



Week 5

exploring
**HUMANITY
& DIVINITY**

A SEVEN-WEEK
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL





FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
OF DECATUR

INTRODUCTION | Before You Begin

It is our hope and prayer this collection of devotional materials will help you on your journey through Lent this year.

The original idea for these entries came from a project for a seminary student at McAfee School of Theology. He and I had long conversations about the intersection of humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus. We wanted to find a way to capture those ideas on paper and put them into a booklet to help others process similar ideas during Lent. So this 7-week long series of devotional entries focuses on just that: wrestling with our humanity trying to transform itself into the likeness of Christ.

The entries throughout the next several weeks explore themes of:

- desire, love, motivation, and emotion;
- purpose and meaning;
- belonging;
- ability;
- security;
- creativity;
- suffering; and
- death and resurrection

The devotional contains one meditation per day, for 3-5 days each week. Each meditation embodies three movements: Learning, Reflection, and Action.

The Learning section of each meditation will consist of either a short personal story framing the theme, a passage of scripture with a short commentary of some sort, a piece of artwork, short imaginative story, or poem. This will lead into the Reflection section of the meditation. This part of the meditation will likely be a guided spiritual exercise in the form of: a written prayer, reflection questions for a journaling, prescribed silence, creation awareness, centering prayer, breath prayer, colloquy, prayer of imagination, etc.. The final part of the meditation will be a step that leads to action, likely either a short prayer, challenge, or the simple question, “What is the loving action associated with today’s reflection?”

It might be helpful to highlight scripture references in your own Bible and to write your responses to some of the reflection questions in a journal. So if you do not have one, it is recommended you get one to best engage in some of the exercises contained within.

Again, it is our hope and prayer these devotions help guide you down a meaningful path of reflection throughout Lent this year. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns along the way, please do not hesitate to reach out to a member on staff.

God bless you on your journey,

Matt Snyder
Director of Communications
First Baptist Church of Decatur

WEEK FIVE

Creativity

The goal of this week's meditations is to reflect on creativity. When we are safe and secure it is remarkably easier to hear God whispering gently within.

A common experience when listening to the leading of the Spirit is a surge of creative energy! This act of creativity can be a time of worship, play, conversation, or communion with the Divine presence. The guiding question for this week is: How does God call or energize us to create or respond to the Divine presence?

Contributors:

Monday, April 8	Kelsey Lewis
Tuesday, April 9	David Jordan
Wednesday, April 10	Kristen Koger
Thursday, April 11	Jackie Durham
Friday, April 12	Matt Snyder

Monday, April 8

Written by: Kelsey Lewis

Learn

My preferred medium is the written word. With words one can give life, bind up internal wounds, bridge divides, express love, engage imagination, break hearts, and create worlds. For a year I served as an intern at Emory's Office of Spiritual and Religious life. My responsibility was to oversee a program called Café Unity, an interfaith free-thought poetry club which met in the undergraduate dorms on Emory's campus. Each week we shared poetry or narrative prose on a given topic — often socially or politically charged issues, which were controversial in nature. This diverse group of students were able to express their differing views through their art in such a way that was constructive and generative, rather than inciting debate or a desperate search for common ground.

It worked because creativity is inherently life-giving. When we create, we are giving birth to pieces of our point of view, giving the world little pieces of ourselves. This is what God did when God made us.

“Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” – Genesis 1:26-27

What does it mean to be “made in God's image”? Modern Christians have a sophisticated enough view to know that an anthropomorphized Deity doesn't sit in the heavens somewhere with a long white beard, lightning bolt in hand. That's an image of Zeus more than our Jehovah.

Instead, our Godly image is internal rather than external. Our capacity to love, our desire to be known and understood, that inner sense of right and wrong, these are all traits inherited from our heavenly parent. One often overlooked trait given to us is innate creativity. Each person, whether or not they would describe themselves as such, is a creative being, made in the image of a great Creator. As such, we honor God when we express our creativity.

Julia Cameron, a great writer and writing teacher, puts it this way:

“Yes. I believe that everyone is creative. Whether you declare yourself an artist or not, you make creative choices every day. You are handcrafting a unique life whether you feel you are ‘artistic’ or not.”

Whether your medium is prose or paint, coding or cooking, know that God looks at you and says, “It is very good.”

Monday, April 8

Continued

Reflect

What is your creative outlet? Take a few minutes to think about it.

It doesn't mean you have to be a writer or painter or sculpter or musician. Maybe your creative outlet is in verbally sharing stories, in coming up with new ideas, in gardening, or even in auto-mechanics! Every industry has some room or need for creativity. What's yours?

Act

Go create something today! Write a poem. Paint a sunset. Sing a new song. Plant some lilies. Dance a new dance. Do something new.

Tuesday, April 9

Written by: David Jordan

Learn

*Present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God...*
– Romans 12:1

As you walk through St. Peter's Basilica and the nearby Sistine Chapel in Rome, one thing certainly stands out — the incredible artwork. Michelangelo's Pieta and the amazing dome in St. Peter's, as well as the frescoed ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, present astounding examples of a world-famous Renaissance man at his best. Many rightly wonder how one individual could possess such renowned talent, while most people exist in relative obscurity.

But let us view this from a different angle. The vastness of St. Peter's is humbling. The artwork is magnificent. The scope and shape and detailed perfection are breathtaking. And yet, the very size of St. Peter's lends itself to another truth: working under and alongside the famous masters were literally thousands of valuable workers contributing their own hard work, creativity, ingenuity, sweat equity, and considerable talent in faithful devotion to a cause larger than themselves.

Though many never even saw the finished product, St. Peter's today remains a thankful reminder of them. Each day, workers carried bricks, shaped marble, created vast mosaics from tiny tiles, raised columns to the sky, and, in many cases, risked their lives. We do not know their names, but we do experience the magnificence of their combined efforts and their anonymous contributions to the larger grandeur of St. Peter's. In each detail, in every corner high and low, their devoted labors live on.

This is another kind of testimony: a spiritual worship, a quiet, humble witness to the glory of God. These are ongoing offerings with no fanfare, little recognition. But the lasting contributions to the larger beauty of St. Peter's and the artwork it incorporates has brought wonder to visitors throughout the centuries.

In the same way, we are creators of our own kind of holy art. Co-creating with God, let us faithfully present our lives "as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God..." In doing so, the artwork of our lives can bring peace and beauty to those around us; and may future generations be blessed for the contributions we make, however humble or unrecognized.

Tuesday, April 9

Continued



Reflect

Saint Peter's Basilica and the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel is a remarkable human achievement. It didn't happen overnight and it certainly didn't happen without help.

Think about the many projects and causes you have been a part of – those that are much bigger than what you could have accomplished by yourself.

How did all the creative energy come together? What new things were born through that act of collaboration?

Act

Make a “creative contribution” plan, that is, determine how you might steward your creative energies toward something that will outlast your lifetime.

Wednesday, April 10

Written by: Kristen Koger

Learn

I was first introduced to imaginative prayer, or sacred imagination, when I was in high school and attended a youth summer camp.

The practice is this: you take a scripture passage or other type of writing (a poem, a section from a book, etc.) and you imagine yourself in the story. Get as imaginative as you can.

What do your surroundings look like? What does it smell like? Sound like? Who are you in the story? Maybe you are one of the main characters, or maybe you're just an observer to the scene. Maybe you are in the story experiencing it as yourself, or maybe you are a different person. The choice is yours.

All that is required is for you to take a few moments to imagine and truly experience the passage.

For our devotion today, we will be experiencing Luke 19:1-10, the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus. You may experience this passage in a couple of different ways:

- If you prefer to listen to the passage, you may go to <http://youtube.com> and search "FBCD Lent Devotion Luke 19:1-10." Click on the video to listen.
- If you would like to read the passage yourself, turn in your Bible to Luke 19:1-10. Read the passage a few times, pausing throughout, and imagine yourself in the story.

When you're finished, follow the prompts in the reflection section on the following page.

Wednesday, April 10

Continued

Reflect

Once you've read or listened to the story a couple of times spend some time reflecting on these questions:

- Who were you in the story? Was it someone you expected to be?
- How did you feel as the story unfolded in front of you?
- What did you notice or experience differently?
- How did this familiar passage change for you by experiencing it this way?
- How will imagining yourself in this story impact you in the days ahead?
- What is one way you can share your experiencing with a friend or loved one?

Act

As you go throughout your day, try to view the world through a different perspective. Put yourself in someone else's shoes or experience something in a different way than you normally do. It can be as simple as paying attention to what you see as you are driving a familiar route in town, or visiting a less-frequented grocery store.

Pray: God, thank you for the gift of imagination. We are grateful for the way you created our minds and our brains that allow us to experience your Word in a different way. Your creative Spirit, God, is like a breath of fresh air, bringing the Word to life and allowing us to participate in your story. As we go throughout our week, help us to find a way to interact with your world in a new way, providing space for us to step out of our comfort zones and into a place where you are leading us. We pray this in your name, Amen.

Thursday, April 11

Written by: Jackie Durham

Learn

Stillness

The birds outside my window
The trees above as sanctuary
My prayer notes before me

Gleaned from
Mornings and moments
Of paying attention
Of asking questions
Of wrestling with answers
Of longing for insight

Mornings and moments
Of stillness and quiet
Of reaching toward the Light
Of intersection with timelessness

And sudden, in a shaft of light
~The touch of wonder
~The kernel of truth
~The flash of transcendence:
~The Gift of epiphany

It is here that I wait
~ wait for the center
~ linger for the Light
~ hear the inaudible whisper
~ feel the imperceptible promise

Listening to Stillness
Hearing the symphony of quiet
Waiting ~ for grace.

– Jacqueline Durham
Contemplation (iv) jbd

Thursday, April 11

Continued

Reflect

God as Presence is a spiritual reality that saints and scholars cannot name but we cannot deny. Spirit, Light, Silence, Breath, Compassion, Love, Mystery and numerous words have been offered. As hard as we try, we cannot accurately name it but, gratefully, we can recognize it. Sometimes. The question may be, ‘What is the point of Practicing the Presence in our walking-around lives (as Brother Lawrence discussed in his small book by that name)? Why should we try to see the world and other people under the influence of that presence?’

Praying earnestly, attending to worship, and engaging in contemplative practices are not ends in themselves. Henri Nouwen speaks of this clearly and on many levels in his book *Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Christian Life*. We reach *In* to reach *Out*; we seek depth of understanding and genuine love so that we can See and Live with all people and in our world with a different point of view, with different eyes.

Some writers and theologians talk of “soft eyes” and “thin places”. (People as diverse as Quaker writer Parker Palmer and theologian and scholar Marcus Borg). Imagine going through a day looking at people with soft eyes or, as Paul wrote, with “the same mindset as Christ” (NIV Philippians 2:5), with eyes of compassion and love, that see beyond the surface, penetrating to a deeper level to see our common humanity. Perhaps we would see with compassion an unspoken need of a neighbor, a colleague, even a stranger in pain or a brave, hurting friend who seems to have it all together. Perhaps with “the mind of Christ” we could look with “soft eyes” of acceptance on those who do not share our point of view or those who are our enemies. Perhaps the question I should ask of myself is, “Am I courageous enough to walk through a day in that Presence, willing to look with soft eyes at my world, at my fellow human beings?”

This Spirit, this Presence that is with us and is, indeed, the very essence of our being does not demand or coerce but, instead, woos us, reminds us, insistently calls us to faith and to an active love of all humanity and all creation.

Act

If you are inclined, journal your thoughts or record a voice memo. If you are interested in ‘soft eyes’ or ‘imagining the Presence’ (or curious or dubious), why not try it for a short period, perhaps one hour?

Friday, April 12

Written by: Matt Snyder

Learn

There is a passage in the book of Exodus that always stood out to me:

The Lord spoke to Moses: See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you...

– Exodus 31:1-6, NRSV

Have you ever learned a new craft or skill? Whether it's drawing, painting, writing, sculpting, cooking, coding, or even learning how to skateboard, it takes time to learn the ropes, doesn't it? Usually our first few dozen attempts at something new turns into a disastrous failure.

I remember the first time I tried my hand at woodworking. My dream was to do everything the old-fashioned way with hand tools instead of power tools. I found a scrap piece of wood and began practicing cutting dovetail joints. If you have never tried this, it's quite difficult!

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get my cuts to line up and there were always gaps in the joints, but I wasn't going to give up. After a few dozen failures (over a weeks-long period), I finally had one small success.

I like this passage from Exodus because, while I have no doubt God filled Bezalel and Oholiab with a creative spirit, ability, and intelligence, they probably learned to work with metals, cut stone, and carve wood from their fathers, Uri and Ahisamach. I'm not convinced it didn't first take them a few years to discover they actually had the creative energy to make their visions come to life. It was a decades-long process of understanding how God's creative spirit intersected with their developed skill-set.

We're not much different. As we grow, we each develop a set of skills unique to our life experiences. It's important to hone in on them and master them, because like Bezalel and Oholiab, we never know when God might call on us to contribute to a creative endeavor using those very skills we've intentionally mastered.

Friday, April 12

Continued

Reflect

Take some time and jot down a list of five skills you feel you have some mastery over. What are five skills you are an intermediate at? Write those down too.

Now spend ten minutes reflecting on how God has used your skill sets to contribute to the work of God's church.

Act

Pick one skill from the list you made above and intentionally utilize it today.

For example, if you're a talented photographer, then maybe there is a family shelter you could contact and offer to take family portraits for its residents for free.



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