

A high-speed photograph of a water splash, with numerous droplets suspended in the air above the main splash. The background is a soft, golden sunset over a body of water. The word 'INFINTUM' is centered in white, uppercase letters. The letter 'I' is followed by a white circle containing the letter 'N', which is then followed by 'F', 'I', 'N', 'T', 'U', 'M'.

INFINTUM

BOOK 2

INFINITUM

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INTRO

THE CREATIVE WAY DOWN

WATCH INTRO VIDEO



“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied,
“tell me to come to you on the water.”
“Come,” he said.

– MATT 14:28-29

WHAT IF WE REALLY FOLLOWED JESUS?

This is a frightening idea, not least because Jesus’ own life ended with violence and apparent failure. Why would we wish to follow this example? Yet there is something about his life that continues to capture our hearts. Something integral. Something coherent. Something *good*. Something we want to join in and experience more deeply, even if it disrupts everything else in our lives.

And if we are honest, even if we have been followers of Jesus for a long time, we will likely admit that our experience of a connection to his life can feel shallow. Maybe we have tried some tools for discipleship, accountability, community and spiritual depth. There are some great tools out there, but even the best tools will not build something good if we don’t know what we are meant to be building. And if we are trying to build anything that is not from the Lord, we know it will be a waste of time.

This is precisely what is missing in most of our imaginations: a vision of what we were *created for*. A sense of what genuine spiritual depth looks like in the world. A glimpse of a life lived in union with Christ. And a trustworthy path that helps get us there.

This is part of the genius of the 12 Step program for Addictions Recovery. It begins with an honest assessment of an unmanageable life and then proceeds to offer a personal and communal journey that will, if taken seriously, help people move into freedom. Every step along the way is reinforced by the living experiences of people who have gone before. The 12 Steps are trustworthy, clear, and provide a

vision for how to live in a new way in the world. What's more, people are encouraged to carry on practicing and going through the steps multiple times, solidifying and deepening the wisdom gained each time. Recovery is understood to be a lifelong process of freedom and connection.

WHAT IF SUCH A PATH WERE AVAILABLE TO THOSE WANTING TO FOLLOW JESUS?

Jesus *has* given us a path, a way. In Matthew 5:1-12 Jesus gives a series of blessings – The Beatitudes – which describe what we were made for and offer a vision for how we can live holy, healthy, and deeply. The Beatitudes are not a program but rather an invitation to join Jesus, step by step, deeper and deeper, into his divinely human life. This is only made possible because Jesus first journeyed towards us in his incarnation, and because the Spirit is powerfully present in us every day. We walk this path with Jesus only by God's grace, power and love for us.

The *Creative Way Down*, based upon Jesus' Beatitudes, is a resource designed to help us on this path.

It is **CREATIVE** because Jesus is making us all into a new creation (**2 Cor 5:17**). This is about a new life, a whole life, a free life, not the half-lives many of us have been living. It is anything but boring.

We recognise that each person's deepening relationship with Jesus is unique, and each of our journeys may look different. Our individual journeys, however, should still be recognisable to other Jesus-followers, because we are after all travelling together with Jesus. There is a **WAY**, a discernible path that Jesus gives us to follow, together. (**Matt 16:24-26**) We don't just make things up and call it discipleship. We submit ourselves and our communities to the revealed and life-giving way of our Lord.

And this way is the way **DOWN**. It is the way of diving *downwards* with

Jesus towards surrender, generosity, and living for others. Ultimately, discipleship means participating in Jesus' self-giving, others-preferring love as we learn the depth of the Father's love for us. **(Phil 2:1-11)**

Ephesians 3:17-19 says: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." We want to know the width, length, height and depth of this love, not just in theory, but in our own personal and communal experiences. This is the *Creative Way Down*.

THE DETAILS

We imagine this twelve-week process as a deep-sea dive. The ocean is beautiful, boundless, untameable, powerful, and dangerous. It covers much of our planet and supports teeming life, yet we know so little about it. It is a mystery that draws at our imagination, representing adventure, wonder, fear, romance and newness, but we must be very careful and brave to dare its depths. It is as strange and alien an environment as we can find on earth. We can't live in it for more than minutes at a time without help. Any exploration, therefore, does not begin at the bottom of the ocean, but in the shallows.

The *Creative Way Down* likewise begins wherever we are and gradually moves towards the deeper waters, towards immersion in the mysterious, new, dangerous, wondrous and boundless life found in God.

It is divided into three progressive sections, based on the three Infinitum categories of *Surrender*, *Generosity*, and *Mission*. Under each of these headings are three weeks of material, each focusing on one of Jesus' beatitudes. Each three-week section ends with a fourth week designed for taking a deep breath and reflecting on what you have just been through, before you dive back in again. You can do all

three sections - and therefore all twelve weeks - back to back, or you can spread them out over a year or years if you like. And you can keep coming back to these sections as often as you like. We can foresee Infinitum Hubs going through this material, or at least part of it, as often as once a year.

Every week begins with an Infinitum group meeting featuring video teaching on how Jesus inhabits each Beatitude, and how he calls us to join him there. The teaching is accompanied by a half-hour podcast conversation on the teaching (which can be listened to in the group or on your own), and accountability questions, prayers, and a new spiritual practice for each week. The rest of the week includes daily teaching, suggested actions, and prayer and scripture guides for individuals. These are designed for morning, mid-day, and evening interaction every day. You can spend as long as you like in these three daily teaching and prayer times but should probably schedule no less than ten minutes for each. There are also suggested movies, books, and playlists to go alongside the weekly teaching.

At the end of each week there is a debrief in your Infinitum Hub before moving on to the next week's focus. Working through this path together is especially important. Talk to one another during the week, encourage one another, ask questions, and especially pray for each other. Why? Because the way of discipleship was never meant to be taken alone. We were created for spiritual friendship and kinship community, and this has been misplaced in much of our Church experience.

Discipleship is also not meant to be compartmentalised. It includes the whole of each person, body, soul, spirit. It includes the way we form community, the way we act politically and economically, the way we treat our neighbours, the way we love. Discipleship radically affects everything and makes it all new. The *Creative Way Down* should therefore include lots of good music, lots of eating well and eating together, lots of fun, lots of joy. It should also include care and love for your body. Sleep well. Walk. And try to get out in the water. Find a local pool, lake or ocean, and remind yourself what it feels like to be immersed in the water as you immerse yourself in discipleship and prayer.

Remember, Jesus is calling us to join him. He *wants* us to be with him where he is. It's time to enter the water.

PREPARATION

No one goes deep-sea diving without preparation. Discipleship also requires preparation. Listen to Richard Foster: "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but where, oh where, are those who think of changing themselves? People may genuinely want to be good, but seldom are they prepared to do what it takes to produce the inward life of goodness that can form the soul. Personal formation into the likeness of Christ is arduous and lifelong."

Before you begin the Creative Way Down, ensure that each member of the Infinitum Hub:

- Reads Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), ideally more than once. Familiarise yourself with this revolutionary teaching as best you can;
- Reads the Creative Way Down Introduction and watches the intro video;
- Writes an honest assessment of where their life is currently. This includes prayer, Church, work, relationship, emotional and mental well-being, physical health, happiness, etc...The more you are self-aware and honest with yourself, the more you will get out of this process;
- Compiles a list of things they know, or strongly suspect, are weighing them down: sins, distractions, bad thoughts, unhelpful worldviews, etc.;
- Begins a rhythm of praying, even if briefly, morning, noon and evening. These prayer times will be guided and progressively deepened and lengthened during the nine weeks;
- Arranges to connect regularly during the nine-week process with a spiritual director, pastor, or mature Christian friend to give feedback;

- Lets their immediate community know that they are engaging an intense season of discipleship, for the purposes of prayer and transparency;
- Commits to walking this out with their Infinitum Hub, which will mean being in regular contact beyond weekly meetings, and most especially in daily prayer for one another.

None of us will be fully discipled after twelve weeks, or after completing a course. Discipleship is a life-long process of surrendering and being drawn more deeply into the generous life and mission of Christ. At the end of the Creative Way Down we will give advice on how to carry on as individuals and as groups in the way of Jesus. But you should not rush through this guide. Go at your own pace. This is not about finishing a course but setting a course for life.

SECTION 2

GENEROSITY

FROM GRASPING TO GIVING



So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- PHIL 2:1-11

WEEK FIVE

TAKING A DEEP BREATH

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER
AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS,
FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.**

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

WESLEY'S ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

Continue using the 22 Daily Accountability Questions from Wesley's Holy Club – www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/everyday-disciples-john-wesleys-22-questions

MOVIE

- *Pay It Forward*
- *Millions*
- *Les Miserables*
- *E.T. The Extra-terrestrial*

PLAYLIST

- "Blessed are the Ones" by Audrey Assad
- "There Will Be Time" by Mumford and Sons and Baaba Maa
- "It's Not Enough" Dustin Kensrue
- "Picture of Jesus" by Ben Harper and Ladysmith Black Mambazo
- "Oh Blessed" by Stu G
- "Fill My Cup" by CeCe Winans
- "Middle of My Storm" Bryann Trejo
- "I Am Satisfied in You" by the Sing Team

BOOKS

- *Generous Justice* by Tim Keller

THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

IN INFINITUM GROUPS

DECOMPRESSION

Share with one another how your week of rest and reflection went. What went well? What was challenging? What issues are rising to the surface for you?

Have you managed to incorporate Stillness, Lament and Awareness Examen into your daily routine? Remind each other how to practice those particular disciplines, checking in with the previous instructions if needed. But also remind each other that these practices, and the ones we introduce in the postures to come, are designed to help turn our attention to the Gospel. They are not, in themselves, the Gospel. They are tools. The moment they cease directing our gaze towards Christ is the moment they become idols. They are very helpful, but we must not come to rely upon them. Our hope is in Christ alone.

CHECKLIST

Ask each other the following questions:

- Are you ever afraid that God will not supply your needs? Financially, physically, emotionally, spiritually?
- Do you look at the world as a place of scarcity or abundance?
- Is there anything you are grasping onto? Resources, time, energy, ideas or space that you don't want to share?
- Do you compare your life with others?
- Do you view other people as competition?
- Do you ever feel like you don't "measure up" to what God wants from you? Or what others expect of you?
- Do you trust that God wants the best for you? Does your life reflect this trust?
- Are you satisfied and fulfilled in your spiritual life? What do you think this would look like?
- Do you believe that fulfillment is possible? Do you want it?

How many of these questions resonate with you? Are you aware of a need for a deeper connection to God? Have some areas in your life been highlighted that you want to address? Do you want to find rest for your souls?

MEDIA

VIDEO

Jesus the Righteous, Jesus the Just

PODCAST

ALMSGIVING

Read **Matthew 6:1-4**

Almsgiving is the new practice for this week. Almsgiving means the giving of material gifts of food, money, clothes, etc. to the poor.

Jessica Mannen Kimmet from the Grotto Network says, "giving away money or possessions is an act of love. Even though it might also help the giver, it's really about choosing to help someone else above ourselves. It's a way of embodying our desire for others' good. It's about making a sacrifice that echoes the self-giving love of God. And it's about returning that love; all our acts of love for others are ultimately acts of love for God."¹

We will be giving daily suggestions for giving alms. Think of it as exercise for growing your generosity muscles. Almsgiving won't save the world, yourself, or the person receiving alms, but it will challenge and expand the way you think about your resources and the opportunities you have to bless others.

Share with each other how you have practiced almsgiving in the past. What are some positive experiences? What are some negative experiences? What excites you about this practice? What makes you nervous?

Read out this poem from St Teresa of Avila together, which will be a daily mid-day prayer during this week:

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

STILLNESS

Read out **Matthew 5:1-12**

Spend nine minutes of silence and stillness together.

End by praying the Lord's Prayer.

WHAT KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read Matthew **5:17-20, 48**

Watching Olympic-level swimmers or Tri-athletes is inspiring. It is incredible to see what the human body and mind is capable of, and thrilling to see records fall as men and women push the edges of speed, form and endurance.

But it can also be disheartening to think that we will probably never get close to that good personally. Watching elite athletes - or experts in any field - reminds us of our own limitations. But if someone told us, "Unless you can swim better than those Olympic athletes, don't even bother getting in the water," we probably wouldn't take that as good advice.

Yet Jesus tells his listeners that unless their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees they could never enter the kingdom of heaven. That might sound like bad news to Jesus' disciples. How were they supposed to get more righteousness than the group of people known for their strict adherence to the Law? Jesus goes on to identify what this might look like in verses 21-47. It is not enough to avoid murder and adultery, for instance; the heart must be free from hatred and lust as well.

And then the kicker: Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect. Good luck with that.

Either Jesus is setting his followers up for epic failure, or he is introducing them, and us, into a new way of understanding and living in righteousness, and new understanding of perfection.

It is much more than moral perfection.

Jesus is not offering a course in behavioural correction, he is offering an entrance into his very life. That is what it means to be blessed. And that, not coincidentally, is also what it means to be righteous. Righteousness is being joined with Jesus, not just trying our best to imitate him, but actually participating with him as he draws us up into his life. It is sharing in the perfectly righteous relationship he has with the Father and the Spirit, and the perfectly righteous relations he has with the world.

If this sounds a bit much, remember Paul says that it is no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him. **(Gal 2:20)** And Peter says, "He has given us His precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the *divine nature*, now that you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." **(2 Pet 1:4)** And John says, "And now, little children, abide in him... If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him." **(1 John 2:29)**

How do we practice righteousness? We abide in Jesus. We join our lives with his, through his invitation. We do the things we know he did, and love in the way that he showed us to love, and are able to do so because it is Christ living and working in us and through us.

So the hunger and thirst for righteousness is not just a hunger and thirst for better behaviour, for some external standard of holiness. It is a hunger and thirst for Jesus himself, the one who brings us into the life of God and who makes us new from the inside out. This renewal will inevitably change the way we think, act and live, which is the source of our daily *practice* of righteousness.

ALMSGIVING

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

- 1 JOHN 3:1

Count the gifts you have been given and rejoice in them. Write a list of all the things in your life, or in your day, that you have received as a result of someone's generosity, be it family, friend, stranger, or the Lord. Speak out your gratitude for every blessing that has been poured out over you. This is essential for the practice of almsgiving, and for the posture of generosity. We learn to be open-handed from a place of abundance, joy and gratitude.

PRAYER

Pray The Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread." Do you trust God to meet your needs today? Do you trust him enough to lay down your worries and anxieties?

Pray **Psalm 4**.

"Following Jesus will mean surrendering the power that masquerades as security in order to love the neighbour and welcome the stranger. It will mean avoiding the safe path in order to pursue the good. But in a culture of fear, we find such risks all the more difficult since our natural inclinations lead us to close in on ourselves when we face danger. How can we maintain the posture of the open hand toward a world that scares us?"

– SCOTT BADER-SAYE

What fear is currently getting in the way of generosity for you? What is the opposite spirit of that fear? Can you name the fear, and then ask God to fill you with its opposite?

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

Find a place to be still and silent for nine minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you what your life might look like if you were filled with the opposite of fear.

Remember **Psalm 4** or a line from the poem as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for nine minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the nine minutes are up, pray **Psalm 4** again.

Read Matthew **6:25-34**

LAMENT

"Ambition is the desire to be above one's neighbour; and here there is no possibility of comparison with one's neighbour...Relative worth is not only unknown - to the children of the Kingdom it is unknowable."

– GEORGE MACDONALD

Where have you been trapped in comparison and ambition? Can you lament this, and ask God to set your soul at rest from this deception?

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

UNFULFILLED

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Matthew 19:16-30**

It is very easy to get disoriented in the water. Whether getting bowled over by a big wave, losing track of the boat while snorkeling, or drifting on the tide away from safety, there are a lot of factors that can confuse us and cause us to lose our course, our sense of direction.

We can't help but swim in the waters of our culture, and the effects of this are especially notable in our attitudes towards money. This is true for individuals, but also for the Church. It is very easy to get confused and to lose our sense of direction when we are daily bombarded with messages that prioritise acquisition, greed, scarcity, self-sufficiency, fear and competition. All of this reinforces the posture of grasping that we are trying to release in our hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Grasping and acquiring do not lead to fulfilment. That is one of the lessons from the story of the rich young man. Jesus doesn't tell him to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor because he is angry with him or wants to make his life miserable. Nor is he saying that such acts of charity will buy anyone's way into heaven. He tells the young man that his attachment to wealth is an obstacle or a disorienting distraction to the fulfilment he seeks: the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. The way to overcome this obstacle is to relinquish what he thinks is going to fulfill him and to adopt a posture of generosity.

Let's admit that this can be a very scary posture. It certainly was for the rich young man. We locate our security, our future, even our identity in many things, our wealth especially. And we are very much encouraged to do so by our culture, as this young man surely was within his. We are advised to hunger and thirst after achievement, provision, self-sufficiency, the good wage and the healthy savings account. We are told to protect ourselves first and foremost. There is nothing wrong with a good job and a savings account. But they are not what we are told to hunger and thirst after for fulfillment. We are starving and thirsting in the wrong direction. We are disoriented. And in our disorientation we withhold needful things from the poor in our midst, thus compounding the sin.

Jesus offers the rich young man an alternative vision of fulfillment, the true way towards the kingdom of heaven. The young man is too committed to his wealth to receive it. Jesus' disciples debate it and wonder how this alternative vision could possibly come to pass.

And the challenge still presents itself to us today. Where do we search for fulfillment? What are the promises that are offered to us for fulfillment in the world? Are they true? Are we, as followers of Jesus, believing, living and modelling this other "way" of Jesus?

ALMSGIVING

Read **James 1:27**. Make a note today of each time someone tries to influence the way you use money. Note especially when someone tries to convince you that the world is full of scarcity rather than abundance. Include commercials, ads, billboards, emails, and conversations in this list. What are the messages? How many times do you hear them? Do they agree or conflict with the attitude the Lord wants you to have around money? How would you summarise the world's counsel about money, and how would you summarise the Lord's counsel? What impact does the world's ideas about money have, especially on the poor? What impact would there be if followers of Jesus obeyed the Lord's counsel instead?

Choose one way today to intentionally oppose the world's money system and enact the Lord's generosity.

PRAYER

Pray The Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." What temptations of our grasping culture affect you the most? What would it look like to be delivered today?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 37:1-6**

"Sin is—to borrow the angel's Easter phrase—looking for the living among the dead. It is to come to a place of nothingness expecting to find something."

– DANIEL GROTHE

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

Find a place to be still and silent for nine minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to reveal where you have put trust in things that will pass away, things that don't satisfy.

Remember **Psalm 37** or a line from the poem as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for nine minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the nine minutes are up, pray **Psalm 37:7-11**.

EVENING

Read **1 Kings 17:7-16**

LAMENT

The widow of Zarephath, quite understandably, sees the world as a place of scarcity. The Lord sends Elijah to ask for her help, and shows her that the Lord's gifts are abundant.

There are people in the world living in genuine material scarcity, often because those of us who have more than we need are unwilling to share. We have even created systems and structures to effectively keep people from accessing our wealth. In our material abundance we have chosen (or have learned) to see the world through the lens of scarcity, and to see others as threats.

God's economy works very differently. Lament this unfair distribution of wealth and needed goods, and confess your part in it. Ask God to show you how to live differently, both as an individual and as part of the Body of Christ.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

DISCIPLINE

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Hebrews 12:1-13**

How long can you hold your breath? Try it now, and time yourself.

There are techniques that help you learn to hold your breath for long periods of time. This is especially useful for what is called Free Diving, which is essentially scuba diving without the use of any equipment. Here is a beautiful National Geographic short film that captures the experience: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4qM1IEhtNQ>

Herbert Nitsch is the current Free Diving record holder. He has dived to a depth of 831 feet without any equipment, and has held his breath for as long as 9 minutes and 4 seconds under water. You don't get to that kind of depth and time without serious discipline, some intense practice in deep breathing and in calming your body and mind, and some difficult experiences learning to operate without fresh oxygen. The practice of holding your breath can be painful and tiresome, but it leads to great freedom.

Discipline has two meanings for us. One refers to an intense level of personal commitment; the other refers to the correction a parent might give to teach a child. In both cases we experience a type of loss: a giving up; a choosing to go without or to abstain; a rebuke that leads to a change of course. Discipline is painful as we undergo it.

Sometimes this pain becomes the primary lens through which we view God. He is reduced to the disciplinarian who corrects and rebukes us, the Judge who is associated with all the things we lose and have to go without.

But, as Wesley Hill says, "Loss is never the final word in Jesus' economy." Hebrews 12 claims that God's discipline is for our good and has its source in love, even though it is painful at the time. Discipline isn't the same as mere punishment. It is teaching us to stop grasping those things/thoughts/attitudes that are harming us and others, the sin that so easily entangles, and to walk in liberating obedience to God. Opening our hands like this can be hard, and we sometimes require correction. But God is always kind, and whatever we "lose" in the discipline we more than gain in love and freedom.

So what is this discipline? What are we asked to give up in the hunger and thirst for righteousness? The answer, as always, is to look to Jesus, always look to Jesus. What did Jesus give up for the sake of righteousness? Think about his life, and the joy for which he scorned shame and endured the cross. Make a list of the things you know Jesus gave away in his life. Could he be asking us to do the same? What would that look like in your life? Not as a burden, but for freedom, for love, for transformation, and for participation in his righteous life.

ALMSGIVING

"I know many who fast, pray, sigh, and demonstrate every manner of piety, so long as it costs them nothing, yet would not part with a penny to help those in distress."

– BASIL THE GREAT

Take something with you from home today to give away. It could be money; a personal item; food; anything that has worth to you and that you can give to someone else. Ask God to show you who to give it

to today, and also how to give it. What is the best attitude for giving something to someone? Decide in your heart that this money or item no longer belongs to you, it already belongs to the person to whom you are going to give it. Then look for an opportunity to give it away.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread." Have you ever thought that you could be part of the answer to the prayer for someone else?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 118:15-21**

Step 6: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

Consider again the list of character defects you worked on in the first month of The Creative Way Down. These may be long-standing "friends" in your life, habits that have provided temporary comfort and escape from fear and pain. Do you want God to remove them? Can you ask God to help you really want this and to make you ready for them to be removed?

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

Find a place to be still and silent for nine minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and prepare you for the removal of sin, distraction and false comfort. Listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying, and how the Spirit wants to open your grasping hands, kindly and thoroughly.

Remember **Psalm 118:15-21** or a line from the poem as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for nine minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the nine minutes are up, pray **Psalm 118:15-21** again. Write down for yourself what the Spirit has said to you.

EVENING

Read **Romans 13:11-14**

LAMENT

Is there anything you are still holding onto that you find difficult to let go? Let the Spirit search your heart and show you. Can you lament this to God and be generous with your life before him? Ask that your hunger and thirst for righteousness would overcome any lingering

grasping after sin, false comfort or distraction, so that you can be free to bless the Lord and to bless others joyfully.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

SELF DENIAL

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Isaiah 58**

You cannot breathe the air above the surface of the water while diving deep beneath the water at the same time. It doesn't make any sense. You have to choose one or the other, and in each choice there is a denial. If you cannot give up the air above you will never reach the beauty in the depths below. But if you never come up for air, you cannot live.

Sometimes in our discussion of generosity, and particularly self-denial, we may accidentally communicate that God wants to take everything from us and leave us empty, wringing from us the very last of our energy and resources. Long-term missions are often promoted with this kind of "true sacrifice" rhetoric, which appeals to a certain type of personality (the heroic martyr).

Sacrifice is a genuine part of faith, including the sacrifice of one's very life. But have we got the equation of giving and receiving all wrong? After all, the blessing for this week is that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled, not that they will remain empty.

Isaiah 58 certainly contains elements of sacrifice: sharing bread, opening one's home, pouring oneself out for the hungry and afflicted. But the point is not self-denial. Simply abstaining from food and spreading sackcloth and ashes - in other words performing religious duties - is worth nothing if it is not accompanied by a commitment to justice. And this commitment to

justice is essential because it reflects the character and nature of God. So, true fasting - and true righteousness - is about participating with God in the way he wants us to live.

But what happens when we live that way? Isaiah 58:8-12 give a beautiful picture of fulfilment and blessing. Stop and read those verses again. Light, healing, protection, heard prayer, guidance, satisfaction, strong bones, watered gardens, restoration of streets to dwell in, delight, provision, inheritance. God is not offering a one-way relationship in this passage, and the life of faith is not about fruitless sacrifice. It is about abundance, for everyone, because God wants to share his blessed life with all his children. He calls us therefore to share the blessings we have received. This includes a denial of things: we don't get to hold onto massive wealth inequality, idolatry, unjust systems, oppressive labour practices, violence, accusation and so on. It doesn't make sense to hold onto these things and to say we are following Jesus. We have to choose one way or the other. But remember, God's giving far outweighs his taking. When we open our hands and let go of what we are grasping, we get to share with our brothers and sisters and receive even more blessing from the Father. It's not like he is going to run out of blessings.

Remember this Annie J. Flint hymn as you reflect upon self-denial for the rest of today:

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision,
Our God ever yearns His resources to share;
Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing;
The Father both thee and thy load will upbear.*

*His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

ACTION

Read **Matthew 6:1-4**. We give, and practice self-denial, for the sake of others, the love of others. Self-denial is not simply for self-improvement, but to be self-giving.

Choose something again to give away today, but this time try to find a way to give to someone without them knowing it came from you. Do anything short of deception to bless someone today without getting any credit or recognition for doing so. Become a secret almsgiver.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "For Yours is the Kingdom." If the Kingdom belongs to the Father, and not to us, how might that change the way we think about our possessions?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 132:1-5**

Rich Villodas says, "When Jesus says to deny ourselves, he's not instructing us to have no regard for our personhood. He's calling us to reject any 'self' we have constructed & protected that doesn't originate from the center of God's life."

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

Find a place to be still and silent for nine minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and begin to show you the false, constructed "self" that the Father wants you to reject, so that you can find your fulfillment in Him.

Remember **Psalm 132:1-5** or a line from the poem as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for nine minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the nine minutes are up, pray **Psalm 132:1-5** again.

Read **Acts 4:32-37**

LAMENT

"It is imperative on us to get rid of the tyranny of things...When a man begins to abstain, then for the first time he recognises the strength of his passion: it may be, when a man has not a thing left, he will begin to know what a necessity he had made of things." – George MacDonald

Have you allowed yourself to fall under a tyranny of things? Lament this tyranny, and ask the Lord what would be life-giving for you to abstain from, and how this abstaining might also be used to bless a brother or sister in need.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

FILL YOUR LUNGS

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Colossians 1:15-20; 2:6-15**

When you have been underwater for awhile and are straining at the edges of your lung capacity, there is nothing more wonderful than reaching the surface and inhaling a huge gulp of air. The ocean is beautiful, but we need that steady flow of oxygen to sustain us. If our lungs are not filled with the right thing, we die.

The motivation for following Jesus is that he really is our satisfaction. God tells us to stop seeking the temporary comforts of this world because he has something so much better for us. We catch a glimpse of this in Colossians 1:15-20, where Paul describes, as best he can, the uniqueness and beauty of Jesus. You can feel him straining at the edges of his vocabulary to capture something of what he has seen: image of the invisible God; firstborn over all creation; all things made for him and through him; before all things; head of the body; supreme; the fullness of God; reconciling all things to himself. What more could be said about Jesus? Paul exhausts himself depicting Jesus as the best possible Lord and Saviour, unique and powerful and loving, bringing peace and reconciliation through his blood on the cross.

Well and good, but Colossians 2 really blows the doors off. Here is where the fullness of God, fully revealed in Jesus, becomes the very thing that overcomes the empty, hollow and deceptive philosophy of the world, all

that stuff that will never satisfy. Followers are told to root and build up their lives in Christ, and to overflow with gratitude. They move from death to life, from enslavement in the powers of the world to fulfillment in the power and authority of Christ.

If we hunger and thirst and grasp after the things of this world, even religious things, we will be empty, hollow and deceived. But when we hunger and thirst after Jesus and his righteousness, we are raised by faith, made alive, forgiven, triumphant with Christ, and brought to fullness. This is what it means to be satisfied.

ALMSGIVING

Read **Matthew 6:24-34**

Make a list of the things that you are currently anxious or worried about. Pray about each one, and then think of something you can do today to act in the opposite spirit. To act as if there was something bigger than your worry. And, in order to really act in the opposite spirit, try to make sure the action is attached to a faithful generosity. For instance, are you anxious about money? Give some (even a little) away today to someone else who needs it. Are you worried that there isn't enough time in the day to accomplish your tasks? Spend your lunch hour intentionally not doing work but spending it with someone else. Whatever your particular concern is, think and pray about what it would look like to act as if God really does know what we need and is delighted to meet our needs.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Give us today our daily bread." What does it look like for you to really trust in God's fulfillment?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 42**

"A believer in Christ needs only to realize his weakness and sins and ask forgiveness, and God's love cleanses and heals all the wounds of sin. The sins of the entire world drown in the sea of God's love, like stone which sinks when thrown into the water. There should be no place for despondency, hopelessness or despair."

– **ABBOT NIKON VOROBIEV**

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

Find a place to be still and silent for nine minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you your sins, worries and anxieties, drowned in the sea of his love.

Remember **Psalm 42** or a line from the poem as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for nine minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the nine minutes are up, pray **Psalm 42** again .

EVENING

Read **Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 8:18-25**

LAMENT

The complete fulfillment of these great promises has not yet come. We still live in a world marred by violence, greed, exploitation, enmity and systems that divide us and crush the poor and vulnerable. Open up a news source right now and look at the sorrow that you see there. Bring this sorrow - or your own experience of sorrow and frustration - to the Lord. While keeping our eyes fixed on the beauty of the Lord and the hope of his promises, we can still weep for the frustration and pain of the world and join with all creation in eager longing and inward groaning, as we wait for the revelation of the children of God.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

FULFILLED

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **John 4:1-42**

“Water, water everywhere, / Nor any drop to drink,” says the Ancient Mariner in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s epic poem. The sailor describes being surrounded by salt water, utterly unable to slake his thirst. It is not fit for drinking, and will hasten death rather than preserve life.

The water the Samaritan woman draws from the well is fit to drink, but Jesus declares that the living water he has is infinitely better. Drink from his water, Jesus says, and you will never thirst again. This is as striking a picture of abundance as could be found, particularly in a time where retrieving water was a laborious and uncertain task. And it is illustrative of Jesus’ generosity to us. He will receive what the woman has to give him, with gratitude, but his desire is to offer her so much more than she could ever hope or imagine. So when we talk about a posture of generosity, let us remember that it is based entirely upon Jesus’ radical generosity to us.

Water is life. A human can go weeks without food, but only three or four days without water. If we are not connected to the source of life, we will die. The New Testament repeatedly says that we must remain in Jesus, stay connected to Jesus, abide in Jesus. There is simply no power, no satisfaction, no fulfillment, no life outside of him.

But what does this mean? How do we remain, participate, and abide?

We get a hint when the disciples return to Jesus after their little shopping trip. In a conversation that echoes the one with the Samaritan woman, Jesus tells the disciples that he has food they don't know about. What food? they wonder. He has a secret stash of food? Jesus explains that his food is to do the will of the one who sent him, to fulfill his work. We are clearly outside the realm of physical bread and water in both these conversations. Jesus is telling the woman, and his followers, what fulfillment looks like. It is not something that neglects the body's needs - he asks the woman for water, and sends his disciples to buy food - but something that puts first things first. Following Jesus into his righteousness (a righteousness that does not balk at speaking with "unclean" women at wells) leads to true satisfaction. It is about aligning our wills with the will of the Father, as Jesus did.

Jesus knows that it is good for us to follow him. He shows us what a fulfilled life looks like through his interactions with God and with other humans. It is what we were made for, what enables us to thrive, what gives us joy and true sustenance. The deeper our connection to Jesus, the closer we are to the Father's will, the more we learn to hunger and thirst after his food and drink, the greater our satisfaction. From this place of abundance and fullness we are still able to see the pain and deception all around us, and even more able to help others find freedom and fulfillment.

ALMSGIVING

Read **Deuteronomy 14:22-15:11**

Consider first: what was the tithe meant for in Deuteronomy 14? It is for a huge annual party! And every three years it is meant to provide for those who otherwise have no provision.

Then look at the Sabbath year. What was the point there? To give rest and release, especially to the poor and enslaved. To redistribute wealth and help people to have hope for a future without debt and oppression.

How can we enact these principles today? This will take some thought and planning, but we suggest hosting a feast with your Infinitum Hub and inviting a ton of friends from lots of different backgrounds, making sure that you do not neglect those who are poor. At the feast read out this passage from Deuteronomy and ask one another how you can help release people from the debt they are under. It may be someone at the table who needs your collective help. Or maybe together you want to give funds to an organisation that fights human trafficking. Whatever you choose, understand this to be an ongoing practice of the creative way down, an opportunity to join God in his alternative kingdom which can bring fulfillment to people here and now.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Is there anyone who owes you a debt that you can forgive today? What does that look like practically?

Pray **Psalm 16**

"The life and death of Jesus of Nazareth made manifest what was always true, that there was a love that could only be made known to us through a gesture of such unthinkable grandeur and generosity - over and above the grandeur and generosity of Creation itself."

– MARILYNN ROBINSON

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

Find a place to be still and silent for nine minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the fullness of joy that is yours in God's presence.

Remember **Psalm 16** or a line from the poem as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for nine minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the nine minutes are up, pray **Psalm 16** once more.

Read **Matthew 8:1-3**

This passage comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Remember how Jesus' description of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount seemed unattainable? This story gives us a key to understanding the Sermon. Consider the hopeless situation of the leprous man: he could not achieve healing and wholeness on his own. Yet he suspected that Jesus could help. And when he asks, Jesus is more than ready to make him clean. He does something for the man that he, on his own, could never do. This is the same offer Jesus makes to us. Will we hunger and thirst for participation in the healing life of Jesus?

LAMENT

Lament and pray for those who are still trapped in feelings or circumstances of hopelessness, and who may not yet be ready and willing to ask Jesus for his help. Pray that God would stir up the hunger and thirst in their lives for Jesus' righteous fulfillment.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

Take some time to write a reflection about this past week. What stretched you? What did you learn? How will you continue to apply the disciplines you explored this week? Were you totally honest with yourself and others? Bring these reflections to share with your Infinitum group.

Bring your day, and your week, to the Father in prayer and thanksgiving.

WEEK SIX

DIVING UNDER THE WAVES

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL,
FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY.**

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

WESLEY'S ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

Continue using the 22 Daily Accountability Questions from Wesley's Holy Club.

MOVIES

- *Of Gods and Men*
- *Munyurangabo*
- *Tsotsi*
- *Spirited Away*

PLAYLIST

- "Kyrie" by Mr. Mister
- "Mercy Mercy Me" by Marvin Gaye
- "Mercy" Matt Redman
- "Down There By the Train" by Tom Waits or Johnny Cash
- "The Mercy Seat" by Johnny Cash (or if you are a little more experimental, Nick Cave)
- "Christ Has No Body Now But Yours" by The Porter's Gate
- "Your Grace and Mercy" by The Mississippi Mass Choir
- "Please Come Home" by Dustin Kensrue
- "Waves of Mercy" by David Crowder
- "O Boundless Salvation" by Transmission

BOOKS

- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
- *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson
- *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White

DAY 1

THE MERCIFUL

IN INFINITUM HUBS

DECOMPRESSION

Share with one another how your week went. What questions, actions, or topics were challenging? Did you encounter anything new about yourself? Did you encounter God in any new or unexpected ways? How were your times of stillness, lament and awareness examen this week? In particular, how did your practice of almsgiving go? Did you feel yourself loosening your grasp on certain things, or on certain attitudes? Did you find it hard to let go?

Pray for one another before you move onto the next focus.

MEDIA

VIDEO

Jesus the Merciful: Giving and Receiving Mercy

PODCAST

LECTIO DIVINA

Blessed is the one...whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

- PSALM 1:1-2

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

- ROMANS 10:17A

The new daily practice for this week is called Lectio Divina. Bonhoeffer said, "The Word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love... Do not ask, 'How shall I pass this on?' but, 'What does this say to me?' Then ponder this word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you."

We need to do this with Jesus' gift of mercy and his command to be merciful. We find it hard to believe his mercy is so free, and we therefore find it hard to give free mercy to others. We have to let Jesus' word of mercy permeate our hearts. The daily practice of Lectio Divina can help us learn this posture of receiving and giving.

THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTION AND GUIDE IS ADAPTED FROM 24-7PRAYER.COM:

Lectio Divina - "divine reading" - is a simple method of praying and meditating on scripture that trains us to listen to God's whisper speaking personally to our hearts. Lectio Divina is a reflective and repetitive way to read the Bible, focused not so much on becoming informed by the text as being transformed by it. It does not replace

the other types of Bible reading - rather Lectio Divina adds depth to all other forms of Bible reading, facilitating a movement from our hearts to more active ways of wrestling with scripture. Here we are reading purely in the devotional sense, as a child receiving a love-letter from a deeply committed and adoring Father.

Think of a cow chewing on its cud. This is as close to discovering the way of Lectio Divina as we may get. Meditating on the scripture, we taste and savour a divine word or phrase, then regurgitate and savour some more, before we swallow the Word finally into our being. We trust that the process of digestion will bring strength and nourishment to our bodies.

There are four main phases to classical Lectio Divina:

1. Lectio: Read and Listen.
2. Meditatio: Meditate on the word. Explore it. No question is off limits.
3. Oratio: Pray and respond. A place of intercession and repentance.
4. Contemplatio: Silently rest in God's word and presence.

This can be adapted in different ways.

Here are six simple steps for individual or group application:

1. **Read the passage.** After inviting the Holy Spirit to guide you, read the passage slowly, out loud if you can. Read it twice with one minute of silence in between. (Group: Ask a couple of different people to read the passage with a minute of silence in between.)
2. **Relish.** We could use the word 'reflect' here also, but relish describes more what we're aiming for at this stage. Meditating on the passage you have read, savour one word or phrase that you have noticed more than others during your reading. Write this word down and begin pondering what God might be saying to you through this. How is this word speaking to your life? (Group: After a moment of resting in the passage, encourage the group to simply say the word/phrase they noticed –nothing more and nothing less. Encourage them to ponder what God might be saying to them or the group, but at this stage no-one speaks out anything more than one word or phrase.)

- 3. Re-read.** Read the passage again.
- 4. Respond.** Speak out in prayer what you sense God is saying to you. Tell Him how you feel encouraged or challenged by what He is saying and ask that the seed of His word develops deep-rooted truth that leads to fruitfulness in your life. (Group: Allow space for people to pray out short prayers, speaking out what God is saying through the particular passage.)
- 5. Rest.** Take some time to allow God to wrap you in His love, and let the word He has given you rest on you. (Group: Encourage the group to rest in God's presence together.)
- 6. Resolve.** Finish by articulating one way you might be able to live out the word that has penetrated your heart in your daily life. (Group: share with one another how God is speaking to you personally or as a group and what an appropriate response might be. Notice if there are some common threads coming through as people share.)²

Now practice as a group. Take **Matthew 6:9-15** and apply the six steps of Lectio Divina together. For the **Rest** step, spend ten minutes of stillness and silence together.

End your group meeting by reading out **Mathew 5:1-12** together.

DAY 2

THE SIGNS OF MERCY

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Matthew 10:1-8; 11:2-6**

We have taken some deep breaths, and now we are ready to plunge beneath the waves. By joining Jesus in his poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we have been prepared to act in deeper ways than we have acted before. We are called now to live mercifully, based upon the mercy we have been given from God. Freely we have received, now freely we must give.

It is fascinating that, in response to John the Baptist's question about his Messianic credentials, Jesus points to his works of mercy: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and good news is proclaimed to the poor. And when he sends his disciples out to the lost sheep of Israel, Jesus instructs them to engage in divine acts of mercy: heal the sick, drive out demons, raise the dead, cleanse lepers. This is who they know Jesus to be, and thus how they should act towards others. We join Jesus in his mercy.

Jesus' mercy is not just a negative thing, not just refraining from wrath. He certainly does call out rebellious and sinful behaviour and urges repentance. But his mercy is something good and healing that is poured out upon the people he loves. It is mercy which characterises

his kingdom activity, and which should characterise the work of the Church in the world.

Mercy isn't weak or soft. Jesus and his disciples kick out demons and heal lepers. Mercy is the work of liberation, the offer of hope to the enslaved, the gift of release to the prisoner and sight to the blind. It stands in opposition to the merciless tendencies of the world, the violence, greed, and dominance that seeks to diminish people. It is important to hold this in mind as we talk about giving and receiving mercy this week. The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of Mercy.

ACTION

Take another look at the list of merciful actions found in the two Matthew passages above. What is one way you can give alms today that will add to the liberation and healing mentioned by Jesus? Think about organisations that bring sight to the blind, such as Sightsavers International; or groups that advocate for those in prison, like the John Howard Society; or people and ministries that proclaim genuine good news to the poor in your city. Do some research, be creative, and add your alms to the work of God's mercy in the world.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth and it is in heaven." What does God's mercy have to do with that?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 93**

Pray this prayer from Maria Faustina each day this week:

“O Lord. I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors’ souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors’ needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, O Lord, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me.”

Find a place to be still and silent for ten minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you where you can act mercifully today.

Remember **Psalm 93** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for ten minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the ten minutes are up, pray **Psalm 93** again.

LECTIO

Read **John 8:1-11**

Relish the Word you have read. What stands out to you? What does Jesus say and do in this story? What is he like?

Re-read **John 8:1-11**

Respond to the Lord in prayer.

Rest in the promise and challenge of this passage, trusting that God is speaking and ministering.

Resolve upon one way you can act on this passage.

LAMENT

The world tends towards a lack of mercy. Consider ways that you have seen this lack of mercy throughout your day, in news stories or in personal interactions. Lament this merciless state of the world, but also announce your trust that the Lord's mercy will prevail, and affirm your commitment to being part of that mercy.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

OVERCOME

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Mathew 18:10-14**

A popular worship song in the last decade contains the lyrics “waves of mercy, waves of grace.” This is powerful imagery, but we should remember that waves are not to be trifled with. To plunge beneath the waves means to be overwhelmed or overcome by them. God’s mercy is not something we dip our toes into, it is something that washes over us entirely. This can be scary, but don’t we want a mercy that is greater than our shame, guilt and sin?

Step 7 of the 12 Steps says, “We humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.” We know we need God’s mercy; do we trust that he is willing and able to give it, and that it is sufficient to overcome anything that is enslaving us? We are often less merciful towards ourselves than we should be, and certainly less merciful than God. We condemn ourselves when God does not. God’s mercy is available to us for the removal of our shortcomings, but we must submit to it with humility. We don’t earn God’s mercy; we receive it as a loving gift.

This leads to a difficult challenge: can we acknowledge our shortcomings without hating ourselves? God doesn’t want you to hate yourself. He wants to reveal and remove your shortcomings not to punish you but to liberate you. He wants to liberate you because he loves you and knows the best possible life for you, the life he made you for. He also wants you to be free to extend his mercy, love and liberation to others around you.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is sometimes read as if the wandering sheep was rebellious. But we don't get that information from the parable. All we know is the sheep is lost; the sheep is missed; the sheep is sought. We are frequently reminded in Church that we should care about "the lost" in the same way, but do we remember that we too are sheep? Even though we have gone astray the Good Shepherd is not looking to destroy us. He is actively pursuing us to rescue us, to pour out his mercy on us. The parable is not really about the actions of the sheep, but about the actions of the Shepherd. When the Good Shepherd finds the sheep he doesn't chastise it, doesn't break its legs, doesn't even ask why it wandered off. He picks the sheep up, brings it home, and throws a party.

God's mercy towards his beloved sheep is boundless and overwhelming. We need to experience this boundless mercy ourselves if we are to communicate it to others.

Listen to the song O Boundless Salvation by Transmission, which is an updated version of William Booth's famous song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ELNOMMHIhE>

READ THE LYRICS BELOW:

- 1. O boundless salvation! deep ocean of love,
O fulness of mercy, Christ brought from above,
The whole world redeeming, so rich and so free,
Now flowing for all men, come, roll over me!*
- 2. My sins they are many, their stains are so deep,
And bitter the tears of remorse that I weep;
But useless is weeping; thou great crimson sea,
Thy waters can cleanse me, come, roll over me!*
- 3. My tempers are fitful, my passions are strong,
They bind my poor soul and they force me to wrong;
Beneath thy blest billows deliverance I see,
O come, mighty ocean, and roll over me!*
- 4. Now tossed with temptation, then haunted with fears,
My life has been joyless and useless for years;*

*I feel something better most surely would be
If once thy pure waters would roll over me.*

5. *O ocean of mercy, oft longing I've stood
On the brink of thy wonderful, life-giving flood!
Once more I have reached this soul-cleansing sea,
I will not go back till it rolls over me.*
6. *The tide is now flowing, I'm touching the wave,
I hear the loud call of the mighty to save;
My faith's growing bolder, delivered I'll be;
I plunge 'neath the waters, they roll over me.*
7. *And now, hallelujah! the rest of my days
Shall gladly be spent in promoting his praise
Who opened his bosom to pour out this sea
Of boundless salvation for you and for me.*

ALMSGIVING

Give yourself a gift today. Do something you would not ordinarily do, buy a treat you wouldn't normally buy, be kind and not stingy towards yourself today. This is not to encourage narcissism or selfishness. It is to agree with God that you are beloved; that he loves to give you gifts; that his mercies are for you; that he wants to bless and not curse you; and that he wants you to see yourself as he sees you. Receive the gift gratefully as if it were from the Lord., because really it is.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Our Father". What does it mean for you to call God Father? Do you believe God loves you like a good Father?

Pray **Psalm 86**

“O Lord. I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors’ souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors’ needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, O Lord, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me.”

Find a place to be still and silent for ten minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how God sees you. Does God treasure you? Does God call you beloved?

Remember **Psalm 86** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for ten minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the ten minutes are up, pray **Psalm 86** again.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **John 8:1-11**

Relish this story. What stands out today? Can you imagine this story from the perspective of the woman?

Re-read **John 8:1-11**

Respond in prayer. If God is speaking to you through this story, what are you saying in return?

Rest for a few moments in God's depiction of mercy, and his challenge to be merciful.

Resolve one way to act upon what you have heard in this story.

LAMENT

"Don't be anxious to condemn yourself every time you fall. Instead, patiently, gently, pick yourself up and start all over again. There is no better way to grow toward perfection than to be willing—and patient enough—to start over again and again. To follow this simple advice is to discover the secret of a truly devout life." Frances De Sales

Have you been unmerciful towards yourself? Have you acted bitterly or hatefully towards yourself in your own mind, or with your actions? Can you lament and repent of this lack of mercy, and receive God's mercy towards you?

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Matthew 7:3-5; 18:15-20**

Diving under the water requires another level of commitment. You leave the firm ground beneath your feet trusting that you can find the surface again. You are at the whim of the ocean, the tides, the current, whatever you find beneath the surface. You can do your best to stay disciplined, swim well and be safe, but you cannot control everything around you. It is a great risk.

Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18:15-20 also involve another level of commitment and risk. This teaching has been used to hurt people, to remove them from the Church in a way that does not seem very merciful. But when seen in the context of the rest of Matthew 18, and when matched with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:3-5, it looks very different.

Sin is real. It is both personal and systemic. We hurt people and are hurt by people, structures, institutions and worldviews when God's commands are dismissed. So when sin is found in our lives and in the Church we need to deal with it. It is clear how seriously Jesus takes sin when you read Matthew 18:6-9. But see how he tells us to deal with the sin of others in verses 15-20.

First, Jesus identifies the offender as our brother or sister. This is not a general call to confront the sin of the world. This is dealing with sin inside the Church, and the approach to our brothers and sisters is one-on-one. We do not broadcast the fault, gossip with others, slander someone's name, or do anything to shame the person. Jesus prescribes a loving, truthful, personal interaction.

There are next steps to take if the one-on-one effort does not work, but Jesus does not give any time limits to these multiple attempts at reconciliation. Maybe one personal discussion isn't enough. Maybe two or three or twenty can be attempted. Maybe the point isn't rushing things through, but lovingly trying everything you can to help your sister or brother be free. The attempt at reconciliation requires the full exhaustion of love, mercy and truth from the whole community.

One thing is clear: you cannot control someone's response. You must do your best to communicate lovingly, but you must also love someone enough to avoid manipulating their response.

And here is another clear thing: we must always first take a close look at our own lives. Matthew 7:3-5 outlines the well-known (but less well-practiced) instruction to remove the log in your own eye before trying to help a brother or sister with the speck in theirs. Seeing the log in our own eye reminds us to be humble, and shows us that God's mercy can deal with our sin. If that is true, then we can confidently help our brother or sister remove the speck in their eye. It all starts from a place of receiving and then communicating mercy, mercy that liberates and restores.

We will continue looking at Matthew 18 tomorrow to see how much further Jesus goes in his teaching on radical mercy.

ALMSGIVING

Wesley asked this question in his daily self-examination: "Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I doing about it?"

Well, what are you doing about it? Are you grasping at some offense, or are you eager to open your hands and let bitterness go? If we are grasping and resentful we will not be able to help someone else be free of their sin, because we will be too busy holding onto ours. Ask God to prepare you to let go of your fear, dislike, or offense. Tomorrow we will try to act on this.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." What would that look like for the person who has offended you?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 32**

"O Lord. I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors' souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors' needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good

deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, O Lord, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me."

Find a place to be still and silent for ten minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how to be free from resentment and offense.

Remember **Psalm 32** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for ten minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the ten minutes are up, pray **Psalm 32**.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **John 8:1-11**

Relish the word you have read. Chew it over. What stands out? What are the different approaches to sin here? Where do you find yourself in the story?

Re-read **John 8:1-11**

Respond to Jesus' challenge and invitation in prayer.

Rest in what you have read, and how the Lord has spoken to you.

Resolve one way to act upon the truth of this passage.

LAMENT

Step 7 of the 12 Steps says: "We humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings."

Have you acted unmercifully towards anyone? Has this been a pattern in your life? Confess and lament this, and humbly ask God to remove this shortcoming in your life so you can better join him in his mercy.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

DAY 5

77

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 6:14-15**

The movie *Silence*, based on the classic Shusaku Endo novel, is difficult to watch. It is the story of the Japanese government's severe persecution of Japanese Christians and foreign missionaries in the 17th century. Some martyrs were tied to crosses that were planted on the shore at low tide, so they would gradually drown as the tide came in. To escape this and other horrors, one of the characters, Kichijiro, immediately recants his faith by stepping on an image of Christ. As the story progresses we witness Kichijiro return repeatedly to the priest to confess his sin and renew his faith, only to relinquish it again and again when faced with further persecution. Kichijiro is a coward, a drunk, and even humorous in his see-sawing faith, but he is also one of the most challenging characters in the novel and movie. Kichijiro's betrayals are both reprehensible and recognisable. His pleading and sorrowful cries for forgiveness are likewise familiar. The viewer - and the priest in the movie - get to the point of wondering if this man could ever be forgiven for all his sin. How much mercy is too much mercy?

This is the question Peter asks Jesus in Matthew 18:21-25. It comes right after Jesus' instructions concerning brothers or sisters who sin against you, so the question and response are clearly meant to speak to that issue. Jesus states that forgiving someone seven times, which is a lot of times, is insufficient. He offers seventy-seven times as the correct

number, a number symbolic of completeness or perfection. Imagine forgiving someone seventy-seven times. For the same thing. It seems impossible, ludicrous even. It seems like enabling sin, being a pushover.

Perhaps sensing incredulity from his disciples, Jesus tells a parable about mercy. A king offers an extravagant level of mercy to a servant, who subsequently refuses to offer a tiny sliver of mercy to someone in his debt. The message is clear. We are to be merciful because it is good and right, but also because we are the recipients of extravagant, ludicrous mercy from God himself. For us to fail to live mercifully is as nonsensical as the servant refusing to be merciful in the parable.

We do not earn God's mercy by being merciful. That is not the point of the parable, nor of the addendum to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:14-15, nor of this week's beatitude. Remember, the blessing is in the invitation to participate in Jesus' mercy, both the receiving and the giving. Jesus points out that it makes no sense for us to receive mercy but refuse to give it. It suggests we haven't understood God's gift of mercy. It means that this mercy is not truly at the centre of our being. God's mercy is radical and scandalous, which means we are called to live radically and scandalously merciful lives.

How much mercy is too much mercy? Maybe a better question is: How much mercy have we received?

ALMSGIVING

"If you change from inhumanity to almsgiving, you have stretched forth the hand that was withered."

– JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Bless someone who is in debt to you. It might be a financial debt, or it could be someone who has sinned against you. Bless them, and not in a passive aggressive way either (ie. "See how I am being the bigger person? Don't you feel small?"). Ideally forgive a debt that someone owes you today.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." What debts are you asking the Lord to forgive? How do you wish to be forgiven?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 41:1-4**

"O Lord. I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors' souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors' needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, O Lord, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me."

Find a place to be still and silent for ten minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how you have been forgiven, and how God wants you to forgive others.

Remember **Psalm 41:1-4** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for ten minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the ten minutes are up, pray **Psalm 41:1-4**.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **John 8:1-11**

Relish the story again. Is there anything here that stands out afresh in your reading? Anything you have missed before? What does Jesus say about mercy?

Re-read **John 8:1-11**

Respond in prayer to what you see and hear in the story tonight.

Rest in the mercy that Jesus shows to the woman, and the mercy that he shows to you.

Resolve to practice this mercy in your dealings, especially in your dealings with those you dislike.

LAMENT

"May we never risk the life of our souls by being resentful or bearing grudges."

– GREGORY OF NYSSA

Is there any resentment or bitterness that you still grasp? Don't dismiss the hurt that caused this resentment - acknowledge it, lament it, and try to give it to the Lord. Pray for the person against whom you carry this resentment and bitterness. Ask God for the grace to see them as He sees them.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

MAKING THINGS RIGHT

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Matthew 5:21-26**

When a ship capsizes in the water it has to be “righted”. Righting a ship means reversing its dangerous situation and getting it back to a safe position. A “righting moment” is used when a ship has gone off course and needs to be corrected. This is also known as a “restoring moment”.

Part of the work of mercy is recognising where we have caused harm, and then preparing to right the hurt and restore the wrong. Step 8 of the 12 Steps says: *“Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”* This is mercy work because it hopes for reconciled relationships, or at least liberation from old resentments and bitterness. And it offers those we have harmed the opportunity to be merciful to us. The thing being righted and restored is not just the relationship, though. It is also our own hearts, which are in danger of capsizing under the weight of guilt or shame. Preparing to make amends means trusting that restoration and mercy are possible, (though we do not get to determine how anyone responds to our amends-making.)

Matthew 5:21-26 contains Jesus’ teaching on anger and reconciliation, equating anger in the heart with murder. This is as serious as it gets.

The prescription is serious too. Presenting your gift at the altar would be done at the Temple in Jerusalem. It was a high and holy moment, the pinnacle of religious worship, yet Jesus says if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you - that you have wronged them - you need a restoring moment before you carry on. Leave your gift at the altar - a scandalous proposition - and journey home - possibly for days - to make things right. It seems Jesus is saying that nothing is more important than this. No inconvenience, hardship, distraction or even religious ceremony should get in the way of right-making.

ALMSGIVING

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." Begin to make a list of people you have harmed. This may take awhile, and don't rush it. Take as many days as you need. Start small if you have to. Remember as you do this that the purpose is not self-loathing or punishment, but freedom, reconciliation and love. Remember that you are a lost sheep whom Jesus has searched for, found, and rescued. Ask God to soften your heart and strengthen your courage as you seek restoring moments in your life. And ask God simply for help to become *willing* to make amends, which is preparation for this ongoing adoption of the posture of generosity.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think of the phrase "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." What tempts you away from thinking about making amends?

Pray **Psalm 36**

“O Lord. I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors’ souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors’ needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, O Lord, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me.”

Find a place to be still and silent for ten minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you any amends you need to make.

Remember **Psalm 36** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for ten minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the ten minutes are up, pray **Psalm 36**.

LECTIO

Read **John 8:1-11**

Relish Jesus' words to the woman. What does he say to her that speaks to your heart today?

Re-read **John 8:1-11**

Respond to Jesus as if he were speaking to you in this story.

Rest for awhile in the safety of Jesus' mercy.

Resolve to examine your own life, and not throw stones.

LAMENT

Confess and lament the harm that you have caused to someone else. Be honest about it, feel the pain of it, but do not wallow in shame. Continue to ask God for help to be courageous and truthful in your desire to make things right with others.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

MERCY TRIUMPHS

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **James 2:8-13**

To plunge beneath the waves of God's mercy is to join Jesus in what J.R.R. Tolkien called "The Long Defeat." Tolkien believed that the greatest and truest stories involve people fighting what they know to be a losing battle. There can be no legitimate hope of victory through sheer force of arms, wit, strategy or any other reasonable means. Yet you carry on with faith, though you face defeat at every turn. This allows for what Tolkien described as the *eucatastrophe*, the opposite of catastrophe, the unlooked for hope and salvation. This help from the outside does not mean the actions of the characters are unimportant. Characters put themselves in the position to receive the *eucatastrophe* by remaining steadfast, courageous, and good. Consider the following dialogue between Frodo and Gandalf, in the Mines of Moria, where hope seems dim. Frodo laments that his uncle Bilbo once showed mercy to the creature Gollum, who now tracks them:

Frodo: 'It's a pity Bilbo didn't kill Gollum when he had the chance.'

Gandalf: 'Pity? It's a pity that stayed Bilbo's hand. Many that live deserve death. Some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them, Frodo? Do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. Even the very wise cannot see all ends. My heart tells me that Gollum has some part to play in it, for good or evil, before this is over. The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many.'

Frodo: 'I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.'

Gandalf: 'So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, besides that of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, in which case you were also meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought.'

Any who have read *The Lord of the Rings* or watched the movies will know that Gollum finally brings about the destruction of the evil Ring of Power when Frodo's own strength of will fails. Tolkien wrote an epic story with mercy right at the heart, because he believed that mercy is right at the heart of the epic human story.

Judgment is real, as is the experience of the Long Defeat. Yet Tolkien, like the biblical author James before him, believed that mercy triumphs over judgement. Mercy is not without cost. There are times when we believe it would be better, and certainly quicker, to judge, to kill, to act without mercy. In business, relationships, culture and politics we are often told there is no place for mercy, that mercy isn't realistic, effective, or even possible. We risk looking foolish, naive, unsafe, weak. But mercy puts us in the position to receive the *eucatastrophe* of Jesus, the help unlooked for but hoped for. The resurrection is the greatest *eucatastrophe* in history, the most powerful and costly offer of mercy imaginable. The cross and the resurrection are the ultimate posture of generosity.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy." He is inviting us into his merciful heart, and into the triumph of mercy over judgment that rests at the heart of our Long Defeat.

ALMSGIVING

Read **1 John 3:16-18**

This short passage beautifully sums up the foundation of Christian generosity (Jesus lays his life down for us), and the ethical behaviour that

should flow out of that foundation (help a brother or sister who is in need, not just in words but in deeds). In the midst of it, John asks the piercing question: how can God's love abide in our hearts if we close our hearts to our brothers and sisters?

Do you know a brother or sister who is in need right now? Do you have access to material resources? Can you help someone, not just in words but in deeds? Don't overthink it, don't imagine reasons not to do it. Offer help to a brother or sister in need today.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Deliver us from evil." Jesus, by laying down his life, has shown us the meaning of love and mercy. How can we participate in that love and mercy today?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 23**

"O Lord. I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors' souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors' needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, O Lord, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me."

Find a place to be still and silent for ten minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how Jesus' mercy has triumphed over judgment in your life.

Remember **Psalm 23** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for ten minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the ten minutes are up, pray **Psalm 23**.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **John 8:1-11**

Relish one last time this week the power of Jesus' strong mercy as it triumphs over judgment. What stands out to you especially in the reading today?

Re-read **John 8:1-11**

Respond to Jesus' invitation to join him in the life and triumph of mercy.

Rest in the knowledge that God's mercy is for you, and that God wants to pour out even more mercy into the world through you.

Resolve to be a willing participant in the mercy of God.

LAMENT

Lament the ongoing experience of The Long Defeat - speak out those areas in and around your life where things seem hopeless - but then declare that God's mercy still wins, has already won, cannot be stopped. Thank God for his great *eucaastrophe*.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

Take some time to write a reflection about this past week. What stretched you? What did you learn? How will you continue to apply the disciplines you explored this week? Were you totally honest with yourself and others? Bring these reflections to share with your Infinitum group.

Bring your day, and your week, to the Father in prayer and thanksgiving.

WEEK SEVEN

OPENING OUR EYES

**BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART,
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.**

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

WESLEY'S ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

Continue using the 22 Daily Accountability Questions from Wesley's Holy Club.

MOVIES

- *Tree of Life*
- *Into Great Silence*

These first two movies are very challenging. They don't have an obvious "narrative", and are long and meditative. But they both present the viewer with beauty and offer an experience of the Divine rather than a story about God. They are worth watching, but not everyone's cup of tea.

- *The Green Mile*
- *The Fisher King*
- *Amazing Grace*

PLAYLIST

- "Open the Eyes of My Heart" by Paul Baloche
- "Grace" by U2
- "I Want to Know You More" by SonicFlood
- "Blessed to Be a Witness" by Ben Harper
- "How Great" by Chance the Rapper
- "Let There Be Light" by Hillsong
- "Refiner's Fire" by Brian Doerksen
- "What If You're Wrong" by Nichole Nordeman and Prince
- "Heaven" by Live

BOOKS

- *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
- *Something Beautiful For God* by Malcolm Muggeridge
- *Seeking God: The Way of St Benedict* by Esther de Waal
- *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* by Annie Dillard

DAY 1

THE PURE IN HEART

IN INFINITUM HUBS

“The reward of the search is to go on searching. The soul’s desire is fulfilled by the very fact of its remaining unsatisfied, for really to see God is never to have had one’s fill of desiring him.”

– GREGORY OF NYSSA

DECOMPRESSION

Share with one another how your weeks went. What questions, actions, or topics were challenging? Did you encounter anything new about yourself? Did you encounter God in any new or unexpected ways? How were you challenged by the disciplines of stillness, almsgiving, lament, *awareness examen*, and especially lectio divina this week? Did you begin your lists of people to whom you need to make amends? Share some of your answers to the questions from the week and pray for one another.

MEDIA

VIDEO

Jesus the Pure in Heart: Seeing Ourselves, Seeing God

PODCAST

VISIO DIVINA

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."

– PSALM 19:1

Last week we practiced *Lectio Divina*, or divine reading. This week we will practice *Visio Divina*, or divine seeing. It is based upon the idea that evidence of God may be seen in His creation. This is not to mistake the Creator with creation. A tree is not God. But God made the tree. So, we acknowledge that through God's art we may encounter the Divine Artist.

This requires a particular, intentional, and holy approach to seeing. Our culture has, by and large, lost the ability to really see things. We don't have time to look deeply, to contemplate, to consider. Annie Dillard's book *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* is an extraordinary depiction of a woman who really looks to see, and who sees what is really there as a result.

The practice of *Visio Divina* can be combined with our times of stillness. This week we will be still for twelve minutes at a time, but we should keep our eyes open and fix our attention on something. It can be a piece of art, a tree, an anthill, the ocean, a toy, a busy pedestrian crossing, the sky. You can choose the same thing each day, or

choose a new object to contemplate. Some suggestions will be made on certain days. What we are looking for is a glimpse of God in his creation, a flash of his love and presence. We should write down what we have seen as best we can afterwards.

Our approach to *Visio Divina* matters. We are not scientists making detached observations. We are pilgrims seeking the face of God. Each day the practice will be introduced with a Psalm and with this poem from Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

To take off our shoes is to know we are on holy ground, and so we sit and look with reverent expectation that God's holy presence can be noticed within his creation. The heavens indeed declare the glory of God.

Be still together now for twelve minutes. You can choose one thing to look at together, or each person can choose their own thing to look at. Share what you have seen once the twelve minutes are up.

Finish your time together by reading out **Matthew 5:1-12** and by praying the Lord's Prayer.

DAY 2

SEEING THE FACE OF GOD

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Exodus 19:1-12; 33:12-23**

"The sea was angry that day, my friends - like an old man trying to send back soup in a deli."

– GEORGE CASTANZA

If you were to travel back to the time of the Exodus and ask an average Israelite, encamped around Mt Sinai, where you could find God, he or she might say: "Over there on that mountain. Look for smoke and lightning and listen for thunder. Oh, don't touch the mountain or you'll die. We think God might be angry."

Not exactly seeker-sensitive.

Exodus emphasizes God's holiness and purity, and Israel's (and humanity's) general lack thereof. It could be described as the central problem of Exodus: How can a holy God hang around with unclean, stiff-necked, rebellious people?

This question leads us back to our Beatitude for this week: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Ok, if I ever meet someone who is perfectly pure of heart I'll let them know.

We shouldn't get too disheartened. It is good for us to acknowledge the perfect holiness and goodness of God; trying to make God somehow less holy is not the way we gain access to Him.

We should also note that, even with the proscriptions on coming near the mountain and God's warning to Moses that he must not see his face, God still approaches his people. God's goal is fellowship. There is even a bizarre scene in Exodus 24 where the Israelite elders are invited (after some serious ritual preparation) to eat and drink with God. And God even agrees to travel with Israel to the Promised Land, though He is frustrated with their sin.

"Seeing the face of God" is, in fact, the point of it all. God created us to be in union with Him and to enjoy Him forever. All the Law and Prophets and History and Psalms lead us towards this promised union. So we can be sure that, however impossible it seems to us, God will make a way for his children to see Him face to face.

ALMSGIVING

In Exodus 32 the people of Israel get impatient with Moses and decide to make their own god by melting down their gold rings. There was nothing particularly impure about the gold, or even about the golden calf. They were just things. We often think things are the problem (money, drugs, food) when the issue actually lies in our hearts.

Wesley asks the daily accountability question: "Do I pray about the money I spend?" This is not a money question, but a heart question. One suspects the Israelites forgot to ask God what he thought about them making an idol.

Pray today before every purchase, and whenever you see an opportunity to be generous. Also look at your bigger financial picture today. Do you pray about your investments? Your leisure money? Your giving? Pray about these things now, and plan to talk with whomever else you share financial responsibilities with. Ask God in all of this for a pure heart.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 24**

VISIO DIVINA

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

Find a place to be still and silent for twelve minutes. Find an object, a piece of art, or something in nature to contemplate. If you are near mountains or hills of any kind consider contemplating them today. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and reveal to you something of the Lord's holiness.

Set a timer for twelve minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twelve minutes are up, pray **Psalm 24**.

Write down what you saw.

LECTIO

(From here on you can go through the Lectio steps without direction.)

Read **Exodus 24:1-11**

Relish

Re-read **Exodus 24:1-11**

Respond

Rest

Resolve

LAMENT

Have you ever been scared to approach God in prayer or worship? Many people carry the idea that they cannot come close to God, or even enter a Church, because they are too sinful. Have you ever felt that way? Is it true? Or is it something you can confess and lament?

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

A NEW HEART

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Ezekiel 11:14-20; 36:22-28**

Opening our eyes underwater is a tricky thing to learn. We are unused to water being in our eyes and our instinct is to close them tight. But if we do that we won't be able to see the world underneath the water. This is not that big a deal in your local community swimming pool, but it's a huge loss when you get to the ocean. Plunging beneath the waves and opening your eyes ushers you into an entirely new reality.

The Beatitude this week promises that the pure in heart will see God. This is quite a promise, and it is one that God clearly wants to fulfill. God wants us to see him and to experience the entirely new reality of his presence. He wants us to open the eyes of our hearts.

But we must confess that our hearts are not very pure: they are divided, distracted, complicated and deceitful things in our experience. We know it isn't enough to just clean up our behaviour a little. Jesus teaches that sin and disorder stem from the heart, and that from the heart's overflow comes impure speech and action. **James 4** talks about how our heart's warring passions cause fighting, coveting and even murder. This is our closed-handed, closed-eyed reality.

How will we ever see God?

We need a fresh heart, a heart that is simple and pure and given over

entirely to God. We can't create that new heart for ourselves, we can't summon it up from our own inner reserves. The good news is we don't have to. Well before Jesus was even born God promises his people that he will give them new hearts. He knew their sin and rebellion and impurity all too well, and he was none too pleased. But it did not stop him from desiring that his people see him and know him with pure hearts, nor did it prevent him from finding a way to make it happen. Twice in Ezekiel, and once in Jeremiah, God declares that he will create a new covenant with his people, one that will be written on their new hearts of flesh, with which he will replace their old hearts of stone. The imagery is staggeringly powerful and hopeful, even as God communicates his frustration with their hard hearts.

How do we participate? When Jesus blesses the pure in heart, remember that he is welcoming people to share in his life, in his heart. We participate by accepting Jesus' invitation, every day, and by following his commands, every day. In particular, we ask God to show us where our hearts are compromised, and ask for help in removing these shortcomings. (This is what we have been doing through the 12 Steps over the last several weeks, and will continue to do this week).

ALMSGIVING

Brother Juniper was a friar and friend of St Francis in the 13th century. He was known for his deep simplicity and purity of heart. It got him into trouble when he tried to follow the commands of Jesus with total sincerity:

"Juniper had been commanded to quit giving part of his clothing to the half-naked people he met on the road. Desiring to obey his superior, Juniper once told a man in need that he couldn't give the man his tunic, but he wouldn't prevent the man from taking it either. In time, the friars learned not to leave anything lying around, for Juniper would probably give it away."³

Check your heart. Is it still attached to material things? Is there something you could give away today to bless someone else and to commit your heart to freedom and simplicity?

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 14**

VISIO DIVINA

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

Find a place to be still and silent for twelve minutes. For this particular exercise, try to find something to contemplate that represents your heart. It could be an image of a heart, a painting, or possibly even a stone. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to let you see the state of your heart.

Set a timer for twelve minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twelve minutes are up, pray **Psalm 14** again, and write down what you saw.

LECTIO

Read **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Relish

Re-read **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Respond

Rest

Resolve

LAMENT

Did any of your actions, words or thoughts today feel like they were coming from you “old heart” rather than your “new heart”? Recognise this, lament it, confess it, and ask God to keep renewing your heart.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God’s presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

DAY 4

SEE JESUS, SEE GOD

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **John 14:1-11**

If you get the chance to swim with sharks, we recommend it.⁴ A boat takes you out into deep waters and throws chum in the water to attract the sharks. As soon as they arrive you know it. The sight of shark fins has been programmed into our subconscious as a sign of danger (thanks Jaws). We just know: if we see a fin, there is a shark attached. If you can overcome the initial fear and get down into the cage in the water, however, the scene is glorious to behold. Sharks are elegant, majestic, awe-inspiring. Once you see them for what they really are you don't lose any respect for their danger and power, you gain respect for their beauty and uniqueness.

The sign - the shark fin - points to the deeper reality beneath the surface.

The promise to the pure in heart is that they will see God. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to wade through two thousand years of cultural history and imagine how the first disciples saw Jesus. So much art and theology has conditioned us to think (correctly) of Jesus as God-in-the-flesh, and to imagine that everyone must have understood that when they were with him. But the disciples did not understand that. Even if they had an idea that Jesus was a miracle worker, or even the Messiah, there is no

way they were expecting him to be God in the flesh. Jesus does make a number of shocking claims about his Divine identity throughout John's Gospel - the I Am statements in particular are difficult to understand any other way - but John 14:1-11 is perhaps the clearest and boldest claim of all. Jesus begins by assuring his disciples that he will prepare a place for them with the Father. When Philip asks, not unreasonably, that Jesus back up this promise by showing them the Father, Jesus responds that if they have seen him, they have seen the Father.

You imagine some jaws had to be picked up off the floor at this point.

Jesus explains that he is in the Father, and the Father is in him. To see him, then, is to see the Father. To know him is to know the Father. Jesus is the fullest revelation of God that humans will ever see, this side of glory. He is the sign, the image - the shark fin, if you will - that reveals the full, glorious, majestic, unique and, yes, dangerous reality underneath the surface. The disciples' eyes were not yet open to this truth that Jesus longed for them to see. Their eyes would eventually open as their hearts were made pure through encountering the risen Lord and receiving the Holy Spirit.

If we long to see God, let us look to Jesus. And let us ask the Spirit to purify our hearts and to open our eyes.

ALMSGIVING

Consider making a donation today to a shark conservation society (some suggestions can be found here: <https://scubadiverlife.com/top-5-shark-conservation-groups/>). It is good and right for us to care for God's creation. An estimated 100 million sharks are killed every year by humans.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 17**

VISIO DIVINA

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

Find a place to be still and silent for twelve minutes. Find an object, some artwork, or a vista to contemplate. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you something of the Creator's beauty, something beneath the surface that you have not had the eyes or heart to see until now.

Set a timer for twelve minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twelve minutes are up, pray **Psalm 17** and write down what you have seen.

LECTIO

Read **Colossians 1:15-23**

Relish

Re-read **Colossians 1:15-23**

Respond

Rest

Resolve

LAMENT

Lament for your friends and family who cannot yet “see” Jesus for who he is. They may only see the shark fin and the danger.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God’s presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

BURNING HEARTS

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Luke 24:13-35**

Anyone who has been snorkelling or scuba diving can tell you of the breathtaking beauty that lives beneath the waves. Colours and patterns we do not see in our daily lives fill our eyes when we dip below the surface, and we receive a vision of beauty that we scarcely knew existed moments before. This vision is especially vivid when the waters we swim in are clear and pure.

The beauty of Jesus can likewise come upon people unawares, and it can set their hearts on fire.

It happened after the resurrection. Two of Jesus' followers are walking and talking about the crucifixion and the rumours of Jesus' return. Suddenly, Jesus shows up. At least, we know it is Jesus because Luke lets us in on the secret. Jesus' followers, somehow, do not know. They don't expect to see him, certainly, but there must be something else going on to conceal Jesus' identity from them. They talk together and Jesus begins opening up the Scriptures to them, showing them how the entire story of God and his people has been leading towards this moment, towards this suffering, towards this glory. But, like the disciples who went to check the tomb after the women's story of visions, most people just "did not see."

These two disciples still do not see Jesus for who he is, but they know something strange is happening. It is only when Jesus breaks and blesses

bread - recalling his actions at the Last Supper - that their eyes are opened and they see him.

Jesus then vanishes mysteriously, and the disciples utter these weighty words: "Did not our hearts burn within us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" Their hearts recognized what their eyes did not. Burning and fire are often associated with cleansing and purity in the Bible. Does this suggest that something was happening to purify their hearts, enabling them to see God when even their eyes were blinded?

This kind of thing still happens today. People still report being surprised and overcome by the beauty of Jesus, and that their hearts became aware of him before even their minds did. Remember, Jesus wants us to see him, and he is the one who purifies our hearts so that we can see him. So ask God to set your heart on fire again with love for him. And ask God to do that in the hearts of others you know as well.

ALMSGIVING

Beauty matters, because it reflects the beauty of God. Invest in beauty today. Find a local artist to support financially, even in a small way. Find ways to help them create unexpected moments of beauty for people in your neighbourhood and city.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 51:7-12**

VISIO DIVINA

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

Find a place to be still and silent for twelve minutes. Choose a familiar object today, something you use or walk past everyday. Sit still and contemplate this familiar sight. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you surprising beauty that points to the Creator.

Set a timer for twelve minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twelve minutes are up, pray **Psalm 51:7-12** and write down what you saw.

LECTIO

Read **John 9:35-41** (skim the story from verses 1-34 so you know the characters)

Relish

Re-read **John 9:35-41**

Respond

Rest

Resolve

LAMENT

Lament again for the people in the world who are so consumed by other things - pursuit of power, greed, bitterness, protection, pain - that like the disciples at the tomb they "do not see it." They do not see the beauty of Jesus, the beauty that he calls us into. Not yet, at least.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

SOMETHING LIKE SCALES

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Acts 9:1-19**

In June of 2018 a youth soccer team was trapped by unexpected flooding in the Tham Luang cave in Thailand. Rescuers sought desperately for ways to deal with the rising waters, tight space, and strong currents. The cave was dark, cold, and the danger of drowning or suffocating was very real. After 18 days, with the help of 10,000 people including divers, doctors, soldiers, and government workers, all twelve youth and their coach were rescued. Tragically, Thai diver Saman Kunan died of asphyxiation during the rescue attempt.

Imagine being trapped in that cave, in the dark and cold, with the waters rising. Imagine having to squeeze through narrow passageways, underwater, attached to oxygen tanks. Imagine the joy and relief of seeing the light and breathing the air again.

Saul, who we also know as the apostle Paul, never got trapped in an underground cave in Thailand, as far as we know (he did get shipwrecked, and was once smuggled out of a city in a basket). But he had his own moment of shock and despair on the road to Damascus, and he was put in the position of being utterly dependent on someone else to rescue him.

Saul was on his way to wreck the lives of some Christ-followers who thought they had evaded his ravaging of the Church. He saw himself as righteous according to the law, as clean and as pure of heart as they come. Yet when God showed up in the flesh, Saul's response was to persecute his followers. Saul was trapped in a worldview that did not allow for a fresh revelation of God, at least not of the kind offered by Jesus. He thought himself a guide, but he could not see.

When Jesus meets him on the road to Damascus he asks why Saul has been persecuting him. This must have come as an enormous shock, evidenced by Saul crashing on the ground. Saul's work was based on the belief that the claims about Jesus were a lie (Saul would have been sure that Jesus was dead and buried at this point), and here is Jesus showing pretty clearly that they are all true! Saul is blinded by the encounter, matching his spiritual blindness, and told to make his way into the city. He enters Damascus not as a conquering persecutor, but as a man in need of serious assistance. A man who has been taken back to a poverty of spirit. He goes three days without sight, food, or drink, just as Jesus did in the tomb.

In contrast to Saul's blindness, Ananias sees a vision from the Lord. Told to go and help Saul, Ananias is justifiably nervous. He has heard of Saul, as have all the Christ-followers in the region. But Ananias goes, lays hands on Saul, calls him brother and prays for him to receive both sight and the Holy Spirit.

Something like scales fall from Saul's eyes.

Imagine the joy, the relief, of receiving sight back. But even more: imagine the joy, the glory, of Saul being filled by the Spirit and seeing Jesus for who he really is. This vision of God incarnate consumes the rest of Saul's life. It is what he lives for, travels for, is imprisoned for, suffers for, ultimately dies for. Saul sees the Lord and understands, famously, that it is no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him - he has had a heart transfusion from Jesus. And because of this he becomes an untiring, unstoppable witness for God's grace and love throughout the known world.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. And oh, what a difference it will make!

ALMSGIVING

Remember that Step 8 of AA asked you to make a list of people you have harmed and to become willing to apologize and right your wrongs. Retrieve that list and pray again for that willingness. Step 9 of AA says we must “Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”⁵

So. Pray, talk to your infinitum hub, and start trying to make some amends today. Start small, and take your time, but commit yourself to this course. Ideally pay someone back if you did something that hurt them financially. Remember, making amends doesn’t guarantee that the person you harmed will respond well. You don’t get to control that. (Saul didn’t have any control over how the Christ-followers in Damascus would receive him.) You are simply seeking to make things right to the best of your ability, to “clean up your side of the street” as they say in Recovery circles. This takes great courage, but it yields great freedom, purity and joy.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord’s Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 31:16**

VISIO DIVINA

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

Find a place to be still and silent for twelve minutes. Find an object, some art, or a spot in nature to contemplate. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you something about God that you have never noticed before.

Set a timer for twelve minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twelve minutes are up, pray **Psalm 31:16**.

LECTIO

Read **1 Peter 1:22-25**

Relish

Re-read **1 Peter 1:22-25**

Respond

Rest

Resolve

LAMENT

Lament again the harm that you have caused that requires amends-making. Give it to God, and ask God to return courage and hope to you tonight. Ask him to help you love your brothers and sisters, especially the ones you have harmed, earnestly and from a pure heart.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

FROM WOE TO WORTHY

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Isaiah 6:1-7; Revelation 4:1-11**

Going underneath the water, if you cannot swim, is a terror. Going underneath the water, when you can swim, is a joy. Same environment, totally different experience.

We actually see something like this in the biblical presentation of God's throne room.

There are some similarities in the accounts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. The Lord is seated upon the throne; there are angels or creatures with wings around the throne chanting "Holy Holy Holy! to the Lord; there are rumblings, shakings and descriptions of firey torches and/or altars. This is recognisably a description of the same divine throne room, from reporters who were roughly 800 years apart from one another.

But there are some key differences to note as well. In Isaiah's passage the Seraphim are covering their eyes with their wings, and Isaiah believes that he is doomed because of his impurity. The centre of the throne room, the centre of the universe, is God's Holiness, and when Isaiah encounters it he cries out "Woe is me!" His impure lips are then burned clean with a coal from the altar.

But in the Revelation passage the creatures are not hiding their eyes. In fact, they are covered with eyes! Something has changed. Something has happened that allows the creatures to look at God's Holiness and not perish. What's more, there are humans sitting on smaller thrones around the main throne of God. Humans, somehow, now have access to this place. And instead of crying "Woe is me!" they are chanting "Worthy are you!" to the Lord.

What has changed? We see it in the very next chapter, Revelation 5:6: "And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain..." The slain lamb, Jesus the Christ, has taken away the sin of the world, and has opened the way for his creation to approach the throne of grace with confidence and joy! God's Holiness is not lessened in any way, but has now been made totally accessible by grace. Roman Emperors employed people to announce that they were worthy of all power and riches. Revelation shows that only the slain lamb is found worthy to take the scroll of history and open its seals. Billions and billions of angles thus sing out a new song, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!"

Same throne room, very different experience.

Jesus blesses the pure in heart and promises that they will see God because he is the lamb who was slain. He opens the way to fellowship with God through his own life. He purifies hearts and offers a place at the glorious banqueting table. We get to accept the invitation to the feast. We get to share in Christ's relationship with the Father. We get to move from "Woe is me!" to "Worthy is he!" And we get to start that now.

Hallelujah.

ALMSGIVING

What is money when we have been given access to God's throne room? Be extravagantly generous today with someone, and if they ask why let them know about how generous God has been to you.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 84**

VISIO DIVINA

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

Find a place to be still and silent for twelve minutes. Find something to contemplate today that reminds you of the description of God's throne room: maybe a precious stone, or a fireplace, or an artistic depiction of an angel or a lamb. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you what it means to have access to the throne of grace.

Set a timer for twelve minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twelve minutes are up, pray **Psalm 84** and write down what you saw.

LECTIO

Read **Revelation 5:1-14**

Relish

Re-read **Revelation 5:1-14**

Respond

Rest

Resolve

LAMENT

John weeps and laments in Revelation 5 until he is shown that the lamb is worthy. Let's join him tonight in putting aside our tears, and just be grateful for what the Lord has done for us. Jesus has been totally open-handed with us, showing us what the posture of generosity truly looks like. Now we get to live that beautiful generosity into the world.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

Take some time to write a reflection about this past week. What stretched you? What did you learn? How will you continue to apply the disciplines you explored this week? Were you totally honest with yourself and others? Bring these reflections to share with your Infinitum group.

Bring your day, and your week, to the Father in prayer and thanksgiving.

WEEK EIGHT

COMING UP FOR AIR

(REFLECTING ON GENEROSITY)

MEDIA

VIDEO

On Rest

PODCAST

REFLECTION

Meet with your Infinitum Hub and talk through how your last three weeks has gone. Share with one about what questions, actions, or topics were challenging, and why? Did you encounter anything new about yourself? Did you encounter God in any new or unexpected ways? What did you learn about the posture of generosity, moving from grasping to giving? Share some of your answers to the questions from the week and pray for one another.

Talk about some of the Nine AA steps that have been recommended to you so far. In particular, how has the process of making amends gone for you?

Check in about the six practices you have adopted so far as well:

STILLNESS

Have you noticed a growing ability to be still, to quiet your mind, body and heart, to to pay attention to God?

LAMENT

Were there any significant moments of lament for you in this past week? Are you learning to address your pain, fear and sin through godly sorrow? Remind yourselves how to practice lament daily.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Talk through how your daily times of Awareness Examen went and remind yourselves how to keep practicing this as you go forward.

ALMSGIVING

How have you grown in generosity through the practice of daily almsgiving? Did anything challenge or surprise you?

LECTIO DIVINA

Has this practice changed the way you approach Scripture?

VISIO DIVINA

Has this practice helped you to notice more of the Creator in His creation? Do you find it easy or hard to focus and contemplate?

During this Reflection week go back through your notes to process some of the questions that you found challenging over the last three weeks. What have you learned especially about the posture of generosity and how to apply it in your life?

End your meeting by reading **Mathew 5:1-12**, and praying The Lord's Prayer together.

FOOTNOTES

1. <https://grottonetwork.com/make-an-impact/volunteer/what-is-almsgiving-and-how-to-do-it/>
2. https://downloads.24-7prayer.com/prayer_course/2019/resources/pdfs/21%20How%20to%20do%20the%20Lectio%20Divina.pdf
3. <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/servant-of-god-brother-juniper/>
4. Just make sure the company is reputable and the cage is sturdy!
5. Once again, do not do these steps alone. Work alongside your infinitum partners and pastors if you can. Some more info and testimonies on this difficult step can be found here: <https://www.verywellmind.com/a-study-of-step-9-69407>

