

— FOUR DAYS OF —

Reflection

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

MATTHEW 11:28-30 (NLT)

Selah: Four Days of Reflection

Written by Sandra Bradley

Design by Kimberly Lamb Creative, LLC

Photography from various Pixabay contributors

Access online resources and a PDF download version
of the Selah readings at Cadence.org/SelahResources.

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Cadence International

PO Box 1268

Englewood, CO 80150

303.762.1400 or 800.396.6680

Cadence.org



Selah

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Introduction

Welcome to Selah! No matter how you enter this time, no matter the state of your heart and soul, the Lord is eager to be with you. His pursuit of His people across the pages of Scripture is not merely *a* theme, it is *the* theme and the heart of the gospel. He has gone to the ends of the earth—literally!—to bring His people back to Himself, for our good and His glory. Surely, we can trust Him to meet us here, in these four days.

Four Reflections have been designed to help us pause and listen to Jesus in new ways. They will engage our heart, mind, soul, and body (see Matthew 22:37) if we will let them. The goal is not to gain knowledge and information, although there is a time and place for that. *This* time is about simply *being* with Jesus.

Take your time as you work through the Reflections. Approach them with an open heart and open mind—and with curiosity! The gospels give us the picture of Jesus as one who asks questions—as many as 300 questions throughout. As you think through the questions posed in these Reflections, be curious about what He might be asking you and what He may want to do in your heart.

The first two Reflections give us time to breathe and receive, while the second two provide opportunities for us to participate and respond. Interact with these online or print them out. Although there are places in the Reflections which give you room to write your thoughts, some of you may want to consider also using a journal or notebook for more space.

If you are limiting your electronic devices during these days, you are still encouraged to bring them out as you go through the Reflections. You will be offered a wide variety of ways to connect with the Lord, such as music, videos, audio, art, etc. These have great potential to add richness and depth to your times with the Lord and give you new ways to think about Scripture and the themes which will be explored. Perhaps you can minimize potential digital distractions by shutting down your email, closing all tabs on the Internet, or temporarily switching the settings on your phone to block notifications on apps.

Some of us will be quite comfortable with the format of the Reflections. For others, the format may be new or uncomfortable. Would you take time to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you? Let's expect Jesus to speak to us as we engage with the content of the Reflections. He may also ask us to do something that feels new and a bit out of our comfort zones. He may take you on a surprising rabbit trail! Whatever the case, let us listen for His voice.

“Make yourselves at home in my love” (John 15:9 MSG). This is Jesus' invitation to us. May the Lord bless you as you open your heart to Him.



DAY ONE

Slowness and Stillness

Have you ever stood before a map, perhaps at a trailhead or in a subway station, and found the red dot ● that indicates “You are here”? Knowing where we are currently located helps us know what direction we want to head. The same is true as we approach the Lord. Recognizing where we are in our hearts and the circumstances of our lives allows us to move into our time with Him with greater honesty. It gives us a chance to invite the Lord into the places that matter to us TODAY.

● What has been most pressing on your heart in the last few weeks? What do you find yourself feeling and thinking about as you enter this time?

Turn your gaze onto the Father, Son, and Spirit. They are eagerly inviting you today to be with Them. Let this knowledge still and quiet your heart.

Opening Prayer

Uncrowd my heart, O God,
Until silence speaks
In Your still, small voice;
Turn me from the hearing of words,
And the making of words, and the confusion of much speaking,
To listening
Waiting
Stillness
Silence
—Thomas Merton¹

Perhaps you would prefer to also **pray through song**:

➤ **Be Still and Know**² by Steven Curtis Chapman (search on YouTube).

Reflect and Ponder

Today we are considering what it means to be slow and still. What stirs in your heart when you think about slowing down, turning off the noise in your life, and being quiet? Does this feel inviting, or does it give you a sense of unease, or even dread?

In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer says, “. . . love, joy, and peace are at the heart of all Jesus is trying to grow in the soil of your life. And all three are incompatible with hurry.”³

I wonder if you have found this to be true in your life?

Consider whether you find that you live in love more readily when you are moving at a slower, more deliberate pace—does this resonate with you? Why or why not?

¹ Thomas Merton, quoted in *Lost in Wonder, Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness* by Esther de Waal

² Steven Curtis Chapman, *Be Still and Know*, © 1999 Sparrow Records

³ From *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer, page 25

The Word

“We enter the text to meet God as he reveals himself, not to look for truth or history or morals that we can use for ourselves.” –*Eugene Peterson*⁴

Spirit of God, reveal Yourself to us as we read your Word.

Take time to reflect on Psalm 131.

Choose a new way to let this Psalm “read you,” by [▶ listening to it](#)⁵ being read (search Psalm 131, NIV Audio Bible on YouTube), listening to it in [▶ musical form](#)⁶ (search Psalm 131 The Sons of Korah on YouTube), or by reading these two different versions of it. Whichever you choose, listen slowly and pay attention to the words, phrases, or feelings that stand out to you and write them down.

Psalm 131 (NIV)

- 1 My heart is not proud, LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
- 2 But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
- 3 Israel, put your hope in the LORD
both now and forevermore.

Psalm 131 (The Message)

- 1 GOD, I’m not trying to rule the roost,
I don’t want to be king of the mountain.
I haven’t meddled where I have no business
or fantasized grandiose plans.
- 2 I’ve kept my feet on the ground,
I’ve cultivated a quiet heart.
Like a baby content in its mother’s arms,
my soul is a baby content.
- 3 Wait, Israel, for GOD. Wait with hope.
Hope now; hope always!

⁴ From *Eat This Book* by Eugene Peterson, page 66

⁵ From NIV Audio Bible, Psalm 131, May 2, 2020

⁶ From Sons of Korah, Psalm 131, September 2020

Meditation on Psalm 131

Take a moment to consider what others have to say about this Psalm.

“In Psalm 131, David presents a beautiful image of a soul at rest. A weaned child resting upon its mother is a lovely thing. It is a mother’s greatest happiness to hold in her arms a resting, contented child. I wonder if God feels this way, too.

What we have to face, though, is that getting to the point of a contentedly weaned child on its mother’s lap is not an easy achievement for the mother or the child. When a baby wants milk, it cries, screams, grabs, demands. But as a child grows, it must learn that it does not always get what it wants when it wants it. It is only after going through a painful deprivation process that a child is weaned and becomes content to sit upon its mother’s lap for (the purpose of) love more than for milk.” *–Laura Hash*⁷

“Weaning is a child’s first experience of loss. It is a difficult but important lesson that you can’t always get what you want in life and that you can’t always have your own way. Unfortunately, some of us are still trying to learn that lesson. You’d think we would have learned it back when we were weaned! But weaning is a process. It’s a battle to wean a child, and it’s a battle for God to bring us to this place of quiet contentment and rest.” *–Ray Fowler*⁸



Be curious as you look inward. Take a few minutes to reflect on your own experience as a weaned child in God’s arms. Some questions you may consider: Are there times you approach God because you want something from Him? Do you think this is right or wrong, or is there another way to think about it? Is it easy for you to sit contentedly in His presence without demanding more? When you are able to simply be with Him, how have you arrived at that place?

⁷ From *Day with God*, article by Laura Hash

⁸ From a sermon titled, *Humbled and Content*, by Ray Fowler

Reflection

You are invited to further curiosity by choosing one of the two options below—or do both if you feel inspired!

Option One

Participate in this [▶ silent video](#)⁹ (search Breathe: Being with God in Silence, Emotionally Healthy Discipleship on YouTube). There is no sound, only written text along with a gentle, meditative exercise for you to try.

Option Two

Choose one of the two pieces of artwork on the next two pages to reflect on. Set a timer for five minutes and spend that time letting the art soak into your heart.





English: Mother and Child by Mary Cassatt, 1890¹⁰

Contemplate this artwork in the context of Psalm 131 (NLT):

*I have calmed and quieted myself,
like a weaned child who no longer cries
for its mother's milk.*

*Yes, like a weaned child is my soul
within me.*

What do you notice about the picture?
What feeling does it evoke in you? Try
using this artwork to draw you further
into the words of David in Psalm 131.



Father and Son by Natalia E. Duarte, 2012¹¹

Contemplate this artwork in the context of Psalm 131 (NLT):

*I have calmed and quieted myself,
like a weaned child who no longer cries
for its mother's milk.*

*Yes, like a weaned child is my soul
within me.*

What do you notice about the picture?
What feeling does it evoke in you? Try
using this artwork to draw you further
into the words of David in Psalm 131.

¹¹ Duarte, Natalia Eremeyeva, Father and Son, 2012. Printed with permission.



Respond

As this time of reflection winds down, here are a couple of ways you may choose to respond to the Lord's movement in your heart.

Try making this song by Kari Jobe a prayer to Jesus—

➤ [Be Still My Soul \(In You I Rest\)](#)¹² (search on YouTube).


You may also simply sit for 5 minutes in the Lord's presence, no words. Enjoy sitting with Him as a weaned child rests with contentment in his parent's arms. If your mind wanders, bring it back to His presence and remember that it's simply an opportunity to return again to Jesus. Let your soul be stilled by the knowledge that you are loved.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13 (NIV)

In Jesus' name, believe the gospel!

TAKE IT FURTHER

Would you like to incorporate some other ways to help you practice slowness and presence?

- **Take a walk deliberately and slowly.** Pay attention to what you see. Leave your phone and headphones behind. Recognize that Jesus is with you as you walk, so resist the urge to have to speak words to Him. Just be with Him and remember He's happy to just be with you too.
- **As you eat a meal today,** make it a point to chew slowly and wait 10 seconds in between bites. Pay attention to what your food tastes and feels like. What is it like not to rush through a meal?
- **Gather the family** and rather than watching TV or a movie, listen to music together. Family members can take turns choosing songs. Using our sense of sound rather than sight helps us slow down and experience things in a fresh way.
- **Watch the documentary film**  **Godspeed.**¹³ Godspeed tells the story of one man's journey of slowing down and learning to live and minister at "God's speed." This 36-minute film is a visual feast (it's set in Scotland) and is also gently thought-provoking (www.livegodspeed.org).
- **Meditate on any of the following quotes:**
"Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure. Somewhere we

know that without a lonely place our actions quickly become empty gestures. The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should, therefore, be the subject of our most personal attention. Therefore, let us look somewhat closer, first at our life in action, and at our life in solitude." —*Henri Nouwen*¹⁴

"God walks 'slowly' because He is love. If He is not love He would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is 'slow,' yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love." —*Kosuke Koyama*¹⁵

"What if the main object in God's idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need—the need of Himself? What if the good of all our smaller and lower needs lies in this, that they help to drive us to God? Hunger may drive the runaway child home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his mother more than his dinner. Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other need." —*George McDonald*¹⁶

- **Take a nap, guilt-free!** Resting and napping is an active way to practice Sabbath and slowness.

¹³ *Godspeed*, The Ranch Studios, 2016. www.livegodspeed.org

¹⁴ From *Out of Solitude*, Henri Nouwen

¹⁵ From *Three Mile an Hour God*, Kosuke Koyama

¹⁶ From *Unspoken Sermons: The Word of Jesus on Prayer*, George McDonald



DAY TWO

Seeing and Being Seen

Start by breathing deeply and slowly. Breathing helps integrate our bodies with our minds and hearts. It gives us the chance to be present in *this* moment.

God is glad to be here with you today. May you sense the tender gaze of Jesus, who is gentle and humble in heart. He offers rest to the weary and dry, those tired of trying hard to get it right. Let the knowledge of that wash over you and soak into the deep places of your soul.

If music helps quiet your heart, you may want to listen to this instrumental piece as you as you breathe in the presence of the Lord.

Gentle Awakening by Jim Brickman,¹ on [▶ Spotify](#) or [▶ YouTube](#)

¹ *Gentle Awakening* by Jim Brickman, 2017 Odeon Records Limited

Opening Prayer

Pause and consider this prayer of blessing as we begin.

Where The Breath Begins

Dry
and dry
and dry
in each direction.

Dust dry.
Desert dry.
Bone dry.

And here
in your own heart:
dry,
the center of your
chest
a bare valley
stretching out
every way you turn.

Did you think
this was where
you had come to die?

It's true that
you may need
to do some crumbling,
yes.
That some things
you have protected
may want to be
laid bare,
yes.
That you will be asked
to let go
and let go,
yes.

But listen.
This is what
a desert is for.

If you have come here
desolate,
if you have come here
deflated,
then thank your lucky stars
the desert is where
you have landed—
here where it is hard
to hide,
here where it is unwise
to rely on your own devices,
here where you will
have to look
and look again
and look close
to find what refreshment waits
to reveal itself to you.

I tell you,
though it may be hard
to see it now,
this is where
your greatest blessing
will find you.

I tell you,
this is where
you will receive
your life again.

I tell you,
this is where
the breath begins.

—*Jan Richardson*²

Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of the desert, where even in the dry, dusty places
You breathe life into our souls.

The Word

Jesus, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory.

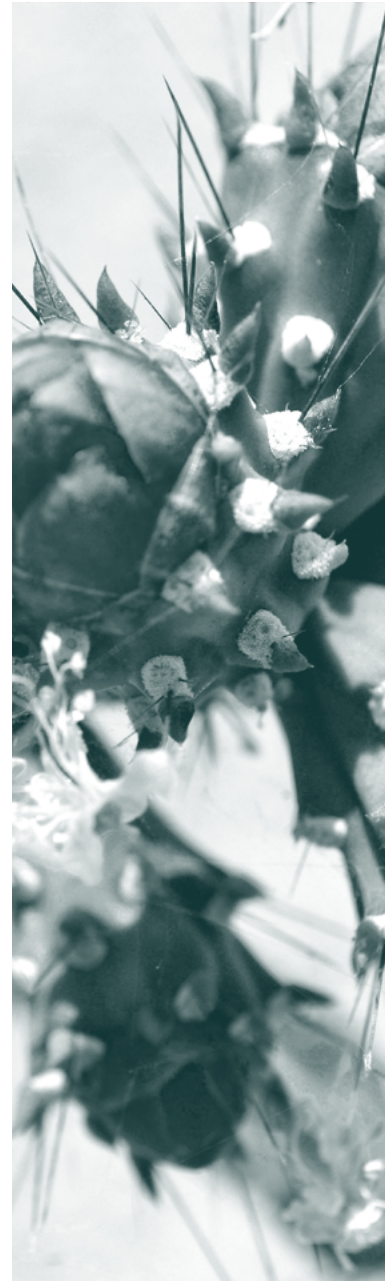
Spirit of God, reveal Yourself to us as we read your Word.

▶ **Listen to Genesis 16³** being read (search Genesis 16 Audio Bible YouTube) or read the Scripture below. Whichever you choose, listen slowly and pay attention to the words, phrases, or feelings that stand out to you.

Genesis 16 (NLT)

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal. So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)

So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. Then Sarai said to Abram, "This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who's wrong—you or me!"



Abram replied, “Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. The angel said to her, “Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I’m running away from my mistress, Sarai,” she replied. The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.” Then he added, “I will give you more descendants than you can count.”

And the angel also said, “You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress. This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives.”

Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, “You are the God who sees me.” She also said, “Have I truly seen the One who sees me?”



Genesis 16 Reflections

Write down which words or phrases stand out to you.

If you want to put yourself one step further into this story, watch this [▶ video of the desert regions](#) of the Holy Land⁴ (search Israel Judea Desert Holy Land, Mike Edri, Offroad on YouTube). Imagine Hagar in this landscape.

Meditations on Genesis 16

It's safe to say that Hagar has most likely reached one of the lowest points of her life in this story. She has been abused and ostracized and is so desperate that she escapes to the desert in what appears to be an attempt to make it back to her homeland in Egypt. But the desert is a harsh and unforgiving landscape, and she is completely alone as she fights to survive.

As you consider Hagar's story, what are some ways you can identify with her?

In what ways has this last year felt like a desert for you? Perhaps you can ponder the areas that have felt dry, lonely, discouraging, or scary.

If we are honest, there are times when we don't sense God's presence in our desert places. We don't see Him stepping in

to help. Consider whether you ever feel disappointed in God. You may wonder exactly what it is you can count on Him to do for you.

Let the beauty of the words in verse 7 capture your heart: "The angel of the LORD *found* Hagar . . ." Finding implies searching! The angel of the Lord—Jesus—sought out Hagar, foreigner and slave. Take a moment to think about how it feels to be sought after, to be seen and wanted.

Hagar, non-Jew and outsider, does something audaciously beautiful: she gives God a name! She calls Him "the God Who Sees Me," and then asks "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?" You can hear the amazement in her words!

Reflection

When life is hard and we find ourselves in desert places, it's difficult to trust that God is good. Even our "solid" theology can seem empty in those moments. It's in those places we can fall back on the larger story of the Bible.

"Jesus left a place where there is no night to enter into our darkness . . . To look to Jesus is to know that our Creator has felt pain, has known trouble, and is well-acquainted with sorrow . . . The story of the gospel is not a mere mantra or a relic of history. It is alive and ongoing. The work of Jesus continues, even now, in our everyday lives. So in hardship we do not look to Jesus solely as one who has been there before, once upon a time in a distant past. We find he is here with us, in the present tense. He participates in our suffering, even as—mysteriously—in our suffering we participate in the fullness of Christ's life."⁵

Consider the places where perhaps Jesus has been present in your desert and where He might be transfiguring your desert places into something beautiful.

Would you be willing to stop and look at Jesus? What might He be saying to you in your desert places? You might try imagining His gaze as He looks at you. What do you see in His eyes?

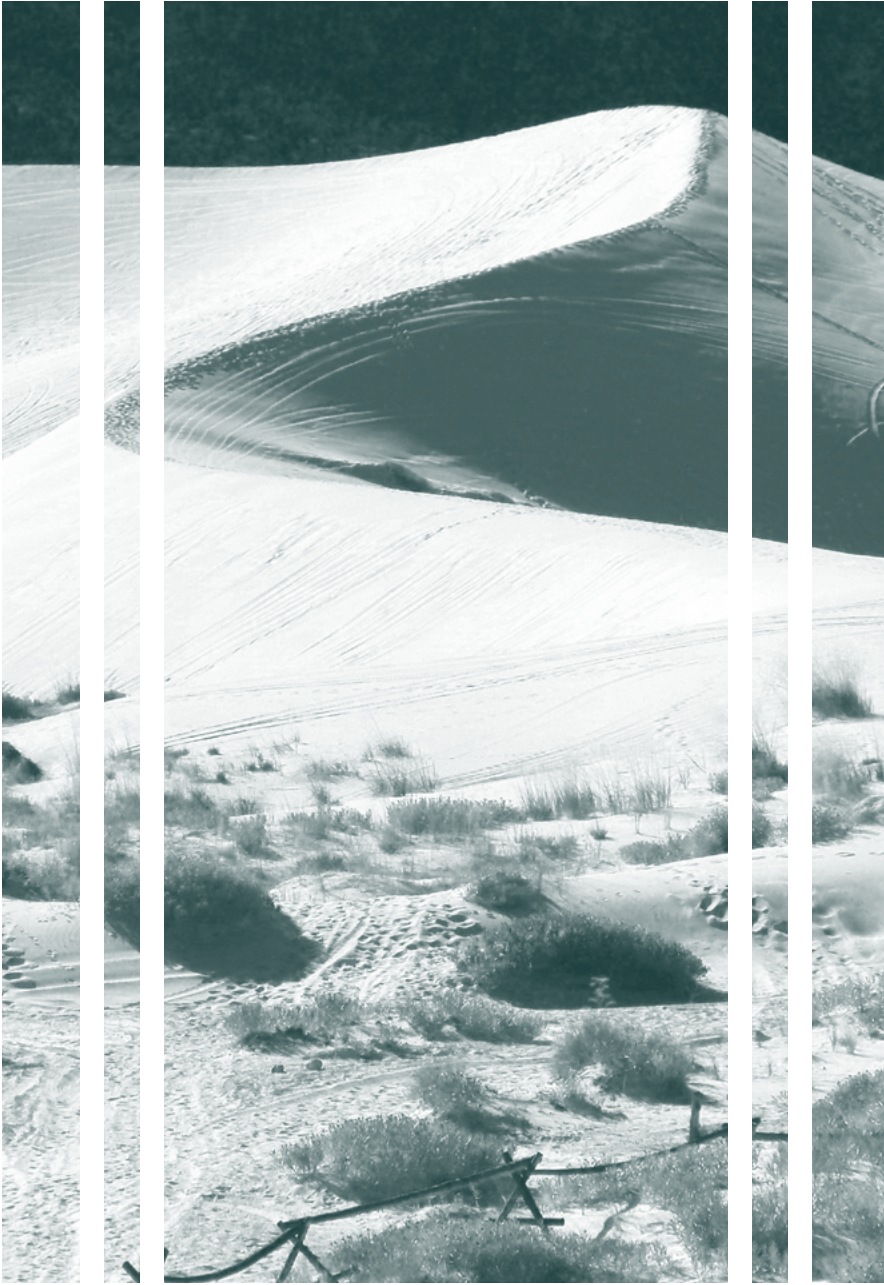


Visual Contemplation

Set your timer for 5 minutes and study this painting, [▶ Sage and Time](#), by Iris Scott,⁶ a finger-painting artist (search Iris Scott Modern Met Amazing Desert Painting). She has illustrated the unique beauty of the desert—a paradoxical ecosystem where both hardship and loveliness can be found. You may want to observe this through the lens of a time when you've experienced your own desert places transformed into places of beauty.



Sage and Time by Iris Scott



Respond

As our time winds down, contemplate this quote by Henri Nouwen:

For most of my life, I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair.

Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not “How am I to find God?” but “How am I to let myself be found by him?” The question is not “How am I to know God?” but “How am I to let myself be known by God?” And, finally, the question is not “How am I to love God?” but “How am I to let myself be loved by God?” God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.⁷

Breathe deeply and know that you are seen. You are found. And you are not alone.

In Jesus' name, believe the gospel!

TAKE IT FURTHER

Would you like to incorporate some other ways to help you remain aware of the Lord's gaze on you?

- **Find a way to enjoy nature today**, to remind you that beauty can spring up anywhere! If you aren't able to get out and about, watch this video of the beautiful [▶ Keukenhof Tulip Gardens](#) in Holland⁸ (search Keukenhof 2019, Holiday Life on YouTube).
- **Read and meditate on Ezekiel 34:11–16**, another beautiful passage that talks about the Lord actively searching and finding the people He loves.
- **This beautiful 12-minute modern-day [▶ oratorio](#)⁹** by Nicole C Mullins and Kathie Lee Gifford tells the story of Hagar, Ruth, David, and Mary—and the God who sees them all (search *The God Who Sees*, from The Rock, The Road, and The Rabbi Foundation on YouTube).
- **Buy a beautiful bouquet of flowers** (or arrange one yourself!) to remind you of Jesus' presence with you.
- **Find a weed in your yard** or some other item from nature that doesn't strike you as beautiful at first glance. Take a few minutes to study it closely and look for the hidden beauty in it.
- **If you didn't try this reflective exercise yesterday**, you may want to invite connection with the Lord through this [▶ silent video](#)¹⁰ (search Breathe: Being with God in Silence, Emotionally Healthy Discipleship on YouTube). There is no sound, only written text along with a gentle, meditative exercise for you to try.
- **On your own or as a family, make a collage** to represent the painful places in your life from this last year and also the places where you have sensed Jesus has seen you or has brought beauty out of the pain. [▶ Click here](#) for more information on how to make a collage if you've never done it before (search Heather Plett, how to use art and collage as a spiritual practice).
- **Worship Jesus as you listen to these songs:** [▶ Always Good](#)¹¹ by Andrew Peterson or [▶ Wilderness](#)¹² by Anna Byrd (search on YouTube).

8 Video Keukenhof 2019, by Holiday Life, May 2019

9 Video The God Who Sees, by The Rock, The Road, and The Rabbi Foundation, April 2019

10 Video Breathe: Being with God in Silence, by Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, November 1, 2018

11 Always Good by Andrew Peterson, Resurrection Letters: Prologue, 2018

12 Wilderness by Gateway Worship featuring Anna Byrd, How Glorious, 2019



DAY THREE

Taste and See

Find a nearby window that offers you a view of God's creation. As you enjoy the beauty, let your heart fill with gratitude and wonder, knowing you are preparing to spend time with the One who created all of it!

Opening Prayer

"Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them. Give me the spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to Thee, 'Speak, for thy servant heareth.' Let me hear Thee speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of Thy voice, that its tones may be familiar when the sounds of earth die away and the only sound will be the music of Thy speaking voice. Amen."¹ —A.W. Tozer

¹ From *The Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer

Reflect and Ponder

Perhaps you've heard these verses penned by Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.²

In his book, *Windows of the Soul*, Ken Gire writes:

How many times have we sat around plucking blackberries, thinking blackberries were all that was there? How many times have we failed to see the heavenly blaze in the earthly bushes we brush by every day on our way to somewhere else?

A story is told of a pagan who asked a rabbi, "Why did God speak to Moses from the thornbush?" For the pagan thought God should have spoken instead in a peal of thunder on the peak of some majestic mountain. The rabbi answered, "To teach you that there is no place on earth where God's glory is not, not even in a humble thornbush."

These moments where earth is crammed with heaven, these Bethlehem moments where something divine is birthed through very human wombs, will go unnoticed unless we realize the meek and unassuming way that God characteristically comes.³

Many of us are used to approaching God in ways that feel familiar and routine: Bible reading and study, worship music, Christian books, and devotionals. But if every common bush is afire with God, how many more ways can we experience Him if only we take the time to look?



Active Participation

Today, the main goal of this Reflection is active participation. A variety of options will be offered to you which are designed to give you a chance to experience God in fresh ways. Some of these may be comfortable for you, some less so. Step outside the norm and try something new! Try choosing a couple of these activities and see what emerges in you. Take time to ask the Lord which activities might draw you closer to Him.

Let's not sit around and pluck blackberries. Let's use our hearts and our five senses to explore the intricacy and beauty of God in new ways.

Jump on in!

WRITTEN EXPLORATION

Personalize a Psalm.

Try paraphrasing a favorite Psalm. Here are several suggestions: Psalm 9, 16, 28, and 32. Read and meditate on the Psalm. Internalize it and let it speak to your life today. Then write it out, and pour your heart out to the Lord just as David did, making it personal to your current life circumstances. See what emerges in your heart as you do this.

USING OUR SENSE OF HEARING

Listen in on Dinner Conversations.

We can hear God by listening to others as they share their own experiences with God. Today, as you share a meal with your family, ask “heart” questions that will lead to below-the-surface discussion. Try asking them about what this Selah has been like for them, if or how they have heard from the Lord—and then listen for ways God might be speaking or revealing His heart to you through their experiences. Listen with empathy and curiosity, and perhaps limit your own words to ensure you are truly *hearing*.



Worship to Music Which isn't Considered “Worship Music”

It's often easy to exalt the Lord when listening to worship music that speaks directly about the Lord. But we can also worship through music that isn't necessarily considered “Christian.” God's beauty and truth can be revealed in the most unexpected places!

Choose one or more of the songs below and see what arises in you as you listen. Let it move you to worship through its beauty, lyrics, honesty, powerful beat, etc. Try listening to a genre you wouldn't normally listen to.

- *Pie Jesu* by John Rutter, Choir of King's College, Cambridge (classical choral)
- *The River Cam* by Eric Whitacre, London Symphony Orchestra, Julian Lloyd Webber (symphonic instrumental)
- *40 (How Long)* by U2 (rock)
- *Unpack Your Heart* by Phillip Phillips (pop-rock or folk-rock)
- *One* by Sleeping At Last (alt/indie)
- *Hopeless Wanderer* by Mumford and Sons (folk-rock)
- *Africa* by Marcus Warner (contemporary instrumental scores)

USING OUR SENSE OF SIGHT

Examine Nature in Detail.

Take a walk and find a couple of items in nature (bark, leaves, rocks). Spend a full three minutes examining these items closely. Notice as much intricacy as you can. What does this reveal about God to you?

You can also recruit your sense of sound and smell by paying attention to what you hear as you walk as well as the fragrances in the items you examine.

Reframe your Lens.

Sometimes we've lived in our homes, neighborhoods, and surroundings for so long we stop truly seeing. This can also be true in our relationship with God. His Word and message can become commonplace, and we stop seeing the wonder and newness in His story. Our views can be limited and need to be expanded. Sometimes we need to see His message "sideways," or through a different lens.

Take a camera outside, or your phone if it has a camera feature, and find a subject

or two you would like to photograph. Try taking pictures from a variety of angles, up close and far away, from the side or the top rather than the front. Play with different tones and filters. Take photos from far away and up close. Then look at your photos when you have finished. You will experience the impact more if you upload them to your computer to enlarge the size. What do you notice about your subject that you don't normally notice in everyday life?

Now ask yourself these questions:

- What have I noticed about God's creation that I didn't notice before? Does that help me worship Him in new ways?
- Where have I seen God at work in the things that have gone wrong or right in my life or others' lives recently?
- How has God been at work in the ordinary activities and experiences of my life?
- Where do I need to take time to reframe and/or refocus the way I view God's interactions with me or others?⁴



⁴ Idea is taken from *Awaken Your Senses* by J. Brent Bill and Beth A. Booram

USING OUR SENSE OF TASTE

What Do You Crave?

Consider these verses in 1 Peter 2:2–3 (NIV): “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him . . .”

The definition of craving is “a powerful desire for something.”⁵ Ask yourself whether you have a powerful craving for the Living Stone, the source of life. While some translate “pure spiritual milk” as being Scripture, the text indicates that it’s far broader than this. One version expresses it as “God’s pure kindness,”⁶ everything that encompasses the message of the heart of God as revealed in Jesus, The Word of God.

Identify a food you normally crave, one which you have on hand.

- Take a bite of the food, slowly and intentionally. What is the

flavor and texture? Where in your mouth do you find that the taste resides once you have swallowed? What do you like about the taste?

- Take another bite. Think about when you crave this food the most. What time of day? Is there a particular emotional state you are in when you crave it?
- How have you conditioned yourself to continue craving it? Do you find that you sometimes use this food to comfort yourself when you are sad or angry?
- Now think of craving as a spiritual metaphor. If you could name what you crave right now in your relationship with God, what would it be?
- Tish Harrison Warren says, “Christians have often practiced self-denial in order to learn to enjoy good things in their proper place.”⁷ Is there a spiritual discipline that might help increase your craving for God?⁸





Watch *Babette's Feast*.

A foreign film with subtitles, this beautiful, slow-moving Danish film is based on a short story by Isak Dinesen that shows how a village is transformed by the extravagant grace of one unforgettable act. The final scene, which depicts a lavish feast, will most likely stick in your memory for a long time to come. Even if you're not a fan of subtitles, this movie is worth the work. You can rent it on Amazon Prime, iTunes, and AppleTV.

After you watch the movie, internalize and celebrate the theme of grace by enjoying a special meal or dessert.

Feast Using Your Imagination.

Feast on this poem . . . such beautiful imagery!

LOVE III

LOVE bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.

“A guest,” I answer'd, “worthy to be here:”
 Love said, “You shall be he.”

“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on Thee.”

Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 “Who made the eyes but I?”

“Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.”

“And know you not,” says Love, “Who bore the blame?”
 “My dear, then I will serve.”

“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my my meat.”
 So I did sit and eat.

—*George Herbert*⁹

USING OUR SENSE OF TOUCH

Build an Altar of Stones.

Our God is a God who is making all things new through Jesus Christ (Revelation 21:5), who makes all things beautiful in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and who never stops making us in His image (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24).

Sometimes we see the victories and we feel thankful for the ways God has worked in our lives.

Sometimes we feel like there is a lot of rubble in our lives. There are places where we sense we have failed or where it feels like God has failed us, or maybe we are just struggling with painful things.

Consider these words from Richard Rohr: “What would happen in your life—right now—if you accepted what God has created and even allowed? Suddenly, this is a very safe universe. You have nothing to



be afraid of. God is for you. God is leaping toward you! God is on your side, honestly more than you are on your own.”¹⁰

Go outside and gather 8–12 small or medium-sized stones. Take time to feel the stones. Do they all feel the same or do some feel different? Are they smooth or rough, cool or warm? You can observe the color as well and whether there are

markings on the stones. Let these stones represent both the places where you have seen the Lord work and the painful places where you have yet to see Him bring beauty from the pain.

Build an altar or “cairn” from the stones, taking time to talk to the Lord about these stones and what they represent in your life. If you can, build it in a place where you can see it in the coming days to remind you of the ways God rebuilds and redeems.

USING OUR SENSE OF SMELL

Discover the Power of Fragrance.

Ephesians 5:1–2 (NLT) says, “Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.”

Jesus’ sacrifice smelled beautiful to His Father. Many verses in the Old Testament which refer to the Israelites’ sacrifices describe them as a fragrant aroma to God. Aromas and smells have meaning in both the spiritual and physical realm. Science has revealed in the last few years that the human nose can detect *one trillion odors!*¹¹

Studies have shown that people can remember a scent with 65% accuracy after one year while visual memory drops to 50% after only a few months. Smell is also connected with our emotions. “The part of the brain that smells and tastes is part of the emotional brain where our personality lies,” states Dr. Hirsch in an interview with Men’s Health.¹²

We can use our sense of smell to help us connect in a tangible, experiential way with Jesus’ love for us. Find an item in your home that has a pleasing scent—flowers, a candle, a favorite food, a beauty item, essential oils. Sit somewhere comfortable and perhaps put on some beautiful music if you’d like to use more than one sense in this activity—it may produce double the benefits! Take 2–3 minutes to smell the object as you



consider Jesus’ sacrifice of love for you. Take deep breaths and give yourself time to associate both the feelings of being loved and the truth of the message with the fragrance. This may feel outside the box to you—good for you for trying something new!

If you want to make this “stick,” take the next week and repeat this exercise each day. Help your body associate the beautiful fragrance with Jesus’ love—as well as His call for us to love others.

¹¹ From ScienceMag, *Human Nose Can Detect One Trillion Smells*, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/03/human-nose-can-detect-trillion-smells>

¹² From Ambius.com, *6 Ways Your Sense of Smell Influences Your Everyday Life*, <https://www.ambius.com/blog/5-ways-smell-influences-your-everyday-life/>

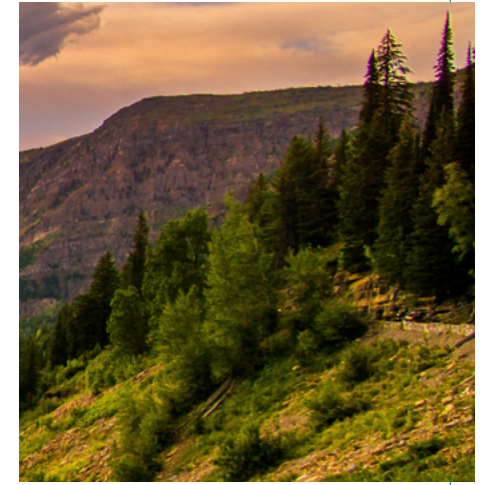
In the future, you might consider incorporating some “active participation” exercises regularly in your times with the Lord. Let’s keep our eyes open for the common bushes afire with God as we walk through the days and weeks ahead.

Benediction

“And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.”
Ephesians 3:17–19 (NLT)

*In Jesus’ name,
believe the gospel!*





DAY FOUR

Celebration

It's time to celebrate! What moves our hearts as humans to celebrate with joy? What moves *you* to celebrate Jesus and the joy of being a child of God? There are probably a few ways you might answer this question, but one of the responses you may consider is *wonder*. When we see things afresh, with new eyes, it causes *wonder* to well up in us—and then we can't help but celebrate!



Opening Prayer

Jesus, as we enter day four of our Selah, we desire to see you anew, to be reminded once more of the beauty of our salvation. You rejoice over us! In turn, we offer back hearts of joy to you.

“For the LORD your God is living among you.

He is a mighty savior.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your fears.

He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”

Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT)

Take time to worship the Lord through music, either with one of the suggested songs or one of your personal favorites.

- ▶ **I Thank God** from Maverick City Music, Grapeview Church ¹
- ▶ **Echo Holy** by Red Rocks Worship, Live from Littleton ²

The Word

The Chosen is a multi-season TV series which tells the story of Jesus in a remarkably moving way. The producers included the scene which depicts the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. We observe Nicodemus as he tries to grasp for the first time the reality of Who Jesus is and His reason for coming, and it's truly powerful.

Take time to [▶ watch the scene](#) . . . be moved in wonder as you see and hear the message of Jesus afresh. (Search “The Chosen Scene: John 3:16”³ on The Chosen YouTube channel.)





Meditation and Reflection

Sometimes, when theology becomes dry or Scripture becomes commonplace, we find our hearts moved by stories. I think Jesus knew this, too, considering how many stories He wove into his teachings. Open your heart as you read the following true story which illustrates God's love for us.

Gregory Boyle is a Jesuit priest and the founder and executive director of Homeboy Industries, a non-profit designed to help gang members in L.A. find a pathway out of gang life. He tells the following story:

At Camp Paige, a county detention facility near Glendora, I was getting to know fifteen-year-old-Rigo, who was about to make his first communion. The Catholic volunteers had found him a white shirt and black tie. We still had some

fifteen minutes before the other incarcerated youth would join us for Mass in the gym, and I'm asking Rigo the basic stuff about his family and his life. I ask about his father.

"Oh," he says, "he's a heroin addict and never really been in my life. Used to always beat my a**. Fact, he's in prison right now. Barely ever lived with us."

Then something kind of snaps in him—an image brings him to attention.

"I think I was in the fourth grade," he begins. "I came home. Sent home in the middle of the day. Got into some *pedo* at school. Can't remember what. When I got home, my *jefito* was there. He was hardly ever there. My dad says, 'Why they

send you home?’ And cuz my dad always beat me, I said, ‘If I tell you, promise you don’t hit me?’ He just said, ‘I’m your father. ‘Course I’m not gonna hit you.’ So, I told him.”

Rigo is caught short in the telling. He begins to cry, and in moments he’s wailing and rocking back and forth. I put my arm around him. He is inconsolable. When he is able to speak and barely so, he says only, “He beat me with a pipe . . . with . . . a pipe.”

When Rigo composed himself, I ask, “And your mom?” He points some distance from where we are to a tiny woman standing by the gym’s entrance.

“That’s her over there.” He pauses for a beat, “There’s no one like her.” Again, some slide appears in his mind, and a thought occurs.

“I’ve been locked up for more than a year and a half. She comes to see me every Sunday. You know how many buses she takes every Sunday—to see my sorry a**?”

Then quite unexpectedly he sobs with the same ferocity as before. Again, it takes him some time to reclaim breath and an ability to speak. Then he does, gasping through his tears. “Seven buses. She takes . . . seven . . . buses. Imagine.”

How then, to imagine, the expansive heart of this God—who takes seven buses, just to arrive at us. We settle sometimes for less than intimacy with God when all God longs for is this solidarity with us. In Spanish, when you speak of your great friend, you describe the union and kinship as being *de uña y mugre*—our friendship is like the fingernail and the dirt under it.

The desire of God’s heart is immeasurably larger than our imaginations can conjure . . . “Behold the One beholding you and smiling.” It is truly hard for us to see the truth that disapproval does not seem to be part of God’s DNA. God is just too busy loving us to have any time left for disappointment.⁴

Our God is a God of seven buses, the One who traveled from heaven to earth to show us we are His beloved.



Respond

Take an opportunity now to let yourself—body, mind, and soul—respond to this love. Choose from one of the options below or do something else that feels meaningful to you.

Option One

Gather your pens and colored pencils and write this verse on a blank piece of paper: *Having loved His dear companions, He loved them right to the end* (John 13:1 MSG). Make it beautiful, using color and artistic elements, to reflect the beauty of this truth and to help it sink into your soul. Put your artwork somewhere you will see it each day, to remind you of God's expansive love for you.

Option Two

Listen to a song which moves your heart and even your body to worship, perhaps [▶ Magnificent](#)⁵ by U2 or [▶ The Hallelujah Chorus](#)⁶ by Handel (search the song titles on YouTube). Don't be afraid to let loose and express your joy. Perhaps follow King David's example and dance before the Lord!

Option Three

Experiment with body postures as you express your worship to the Lord. You might try kneeling, lying prostrate on the ground, opening your arms in an expression of receiving His love, or another movement which seems fitting.

5 *Magnificent* by U2. *Magnificent: Live from Madison Square Garden*, 2011.

6 *Hallelujah Chorus* by Handel, George Frederick. *Live at the Sydney Opera House*, 2019.

Take the remainder of your day and celebrate God's love for you.

Some suggestions are listed in the Take It Further section on the next page.

Benediction

"Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen." Revelation 1:5–6 (NLT)

In Jesus' name, believe the gospel!



TAKE IT FURTHER

Would you like to enjoy an extended time of celebration today?

- **Laugh!** Watch your favorite comedian or comedy movie. Enjoy the gift of laughter!
- **Dance!** Put on your favorite music and let loose!
- **Practice forgiveness.** Does that sound like a strange way to celebrate? Harboring resentment and bitterness can “bind up” our ability to experience joy and delight. Spend a few minutes letting go of a grudge you may be holding against someone.
- **Spend time with the ones you love the most today,** doing something fun. Recognize they are a gift from God to you!
- **Go to a museum or art gallery.** Enjoy the beauty and creativity on display. This is such an enjoyable way to worship the Creator of all good things.
- **Go to a local park and enjoy the scenery around you.** Notice the many forms of nature around you and also the wide variety of human beings who are reflections of our Creator.

- The poet Mary Oliver has written these thought-provoking words in her poem, *Don't Hesitate*: “If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it . . . don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not meant to be a crumb.”⁷

Now those are some words worth pondering: “Joy is not meant to be a crumb.” Sometimes we live with a scarcity mentality when it comes to fully entering the goodness God reveals to us in a myriad of ways—we are afraid to fully embrace the joy because we are too worried it's not going to last.

Gratitude is a way for us to embrace the joy of the Lord, to celebrate His goodness and the gifts He's given us.

To practice this, **make a list of all the things you are grateful for**, big and small, as many things you can think of. Choose to embellish it artistically if you'd like.

⁷ From the poem *Don't Hesitate* by Mary Oliver, from her book *Swan Poems and Prose Poems*

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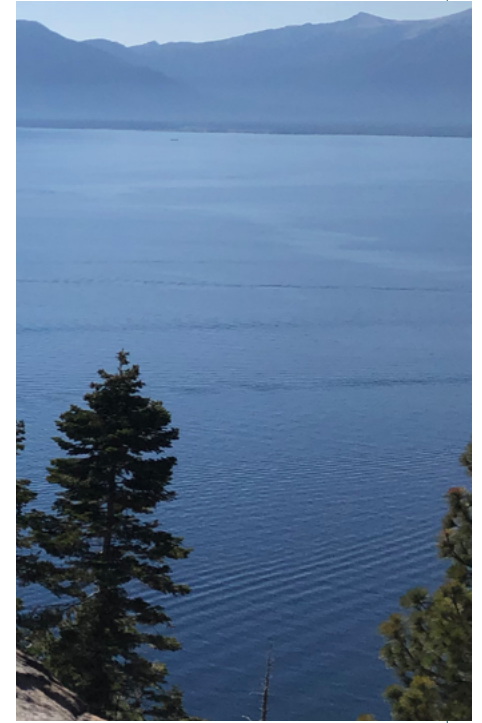
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