



Dear Participants,

We hope you will accept this guide as an offering, in addition to the worship resources and devotions, as a means of deeply engaging with the practices of prayer, Scripture, silence, fasting, sabbath, and service. These activities are suggestions, especially for those who do not know where to start. Try one activity or try them all. At the end of this resource guide, you will find additional texts that we have referenced that you might deem helpful in cultivating the spiritual practices that allow you to know God more fully. Our prayer is that you will be awakened to grace through these practices.

In Christ,

The Awakened to Grace Team

## **Awakened Through Prayer** **Exploring the Breadth of Christian Prayer**

Prayer is so much more than asking God for things. It is the kitchen table around which we build a living relationship with Christ.

### **Prayer as Friendship with God**

*“Prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.”* — Teresa of Ávila

Teresa reminds us that prayer is not a duty or performance but friendship — a way of being with the One who loves us.

Practice:

1. Write or say a prayer as if you were talking to a friend. Share the mundanities of life and your feelings at the time of your prayer. Like a friend who you might text just to say, “Hi. How are you?”, what might you say to God?

Reflect or Journal:

1. When I speak to God, do I tend to “perform” or “report,” or do I share my thoughts and feelings the way I would with a trusted friend?
2. What would change if I brought not only my needs, but also my gratitude, frustrations, and even my ordinary daily experiences into prayer?
3. How might I make more space in prayer to “listen” as well as speak — the way I would in a genuine friendship?

### **Prayer as Silence and Longing**

*“Prayer is an expression of who we are... We are a living incompleteness. We are a gap, an emptiness that calls for fulfillment.”* — Thomas Merton

Practice: Centering Prayer

1. Sit for a short period of time in silence. (If this is a new practice, try 5 min) You’ll want to be in a comfortable position, so you can fully relax, but not fall asleep. You may want to use a gentle sounding timer to mark your period of silence, and keep you from being focused on time. If this is a new practice, try 5 minutes.

2. Choose a focus word like peace, or love, or Spirit. This is a way of opening and reminding yourself of your intention to awaken your awareness of God's presence.
3. It is very common to experience a wandering mind when learning this practice. Each time your mind wanders, gently return to the word. Imagine you are using the word like a feather delicately brushing the palm of your hand, to peacefully guide your mind back toward awareness of God with you.
4. Rest in God, allowing your "living incompleteness" to be filled by God's presence.

Reflect or Journal:

*What surfaced in the silence? How did I feel about my own "incompleteness"?*

### **Prayer as Transformation**

*"To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us."* — Richard Foster

Practice: Prayer of Surrender

1. Take a few slow breaths and imagine placing yourself fully before God.
2. Reflect on one area of your life where you resist change (a habit, an attitude, or a relationship). Or a place in your life right now in which you are longing to grow.
3. Hold that area gently before God. Try to create a visual image or metaphor for that area and hold this in your mind as God meets with you in the midst of this habit, attitude, or relationship.
4. Offer God your consent to let things grow or change. "Lord, I open this part of my life to your transforming love."
5. Thank God for joining you in this place of growth and challenge.

### **Reflection Prompt:**

What did I notice when I brought my resistance or struggle into prayer? What might God be inviting me to release or embrace in order to be transformed?

### **Prayer as a Way of Life**

*"Whether we think of, or speak to, God, whether we act or suffer for Him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than His love, and the desire of pleasing Him."* — *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* — John Wesley

### Practice: The Examen

1. Think back through the events of your day (or week) as if you are watching a movie montage of quick moments.
2. Ask God to help you notice where you were closest to Christ.
3. Ask God to show you where you were furthest from Christ.
4. Celebrate, repent, and get guidance from God about how to move forward tomorrow in the most loving, just, and generous way.

### Reflect or Journal:

- *Which way of prayer surprised me most?*
- *Which might I want to practice more regularly?*

## Awakened Through Scripture

One way in which we can be awakened to God's movement in our life, to what God is saying to us, is through the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, or "divine reading." The basic format of *lectio* is read, reflect, respond and rest. Allow the Spirit to move in you and respond to God's grace as the Scripture is proclaimed. Similarly, the practice of *visio divina*, or "divine seeing" allows us to engage a different sense, our sense of sight, to see how God is moving in our lives through sacred images.

### A Method for Group Lectio and Visio Divina

Written by: Christy Allen Holden

#### *Lectio Divina*

##### 1) Prepare:

- a) As you gather, pray together, explain the process, and then set the atmosphere. You might light a candle or enjoy a piece of quiet worship music together. Choose three different readers for the text. Make sure everyone in the group has a printed copy of the text in the same version.

##### 2) Step 1 - Lectio:

- a) Share with people that in this step, we will hear the reading and be listening for whatever word or phrase stands out to us. People might choose to circle or mark or write down that word or phrase from the text. The goal here is just to focus on what emerges. We are not evaluating or analyzing. We're just allowing words or phrases that stand out to be acknowledged.

**Our focus question here is: "What is emerging from this text?"**

- b) The first reader offers the first reading. Leave at least two full minutes for silence after the reading ends.
- c) At the end of the silence, each participant will simply speak the word or phrase without any further commentary. It is important to keep this boundary for this round.

##### 3) Step 2 – Oratio:

- a) Share with the group that we will hear the reading a second time. This time, we may return to words or phrases that emerged in the first pass, or new things may emerge. That is ok. Wherever the Spirit leads, follow.

**Our focus question here is: “What meaning do these words hold?”**

- b) The Second Reader offers the reading. Again, allow silence after the reading for several minutes. Participants are invited to journal about their understanding of the emerging words or phrases. What particular meaning, significance, or connections do these words hold?
- c) In the sharing circle, participants are invited to share one sentence about the meaning that their word or phrase holds for them.

**4) Step 3 – Meditatio:**

- a) During this period, we return to the text for a final time to discover more about how this text and the words that have emerged, intersect with our real daily living, or that of our community.

**Our focus question here is: “How does what the Spirit is showing me in this text, converge with my life and the needs of my community?”**

- b) The Third Reader will read the passage a final time, allowing silence after the reading for several minutes. Participants journal about how these emerging ideas can be applied in daily living to help us become more loving, just, and generous. How can I move forward from this experience holding what I have learned here, in ways that allow me to grow spiritually and respond to needs in my community?
- c) In the sharing circle, participants are invited to share about how they are experiencing this intersection, and what they think might be helpful next steps or commitments.

**5) Step 4 – Contemplatio:**

- a) Rest in the awareness that the Holy Spirit is our loving companion and guide. Thank God together for the blessing of this time with God, with the scriptures, and with each other.

*Visio Divina*<sup>1</sup>

1. Pick out an image from a website: a photograph, painting, or icon.

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<sup>1</sup> Steps for Visio Divina taken from <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina>

2. Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the first thing you see. Focus your attention on the part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.

3. Let your eyes now gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so

4. Consider the following questions:

- What emotions does this image evoke in you?
- What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
- Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.

5. Offer your prayers to God now in a final time of silence.

## **Scriptural Storytelling Meditation<sup>2</sup>**

Try a creative form of meditation based on scriptural storytelling. Choose a familiar scriptural story in which there are a number of characters, such as one of the healing Jesus did. You may want to look at Mark's Gospel for such stories of healing. When you meditate, play one or more of the roles in order to experience the grace of meditation more fully. A group may do this exercise by assigning the roles beforehand, then praying privately and returning to reflect on the experience.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffin, *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines* (New York, New York? HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2007), 15.

## **Awakened Through Silence**

*Plan to take some time off, and give some thought as to what you'd do with that time; hopefully, you'll spend part of it reviewing God's favors to you in the past.*

*What else? Lock up ye olde curiosity shop. Devote more time to reading your spiritual books than your survival manuals. Withdraw from casual conversation and leisurely pursuits. Don't contract for new ventures and don't gossip about old ones. All these having been done, you'll find more than enough time to undertake a program of meditation. Most of the Saints did just that, avoided collaborative projects whenever they could, choosing instead to spend some private time with God.* -Thomas à Kempis

Silence can be the physical absence of sound within a space, but silence can also be the quieting of one's mind to hear God's voice in the midst of a noisy, chaotic world. Because we live in a chaotic world, full to the brim with overwhelming experiences of the senses, we can find ourselves uncomfortable with times of silence, of nothingness, of stillness. Some of these practices may seem overly simplistic. And yet, upon reflection, you may find that even the most simple practices can be uncomfortable. We encourage you to sit in your discomfort and work to connect your thoughts and emotions.

### **Lean into the Silence**

Have a regular conversation with someone. When you feel the conversation is at a lull, where there might be a pause, allow that pause to take place. Rather than picking up your device or making small talk to fill the space, allow the silence to wash over you and your conversation partner.

Reflect: How did I feel about sitting in silence? Did my mind wander? If my feelings were those of discomfort or annoyance or unease, what might be the cause of those feelings?

### **Cultivate Silence**

1. List in your journal (or with your group) two or three practical steps you can take to stop rushing around, spinning your wheels, and running scared from life pressures (What about taking a day off from local, national, and international

news?).<sup>3</sup> Once, you have those steps, put them into practice daily, weekly or monthly (depending on how often you need to do them).

Reflect: How can I restructure my daily routine to practice silence at some time of the day or week?<sup>4</sup>

2. Plan an experience of solitude that includes some formal use of silence. Perhaps this could be in a retreat center near you, or even in an unexpected locale, like an urban park in the center of a noisy metropolis. It is important to keep a journal record about an experience of solitude; also, it is well, at some later time, to reflect on the benefits of such an experience.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 158.

## Awakened Through Fasting

### Reflective Practice: Let Me Be Full, Let Me Be Empty

#### Introduction

John Wesley saw fasting as a **means of grace** — not a test of willpower but a practice of humility and willingness to make room for God to work in us.

The **Wesley Covenant Prayer** gives us a language for this self-opening:

“Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal.”

This guide will help you step into fasting as a prayer lived with your body — an offering of self-emptying love to God.

#### Before the Fast: “Let Me Be Empty”

Scripture: Isa 58:5-7, Phil 2:1-11

#### Prayer of Preparation

God of grace, I come before You with open hands. Empty me of distractions and self-reliance. Prepare me to hunger for You above all things. Amen.

#### Reflection Prompts

1. What do I need to empty myself as I enter this fast? From what am I fasting? (busy-ness, speaking, noise, food, spending, social media, ill speech)
2. How do I tend to fill my emptiness? What do I plan to say to myself when, during this set aside period, I feel tempted to re-engage what I am fasting from?
3. What question or intention will I carry with me into this fast?

#### During the Fast: “Let Me Be Full”

Scripture: John 6:35-40

#### Prayer in Emptiness

“Lord Jesus, Bread of Life, even as I am empty, fill me with Your Spirit. May my emptiness become space for Your presence.”

### **Reflection Prompts**

1. Where do I notice emptiness today — in body, spirit, or heart? How am I aware of my need for this open space?
2. What surprises or insights am I experiencing in the midst of feeling emptied?
3. How does fasting connect me with those who are empty against their will?

### **Breaking the Fast: “Let Me Have All Things”**

Scripture: Luke 24:30–31 — Jesus made known in the breaking of bread

### **Prayer of Gratitude**

Generous God, thank You for all that sustains life. Thank You for Your presence in emptiness and in fullness. As I break this fast, let me be more deeply aware of Your daily provision and more generous in offering myself in generosity to others.

Amen.

### **Reflection Prompts**

1. How did I experience God’s presence in emptiness? In fullness?
2. What surprised me about fasting as prayer?
3. How might God be calling me to share what I have with others who hunger?
4. How can I continue to live the Covenant Prayer — empty and full — beyond this fast?

### **Ongoing Practice: “I Freely and Heartily Yield All Things”**

- Consider repeating this practice regularly (e.g., once a week/month)
- Let fasting be joined with acts of mercy — giving food, time, or resources to others.
- Return often to the Covenant Prayer, letting it anchor your commitment to God.

## Practice Simplicity<sup>6</sup>

One way for families with young children to ease into the practice of fasting is through simplification. This is slightly different from fasting, but it allows children to focus on ways in which we can simplify our days and center our lives on Christ. Try one of the following simplifications:

**Instead of:** Giving up screens

**Try:** Going outside

Leave the screen inside while you experience the beauty of the created world outdoors.

**Instead of:** Giving up sugary drinks

**Try:** Drinking more water

Give thanks for the water we receive and reflect on how God gives us life through living water.

**Instead of:** Giving up internet scrolling or games

**Try:** Reading books or listening to audiobooks

We might think we don't have time to read, but when we add up the time spent on video games or internet scrolling, there's a significant amount of time that might be better spent reading or enjoying a full book.<sup>7</sup> Try reading books that allow you to learn more about God or your global neighbors. Or read a book that you enjoy but look for the divine in the words written. How can you experience God through your reading?

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<sup>6</sup> Ideas on simplicity pulled from Tracy Smith, *Faithful Families for Lent, Easter, and Resurrection: Simple Ways to Create Meaning for the Season* (Ashland: Chalice Press, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 41.

## Awakened Through Sabbath

*“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”*

- Genesis 2:1-3

Sabbath is vital. Sabbath rest is holy. Rest is the way in which we take deep breaths, replenish our bodies, and reset our minds. Perhaps you remember the days when everything shut down on a Sunday- no grocery stores, no commercial stores, nothing open. It was easy to participate in the practice of sabbath when it was the only option. In a fast-paced, commercial-driven society, an emphasis on sabbath rest no longer exists. Now, we must actively create the rhythms in our lives. It's a discipline that requires a shift in schedule and a shift in mindset. You may not have a whole day at the moment to commit to rest, but maybe that is the ideal. Perhaps you can carve out a portion of each day, or build in a spiritual day once a month, to find the time to feed your mind, body and soul. Try out one of these actions with the intention of focusing on your connection with God:

- Take a walk, free of screens (you may listen to music or an audiobook) and take in the world around you.
- Practice a restful hobby.
- Take a nap.
- Slowly enjoy a beverage of your choice.
- Read a book or listen to an audiobook.
- Pray.
- Read Scripture.
- Eat a good meal.
- Encourage those around you (especially your pastors) to participate in restorative practices.
- Create boundaries from work and life that prioritize rest.

For more information on rest, take a look at The Nap Ministry:

<https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>

## Awakened Through Service

The first two activities are inspired by the book *Parenting for a Better World*, edited by Susanna Snyder and Ellen Ott Marshall. While the intent of many of these activities is to have children in your life engage in social justice practices, I believe that any of us would benefit from these practices, with children in tow or without. Try one or try them all.

### Practice Kindness

“We love because God first loved us.” (1 John 4:19 CEB) Though kindness and love are not quite the same, as children, some of the ways they learn to show love is through the practice of kindness- to oneself, to each other, and to the planet. As we care for God’s creation through kindness, we come to experience and know more of God’s creation.

#### 1. Practice kindness toward self.

- Create a list of affirmations, the different things you like about yourself. They can be comments like, “I like that I ask so many questions”, “I am brave”, or “I love my wild curly hair.” Now, stand in front of a mirror and recite those affirmations. Once you have recited those affirmations, repeat but add “because I am a child of God, made in the image of God” to the end of each affirmation.

#### 2. Practice kindness toward others.

- Make a meal together to take to someone in your congregation who might be going through a hard time or who is experiencing sickness.
- Bake cookies and drop them off at your local firehouse.
- Offer your assistance to neighbors who might have small projects, like mowing the grass or weeding, that they need help with but do not have the ability to complete.

#### 3. Practice kindness toward the planet.

- Spend the morning picking up trash around a local park or body of water. While you are there, take some time to marvel at God’s good creation.

- Pick out a cause or something that you care deeply about in creation (animals, national parks, water, gardening, etc.). Make a list of ways in which you can assist in helping your specific cause.

As a follow up, take some time to reflect on these questions:

1. Who and what did I see?
2. Who don't I see?
3. What do I hear?
4. How do I see God at work in the person, place, or experience I encountered?
5. How do I feel after my encounter?

### **Pilgrimage of Solidarity by Anton Flores-Maisonet**

According to Anton Flores-Maisonet, a pilgrimage of solidarity helps children (and adults) “*see* the world as God does, to *hear* the voices of the voiceless that God hears, and to *know* what it means to lead a compassionate life of radical solidarity.”<sup>8</sup>

Flores-Maisonet suggests planning a reverse pilgrimage with your children. “A reverse pilgrimage is an opportunity to see oneself in the reflection of a new mirror, an opportunity to pause the rat race and embrace one’s own complicity and powerlessness in the face of massive inequality...Reverse pilgrimage is a journey inward through which we—we hope—are the ones being changed.”<sup>9</sup>

- Don’t serve behind the counter at a soup kitchen. Visit a soup kitchen, stand in line, be fed and sit down with the unhoused. Introduce yourselves and ask their names. Shake your companions’ hands. And then listen. Listen deeply.
- Ask good open-ended questions, and don’t forget to share about yourselves as well.
- Establish common ground. Get your children to ask your new companion(s) about their childhood. What common interests did (or do) they share?

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<sup>8</sup> Susanna Snyder and Ellen Ott Marshall, *Parenting for a Better World: Social Justice Practices for Your Family and the Planet* (Ashland: Chalice Press, 2022), 87.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

- When the meal is over, give your sincere gratitude and maybe an embrace.
- On the journey home, explore with your child what this reverse pilgrimage meant to them, using these questions:
  - What did your eyes see that inspired or confused you today? How do you think God saw that?
  - What is something our meal companion shared that most affected you?
  - What do you think breaks the heart of God in what we experienced today? What of what we experienced today fills God's heart with love?
  - Now what is God inviting us to do in response? <sup>10</sup>

## **Service Scavenger Hunt and Community Tour**

How well do you know the city, town or community you call home? Using these prompts as a guide, get to know the history of your church and community while serving the people who live there. Building community is about engaging each other with curiosity, asking questions, and finding common threads of connection. Do this alone or gather a group of folks from your congregation or small group to participate in this reflective activity.

1. Where does your church serve? Look up the organizations or groups that your church commits to serving. Pick a day and serve with one of those organizations.
2. Do you have a history museum or historical sites in your town? Learn the history of your town. Often, this will reveal to you the injustices that existed (or still exist) as well as the common themes that bring a community together.
3. Assemble a checklist of some of the things in your town. How many schools or restaurants does your town have? Grocery stores? Public transportation? Public buildings? Hospitals and medical offices? Places of worship? Are there gaps in public services for people? Reflect on what we might be able to do if these places work together in collaboration.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 96.

4. Drive to a part of town you don't normally drive through. Reflect on why it is that you don't go to that area of town. Wonder for a moment what the people are like in this part of town. Pray for the flourishing of the people in the neighborhood.
5. Find animal shelters, shelters for unhoused people, and food pantries within your town or county. If there is not one within a ten-mile radius to your town, do some research as to why that may be the case. Brainstorm ideas to help fill in any gaps that may exist with services for the most vulnerable people and creatures in your town.
6. Visit a locally-owned restaurant and learn the story of the people who own the restaurant. Ask them what is required to run a small business.
7. Walk your neighborhood park or trail. Pick up trash as you go. Note the types of trash you pick up. Is there a theme? Question why it might be that certain trash ends up where it does and what could be done to alleviate its presence.

## **A Reflective Practice: How Can I Make a Difference?**

### **Opening**

Begin with a moment of stillness or prayer, invite God's Spirit to join with you as a conversation partner.

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Frederick Buechner

Journal Briefly: What do you notice in these words? What if anything stirs in you?

### **Step 1: Discovering My Deep Gladness**

Deep gladness is at the center of being your unique God-made self. Every person has passions, talents and skills, and spiritual gifts. When we engage these parts of ourselves, we can feel a deep sense of joy and fulfillment.

Reflect in your journal:

1. What activities, roles, or practices make me lose track of time because I feel so alive while doing them?
2. When do I feel most energized, joyful, or grateful?

3. What gifts, skills, or talents have others affirmed in me?
4. If money, fear, or expectations were not obstacles, what would I spend my days doing?

**Prompt:** Write down specific stories or moments—not just abstract ideas. Look for patterns.

### **Step 2: Exploring the World's Deep Hunger**

In this step, consider the issues, challenges, and needs you notice in the world around you. This can be both global and local.

Reflect through writing or journaling:

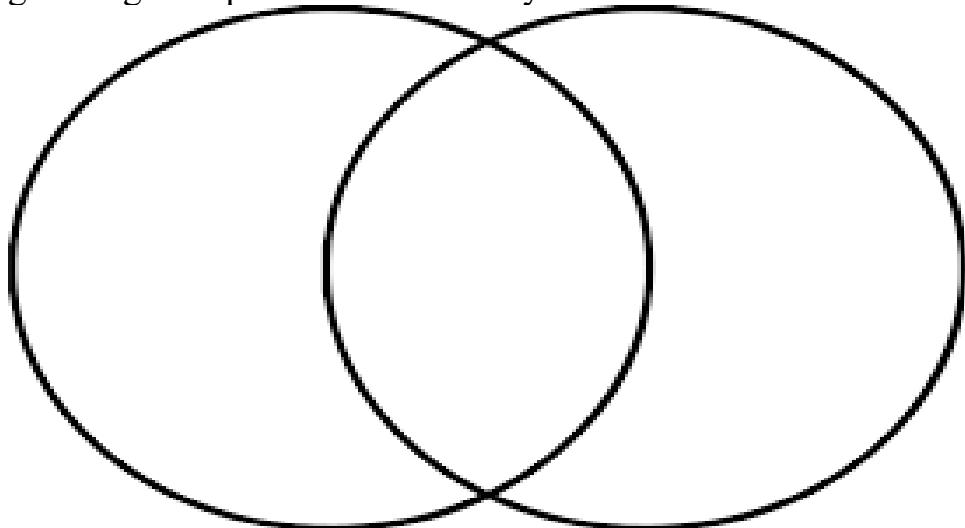
1. What injustices, broken systems, or wounds in the world move me to grief or holy anger?
2. Whose suffering is hard for me to turn away from?
3. Where do I feel an ache or longing for change, healing, or renewal in the world?
4. In what communities or issues do I sense God tugging my heart to pay attention?

**Prompt:** Name and write down some of these hungers specifically.

### **Step 3: Points of Intersection**

Now, prayerfully explore overlap between your responses in Steps 1 and 2.

- Circle or highlight the words/phrases that stand out most from each list.
  - Using the Circle Diagram, write things you have identified in the appropriate spaces,
  - In the overlapping space, write down possible ways your passion and gifts might help to meet the needs you named.



## Reflection Questions:

1. How could my joy become nourishment for the world's hunger?
2. Where might my gifts be good news for someone else?
3. Who else is working on things that I might join in with?

## Step 4: Prayer

Lord, guide my heart today.

Show me where my joy meets the world's need.

Give me wisdom to discern,

courage to follow,

and love to serve in Your name.

Amen.

## Step 5: Next Steps

- Write down one **small, concrete next step** you can take to explore serving in this possible area of impact. (Examples: volunteering with a specific group, setting up a conversation with someone working in the field, experimenting with a creative project, or shifting a daily habit.)
- Share your commitment with a trusted friend, pastor, or group for accountability.

## Closing

*God does not call us to ease or comfort, but to joy. God does not call us to scarcity, but to love poured out. May we find the place where our gladness and the world's hunger meet, and may we walk there courageously.*

Take a deep breath, giving thanks to God for the insight you've gained, and the mystery still unfolding.

## Works Cited

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