony about the Lord or of me, his prisoner. Instead, share the suffering for the good news, depending on God’s power. God is the one who saved and called us with a holy calling. This wasn’t based on what we have done, but it was based on his own purpose and grace that he gave us in Christ Jesus before time began. Now his grace is revealed through the appearance of our savior, Christ Jesus. He destroyed death and brought life and immortality into clear focus through the good news.” *2Timothy 1:8-10 (CEB)***

The last line in the passage above refers to Jesus bringing “life and immortality into clear focus through the good news.” It was through his life and ministry that Jesus brought the good news. But, what exactly did this mean? If it was such good news, why was he killed for his work?

Jesus encouraged the people who were looking for a “savior” to view life and living from a new perspective. He provided new interpretations to the people about their historic interactions with God. He shared the Spirit of a loving living God which resides within every heart.

Jesus shared news of a God always present to us through the Holy Spirit. From Jesus, we learned this Spirit is accessible to all, available to all, and wholly inclusive with unconditional love. We also learned that we must consciously seek the Spirit and openly welcome God into our hearts. These were not the traditional (i.e. old Testament) beliefs about the God the Jews worshipped, so Jesus upset tradition with his ideas.

Believing a personal relationship with God is available to each on us, Jesus further taught about what living with God in one’s heart looks like; how a faithful person is one who shares God’s Love with others; and, ultimately, he showed that the relationship between our Souls and God does not end with this earthly life, but continues after death.

Jesus was reborn into new life with God . . . Jesus died for this resurrection.

The painting before you is called “**Resurrection.**” You may notice . . .

*Though formed of this earth and rooted to it, Jesus’ Soul and Spirit returns to the Spirit God upon death. The flesh of the body is what keeps humans so tied down to Earth, yet that is not the final stage of the spiritual journey. The body will remain while the Soul merges again with God.*

Having been merged with God at birth, then challenged to return to God throughout a human existence seemingly intent on keeping us separated, the resurrection or the re-merging of our Spirit with the whole of the God-Spirit upon death is the end to the spiritual path each human has been traveling while on earth.

### **QUESTION AND REFLECT:**

Understanding and interpreting the New Testament writings can be a complex and confusing endeavor especially since writings by those telling the stories of Jesus’ life seem to be missing details and/or the same story told in two different gospels gives rise to contradictory details. The passages regarding Jes resurrection are equally challenging.

- What specific personal beliefs do you hold regarding the resurrection of Jesus? What is its meaning for you personally?
- What is your belief about why Jesus “had” to die? Would Jesus’ message and life ministry somehow be diminished for you if his death were not actually foretold in the Old Testament?
- What is the significance and meaning for you of Jesus’ return after three days? What does scripture say the disciples believed and experienced? Why did they need to see Jesus again?
- Can you sense how there might be freedom found through death of the body and the release of the Spirit unto God? How do you think the release of the Spirit might appear to us while human, if at all?
- Can you sense how there can already be freedom with the Spirit before death and while you are on your spiritual journey moving from birth to death?

With a personal relationship with God, one can trust without fear that our questions, skepticism, and challenges to Spirit about what is, what has been, what

will be, etc. will be welcomed and answered with Love. Humans are imperfect and produce imperfect results even when inspired by God. Faith grows when we engage with Spirit, scripture, other spiritual writings and belief systems in any way which expands our Love and energize our compassionate kindness towards others. With God within, we can learn from and see through to the spiritual message contained in the gospels while also safely questioning an author's agenda and intent.

We exit from this learning experience on Earth wiser in truth, merging fully with the One spiritual energy and with our Souls at peace.

Meditating for life . . .

**With your eyes closed, reflect back over the spiritual path you have followed thus far in your life. Let yourself imagine the Spirit with you in childhood; see the movement of God throughout significant spiritual lessons and life experiences you have had; recall how you felt during times you were intentionally aligned with God; let any other thoughts and feelings you have over your journey freely come and go.**

**Bring to mind the actions and feelings you have yet to experience as part of your spiritual growth in relationship with and for God.**

**Give these desires over to God with thanks. Breathe deeply of the sense of Spirit that is with you now. Feel the Love of God around and within you, warm, comforting, safe.**

**Smile.**

## **THE GIFT:**

Take with you a confident trust in the comprehensive and unconditional Love of God which embraces, supports, and sustains you on your own unique spiritual journey. You have been given this grace to hold for yourself and to share with others. The greatest gift is that when we are with God, we can make all good things possible.

In our imperfection as humans, we often deny the Spirit within for thousands of reasons, saying I will talk to God, listen to God, do good works, show compassionate-kindness, and figure my spirituality out when I get a round to it.

Modern life is fully of distractions demanding our attention. We tend to keep choosing to turn away from our Spirit and somehow never find the time to turn toward God.

In the cup on the table is a simple wooden token. Please take one with you as a reminder that you now have a “round tuit.” This means there are no more excuses, delays, or barriers for you to overcome before you choose to be intentional with developing a personal, intimate life-long friendship with God.