



The Renewing

*A Season of Action, Contemplation,
and Transformation*

Thom Miller

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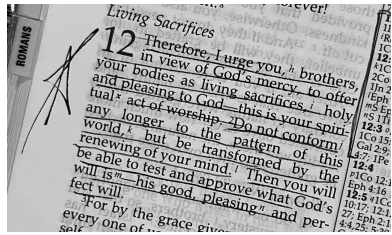
The Renewing
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*To my friends
at the BCJ.*

*“Hey there.
Grace and peace.”*

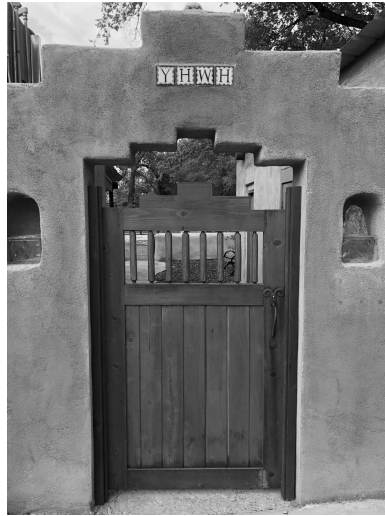
The Renewing



*Do not conform any longer
to the pattern of this world, but
be transformed by
the renewing
of your mind.
Then you will be able
to test and approve what God's will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

*From Paul's Letter to the Romans.
Chapter twelve.
Verse two.*

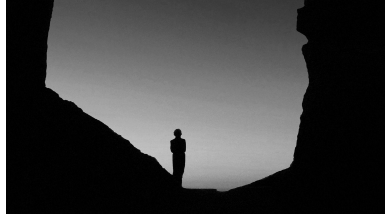
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A Time of Waiting



In scripture, the number, forty, is significant.
It symbolizes a period of time and a season of change.

When early readers of scripture saw the words “forty days” or “forty years,” they didn’t think this meant a literal amount of time. They understood it to simply mean “a long time” of waiting and renewing.

The number was a cue for readers to pay attention and take note, because something important was about to happen. A time of testing and struggling and wrestling was on the horizon. They were about to read a story of growth and new life. The readers knew this, so the writers used this number intentionally.

With that said, this book holds forty journal writings. Over the past “forty weeks,” I journaled every day. Then I went back and chose a few of these to share. These journals document my thoughts and reflections during a time of spiritual transformation and renewal.

The next journal in this book is titled,
A Writer’s Contemplation.
In that journal, I discuss two other significant seasons in my life.
My season of “forty years” and my season of “forty days.”
For a very long time, I felt separated from God.
I felt I could not measure up no matter what I did.

For years, I wondered why I never felt peace, and
I wondered why I never felt worthy of love or grace.
Most of my life, I wondered what was wrong with me.

I spent far too long waiting and wrestling and wandering.
I was in a desert of fear and shame and guilt with no escape
in sight.
But then, something special happened.

I found a treasure.
I found transformation and renewal and peace with God.
The forty journals you now hold reflect my season of
change and renewing over these past forty weeks.

As you read through these journals,
I hope you recognize your own seasons of change.
And I hope you recognize the fact that you and I are not in
a state, but rather we are on a quest.

One of my favorite lines in Paul's letter to the Romans is
when he advises his church,

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this
world, but be transformed by the renewing of your
mind.*

This passage offers hope to people like me who struggle
and wrestle and wander and wait.

Over these past forty weeks, I have learned that my
continual transformation and renewal has been and will
continue to be a source of great comfort and peace in my
times of waiting.

I hope you too find peace in your times of waiting,
in this story you find yourself in.
This story that continues to unfold, transforming you and
renewing you season after season.

A Writer's Contemplation



In the fall of 2020, I submitted a proposal for the *Lilly Teacher Creativity Fellowship*.

This fellowship provides financial support to teachers who wish to set aside meaningful time to pursue a project.

Teachers design, plan, and propose a project that will energize and renew them for their work in the classroom.

It is a creative approach to positively affect educators who can then positively affect their students and colleagues.

The wisdom of this fellowship's renewal initiative reminds me of my favorite quote by Franciscan Friar, Richard Rohr.

“Transformed people transform people.”

The *Lilly Teacher Creativity Fellowship* is a powerful opportunity that allows teachers to do just that.

Fellowship candidates plan activities and experiences they could not otherwise pursue without financial assistance.

Then, the *Lilly Endowment* selects a handful of proposals to support from the several hundred applications they receive each year.

In the fall of 2020, my proposal was one of those selected. My project was titled,

A Writer's Contemplation

*Drawing peace from the monastic experience,
pouring stillness on the pages of life's story.*

I know, that's quite a mouthful considering the title could have simply been, *I want to get away to write and pray*. But this was what I proposed and exactly what I did. This monastic experience allowed me to quiet my mind, find rest, read from spiritual teachers, and write about my thoughts and experiences of this adventure.

I was granted the opportunity to draw peace and practice pouring stillness in those forty days. I began filling the pages of my life's story with daily practices and daily journals that continued to follow me long after that season of renewal had passed. My forty day summer project had a powerful impact on me. An impact that continued to renew me over the past forty weeks.

This book holds several journal I collected over that transformative season of forty weeks that began with those forty days in the summer of 2021.

There are three passages of scripture that I held dear over those seasons of change.

"Peace be with you." Luke 24:36

"Be still and know..." Psalm 46:10

"...be transformed by the renewing..." Romans 12:2

As I read these words, I can't help but think about the person and presence of Jesus.

I love that Jesus would often take time to retreat to a quiet place where he could find rest and renewal.
What a compelling practice he modeled for us.
It's so easy to get caught up in the *Action* of living life and neglect the *Contemplation* of living this life.
It is wise for us to follow Jesus's example, taking time to retreat and care for ourselves mind, body, and spirit.

This renewal project allowed me to withdraw from the busyness of life so I could seek stillness and peace.
And I understand what an amazing gift I was given.
This gift allowed me to continue my daily practice far beyond the "forty days" of this summer project.

Looking back, I know my first "forty years" were a journey filled with spiritual restlessness and struggle.
I wandered and searched but could not find rest or peace.
I was a Christian, but I was full of fear, shame, and anxiety.
For years, I struggled and wrestled with these feelings
It was exhausting.
In fact, about five years ago I was ready to "let go" and walk away from my faith tradition, but there was something that kept me holding on to my faith.
Then, I stumbled across something peculiar and caught a glimpse of something special.
A new way of spiritual living was revealed to me through the practice of *both* action *and* contemplation.
You might say I began to understand the balance of being-ness and doing-ness.
You might say I was ready to begin my spiritual hero's journey.

So I did, I began.

I began the practice of starting my days reading scripture, spending time in contemplative prayer, and committing to time journal writing.

I began discovering spiritual teachers who would guide me to much more rich and deep faith journey.

I began to understand that faith had much less to do with believing and saying the right things and much more with experiencing the Spirit of God as radical and unconditional love, joy, and peace.

I began to understand that loving God and loving others is much more about listening and being present than talking and having the right answers.

I began to understand that faith is about trust, hope is about openness, and love is about connection.

I began to see an alternative orthodoxy taking form, and I wanted more.

I began to draw peace, and I began to pour stillness.

Thanks to this fellowship, I continued to begin my journey.

I began again in the *Center for Action and Contemplation* in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

I began again at the *Prison Contemplative Fellowship* Headquarters in Folsom, California.

I began again at the *St. Francis Retreat* in San Juan Bautista, California.

And I began again at the *Deer Park Monastery* in Escondido, California.

I thank you for taking time to follow along and share in this journey of transformation and renewal.

May you find peace and stillness in these words from this writer's contemplation.

Grace and peace!

Our Story of Stories



We are all writing a story. Every day, we add smaller stories to the big story. When we come to the end, the story of stories of our lives will be complete. The interesting thing is that no one gets to read the full story. No one gets to see the whole book. Even those closest to us only get to see a few pages, a few short stories. Many of our family and friends see a few sentences throughout the book, but never the whole chapter. Several short stories. Never the whole story. We write the story of stories over the course of our lives. Each day is a new page filled with many new stories. We share parts of the story with a select few. Or even no one at all. All day we fill the page. Living a life that will be the full book. The full story.

Have you ever heard someone repeat a story you've told? It's interesting to listen as an event from your life is summarized and repeated by someone who wasn't there. They've taken bits and pieces and created a narrative. And there we are. The author of the moment with no power over this particular story unfolds. Or have you ever had a story told about you when you are not present? The answer to this is yes. We all have. That too is interesting to consider. We are living our lives and others create a narrative about us. How can they do this? By filling in the gaps, and making assumptions and judgments based on previous stories. Creating a conversation based on the short stories they know. We do the same thing. Even though we often know very

little, it seems quite human to figure out others and share our conclusions based on how the stories come together.

Over the past year, I've attended four funerals. The ultimate closure of the book they've written in their lives. We are left with anecdotes and observations. Small quips and sentences, perhaps a few paragraphs, but never the whole chapter. Certainly not the whole story. But there is power in these short stories. We get to learn about each other in a way that helps us learn about ourselves. As the author of my story, I often look back on chapters full of short stories already written. I look ahead to chapters and short stories waiting to unfold. But I don't think I spend enough time fully engaged in each short story in the present, as the black lines work their way across each page. But while I'm living the story, others can catch a glimpse that will build part of their narrative about us. And they can hear stories that I share with them, and stories that others share with them.

Consider those closest to you. You know enough short stories to write a pretty good narrative. You can do the same with others you know less well. We humans find each other pretty interesting. We humans also like to size each other up and understand each other. We do this with the accumulation of short stories. We don't always think about others doing the same with us, though. As I think about sitting at those funerals, I can see how I replayed so many short stories about their lives. Stories I've witnessed, stories they've told me, stories others have told me about them. And it has started to occur to me that they are the authors, and we are the storytellers. Sometimes the stories are amazing and beautiful. Sometimes the stories are sad and unfortunate. But it's all part of the greater story of our shared humanity.

So here we are, telling and sharing our short stories. You have a sense of mine, I have a sense of yours. I think that this is a good reminder that we should take care in sharing what we know about each other. We should consider the impact and

consequences of the stories we share. We need to consider the purpose of our sharing. Are we building others up or tearing them down? Would we tell these stories in their presence? If these were our stories, would we want them to be shared? I know my story, but I have no power over how my story is told. All I can do is try to live my stories well and help others do the same. Or as I've heard, to love others as I love myself. Let's consider this the next time we have an opportunity to tell a piece of someone else's story. Is this how we would like our story to be shared?

Let's continue to share the short stories.

Let's continue to love the story authors.

Let's write a story we would love to hear others tell.

Everything. Open. Eager



*Three books and three lessons
on Listening, Loving, and Living.*

Everything...I'm struck by the story of a lady whose husband died. And whose God died. Rob listens to the story with his hand on his heart. The audience leans in, waiting. Waiting to hear the response, the comfort, the wisdom. What will he say?

Open...I'm learning a new way to pray. Opening my heart, mind, body, emotions, and whole being to the Ultimate Mystery that is the Spirit of God. Focusing more on presence than words. I love the opening line of this book, "Contemplative prayer is the world in which God can do anything." As I near the end of this book, I see how Thomas helps unveil the unimaginable depth of life and love and mystery in the Spirit. What does he say?

Eager...I'm learning about an alternative way of living. The way of St Francis. A way of living on "the edge of the inside." A way of living in humility, simplicity, peace, and freedom. Living a radical Christianity following a radical Jesus. Living in solidarity with humanity. Letting go of the old ways of thinking and living to gain a new way of thinking and living. What does Richard have to say?

Everything...It's what he didn't do that touched me. Here he is, the "expert." The guy everyone came to see and hear. The guy with the answers. Here he is, leaning in with everyone else. Fully engaged in the moment. In this story. Here he is, not speaking, but listening. Listening to the story of this lady's husband and God dying. Feeling the emptiness. Joining in the loss.

Open...I've never written so much in a book before, underlining text and writing in the margins. I'm savoring this book. The message is simple and repetitive, but still fresh and powerful. I'm learning to pray for the first time again, and Thomas is showing me an alternative way to reach deeper. Connecting to a source in a way that is more real than any prayer practice I've ever experienced. The fullness. The gift.

Eager...As I read the pages, I can almost hear Richard narrating. I've listened to so many of his messages and interviews. I even took his online course teaching the alternative way of Francis. So as I see the words, I hear his voice. I can hear the admiration for this man who embraced the teachings of Jesus so deeply and lived so fully. So fully "on the edge" as was the Jesus he followed. I hear his words painting the picture of life eager to reach out, eager to love.

Everything...There is suffering and pain. And we go through this together. Our suffering creates a whole new story. We are transformed daily in the mundane and in the spectacular. Some transformation is painful, some is joyful. The beauty is that we don't have to have the answers. We have to be in it together. We have to listen. We have to love. We have to live.

Open...When we step into the unknown, we're stepping out in faith. Collectively and individually, we have created belief systems and dogmas and doctrines to help us make sense of this mysterious and magnificent God and His Spirit and His Son. I've always felt like we are supposed to know the answers and be able to share those in "statements" of belief. But I love the idea that

“statements lead to a state and questions lead to a quest.” I’m definitely on a quest. This book is taking me even further into the mystery of prayer and faith. I’m listening. I’m loving. I’m living.

Eager...I didn’t know that an alternative orthodoxy was an option. But when the Spirit leads, it might be the only option. Long before I came across Francis of Assisi, I knew there had to be an alternative to the formulaic belief system I had been handed. It was a good system to begin my spiritual journey, but if I plan to transform and grow, I must be willing to step forward in faith to my next step. In prayer. In life. Listening, loving, and living.

I was thinking about *the greatest commands* to love God and love others. In reading these three books, I think we can show this love by *listening* to God and *listening* to others. Without all the answers. Just embracing the mystery of this life’s journey. This quest.

Everything...*listen*

Open...*love*

Eager...*live*

Everything is Spiritual ~ Rob Bell
Open Mind, Open Heart ~ Thomas Keating
Eager to Love ~ Richard Rohr

Life is a PSALM and a GIFT



Constructing a Framework

This week, I reflected on my intentions, my vision, my mission, my purpose, my goals, and my guiding principles. For some time, I've been making space for new wisdom and integrating it in a way that is in tune with my current values. To do this, I did a little word play and came up with a couple of acronyms to help construct a framework I can build on. This framework continually evolves and transforms with each step down life's path but as for now I feel comfortable making this statement:

My life is a PSALM and a GIFT.

My Life is a PSALM

Presence

Stillness

Awareness

Living

Moments

and Life is a GIFT

GratITUDE

Intention

Foundations

Transformation

A PSALM is a sacred song, holy and set apart. The original Hebrew word can be interpreted as a melody or bright music brought forth from an instrument. I like the thought of my life being an instrument that plays the melody of God's love in this world. Our lives are this song and this PSALM. And our lives are a GIFT, given out of love. Not earned. Simply received from the Divine Giver. With each letter, I added a few thoughts and words that deserve my daily attention. Words to help anchor my intentions, vision, mission, purpose, goals and guiding principles. Words to contemplate. Words to remember.

My life is God's PSALM

P: presence, patience, and peace

S: solitude, silence, stillness, serenity

A: awareness, and achieving arete, actualizing my potential

L: loving God and others; living life better; living an intentional life, an optimal life, a compelling life, and a contemplative life

M: moment to moment to moment

My life is God's GIFT

G: gratitude; grounded spiritually, emotionally, and relationally; gaining and giving love and compassion

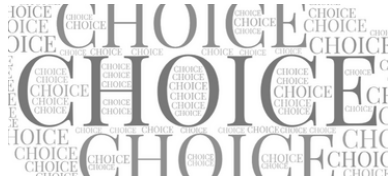
I: Intentionally Implementing habits, systems, and rituals

F: foundations of faith and family

T: transformation; my time is now and precious; today is the day

May your day and my day and your life and my life be
a PSALM and a GIFT.

A Daily CHOICE



I have this weird thing I do every morning.

It's something I write. Every day. Right at the top of the page of each daily journal. It used to be three words. I made a choice to add a fourth.

My *One Word* this year has been "Presence." So that's the first word I write. Then I've been writing "PSALM" and "GIFT." I've been doing this for quite some time. Those are the 3 words that center me before I begin gratitude journal. A journal that often includes phrases about contemplative living, optimal living, intentional living, and compelling living. A journal that often include something about life "experiments" and trying things that will help me live life better and help others do the same.

So one day I just wrote COIC on my page as a shortcut for "contemplative, optimal, intentional compelling living." Similar to the idea behind writing PSALM and GIFT. But when I write "COIC," I paused and thought, "hmm, that kind of looks like 'choice.'" I remembered the idea of an experiment, so I added an E. That made a COICE. Close, but now I need an H. I started thinking about the 28-day experiment and how the idea was to make a personal transformation that was holistic. There ya go! I got the H.

So what do we have here?

Each day is a **CHOICE**.

Each day is a...

Contemplative

Holistic

Optimal

Intentional

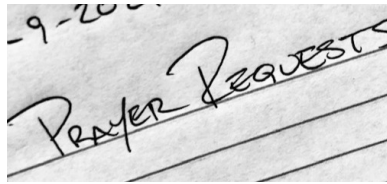
Compelling

Experiment

So yes, it's kind of weird. But I think I like that. So there it is at the beginning of each daily journal entry. "Presence. PSALM. GIFT. CHOICE. My life is a psalm and a gift. Each day is a choice. And I plan to be present in it. So now, what am I going to do with this day? I'm going to live life better and help others do the same. I'm going to do to love, enjoy, inspire, encourage, and positively impact my neighbors and my neighborhood. I'm going to greet this day as a gift and live it as a psalm.

This is my daily choice.

From Wisdom to Wonder



Every Sunday evening, I sit in jail, looking at a piece of paper.

The paper has the date and "Prayer Requests" hand printed at the top. In a moment, this paper will be passed around the room, stopping with each man who will write his name and a few words. Following the service, I will share this paper with the ministry team. And prayer will begin.

I've been doing this for a few years now. Going to visit the jail. Sitting with the men serving time, listening to the pastors speak, joining in song and in conversation about life and struggles, addiction and recovery, hopes and dreams, faith and family, obstacles and transformations, pain and healing, and...

Prayer Requests.

So the paper works its way around the room. Each man adds his name and writes a few words, sometimes several lines, and passes the paper along to the next. The paper returns to me, I read the names and the notes. The prayer requests vary...upcoming court dates, plans after their release, addiction struggles, recovery needs, friends and family in need, and spiritual needs. After the service, I will snap a picture of it and send it to a group of men who I know will be in prayer moments after I press "send."

But before that paper circles the group, I look at it. No names. No requests. I'm always the first to write my name and request.

Usually I write some variation about my family, my faith, the community, and for healing and hope. But one thing I ALWAYS write is prayer for “wisdom.” Some days, that is the only word I write. But tonight, I’m going to do something different. I’m going to begin by either telling the guys about this piece or reading it to them. Then I’m just going to write my name and one word. I’m going to write...

“Wonder”

Over the past few months, I’ve been intentional about practicing Presence, Contemplative Prayer, and Mindfulness. Accepting what is without judging. Being more engaged in the present moment rather than drifting to the past or the future. Yes, I’m still seeking wisdom, but I see the pursuit of wisdom as more of a guiding star or a distant shore more than a milestone. Wonder, on the other hand, is within reach at any moment. Wonder is a choice, moment to moment. This choice begins with presence and awareness of right now. We don’t have to wait. There are countless opportunities for wonder and awe. Ironically, that’s a great piece of “wisdom” that I’ve been seeking for so long.

Tonight, as I sit in jail, I plan to sit in presence, in prayer, and in wonder. In the wonder of the flow and transformation of life. In wonder of this community and humanity. In wonder of this world that sustains us. In wonder of Presence in the presence. The Presence, the Spirit of God, that transcends and includes all that is, was, and is to come. I am grateful that I can simply embrace the mystery and motion and movement of life. I am grateful for the pursuit of wisdom and self-actualization. I am grateful for awareness and opportunities to love God and love others. I am grateful for the wonder that I seek, pray for, and find. And I am grateful for the blank page, waiting to be filled. How will you fill your page?

I choose to fill mine with wonder.

Humans Doing and Being



Contradiction often brings about tension. And there is tension when we attempt to hold together two opposing or seeming opposite ideas. A duality arises, and we seek peace by aligning ourselves with one idea or another, with one side or another, with one group or another, with one mindset or another.

On my desk lies a task list, for this day and for this week. I have another similar task list at work. I am constantly updating these lists with new things to do and removing tasks I've finished. I have my personal mission and vision and wildly important goals, and I use these as my guiding stars. I enjoy checking boxes as complete and drawing lines through tasks I've completed. I have purpose and direction and things that need to be done. I manage my time and my energy and feel a great degree of satisfaction when I come to the end of my day knowing that I've made the most of it.

I love DOING.

On my desk is a stack of books I've been reading. Books on contemplative prayer, mindfulness, and meditation. I have been intentionally setting aside time for solitude, silence, stillness, and prayer. I read and learn about the benefits of embracing a mindfully spiritual practice of inner silence and centering prayer. My faith has never been more strong and my mind has never been more clear. This is not to say that I am anywhere near

where I wish to be, but I am confident I am on the right path heading in the right direction. Throughout the day, I know the transformational benefits of calming my spirit and my mind in focused, mindful contemplation.

I love BEING.

Doing and being appear to be in contradiction.

How am I to hold this paradox?

How am I to make peace with the fact that

I am a human doing, and

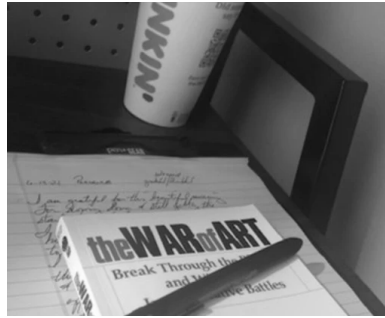
I am also a human being.

Both are important. Every day I'm DOING the work. Every day I'm BEING in the moment. And as I look beyond the seeming duality, I can see the beauty of their interconnectedness.

Beingness is the teacher of our doingness. Doingness is a fruit of beingness. A robust life requires non-dualistic thinking and living.

It is truly my deep desire is to live life better and help others do the same. A great life is one filled with love and joy and peace and patience. Spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Living life better requires we hold together tensions and contradictions. That we come to peace with the paradoxes of our humanity and spirituality. Holding the tension and finding peace as humans doing and being.

The Part That's Hard



*“There’s a secret that real writers know
that wannabe writers don’t,
and the secret is this:
It’s not the writing part that’s hard.
What’s hard is sitting down to write.
What keeps us from sitting down is Resistance.”
~ Steven Pressfield from The War of Art.*

I woke up 748 miles from home.
I was greeted with some Resistance.
And I am blessed and grateful.

My summer renewal story is beginning to unfold.
A story twenty years in the making.
A story of transformation.

And patience.
And resistance.
And writing.

And persistence.
And presence.
And peace.

There was no coffee in our hotel room.
Or the lobby.
Here in Oklahoma City, our first stop.

Resistance.
Not a big deal. But an obstacle.
An obstacle keeping me from sitting down.

748 miles from home,
on the first stop
of this *Writer's Contemplation*.

Seeking silence, and stillness.
Seeking contemplation and prayer.
Seeking presence and practice. And coffee.

Yes, Steven.
Sometimes the hard part is simply sitting down.
So I'm here now, not far behind schedule.

Overcoming the first obstacle,
sitting down, writing,
and enjoying my favorite coffee.

Is it okay to be blessed and grateful?
Grateful for a black, dark roast coffee I found at a nearby
Dunkin'?
The answer is a most definite *yes*.

In a couple of hours,
Jill and I will be in the OKC First Church
listening to Jon Middendorf.

We've already spent hours listening to and talking about
Richard Rohr. And Rob Bell.
And Rachel Held Evans. And Jon Kabat-Zinn.

It's all part of the journey,
the transformation,
and the *Writer's Contemplation*.

Slowing down. Praying. Writing.
Sharing this experience with my partner in life.
Loving God, loving others, and loving life.

Day two of this journey, twenty years in the making.
The hard part of today is over.
Sitting down.

The “not the hard part” is living up to its name.
But here I am on the other side.
Sitting in silence and stillness and contemplation.

Resistance makes us stronger.
It transforms and renews.
Not by the doing, but by the showing up to do.

And this is why I am blessed.
This is why I am grateful.
This is why I need the part that's hard.

The Sacred Journey



"Your life is a sacred journey.

And it is about change, growth, discovery, movement, transformation, continuously expanding your vision of what is possible, stretching your soul, learning to see clearly and deeply, listening to your intuition, taking courageous challenges at every step along the way. You are on the path...exactly where you are meant to be right now... and from here, you can only go forward, shaping your life story into a magnificent tale of triumph, of healing, of courage, of beauty, of wisdom, of power, of dignity, and of love."

~ Caroline Joy Adams

I didn't quite know what to do with it at first.
I stood at the entrance of this labyrinth, this meandering path that lay before me.
So as with many mysteries in my life, I took a deep breath, stepped in, and got started walking this path.
This sacred journey.

I was at the "CAC."
Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation.
Two time zones and twelve hundred miles from my home.

I walked this winding path of rocks in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
This path representative of my spiritual renewal and
contemplative experience.
My sacred journey.

This particular path was a “seven circuit, classical labyrinth.”
An ancient, symbolic walking path used for meditation and
prayer.
I’ve learned that they take many forms and serve many purposes,
but generally help seekers represent their transformation along
their life's path.
Their sacred journey.

The labyrinth pre-dates Christianity but has been adopted by
Christians as a way to experience God’s presence all along life’s
path.
As the Psalmist said, *You make known to me the path of life.*

My mind meandered as I walked the labyrinth.
But I kept moving, making my way closer to the center of this
path.
Just as I continue to move closer to the presence of God.
On this, my sacred journey.

The labyrinth is a beautiful metaphor. A symbolic representation.
All of our paths wander. We are all moving, seeking
transformation, seeking peace, and seeking renewal.

I pray today we can all catch a glimpse of the *presence and
fullness* as we follow *the Way* to spiritual renewal and clarity on
our paths.
Exactly where we are each meant to be.
Over and over again.

Right now and right now again.
Always moving forward.
Always present on our sacred journeys.

Action and Contemplation



*Draw peace and pour stillness.
Act and contemplate.
Trust, be open, and say “yes.”*

My intention is personal renewal through action and contemplation. We are all continually being transformed by the renewing of our minds and hearts and spirits. This summer, I am drawing peace from my experiences and pouring stillness onto the pages of my life.

We each have our own unique virtues and shared universal virtues. My unique virtues are gratitude, spirituality, and the love of learning. These virtues guide my steps as I use my energy and time to develop my unique identity and path. Our shared universal virtues are faith, hope, and love. These virtues guide our steps as we enter this flow of life together to further develop and continue to write the story of Life. Here. Now. Always.

I first began reading and listening to Richard Rohr a few years ago. His influence has helped reignite the fire of my spirit. He is the founder for the “Center for Action and Contemplation” in Albuquerque, New Mexico. An odd name, I felt, but I’m beginning to understand. By nature, I like doing. I love the satisfaction of making lists and getting things done. But I’m

finding the great value of being. Being present and appreciating the joys and the gifts of these days and moments we are given. The more time I spend in action and contemplation, the more I find balance in my unique virtues and the more I'm growing in the universal virtues of faith and hope and love.

The idea of these universal virtues come from David Steindl-Rast, another treasured influence in my life. He has a way of addressing the deep yearnings of life with simple language that inspire wonder and awe as well as surprise and delight in everyday life. He says that gratitude opens the door to faith, hope, and love. Faith (the opposite of fear) is trusting ourselves to life. Hope (not "hopes") is openness for surprise and the right attitude that leads to the unimaginable. Love is a limitless and radically lived "YES" to belonging.

I once heard David teach a lesson on happiness and gratitude. In this lesson, he encourages us to "stop, look, and go." The idea is that we need to find opportunities to pause, be present, look around, say yes to life. We need to say yes to the "action" and the "contemplation" of life. We say yes, that there is much work to be done. We say yes, that there is much to be attuned to in the present moment. We say yes, with the understanding that action and contemplation work in tandem. And when we are aware of this, life becomes much more full and robust.

One of my favorite stories is when Jesus calls a child and says that we need to *change and become like little children*. I love this image because when I think of children, I think of wonder and awe. The surprise and delight. The unknowing and the trust. The imperfections and the curiosity. The learning and the growing. The action and the contemplation. The transforming and the renewing.

Today, let's let life surprise and delight us.
Let's live with faith and hope and love.
Let's draw peace and pour stillness on this day.

Becoming Like Children



“...change and become like little children...”

Matthew 18: 1-5

Let's try this.

Closing our eyes.

Taking a slow, deep breath.

Let's give ourselves permission

to change our perspective
for just a moment.

Permission to trust,

to be open,

and to say, “yes!”

We'll begin with gratitude.

Being grateful for this moment
and the opportunity it presents.

We'll begin without judgement

or expectations.

Just presence.

Using a little imagination,
consider the world
from the perspective of a child.

Look around
breathing slowly and deeply,
taking in the beauty of life.

Like a child,
get lost in the moments,
filled with wonder and awe.

Pay attention
to the particulars that bring joy
and smile and laugh and play.

With the faith and trust
being open to the surprises
and delights that life gives so freely.

Be changed
like the wise children
simply saying "yes!" to life.

Grateful for the Opportunity



For the twentieth time, I'm seated and ready. Twenty times. I grin at the thought. A yellow spiral notebook lies unopened in my lap. I hold a still-unclicked pen in my hand, mindful of this moment and what it means to try yet again. I take a deep breath and look at the notebook cover. I click the pen, open the notebook, and write, "Lilly 2021."

Opening to a blank page, I remember those nineteen rejection letters. The nineteen times I've mailed a proposal and waited for the decision to be made. The nineteen times I've opened my mailbox to find a thin envelope with a note of appreciation for my proposal followed by the dreaded, but all too familiar, "...unfortunately..." The times I've sighed and decided that was my last try, followed by the inevitable, "...well maybe if this year I should propose..." Then, as always, the NEXT proposal begins to take form for another shot.

A few months later, I'm checking my email. A new message arrives in my inbox. The subject line reads, "Award Notification for Lilly Endowment 2021 Teacher Creativity Fellowship Program." Notification of Award winners? Wait! This can't be right. They're not saying I won. They're just telling who the winners are. Right? It takes a moment to gather myself and open it. After a deep breath, or two or three, I brace myself, open the email, and read these words, "Dear Thomas, Congratulations!..."

A few months later and t's 5:30 a.m. in Oklahoma City. I'm in the hotel room seated at the desk. Spending time writing. And praying. Grateful for the part that's hard. Grateful for this journey that has begun. This journey, twenty years in the making. Making friends with rejection and resistance. These two have been such a good teacher in so many ways. Life has a way of presenting opportunities to learn through rejection and resistance. And with each opportunity, we can respond or we can react. Several months early, I chose to respond by opening up that yellow notebook. I chose to respond with another attempt. Another shot at this grant opportunity. And on this day in Oklahoma City, I choose to respond with gratitude.

Here I stand, a few days later, at the entrance to the labyrinth. This path that lies before me is symbolic of the sacred journey of life we all share. As I follow this path, I'm reminded of the steps that got me here and the steps that will follow. With each step, I try to bring my mind to the present moment, to the *Presence* with me in Albuquerque. To this *Renewing*. My mind constantly wanders from the past, to the future, and back to the present. All the while, I follow the path, always moving forward and closer to God on this sacred journey. Grateful for this opportunity.

I've been here a week now. Settling into this tiny hermitage in the desert. Considering the steps that brought me here, now. Drawn to this location to visit the *Center of Action and Contemplation* founded by Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar I have grown to love. As I sit here, seeking peace and stillness, I'm reminded of David Stendl-Rast, a Benedictine monk I also admire. I am on this journey of contemplation, spending time with these two men, reading their books, listening to their lessons, and making connections. I truly am finding spiritual renewal on this journey.

It's been another week, and I've been considering my grant proposal and the project title, *the Writer's Contemplation*. Considering the purpose of this renewal. I am truly drawing peace from this experience. I am truly pouring stillness on the

pages of my life's story. This is a project of both action and contemplation. Of both writing and prayer. Of both doing and being. I've traveled northwest to this St. Francis Retreat. And here I sit. Writing a few short sentences. Sitting with the questions of life and purpose. Grateful for the opportunity.

A few days pass and now, here I am. I don't know what to expect as I arrive at the Deer Park Monastery, but I come equipped with the divine virtues of "faith, hope, and love" (1 Cor 13) and with the awe and wonder of a child (Matt 18: 1-5). I have greatly admired Thich Nhat Hanh for years, and this is one of the monasteries he established to share and practice mindful living. As I share time with the monks and other guests, I'm drawn to the peace and stillness of these grounds. I'm greeted with a sign that says,

"peace is every step"

and I truly feel that peace on this visit. Another visit that is a gift, for which I am truly grateful.

I sit here now, at home, reflecting on this experience. This gift twenty years in the making. I am blessed, humbled, and grateful that I've received this gift from the Lilly Endowment. The Teacher Creativity Fellowship Program has allowed me to take time for meaningful renewal. I am energized and ready to return to my life as a teacher, coach, chaplain, dad, and husband. And I am grateful for the opportunity.

I am grateful for *The Renewing*.

A Glimpse Back and a Challenge Ahead



I'm revisiting a revisit that I've written about and written about. This is a document I've printed and posted above my desk in my office. Each day, I read through this daily reminder about the life I want to live and the identity I am building for myself. It is my vision and my affirmation. Some days I read every word. Some days I do a quick skim. But if I plan to truly self-actualize, serve heroically, and empower others, I need a daily target. This is my target. This document is a work in progress, as am I. This document continually changes and grows, as do I. But I love to watch this document and this man evolve and transform as I live each day trying to close the gap between who I'm capable of being and who I'm actually being.

My Mission

To love, enjoy, inspire, encourage, and positively impact those around me (my neighbors) and to grow my circle (the neighborhood).

My Mission Requires...

"Spending time in my sanctuary."

I do this by getting to know myself and God through daily contemplative prayer, reading, and writing in the sanctuary. Being deeply and holistically transformed. Heart soul mind strength. Practicing presence and peace. Moment by moment. Transcending my relationship to a deeper level, embracing my

mystical and mysterious God. Living the way of Jesus. With daily attention, intention, and discipline. Moment by moment.

*“Loving my neighbors
and growing my neighborhood.”*

I do this by building connections and relationships with those around me, living on the edge of the inside, in the sanctuary. Showing love and compassion to others and myself. Practicing presence and peace. Moment by moment. Touching the hearts and minds of my tribe with my time and through writing. With daily attention, intention, and discipline. Moment by moment.

My Wildly Important Goal

*To live life better and help others do the same.
To self-actualize, to serve heroically, and to empower others to
do the same.*

I do this by nurturing and cultivating Gratitude, Joy, Compassion, Presence, and Holistic Wellness in myself and others. By Writing and Coaching. Showing Up. Hammering the Stone. Closing the Gap. Battling the Obstacles, Struggles, and Obstacles. Being a good steward of my mind, body, spirit, time, family, community, resources, and world. Intentionally Building a Compelling Life. Making Daily Progress, and Enjoying the Process. Remembering that today is a PSALM, a GIFT, and a CHOICE.

Some Thoughts and Wisdom From a Few of My Heroes

Today, I will have faith (trust in life and the source of life), hope (openness to surprise), and love (belonging, saying “yes!” to life).

~*David Steindl-Rast*.

Today, I will hold the paradox of action (doing) and contemplation (being) with peace and trust, living at the edge of the inside, and appreciating the particulars of my life as a window to the universal and the divine ~ *Richard Rohr*.

Today, I will think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive; to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love. ~ *Marcus Aurelius*

Today, I will be humble in my aspirations, gracious in my success, and resilient in failures ~ *Ryan Holiday*

Today, I stand at the door ~ *Sam Shoemaker*

I will be an “instrument of your peace” ~ *St Francis*

Today I will close the gap between who I’m capable of being and who I’m actually being ~ *Hal Elrod*

Today, I will lean into life ~ *David Hayes*

I understand that what matters is not our status, but our trajectory; not where we are, but where we are going ~ *Brian McLaren*

Today, I will step forward into growth ~ *Abraham Maslow*

Today, I will think like a gardener and work like a carpenter
~ *Daniel Coyle*

Today, I will live moment to moment as I self actualize, serve heroically, and empower others to do the same. ~ *Brian Johnson*

Today, I will let mercy lead. ~ *Rich Mullins*

Today, I invite and consent to the Spirit of love, joy, and peace as

Today, I will seek to be transformed, I will be still and know.

~ *Thomas Keating* and *Paul, the Apostle*

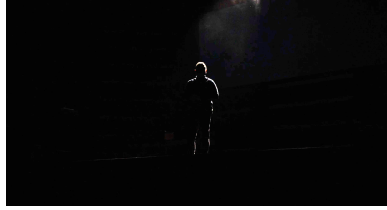
Today, I understand that my identity is my repeated being-ness.
~ *James Clear*

Today, I will “change and be like a little child” greeting the day and creation with awe and wonder and surprise and delight. I will seek mercy and compassion for myself and others, I will seek presence, peace, stillness, and awareness. Today, I forgive myself and others with reckless abandon and without judgement, I seek true grace and true peace, loving God, and loving others. ~ *Jesus*

**A challenge to you as we remember that
we are all stewards of our lives**

I challenge you to consider your own mission.
Consider what it is you are doing with your days.
Consider what kind of life you hope to build.
All of us are in the middle of our life's story.
Imagine flipping through this book of your life
seeing how the chapters unfold
giving us a fuller picture as we keep reading.
The ups and downs and learning and struggles.
It's all part of the story.
Think about this chapter we are living now.
The one where things really start changing.
This part of our story
where we begin seeing the possibility of our futures,
catching a glimpse of the lives we hope to build.
May we remember that each day,
we are stewards of our lives.
That we are writing and adding pages to our own book.
I encourage you to think about your mission and
what your mission requires.
Think about your wildly important goals.
Start writing and make the page you write today a good one.

The Person and Presence



My dear friend and teacher
stands among a group of my friends and me.
We sit listening, as he quietly draws us in.

Is it the words he speaks? Yes.
But really, it's more than the words.
It's the *Essence* of the message behind these words.
It's the **person** behind the words.
It's the **presence** behind the word.

The teacher has been discussing
a different way to look at living and
a different way to live.
There is a familiar sense of
“what would Jesus do?”
in the lesson,

but THIS.

This feels very different.
This feels very beyond.
This feels very right.

The words
that struck me so deeply
were that we are to

“...be
the person
and presence
of Jesus.”

He speaks these words, and
there is a pause
of about twenty years.

As I sat in the church listening to David Hayes speak, I had no idea these words would continue to echo in my mind and heart so many years later. It was as if *the Essence of the Spirit* knew I needed to hold on to these words and draw upon them, later, when I was ready. *The Essence of the Spirit* knew I had caught a glimpse of something special. *The Essence of Spirit* knew I would return to the words behind the words over and over again in my searching and seeking.

And here I am
twenty years later,
still considering these same words
from my dear friend and teacher.
I believe this *Essence*
that was behind the words in that lesson is
the Essence of Jesus, the man and
the Essence of Jesus the Christ.

It is certainly worth considering
that once-popular phrase,
“what would Jesus do?”
but for a moment,
let’s consider this.

Let’s consider
when Jesus says,

**“I am in the Father, and
you are in me, and
I am in you.”**

Let’s consider the possibility that we don’t have to wonder.
We don’t have to think “what would Jesus do?”

Let’s imagine
we can trust Jesus’s words.
Let’s imagine
we can actually BE

the **person** and **presence**.
Let's imagine
we can actually tap into
this *Essence* that made Jesus,
Jesus.

Look at those words again.
**"I am in the Father,
you are in me, and
I am in you."**

THAT is the *Essence* Jesus carried.
THAT is the *Essence* of the Father.

So with this in mind,
dare we imagine that we can
tap into this same Divine *Essence*?
Dare we imagine that we can
soak up this same Divine *Presence*?
Dare we imagine that we can
BE this collective *Person*
in our shared humanity?

After all of this considering and imagining and daring, I am
reminded of another reminding from my same dear friend, David
quoting the Apostle Paul who encourages us to

**"...be transformed
by the renewing of your mind."**

Over these past twenty years, I can say without a doubt that my
mind has been and continues to **be transformed**. Those words
spoken so long ago still speak to me today. I cannot help but
think that *the Essence* that is the **person** and **presence** of Jesus
is giving me peace to simply be. A peace that comes from a
renewed mind. A mind that is continually being renewed day by
day in this fragile "jar of clay" that is my life.

Over the past few weeks, I've been wrestling with the paradox of
being and doing and how we as Jesus followers can best hold this
dynamic tension in peace and in stillness.
And I feel compelled to trust, be open to, and say "yes!"

to this paradox of **person** and **presence**.

So as I lay out these thoughts,
I want to leave you with one last
considering, or
imagining, or
daring.

Today, let's consider
BEing the person.
Let's imagine
BEing the presence.

Let's dare to immerse ourselves in and
live the same *Essence*
that my dear friend and teacher spoke of
that made Jesus,

Jesus.

Becoming Who We Are



*“Our job in this lifetime
is not to shape ourselves into some ideal
we imagine we ought to be,
but to find out who we are
and become it.”
~ Steven Pressfield*

I believe each of us has an authentic self.

A self we are meant to be.

A self we must seek out.

A self to discover.

A self to become.

I believe finding our authentic selves really has nothing to do with “finding our passion.” It is much deeper than that. It's more about connecting with the inner drive and yearning we each carry. It's knowing that there is something true and authentic to us. And we have no choice but to seek it out. But there is little we can do to find this authentic self. Our becoming is a result of discovery.

We have heard it said that what we seek, we will find. And this is a great piece of wisdom to help us begin our search. But my experience is that what we seek is revealed. Slowly. Our authentic

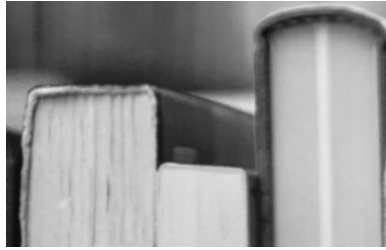
selves are revealed through the unique particulars that our lives present us. Regardless of what those particulars may be.

We each have families, friends, communities, and experiences all working together. They work by shining glimmers of light on our true selves. These glimmers help us slowly discover what already lives and breathes deep within each of us.

Countless choices help form the shape of the “selves” we show to the world. But behind it all, each of us has an authentic self working to find its way out and connect with us. It works moment after moment, day after day, and year after year. Experiences and choices that create a path for our authentic selves navigate. A path of our unique particulars. A path that allows “who we are” to reach our searching, seeking souls so we can “become it.”

Today, I encourage you to stop. To stop and take a look at your true self. Look at that. Look at the unimaginable series of unique experiences you have navigated. Experiences that have touched and nudged and directed you in a way that allowed your authentic self to emerge. And continue to emerge day after day after day. Look at that and be grateful. Then go. Go into your day still seeking. Still discovering. Still finding. Still being.

Welcome Back, Fred



*“...just who you are at this moment,
with the way you’re feeling, is fine.
You don’t have to be anything more
than who you are right now.”*
~ Fred Rogers

I am a notorious book starter.
A book finisher?
Not so much.
But I’ve found a trick.

To keep myself focused and able to actually finish a book,
I limit myself to three books at a time.
Some books take a week or two, some take a few months.
But I’ve made a daily commitment to this practice that allows me
finish more books than I ever have before.

So I have three books.
And with those three books come three bookmarks that slowly
work their way down the spines.
As they near the bottom of the spine, my anticipation grows.
I savor the last few chapters and pages as each book nears the
end, but I also find myself glancing with excitement at the books
I’ve lined up in the queue.

This week, Richard Rohr's *Eager to Love* came to an end.
After finishing the final page, I paused and stared at the cover.
For quite some time.
Grateful to have spent some much time with this precious book.
I then placed the book on my shelf, and pulled a new book out I
had selected a few days prior.

Fred Rogers's *Life's Journeys according to Mister Rogers:
Things to Remember Along the Way*.

I appreciate Fred's relentless pursuit of kindness, compassion,
and presence.

I admire his mission and disciplined daily work to serve children
and to actively demonstrate loving our "neighbors."

I will certainly miss my daily time with Richard, but

I look forward to spending time with Fred over these next few
days and weeks to come.

I've spent time with him and his books before.

And I'm happy to have him back.

Sharing time with this wise man through his published words.

Spending time as he reminds me of some wisdom.

Fred reminds me that in all my imperfection,
who I am and what I feel is fine.

He reminds me that I don't have to be anything more
than who or what I am right now.

He reminds me that today can truly be a wonderful day.

A wonderful day in this neighborhood.

Just being me.

Just being a neighbor.

I've been looking forward to this, and I need this.

We all need this.

Thank you, Fred.

And welcome back.

Practicing Recklessness



I have been practicing recklessness.
Intentionally.
For about three weeks now.

This is an aftereffect of a message I heard from OKC First Church Pastor, Jason Smith.

His message was on *the Reckless Love of the Sower* from Matthew thirteen.

As the story goes, there is a farmer, *the Sower*, "scattering seed." Some seed falls on the path, some on rocky places, some in thorns, and some on good soil.

The story continues and has been the subject of many sermons and lessons.

Often on the virtue of being good soil.

But Jason focused his attention on *the Sower*.
And it really resonated with me.
It took root.

I've been imagining the picture of this farmer, "scattering seed." Just throwing seeds wherever he happened to be with the seeds landing in all directions.

In my imaginings, I can see the farmer's path.

By following the trail of seeds and seedlings left in his wake.

*Here are some young plants taking root.
He must have been here.
He must have thrown some seed here.
And there are a few more over there.
That must have turned his attention there.
Then more plans, further ahead.
He must have gone there next.
Everywhere he walks, he throws seed.
And everywhere he goes, he is*

scattering seed.
Recklessly.
And the seed is taking root.

Parables are interpreted by the listener. And the clever story-teller scatters seeds to those of us his path. If we're paying attention, that story impacts us and takes root. This particular seed was planted June 13, 2021. 84 days ago. Plenty of time for that story to take root. Plenty of time for things to start happening deep within me. And it did. And it does. So for a few months, I've been thinking about that message. And for a few weeks, I've decided to put intentional action into those words. My goal has been to practice recklessness. Like that of *the Sower*.

Reckless love.
Reckless forgiveness.
Reckless compassion.

I've decided I don't have time to focus on anything but love, forgiveness, and compassion for others. And I've decided that I don't have time to worry about how the love, forgiveness, and compassion is received or not. And I've decided I don't have time to dwell on the consequences of my love, forgiveness, and compassion. I've decided to be at peace just scattering seeds and taking one step at a time. Practicing recklessness like that of *the Sower*.

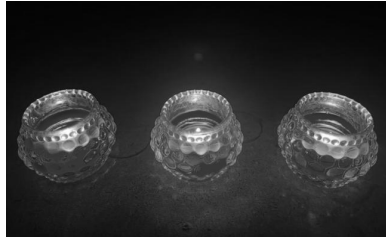
My Sacred Journey Home



Three months ago,
I stood at the entrance of a labyrinth.
I was beginning of the renewal experience,
my summer sacred journey.
A journey to experience contemplative prayer.
A journey to connect to God and others.
A journey that led me to
the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, NM.
And at that moment,
as I stood at the entrance of this labyrinth,
I had no idea where this moment would lead.
Over these past few months,
I have fully embraced the contemplative practice.
Spending intentional time daily in silent prayer.
Formally and informally.
Part of my informal practice involves walks
in the woods on our property.
As I enjoy my time in the woods,
I often think about the Center and the labyrinth.
Thinking of how I could bring
the experience and practice
of the labyrinth home with me.
And I had this idea.
To began building my own
contemplative prayer area.

My own little sanctuary.
My own labyrinth.
I chose a spot in our woods near the house.
Then developed a plan and got to work.
Several weeks and several hundred wood slices later,
I laid out this path.
I placed a cross at the entry,
similar to the one at the CAC.
Then added a few painted boards.
Key words from my daily prayer.
I felt the trinity knot would be a nice touch.
So the path was completed.
And now I can walk the labyrinth every day.
Walking with
faith (trust in Life and the Source of Life),
hope (openness to Life and the surprise it has to offer, and
love (belonging and saying "yes!" to Life).
Taking time for a transformative, sacred journey.
Over and over and over again.
Taking time for action.
Taking time for contemplation.
Day after day after day
In this prayer area,
ut more importantly,
in my life.
Grace and peace to you today.
And may God keep you safe and well
on your own *renewing*
and on your own sacred journey.

The Meditation Medication



*“Suppose you read about a pill that you could take once a day to reduce anxiety and increase your contentment. Would you take it? Suppose further that the pill has a great variety of side effects, all of them good: increased self-esteem, empathy, and trust; it even improves memory. Suppose, finally, that the pill is all natural and costs nothing. Now would you take it?
The pill exists. It’s called meditation.”*

~ Jonathan Haidt

My “self medication” began last year.
That’s when I began taking this daily medicine.
It was the lowest possible dosage.
One breath.
But I could feel the positive
effects even with these daily tiny doses.

I love how Jonathan Haidt describes “the pill.”
The evidence is clear.
Meditation has a positive effect on our overall health and
wellness.
Physical, emotional, and relational.

I am a believer in meditation.
I also believe in the power of contemplative prayer.
For me, it’s often difficult to tell them apart.

The “pill,” as I see it, is my formal meditation or prayer.
The practice of intentionally blocking out time to sit in silence.
Bringing peace to my mind.
Not clearing my mind.
Rather training my focus.
Finding an energized tranquility.
A stillness I can draw upon multiple times a day.
So I have my formal practice, “the pill.”
But I feel the effects all day long.

My self-medication began with the smallest possible dose.
One breath.
Which often led to two or four. Or a minute or two.
But I consistently and intentionally took my medicine.
At least the minimum dosage every morning.
I found myself falling back on it several times throughout the day.
The medicine always did the trick.
It never failed to give me that hit of stillness or calm.

This summer, I decided to up the dosage.
Significantly.
To twenty minutes at a time.
I was reading Thomas Keating’s *Open Mind, Open Heart*.
I was also taking the *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* course.
With this stronger medication, I noticed a strong connection.
The connection between my meditation practice and my contemplative prayer practice.

Sitting in silence and stillness.
Practicing presence.
Being aware and attentive.
Judging the experience and myself less.
Noticing without reacting.
Feeling energized.
Feeling tranquility.

The medication boost was a definite wellness boost.
Physical, emotional, relational.
And spiritual.

*“Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives.
It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment.
We feel more alive. We also gain immediate access
to our own powerful inner resources for insight,
transformation, and healing.”
~ Jon Kabat-Zinn*

*“The root of prayer is interior silence.”
“Silence is God’s first language.
Everything else is a poor translation.”
~ Thomas Keating*

I am grateful for my self-medication.
I am grateful for the side effects.
And I encourage you to give it a try.

Take a breath.
Now do it again.
Be silent
And fully awake.
Enjoy the energized calm of this moment.
Find a moment of stillness and peace.
And hopefully you’ll find the value of this powerful
meditation medication.

Listen



Contemplative prayer.
Taking time to sit in silence.
A formal practice that I have come to embrace.
A practice that affects the way I approach daily life.

My anchoring word is "Peace."
Peace with God, self, and others.
Peace with life.
Peace with the present, moment to moment.

The contemplative prayer practice has helped me
learn to sit in silence.
To rest in the presence of God.
To be present, aware, and alert.
To listen.

We are told to love God and others.
We are told to be still and not afraid.
We are told to live with love, joy, and peace.
The path begins with listening.

We all need our voices heard.
When we are heard we feel valued.
How better to be valued than to first value others?
As we do unto others as we would have them
do unto us.

Loving God, by listening in silence.
Loving others, by listening in silence.
When we listen, we hear and we value.
And when we listen, we are heard and we are valued.

In prayer and
in presence,
to love is
to listen.

Another Look at Listening



I'm taking a look at this path
to live better.
And the more I look
the more I find
the key to this path is
listening.

I have company on this path.
Three co-travelers that deserve
my attention,
my focus,
my looking,
my listening.

Three fellow travelers
and answers to prayer to be
an instrument of love, joy, and peace.

So how do I sow love, joy, and peace?
What is the key to live better?
It begins with listening
to the Source of Life,
to my neighbors, and
to my inner spirit.

This is how I sow love,
and joy,
and peace.
By listening in silence
as I travel and
live
better.

When we listen,
we give a gift of valuing.
When we listen,
we receive the gift of sharing.
Valuing and sharing
with the Source of life,
with our neighbors, and
with our inner spirits.

So as I take another look at this path,
I'm taking a closer look
at my three fellow travelers.
I'm taking a look and finding that

listening
is the key.

Essential Ingredients



"The essential ingredients for creativity remain exactly the same for everybody: courage, enchantment, permission, persistence, trust - and those elements are universally accessible. Which means that creative living is not always easy; it merely means that creative living is always possible."

~ Elizabeth Gilbert, Big Magic

*Allow me tell you a little about this book.
I'm nearing the end, again.
I read it last year, but I was drawn back to it.
I'm giving it the reread it most certainly deserves.*

*By nature, we are creative beings,
bringing life to thoughts and ideas and dreams.
Elizabeth is an encourager and coach for creatives,
identifying ingredients to better live creative lives.*

*She identifies five essential ingredients.
Courage, enchantment, permission, persistence, and trust.
The subtitle of her book is Creative Living Beyond Fear.
And fear is the enemy of creative living.*

*As creative beings, we all have treasures buried within us.
In creative living, our goal is to unearth those treasures.
Those treasures are gifts we've been given.
It is our responsibility to be good stewards of these gifts.*

*These treasures and gifts deserve our attention.
And we need a way of embracing the process of bringing forth.
Creative living helps us wrestle and struggle and overcome.
It empowers us to move beyond the obstacles in our path.*

*As she says, it is not easy, but it is possible.
So we have these essential ingredients to assist us.
I encourage you to seek out these ingredients.
Seek out ways to use these ingredients in your own creative life.*

*Inside of you is a treasure, a gift.
I hope you can look beyond any fears holding you back.
I hope you can embrace the idea of creative living.
I hope you bring forth the Big Magic waiting for you now.*

A Tree, a Prayer, and a Subtle Shift of Love

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

Every morning,
before my time of contemplative prayer,
I read a meditation.

Every morning,
after my time of contemplative prayer,
I pray the Peace Prayer.

This morning,
before the meditation,
I read the second greatest command.

This morning,
after my prayer,
I made a subtle shift.

In Richard Rohr's meditation, he tells the story of St. Catherine's Tree. The metaphor of Love as the trunk of a tree. Patience as the core of the trunk. Self-Knowledge as the roots. Discernment as the branches. The message is that Love cannot stand without patience, self-knowledge, and discernment.

As I considered this metaphor, I thought of one particular line of the Peace Prayer. The line that says we should seek not to be loved but to love. There seems to be conflicting messages if we are to also love our neighbors as ourselves. I wrestled with this paradox and settled on a solution that brought

me some peace. So if I may be so bold, I propose a subtle shift in the Peace Prayer.

A shift from
Seek not to be loved, but to love.
to
Seek both to love and to be loved.

Read those words again. Notice the slight shift. This shift allows us to consider our own needs as well as the needs of our neighbors. We are told to build our house upon the Rock by loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And when WE are built up, we can help build up OTHERS. And that is the point. Loving our neighbors. Seeing our trees grow with a strong trunk, a supportive core, the nourishing roots, and the reaching branches. Love. Patience. Self-Knowledge. Discernment.

A tree.
A prayer.
A subtle shift of love.

Thanking the UnThankable



Four years ago, I had an idea
to begin a blog. And I did.
Then first piece was titled *Great / Full*.

This writing path has meandered,
but has found its way back.
It began with gratefulness
and here I am, four years and
two hundred three blogs later.

Still grateful.
Still thankful.

I have a daily practice of reading and journaling.
This morning, I looked back over my weekly journals and noticed
a theme developing.
This week I wrote about the peace prayer and how I can be an
instrument of peace in my daily living.
I wrote about action and contemplation, and how I can better
hold the paradox of doing and being.
I wrote about loving our neighbors as ourselves and how I can
better care for myself and others.
I wrote about being a participant in life and creative living as we
all share the DNA of our Creative Father.

I wrote about the fundamentals of optimal living and how I can better eat and move and sleep and breathe and focus and celebrate and prosper.

I wrote about living on the edge of the inside (Rohr) and standing at the door (Shoemaker) as I navigate the path between darkness and light.

And finally, I wrote about how I can thank the unthankables in my life.

Who are the unthankables?

Right now, they are the writers and authors I'm reading.

The men and women who have poured out their hearts and have poured countless hours into their writing.

They have wrestled and struggled and have spent years developing a gift, to me.

To us.

In a few hundred pages, I can glean wisdom that took years to develop and articulate.

In a few hours, I can see into the heart and soul of someone committed to finding and sharing a lesson or truth.

And I have received this gift with no way to thank the creator.

So how can we givers of these gift?

Not just the givers of words, but the givers who have given their life to create and build and maintain and sustain the world we live in.

The participants in life who love their neighbors with action and who care for themselves with contemplation.

How do we thank the countless people who have contributed to our own wellbeing?

It seems the best way to thank the unthankable is to participate.

To create.

To do and to be.

To navigate life and help others do the same.

To love our neighbors.

To give our gifts.

To be grateful and thankful.

To give others something to help them be grateful and thankful.

So back to this idea I had,
four years ago,
the day before Thanksgiving.
I decided to create,
to meander,
and to be grateful.

Now here I am,
four years later,
still grateful,
and still thankful
for the thankable
and the unthankable.

The Collector



Dad Was a Collector

He collected coins. And cars. And trucks. And parts.
He collected guns. And fishing poles. And cookware.
He collected stories. And jokes. And smiles.
And moments and memories to cherish and hold dear.
And this is obvious when we think about his collections.

The Collector of Coins

These coins were not especially valuable, but he valued them.
These coins that caught his eyes were special.
He found them. He held them in his hands. He pulled them
aside.
He paid attention and noticed and did something about it.
I like to imagine him holding these coins.
Admiring their unique beauty.
These weren't just coins.
These were special coins.
These were his coins.
Just as the people around him weren't just people.
These were special people.
His family, his friends, and his community.

The Collector of Cars

And trucks. And parts
The cars held little to no value to most people.
But he knew the value they could bring.
He knew that there would be someone who would need this car.

Someone who would need this part to get to work.
He knew that this could help someone take their family on vacation.
This car could free up money to be spent on food and clothes and housing.
He collected cars and parts to help people.
And these were his people.
His family, his friends, and his community.

The Collector of Fishing Poles

And guns. And cookware.
These were a means for food.
And shared memories.
And time together.
Talking and teaching and listening and learning.
Fishing at a pond or a lake. In a boat or on the shore.
Shooting in the woods or in a field. With target or clay pigeons.
Cooking at home or in church. Eating with family or friends.
The poles and guns and cookware represented time together.
Connecting with the family, friends and community he so loved.

The Collector of Stories

And jokes. And smiles.
Coins were special.
Cars and trucks and parts gave us transportation.
Poles and guns and cookware gave us meals and times together.
But I think what Dad loved most was sharing stories and jokes.
He loved to see people smile and laugh.
He loved to see people appreciate the funny moments of life.
He paid attention to life and found a way to make us smile.
He found a way to find joy.
He found a way to reach in his collection of stories.
He found a way to share memories and jokes.
And laughter and smiles.
From his collection that never seemed to stop growing.

Dad Was a Collector

And we were the most valued part of his collection.
His family, his friends, and his community.
His memories of moments with us is what brought him joy.
I know that it is in the giving that we received.
And I know that Dad received much. Because he gave much.

So When We See

an old coin or an old junk car,
or a fisherman, or a hunter, or a cook,
when we see a gleam in someone's eyes
as they tell a story to coax a smile or a laugh,
let's take in these moments.

Collect Them

and hold them dear.
Look around. These are our treasures.
Take a moment to remember what mattered to Dad.
Connecting. And loving. And collecting and sharing
Let's pay attention and notice the joys of life and each other.
Our families, our friends, and our communities.
That's a pretty good lesson Dad gave us.
I think I'll add that to my collection.

Lisa & Josh & Children & Jesus



*"Lisa is the best person
in the world to tell a story to.
She is like totally engaged and excited
about everything you say."
~ Josh*

Our family was together for supper.
Lisa was in from Wyoming.
And as always, she brought with her
energy, joy, and enthusiasm.
And the gift of attention.

She is a gifted storyteller who can breathe excitement and life into everyday experiences and have the whole room listening and hanging onto every word. She has a way of noticing and sharing and connecting that turns a conversation into an event. Listeners are drawn in as she builds the story and as her facial expressions become more and more intense and her waving hands become more and more animated. Her delivery is an art. The flow of her stories are interrupted only by moments when she laughs at herself searching for the perfect word or phrasing. The payoff is always worth it to the listen. Storytelling is one of the qualities people love about Lisa. She pays attention to the people and the world around her and is truly in love with the beauty of life.

So yes, she is very good storyteller.
But she is even a better listener.
This is the quality Josh noticed.

Lisa brings the same intensity to listening that she brings to storytelling. I guess I've always known that, but until Josh wrapped words around it, I hadn't quite seen it so clearly. Josh's noticing was a great catch. Maybe because he himself is a great storyteller and lover of life. I'm guessing that is what caught his attention. He sees and appreciates those qualities in his Aunt Lisa. This great role model of listening, paying attention, noticing, and being in awe.

Lisa constantly connects on a deep level and immerses herself in the lives of people around her. Storytelling and story-listening with intensity. In Matthew 19:14 Jesus said,

*“Let the little children come to me,
and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of heaven
belongs to such as these.”*

I think what Jesus loved about children was their curiosity and wonder and awe. I think he loved how children can be completely present and lost in the moment.

I like to imagine those moments when Jesus had so much going on around him. So many things to do. So much important work on his mind weighing him down. I like to imagine in those moments, Jesus catching a glimpse of these children around him. Smiling and laughing and full of pure joy. Seeing these precious lives who were "totally engaged and excited" as Josh might say. I like to imagine those moments when Jesus just becomes lost in the wonder and admiration of their energy and joy and excitement.

I love that Jesus noticed this
and admired this quality
in those precious children.
I love that Josh noticed this
and admired this quality
in our precious Lisa.
We can all learn from Jesus.
And from those children.
And from Lisa.
And from Josh.

So today, I challenge you to call attention to the beauty and wonder and specialness of the people around you and the stories they tell. Notice the precious lives around you. Pay attention. Connect on a deep level. Get lost in the moments. And be little more like Lisa and Josh today.



"I desire MERCY, not sacrifice."

~ Hosea 6:6

Every so often, I come across a word that I can't seem to shake.
A word that resonates and seems to follow me around.
A word that becomes my *One Word*.

I first heard about Evan Carmichael's *One Word* in 2017.
Since then, I've found there are certain words
that seem to embody where I am and what I'm trying to do.
These *One Word* statements have lasted a few months to over a
year.

I don't really seek them out.
They just seem to find me.

It first began with IMPACT, then INSPIRE.
Followed by CONNECT, then PEACE.
The most recent have been PRESENCE and LISTEN.
But over the past few weeks, MERCY has been knocking at my
door.

I have the daily habit of writing my affirmations
and gratitude statements on my notepad,
then I write a page or two in my digital writing journal.
This morning, I was looking through my daily journals
from the past couple of weeks, I noticed a trend.
The words MERCY and GRACE kept reappearing.

With others.

With self.

I was also reading Matthew this week
and took pause when I read Jesus quote Hosea saying,

*"go and learn what this means,
'I desire MERCY, not sacrifice.'"*

So I'm going to "go and learn what this means."
I'm going take my time with this *One Word*.

I often close out my notes and text messages
and emails and letters with a phrase borrowed from Paul.
Grace and peace.

For the time being, I plan to add *One Word* to this closing.
This word has been following me around for a while now.
May this word follow you around today as well.

As I wish grace and peace and MERCY to you today.

The Trinity and the Triune



I've spoken of the Trinity Knot before. It is a beautiful symbol also known as a Triquetra or Celtic Knot. I was formally introduced to this design at the Saint Francis Retreat in San Juan Bautista, California.

There is a rich history behind this symbol that has been adopted and appreciated generation after generation. There are many possible ways to interpret or find personal meaning, but I've been drawn to the representation of the Holy Trinity. The Father, Son, and Spirit. The Three in One.

We've heard it said that we share the divine DNA of the Source of life. I like to think of this as our individual "triune selves." The mind, body, and soul that make up this three in one that we each call ourselves. It's interesting to think about this in regard to the Trinity. If you're curious, here is the *Wikipedia* definition.

*"In Trinitarian doctrine,
God exists as three persons but is one being,
having a single divine nature.
The members of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal,
one in essence, nature, power, action, and will."*

What I like about this definition is that it's easier to relate to God existing as three persons in one nature. Because it's easier to see this quality in ourselves. We are not simply our minds. We are not simply our bodies. We are not simply our souls. We are each and all three. Which I find a wonderful way to connect to God on a deeper level in our lives. In mind, body, and soul. And I find the Trinity Knot as a nice icon to remind me of this.

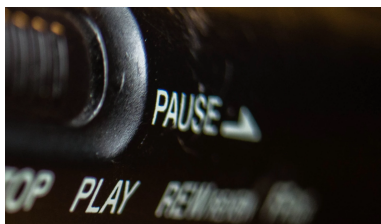
This beautiful symbol has three arcs. These arcs represent the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Or if you will, the mind, body, and soul. We also have this circle that unites them. This morning, during my quiet time of prayer, I was thinking about that circle. That thing-ness that unites the three and binds them together. What is that thing-ness?

Take a look at that circle again. We actually see three sections of that circle. So maybe a better question might be, what are those three things that bind us together? What binds together the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. And the reflection of that Holy Trinity of us and our minds, bodies, and souls. What are those things?

As I was meditating on that thought, I was reminded of David Steindl-Rast's lesson on faith, hope, and love. Faith: trust in Life and the Source of life. Hope: being open to surprise. Love: belonging and being connected. So maybe these three visible parts of the circle that unites are faith, hope, and love. The Trinity, the triune, and the circle. It's a nice thought just to find a little peace and serenity in the mystery of all that is. None of us knows all the answers, but all of us are welcome to seek the Mystery of Life. I find this symbol is a helpful icon. The Trinity Knot. Tied together. United. Part of something bigger. Yet having the same divine nature. And with this, I'll close out these triune thoughts and offer you to be trusting, open, and connected as well.

Grace and peace and mercy to you today.

A Takeaway I Tookaway



There were several takeaways from my summer *renewal*.
So many important ideas and lessons from that spiritual
adventure.

Today I was reminded of a key takeaway I tookaway.

Today, I took a relook at
the Pause.

The point of my summer renewal project was to slow down and care for my soul. To dedicate time learning how to quiet my mind and be present. To learn how to hold the paradox of doing and being. Of action and contemplation. One key takeaway from this trip was allowing myself to slow down and breathe. When we slow down and breathe, we are more likely to be present. When we are more present, we are better able to notice and appreciate the beautiful moments of life. When we appreciate these moments, we find peace and joy.

And I've found that peace and joy rely on us noticing and appreciating,
which relies on our being present
which relies on us slowing down and breathing.

But before we slow down and breathe,
we must first...
...pause.

I find myself doing this quite frequently.

Just stopping.

Everything.

I know I am not unique in that I'm a doer. I enjoy making task lists and getting things done. I have rituals and routines and systems and habits that help "optimize" my day and my energies so I can do all the things I want to do. But too often I find myself missing the beautiful moments along the way. I find that in my drive to GET somewhere, I forget to enjoy GOING somewhere.

I cannot forget to notice and appreciate, because I don't want to rob myself of peace and joy. I cannot forget to be present, because I don't want to rob myself of noticing and appreciating. I cannot forget to slow down and breathe, because I don't want to rob myself of presence. I cannot forget to pause, because I don't want to rob myself of slowing down and breathing. I cannot forget, because I don't want to rob myself of my peace and joy.

So how do I remember to
slow down and breathe,
notice and appreciate,
be present, and
find peace and joy?

I take a relook at the key.

The takeaway I tookaway.

The first step to peace and joy begins with

the Pause.

So don't forget to pause today.
Take a look and take this away.
And later take a relook
at *the pause*
you tookaway
today.

Holding Still



*"All we really need is a direction
and a next obvious step"
~ Ray Leonardini*

Jill and I were sitting under a big yellow umbrella, outside a coffee shop in Folsom, California. It was June. It was hot. Jill had an iced tea. Ray I had coffee. Jill and I were a couple thousand miles from home, talking with Ray Leonardini, the chaplain from Folsom Prison. The same prison made famous by Johnny Cash's live concert in 1968.

I connected with Ray after I Jill showed me his website, *Prison Contemplative Fellowship*. I had been reading books about prayer by Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, and Richard Rohr and was interested in sharing a different way to pray with the men and women in the Brown County Jail. This different way to pray was a silent meditation called Contemplative or Centering Prayer.

This prayer practice was familiar to the early church and often references Jesus's instruction on prayer in Matthew 6:6. We are to go to "our inner room" where we pray "in secret." This can be interpreted as spending time in silence, trust, presence, and focus with a freedom and invitation to quietly sit in Divine

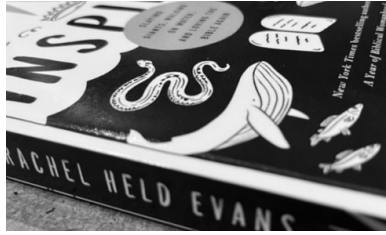
presence. It's a beautiful practice I've adopted and have enjoyed sharing with my friends at the BCJ. I connected with Ray and he sent copies of his book, *Finding God Within*, to share at the jail.

What brought us to Folsom was the *Lilly Teacher Creativity Grant*, a summer renewal opportunity for teachers. I was one of the fortunate recipients and focused my plan on contemplative study and practice. Meeting Ray was one of the highlights of this summer journey. Ray shared with us that he had been working on a documentary called *Holding Still*. I recently watched this and plan to share it at our local jail.

Our lives are a series of next obvious steps.
Far too often, we look far ahead.
It is good to have guiding stars, but as Ray reminded us,
we really just need to worry about our next obvious step.
And sometimes, the next step is to simply "hold still."

For a moment of silence.
For a cup of coffee.
For a moment of prayer.
For a glance in the next direction.
For a clearer look at our next obvious step.

A Magic Book



*"Once upon a time,
there lived a girl with a magic book...
...May you always know without a doubt
that you are loved, and
may you always be surrounded
by great stories."*

~ Rachel Held Evans from Inspired

What a great way to start this book.
What a great way to finish this book.

This week, I finished reading *Inspired*
A beautiful look at the Bible.
And I was engrossed in this book from the moment I read that
first sentence,

*"Once upon a time,
there lived a girl with a magic book...
Until I read the last,
...May you always know without a doubt
that you are loved, and
may you always be surrounded
by great stories."*

It is fitting that such a wonderful storyteller took aim at shedding new light and breathing new life into these treasured ancient poems, letters, and stories. Rachel Held Evans was a lover of the Bible. She loved this ancient *Magic Book* and spent most of her

life wrestling with the text to make sense and find meaning. There is a lot of mystery that surrounds this *Inspired* collection of writings, and like other great books, there is a lot of interpretation left to the readers. Also like other great books, the readers reach differing and continually evolving meanings. This *Magic Book* tells a beautiful, complex story that we all continue to share in. And I'm grateful for writers like Rachel who continue to shed light and breathe life into this great anthology.

Reading and writing are two of my favorite activities. Like any other activity or craft, there are varying levels of participation and mastery. I like to think of all writers, past, present, great (e.g., Rachel) and small (e.g., Thom) are in this club unbound by geography and time.

And we writers all have ideas we wrestle with and wish to share. Now I certainly do not consider myself to be a wordsmith, but I do enjoy participation in this craft. I enjoy reading the works of the experts who perform at such an elite level. Rachel is one of those experts I admire. I also have great respect for anyone who takes on a topic that stirs great emotion and can do so with courage, love, and humility.

As I neared the end of the book, I did so with joy and sorrow. I was so grateful for the journey and time I spent with Rachel and her thoughts, but I was sad that it was coming to an end. As I finished off the final few pages, I was drawn deeper and deeper into the story she wove of this greater story we all find ourselves in. And as I read that last line,

*"May you always know
without a doubt
that you are loved,
and may you always be
surrounded by great stories."*

I smiled and sat back satisfied from such a beautiful experience. Before I placed the book back on the shelf, I took a glance back at

the first line, "*Once upon a time, there lived a girl with a magic book...*" I read those words again, "Once upon a time..." What a beautiful way to begin a book. And what a beautiful way to end it. I sat there a moment and held the book, staring at it, thinking of the time and effort this skilled writer spent researching, writing, collaborating, editing, and weaving together this masterpiece. What a gift it was and continues to be.

Thank you, Rachel.

I am grateful for you and inspired by you. And I am grateful for and inspired by the *Magic Book* you so loved. And I am so grateful that we will

"always be surrounded by great stories."

Just Go



I started this journal entry by just beginning.

By just opening a new page and putting down that first sentence.
I write every day.
Not that I have anything special to say.
I simply enjoy the practice.
This practice of writing on a schedule.

Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, and sometimes it's ugly.
But day after day, I write.
Often I have ideas that have been swirling in my mind for quite a while.
Sometimes I find ideas by rereading my old daily journals.
This morning, I sat at the computer with nothing.
I opened a new document with nothing.
And I knew I had nothing, but that didn't stop me.
I just put down that first line.

I just started by beginning.

In his book, *Courage is Calling*, Ryan Holiday tells a story about Charles Lindbergh. According to Holiday, several problems preceded his flight across the Atlantic. Lindbergh was fearful, but climbed into his seat, put on his goggles, and started the engine. Then he taxied, accelerated, and lifted off toward destiny. How did he push through the obstacles and the fears? How did he do it? Ryan says,

"You just do it."

*You leap into the dark.
It's the only way.
Because if you don't, what looms?
Failure. Regret. Shame.
A lost opportunity.
Any hope of moving forward."*

And this daily journal is exactly like Charles Lindbergh taking flight in his single-engine, single seat monoplane over the Atlantic Ocean.

Future generations will speak of this day when I wrote this heroic journal.

Without a doubt, they will say,

*He fought through the fear and uncertainty.
He leapt into the darkness.
He braved the computer screen before him
just as Lindbergh braved the ocean in his windshield.
He clicked and typed and journaled.
And when he did, he found his destiny
waiting for him on the other side.*

Or maybe, this morning,
I was just reminded that sometimes,
we just need to start.
We just need to begin.
We just need to move forward.

Whether we are taking flight across the ocean or clicking keys on our daily journal, we need to just go.
And as I reach the end of this momentous accomplishment of completing a daily journal, I am grateful that I have leapt into the darkness. That I have found my destiny. That I started by just beginning. That I was brave enough to move forward and to just go.

Courageous Possibility



My morning routine is consistent and mundane.
Not at all courageous but full of possibility.
And I absolutely love it.

I've created a relatively simplified system of daily practices
that takes the thinking and decision making out of my mornings.
These intentional practices keep me active and on autopilot
allowing my mind freedom to consume and create.
And perhaps with a tiny bit of courage,
maybe discover a bit of possibility.

Two of my daily practices are reading and journaling.
What I read often influences what I write.
And sometimes what I read rubs against other things I have read.
This is when it gets a little exciting, because
between these worlds is where *adjacent possibility* lives.

This morning,
possibility waited patiently for me to finish reading.
Then it revealed itself to me when I started journaling.

I am currently reading *Courage is Calling* by Ryan Holiday and
this morning, I took note of the chapter called, "make it a habit."
The idea was that if we regularly practice small courageous acts,
we are more likely to perform important courageous acts when
the stakes are higher. We make courage a habit by practicing it.

This clicked for me because my "one word" is mercy. Mercy (along with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness) for self and for others has been a daily focus of mine for the past several weeks. To be merciful, we must practice being merciful. The same is true to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. All of these qualities require regular practice. In doing so, I've found many opportunities to practice mercy in times that matter greatly to myself and to others.

In addition to this glimmer of possibility, I was given another connection in my daily scripture reading. The first was in Luke 2 when the angel said, "do not be afraid." I followed that passage with passage from 1 John 4 that states, "there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear..." (*thank you for sharing that gem with me, Matt Stark*). What stands between possibility and action is fear. These two passages were timed well with this reading from Holiday and my reminder of adjacent possibility. But it doesn't end there.

I'm also re-reading Rob Bell's, *Everything is Spiritual* and reading Richard Rohr's *Yes, And*. The passage from Bell was discussing the Spirit of Christ that is shared by all humanity past and present. The great body of Christ. I followed this with Rohr's discussion of "the communion of saints" where he talks of us all being part of the "Great Whole" of humanity and all of us being part of this body of Christ. It seems clear that these two men are onto something. Something that created a little possibility for me as well.

The journey of life and our spiritual journeys are filled with mystery. There are a lot of questions to ask, interpretations to make, and wrestling to do. And in all of this, we need to have some courage. We need to be not afraid. To stretch and grow and go deeply takes practice.

To stretch and grow takes habit. To stretch and grow takes trust and openness and connection. To stretch and grow takes mercy

and kindness and compassion and forgiveness for ourselves and for each other as we venture on this journey that all humanity enters. This great whole, this great flow, this great body of humanity. Together, past and present. And we find possibility when we have the courage to trust in faith, the courage to be open in hope, and the courage to be connected in love.

SUNDAY - 1948, WY.
 Letter from, SUNDAY
 Answer to MAVE SAICED
 or by MAVE Huif
 Unattended living, untamable, many
 a night, meeting something sacred

I was told, more than once,
"No running in the sanctuary!"

But now
I'm second guessing
this sanctuary rule.

They said it was a *consecrated place...sacred.*
A place for worship...a place of refuge.
A sanctum...free from intrusion.

As parents, we will not be perfect,
but we can pay attention, be engaged, and be open.
We can invest our time and our energy.

Engagement requires us to invest.
We offer, surrender, and sacrifice.
We make things "holy" or set apart.

Brené says that wholehearted living (and parenting)
is imperfect, vulnerable, and messy.
But it creates something sacred.

Which brings us back to the sanctuary.
This sacred space made holy, in spite of
and because of our imperfect presence.

So why is there no running allowed?
Why is there no playing and laughing and chasing?
I think this rule, this mandate, deserves a second look.

I don't remember Jesus having a sanctuary rule.
I remember him calling for the children.
With all of their life and energy and imperfection and joy.

We need to remember that everywhere we step is sacred ground.
So let's take our kids' lead and play and engage in life.
And let's go for a little run in the sanctuary.

We Will and We Must



We are all part of something bigger than ourselves.
We are all connected to one great story of life.
We all have our moments.

Those before us who are now gone.
Those after us who have yet to be.
And those of us here. Now.

This has been true since the beginning.
We have this shared human experience.
And each story is unique in its particulars.

We share in life together.
This life that spans time and distance.
It is both humbling and awe-inspiring.

I enjoy reading Ryan Holiday.
He introduced me to the Latin,
Memento Mori, "remember, you will die."

It is not meant to be grim.
It is meant to be a reminder.
It reminds us to live each day fully.

I like to add the phrase, *Memento Vivere*,
which means "remember, you must live."
We must appreciate the gift of life's moments.

We are all part of this great story.
A story that started before us.
A story that will continue after us.

This is our day and our moment.
How will we live it?
Remember, we must choose.
Today, I choose appreciation.

I choose awe and wonder
of this great story we share, and
of this gift we have "to remember."

To remember, we will.
To remember, we must.
To remember today.

Today, May We



Today, may we
remember the beauty of life.
May we
be instruments of peace.

Today, may we
be patient and present.
May we
spend time in silence and stillness.
May we
have serenity, courage and wisdom.

Today, may we
trust, be open, and connect.
May we
be centered, mind, body, and spirit
in our action and in our contemplation.

Today, may we
live with mercy and compassion
and kindness and forgiveness
for ourselves and
for others.
May we
find rest in Christ,
peace in God, and
freedom in the Spirit.

Today, may we
recognize our permission to
ask, seek, knock,
question, wrestle, wait, and listen.
May we
let go of ourselves,
say 'yes' to life, and
be transformed.

Today, may we
be grateful for this day.
May we
love and have reverence for all life.
May we
rediscover our childlike wonder and awe.

Today, may we
seek to be surprised and delighted.
May we
find joy and beauty and laughter.
May we
find appreciation.

Today, may we
remember the beauty of life.
May we
live fully.
May we
love deeply.

May we, today.

Unconditional Mercy



and Reckless Love.

It's been some time since I chose the word, Mercy to be my "One Word." Mercy is what I am striving to attain. I want to have mercy for myself and for others. I'm developing a deeper sense of and reverence for life. The miracle of life that surrounds me in all its beautiful imperfection. More and more, I'm finding wonder and awe in it all. And more and more, I'm finding the need for mercy in my life. For myself and for others.

This past summer, I was at the Oklahoma First Church of the Nazarene. The pastor, Jason Smith, spoke about the "reckless love of the Sower." This message has stuck with me. So has the image of this seed sower. No time to look back to see if the seed is taking root. There are more seeds to sow. It is a seemingly imperfect plan to spread love in this manner, and I love this beautiful image. I love this way to approach this life. I love this mindset. Loving recklessly. Always moving forward.

Every morning I enter a sanctuary. A place set aside to spend time in thought and prayer. A place to come to an altar. A place where I find I am being altered. Being transformed. This place is my quiet time of reading and writing and praying and journaling. Each day, I am greeted with a blank notebook page. I write the date and time. Then I write the word, "Mercy." Then I follow this word with a short phrase, "for self and others." I find it to be a good way to start my journal practice and my day.

This past week, I've started my journal with one word, mercy. Then I've added the word, "unconditional" before it. Then I've added the phrase, "and reckless love" after it. And I still add the

familiar "for self and others." It sets the tone for this time in the sanctuary, at the altar. This week, I have set the intention of leaning into mercy. Often I fail. Often I succeed. I find it a worthy intention.

In the week to come, I plan to continue this practice. I plan to continue setting this intention to my day. I'm certain I will fail. And I'm certain I will succeed. And through it all, I will offer myself mercy. I will offer others mercy. I will offer myself reckless love. I will offer others reckless love. I have found a deeper appreciation and reverence for life. I have found many times when others and I lack reverence for this life. And I have found mercy to be an appropriate response.

Mercy offers healing and comfort. Mercy shows compassion. In a world with so many things beyond our control, mercy is a gift we can offer ourselves and others in this beautiful, imperfect miracle of life. Mercy can be unconditional if we so choose. Our love can be reckless as well. These are choices we can control as we find the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, find the courage to change the things we can, and find the wisdom to know the difference.

You Have Heard It Said



"You have heard it said...but I tell you..."

~ Jesus

I was rereading the *Sermon on the Mount*. And I was reminded of the wisdom of this teaching. I imagine the audience was filled with listeners very familiar with the Law and the Prophets. The teachings and expectations had been handed down from generation to generation and they had very likely "heard it said" much of their lives. So I love the way Jesus both includes and transcends the familiar words with "but I tell you." He does not discard the teachings. He takes the teachings a step further. He wants the listeners to dig deeper.

I've been teaching math for the past twenty-six years, and I've taught every grade level from fourth grade through high school. What I find interesting is that for the most part, I've been teaching them all the same big ideas. For all those years and all those grade levels, I've taught the same basic concepts and skills. The only difference is the varying levels of depth and complexity. When it comes to the big ideas of problem solving and communication in math, my older students have most certainly "heard it said" over and over again.

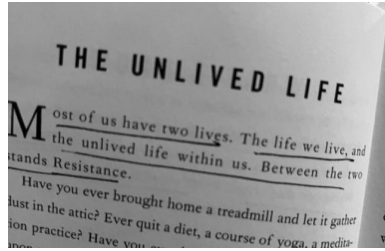
So as I was reading *the Sermon*, I was thinking of my students. The ones who have "heard it said." They have learned the rules and formulas. They have figured out how to "do math." Then I think of the times when something happens. The times when

something clicks. The times when they move past "the what" and catch a glimpse of "the why." I was thinking of the listeners of *the Sermon* who also began catching this glimpse. They had a foundation and knew the rules and teachings, but then something happened. Jesus takes it a step further. He makes a claim that requires the listeners to look back, look forward, and then dig deeper.

This is how good teachers teach. They meet students where they are and then build on their understanding. A good strategy is to surprise the learner. To use stories and examples and thoughts that stretch them to think a step beyond what they already know and give them something to consider. To include (you have heard it said) and to transcend (but I tell you). I imagine the listeners had a good foundation. But the listeners become learners when they are surprised by the words of this sermon. I love this image because I get to see a version of this so often in my classroom.

So I encourage you, as I encourage myself, to take a step beyond "the what" and consider "the why" of this teaching. Think back to your days in the classroom as a learner. Think of how much you grew in the depth of your wisdom and understanding from year to year. You have heard it said that it is good to know the what, but I tell you it is even better to know the why. When you have "arrived" is the perfect time to start digging deeper.

The Unlived Life



*Most of us have two lives.
The life we live, and the unlived life within us.
Between the two stands Resistance.
~ Steven Pressfield*

I just read my journal entry from last year on this same date.
I was in Albuquerque, New Mexico,
headed to *the Center for Action and Contemplation*.
The second destination on my summer renewal project.
I had taken a few books with me.
One was Steven Pressfield's, *The War of Art*.

In my journal, I quoted these lines from the book.
It's a powerful thought that each of us has an unlived life.
That each of us has a calling that is unique and ours alone.
And yet, there is a gap.
There is something that separates us from
that unlived version of ourselves.
Steven personifies that something as Resistance.
The enemy that defeats us before we begin.


As I journaled, I was beginning an adventure.
A summer journey of travel and self-discovery.
A writer's contemplation.
A time of drawing peace and pouring stillness.
And each morning began with reading, writing, and prayer.

Last summer, I began to close the gap.
I was closer than ever to living that unlived life.
 Living that life of a writer.
 Living that life of prayer.
 Living that life of action and contemplation.

My summer renewal project came to a close,
but my quest did not.
I continue to close the gap between this life and the life unlived.
Each day, Resistance makes his presence known.
Each day, I am aware of his presence.
And each day, I do the work to live that life I wish to live.

 Next year at this time, I plan to be closer still.
 Always moving forward.
 Always closing the gap.
 Always battling Resistance.
As I work to remove the “un” from my unlived life.

Changed People Change People



*Changed people
change people*

*"When we love,
we always strive to become better than we are.
When we strive to become better than we are,
everything around us becomes better too."
— Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist*

A few days ago, I started reading Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. I am only a few dozen pages in and am already captivated. An "alchemist" is someone who transforms things for the better. "Alchemy" is the seemingly magical process of transformation, turning something ordinary into something extraordinary. *I had to look those words up.*

In Paul's Letter to the Romans, he said we are to
"be transformed by the renewing of our minds."
This verse has resonated with me for decades.
I've spent a lot of time with that passage in thought and prayer.
And this week, I made a connection and I considered a few familiar quotes.

*"Be the change you wish to see in the world." Gandhi
"Everyone thinks of changing the world,
no one thinks of changing himself." Tolstoy
"Transformed people transform people." Rohr*

This week, I spoke with a group of kids at a church youth camp.
I shared thoughts about what I've learned in my role as chaplain
at the sheriff's office.
And this is message I shared.

Our job is not to change people.
Our job is to be changed.
Because changed people change people.

In my experience, there is not really much that we have to do
to have a profound effect on people.
It is more important that we be.
We should be looking, be listening, and be loving.

I think Jesus said it best
that we have just two commands: love God and love others.
And Paul closes *the love chapter* by saying,
"these three remain: faith, hope, and love,
but the greatest of these is love."

I would say we show this when we, "look, listen, and love."
When we look people in the eye or look to God, we are attentive.
When we listen to people or listen to God, we are silent and
present.
When we love, we are taking part in the great alchemy of life,
the seemingly magical process of transformation,
turning something ordinary into something extraordinary,
in ourselves and in others.

So this week, may we strive to become better than we are.
Not by doing anything, but rather by being changed.
And may we seek only to change others by looking, listening, and
loving.

Because changed people change people.

Prayer and Reflection



Thom Miller
man of faith, family, and
community
teacher, coach, and chaplain
contemplative writer

I love that Jesus would often take time to retreat to a quiet place where he could find rest and renewal. What a compelling practice he modeled for us. It's so easy to get caught up in the Action of living life and neglect the Contemplation of living this life. It is wise for us to follow Jesus's example, taking time to retreat and care for ourselves mind, body, and spirit.

The book you hold contains a series of journal reflections during a transformative season of change and renewing in my spiritual life. As you read through these journals, I hope you recognize your own seasons of change. And I hope you recognize that you and I are not in a state, but rather, we are on a quest. A quest for serenity, courage, and wisdom. A quest for faith, hope, and love. A quest for action, contemplation, and transformation. A quest for Renewing.

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