

Lenten Devotional



Reflections for each day in Lent

First Church
First United Methodist Church of Seattle

Introduction:

Lent is a journey of 40 days that we take to remind ourselves of a critical part of the story of the Christian life: the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Each year, First Church reflects on that age-old story with devotionals written by members of our community. This book includes 40 reflections offering insights on the scriptures assigned for each week. They help the ancient texts come alive, and you get to know the people sitting in the pew next to you a little better.

This year each reflection offers you food for thought, a specific action for each day, and journal space to record your own responses to the scripture or the author's ideas.

The word Lent means "springtime," encouraging us to look to the future, to the new life emerging from the dormant soil as the winter fades. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that God offers a "future with hope." I cannot wait to spend every day of Lent in reflection on our past, present, and future together.

Thank you so much to Barbara Moreland (editor), Isaac Pruden and Alicia Choi (design) for this gift this Lenten season.



Rev. Jeremy Smith

Table of Contents

Day 1 - February 22	Claire Gebben
Day 2 - February 23	Bruce Hall
Day 3 - February 24	Jim Schone
Day 4 - February 25	April Little
Day 5 - February 27	Karen McOmber
Day 6 - February 28	Joe Frost
Day 7 - March 1	John Loacker
Day 8 - March 2	Bruna Hygino
Day 9 - March 3	Peg Hall
Day 10 - March 4	Anonymous
Day 11 - March 6	Isaac Pruden
Day 12 - March 7	Dana Birkby
Day 13 - March 8	Alex Smith & Jean Braun
Day 14 - March 9	Sharon Perez
Day 15 - March 10	Jerry Roberson
Day 16 - March 11	Bola Babarinsa
Day 17 - March 13	Greg Wallace
Day 18 - March 14	Teresa Canady
Day 19 - March 15	Joyce Frost
Day 20 - March 16	Kathryn Everett
Day 21 - March 17	Janet Crawley
Day 22 - March 18	Jonathyn Kraig
Day 23 - March 20	Em Rigler
Day 24 - March 21	Shawn Smith
Day 25 - March 22	Julius Perez
Day 26 - March 23	Tom Bruhns
Day 27 - March 24	Tom Carlson
Day 28 - March 25	Beth Snyder
Day 29 - March 27	Debbie Cherry
Day 30 - March 28	Sue Porter
Day 31 - March 29	Cynthia Lockwood
Day 32 - March 30	Craig Mathews
Day 33 - March 31	Deb Anderson
Day 34 - April 1	Kari Wilson
Day 35 - April 3	Jane Vernon
Day 36 - April 4	Jackie Celin
Day 37 - April 5	Peter Jabin
Day 38 - April 6	Barbara Moreland
Day 39 - April 7	Vi Boyer
Day 40 - April 8	Don Crawley



1

February 22
Ash Wednesday

...
Claire Gebben

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

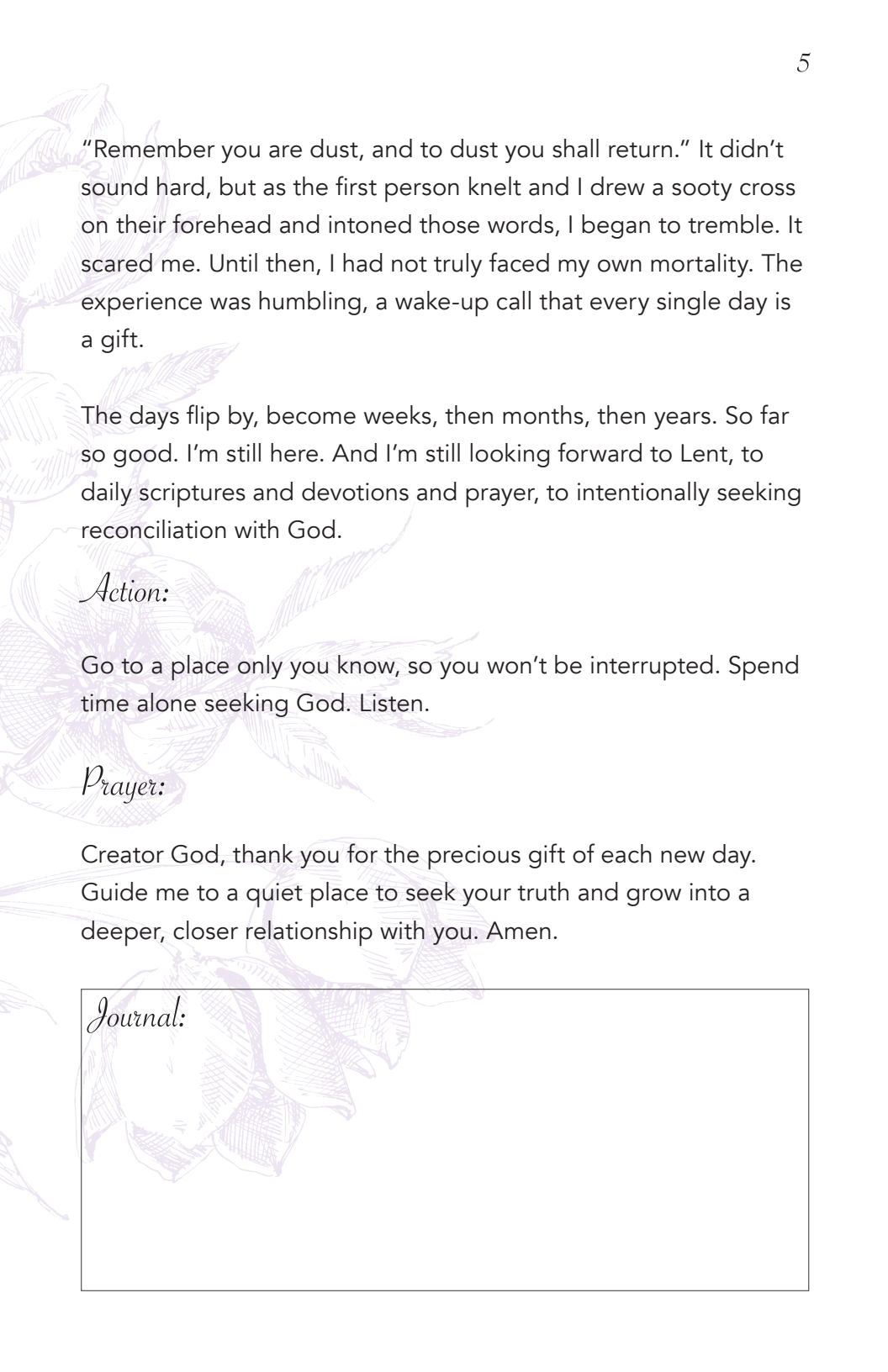
Reflection:

Ash Wednesday arrives just as the long dark nights are fading. The perfect time to “reset” the Christian year.

Lent is a 40 day journey toward reconciliation with God. The theme of today’s scripture emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with God. As in, don’t act as if you are pious. Simply be pious.

When I returned to church in my thirties, I thought Lent was something Catholics did. Especially the Ash Wednesday service, with the ashes-on-the-forehead thing. Gradually, the season grew on me. I looked forward to the quieter music, the self-reflective inward gaze of the services. Then one year in the 1990s, I assisted with the Ash Wednesday service.

It was held in the old building, in the smaller chapel at Fifth and Marion. Dark wood, stiff pews, dim lights. The pastor told me what to say as we stood side by side administering the ashes.



“Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” It didn’t sound hard, but as the first person knelt and I drew a sooty cross on their forehead and intoned those words, I began to tremble. It scared me. Until then, I had not truly faced my own mortality. The experience was humbling, a wake-up call that every single day is a gift.

The days flip by, become weeks, then months, then years. So far so good. I’m still here. And I’m still looking forward to Lent, to daily scriptures and devotions and prayer, to intentionally seeking reconciliation with God.

Action:

Go to a place only you know, so you won’t be interrupted. Spend time alone seeking God. Listen.

Prayer:

Creator God, thank you for the precious gift of each new day. Guide me to a quiet place to seek your truth and grow into a deeper, closer relationship with you. Amen.

Journal:



2

February 23

...
Bruce Hall

Psalm 90: 1-10, 12

Reflection:

God is so huge, always present, always everywhere. God is constant. Timeless. Before there were mountains. Waaaaaaay before. Before there was an earth?!? That's so hard to comprehend!

Do you ever think about how our lifetime is just a quick blip in the grand scheme of things in the universe, or in the history of all time, or even in just the timeline of human existence? A lifetime of 70 or 80 years (if we're lucky), quickly passes, and we fly away. I have often thought about this, although I haven't really thought about it from God's perspective, as this Psalm does.

Is that a comforting thought or a disturbing one? On the one hand the things we stress over or the things in our life that we mess up - 1,000 years from now, what difference will they make? On the other hand, doesn't our life matter, too?

This prayer is attributed to Moses, who led his people around in exile for 40 years. Perhaps he was thinking about himself and his people: "We have got to get right with God. Our 70 or 80 years will be over before you know it! God knows all of our sins, our shortcomings, our bad habits. I guess we know them about ourselves, too. So we must ask for forgiveness, right?"

So, how does God want us to live each day?

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Action:

How can you act with wisdom today? Write a post-it note with a word for today or your intention of today. In prayer, tell God your intention and ask for strength, wisdom, and support to achieve this. Put the post it on your bathroom mirror, where you will see it at the end of the day. Then reflect on how you lived today.

Journal:





3

February 24

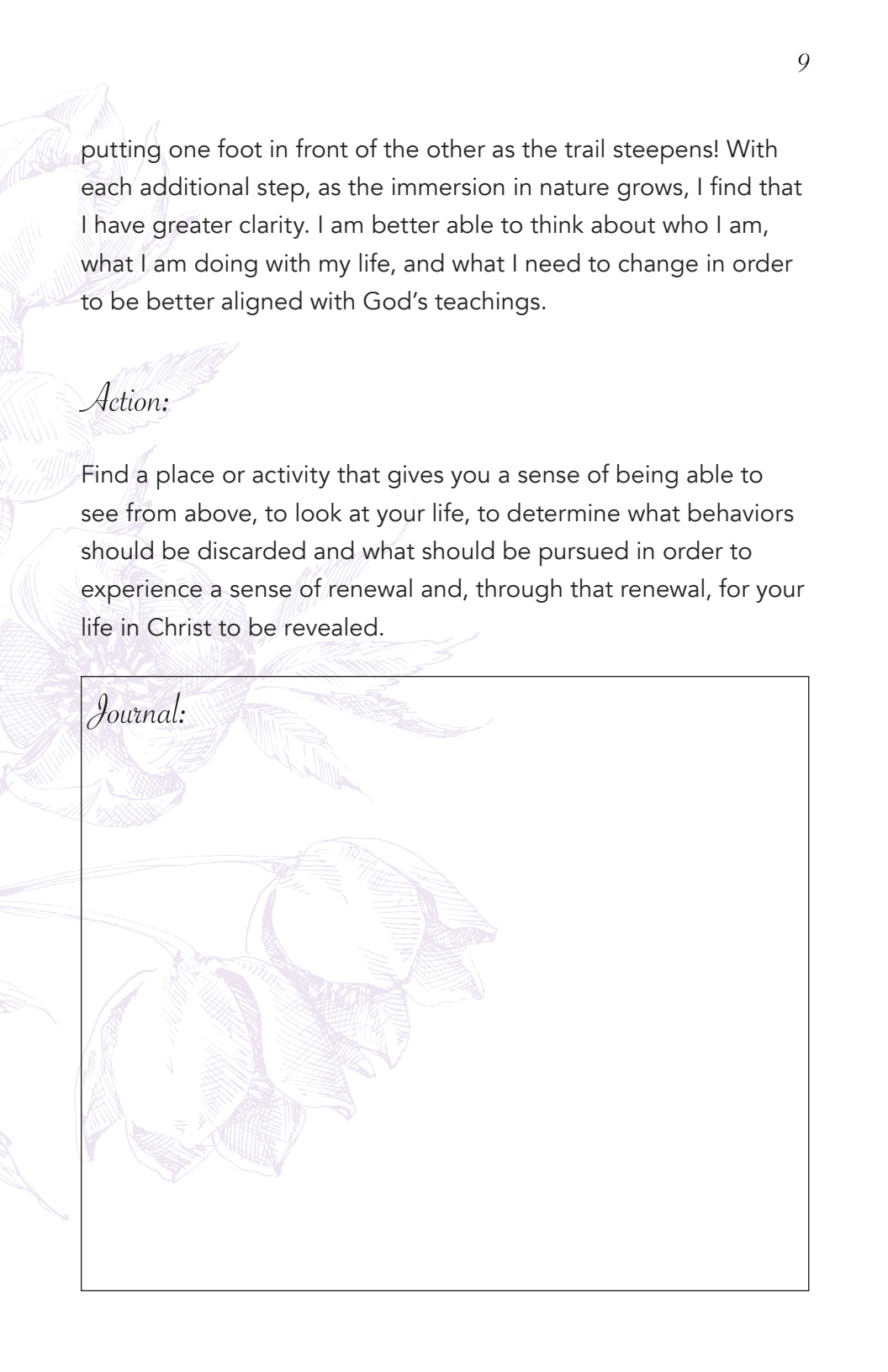
...
Jim Schone

Colossians 3: 1-11

Reflection:

Growing up in Nebraska, one of my favorite experiences of the year was our family vacation in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado every August. There I would spend almost every day hiking in the mountains with my parents and siblings. I grew to love the beauty of that area as well as the sense of rejuvenation that I had as I walked along mountain trails. It was that love of mountains that was a major reason for my move in 1985 to Seattle, a city with beautiful mountains seemingly in every direction one can look.

In this passage, we are encouraged to set our sights on those things that are above the earth, where Christ is seated, and to rid ourselves of negative, self-indulgent behaviors. Though always a challenge, during my time in the mountains I feel best able to engage in the self-reflection needed to attempt this shift in perspective. As I start the ascent of a mountain trail, I feel my concerns easing - maybe because I have to focus so hard on



putting one foot in front of the other as the trail steepens! With each additional step, as the immersion in nature grows, I find that I have greater clarity. I am better able to think about who I am, what I am doing with my life, and what I need to change in order to be better aligned with God's teachings.

Action:

Find a place or activity that gives you a sense of being able to see from above, to look at your life, to determine what behaviors should be discarded and what should be pursued in order to experience a sense of renewal and, through that renewal, for your life in Christ to be revealed.

Journal:





4

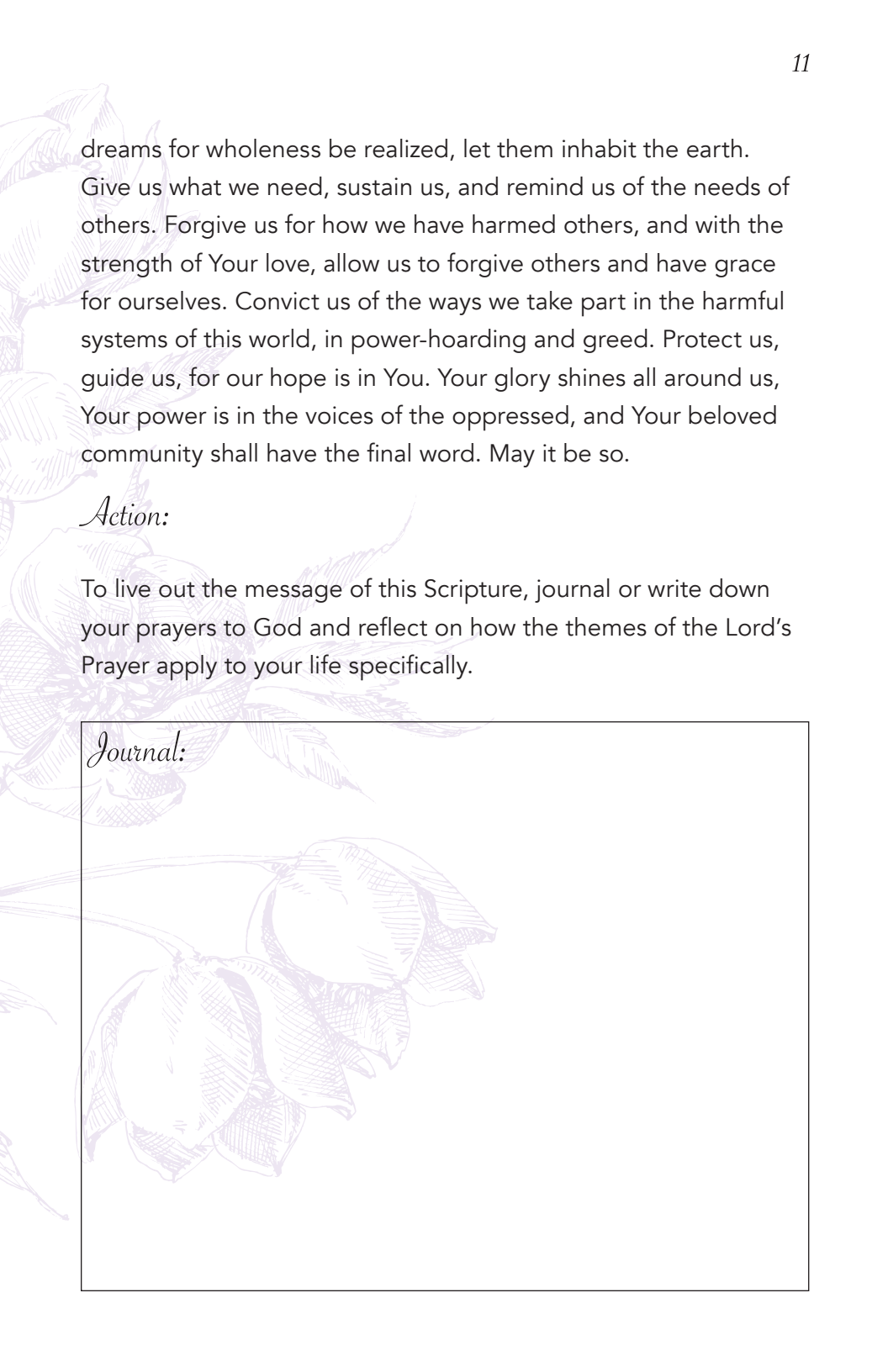
February 25
...
April Little

Matthew 6: 9-13

Reflection:

This teaching of Jesus about how we should pray reflects his values and God's dreams for this world. That we might take part in the work of restoring God's creation so that heaven (God's space) might be reunited with earth (human space). That we recognize the bread we have been given and remember that some people do not have enough food to eat. That we seek forgiveness and give forgiveness. And that we be protected from harm. Since Jesus said this is how we should pray and not that we need to always use these exact words, I like to imagine what this prayer would look like in our modern context. Often the words of this prayer become so familiar and we recite them at church every week without even thinking, but playing with the language can spiritually refresh our hearts to the prayer's meaning. Here is my reimagining:

Our Mother/Father/Creator, who is bringing heaven to earth,
hallowed be Your name. May Your beloved community and Your



dreams for wholeness be realized, let them inhabit the earth. Give us what we need, sustain us, and remind us of the needs of others. Forgive us for how we have harmed others, and with the strength of Your love, allow us to forgive others and have grace for ourselves. Convict us of the ways we take part in the harmful systems of this world, in power-hoarding and greed. Protect us, guide us, for our hope is in You. Your glory shines all around us, Your power is in the voices of the oppressed, and Your beloved community shall have the final word. May it be so.

Action:

To live out the message of this Scripture, journal or write down your prayers to God and reflect on how the themes of the Lord's Prayer apply to your life specifically.

Journal:





5

February 27

...
Karen McOmber

Genesis 2: 7-9, 15-17, 21-25

Reflection:

In the beginning of the Bible, we have Genesis, the story of no less than the creation of everything. God creates Adam from dust, and Eve from Adam's rib, and puts them in a nice garden, featuring a forbidden tree of knowledge right in the center. There were no rules (except to stay away from the tree), no sense of right or wrong, no morals. Adam and Eve were innocents, It is no surprise that they eventually eat from the tree of knowledge.

Like many other creation stories, I find this account a little hard to believe. It comes from a time before ideas about evolution, DNA, or science. What can we take away from this creation story? I do believe that God created everything, including humans, but perhaps in a little less direct way. I believe God has given us our sense of right and wrong and also allows free choice. Why would God create us with the ability to have greed, violence, and hatred? Perhaps having the freedom and ability to choose – even

if we make bad decisions – also gives us the ability to love, care for, and respect others and to create beauty in art and music.

Action:

Ponder the way you view others and the world, and notice what actions you take, both good and bad. Begin choosing to focus on the goodness and beauty you find and let go of negative actions and feelings.

Prayer:

Dear God, You created me and gave me the ability to be joyful and creative, just as you have given me the ability to be afraid and bruised by the world. Let me use the bad experiences to grow and learn. Help me to see the goodness and beauty that are abundant. Amen.

Journal:





6

February 28

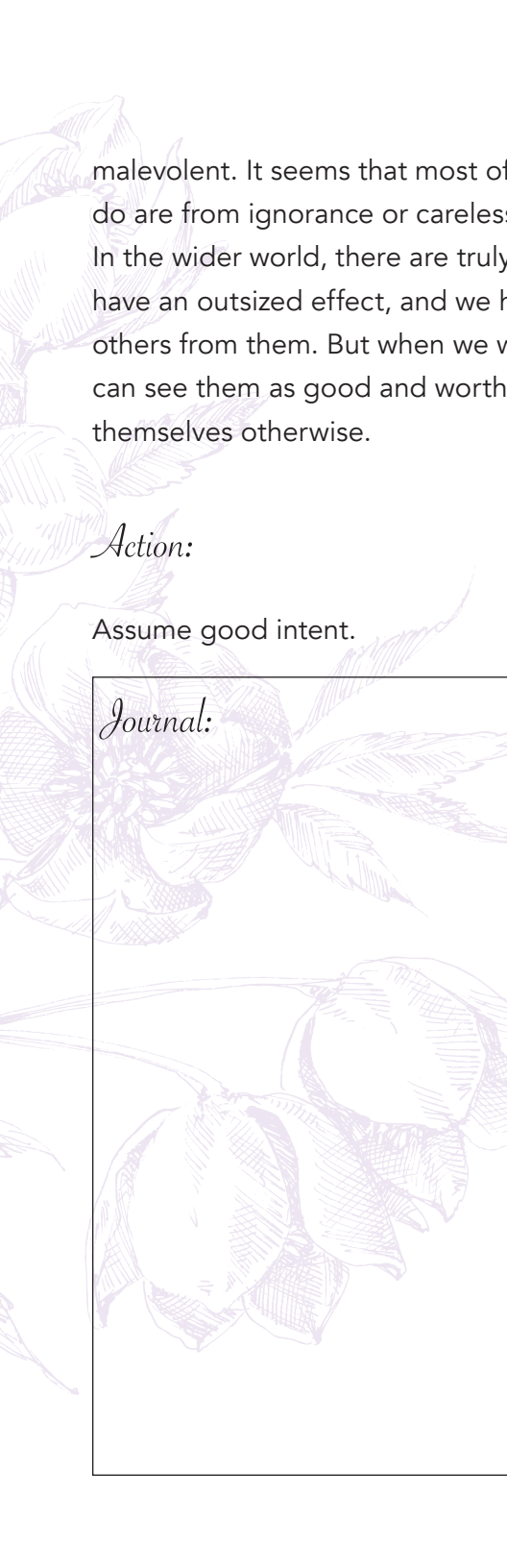
...
Joe Frost

Genesis 3: 1-7

Reflection:

This episode reminds me of one of my favorite pictures of my granddaughter. Her face is covered with chocolate smears, and she has just told her mother that she has no idea what happened to the cookies that were on the counter. She was just old enough to know that she shouldn't have eaten them, but not yet wise enough to know that she would be caught, nor yet mature enough to resist the temptation. Her childish innocence makes the episode charming in a way that the same brazen behavior in a nationally known politician is not.

I've always seen Adam and Eve as witless children who misbehaved, though the punishment that they received is more appropriate for pathological behavior. Hopefully, it says something about my view of people that I can see them with a charitable interpretation. Joyce once chose the Lenten task to "assume good intent." That seems reasonable to me in that I've rarely encountered people in my personal life who really were



malevolent. It seems that most of the hurtful things people say or do are from ignorance or carelessness rather than evil intent. In the wider world, there are truly evil people whose actions have an outsized effect, and we have to protect ourselves and others from them. But when we work with people, I hope that we can see them as good and worthy of kindness until they prove themselves otherwise.

Action:

Assume good intent.

Journal:





7

March 1

...

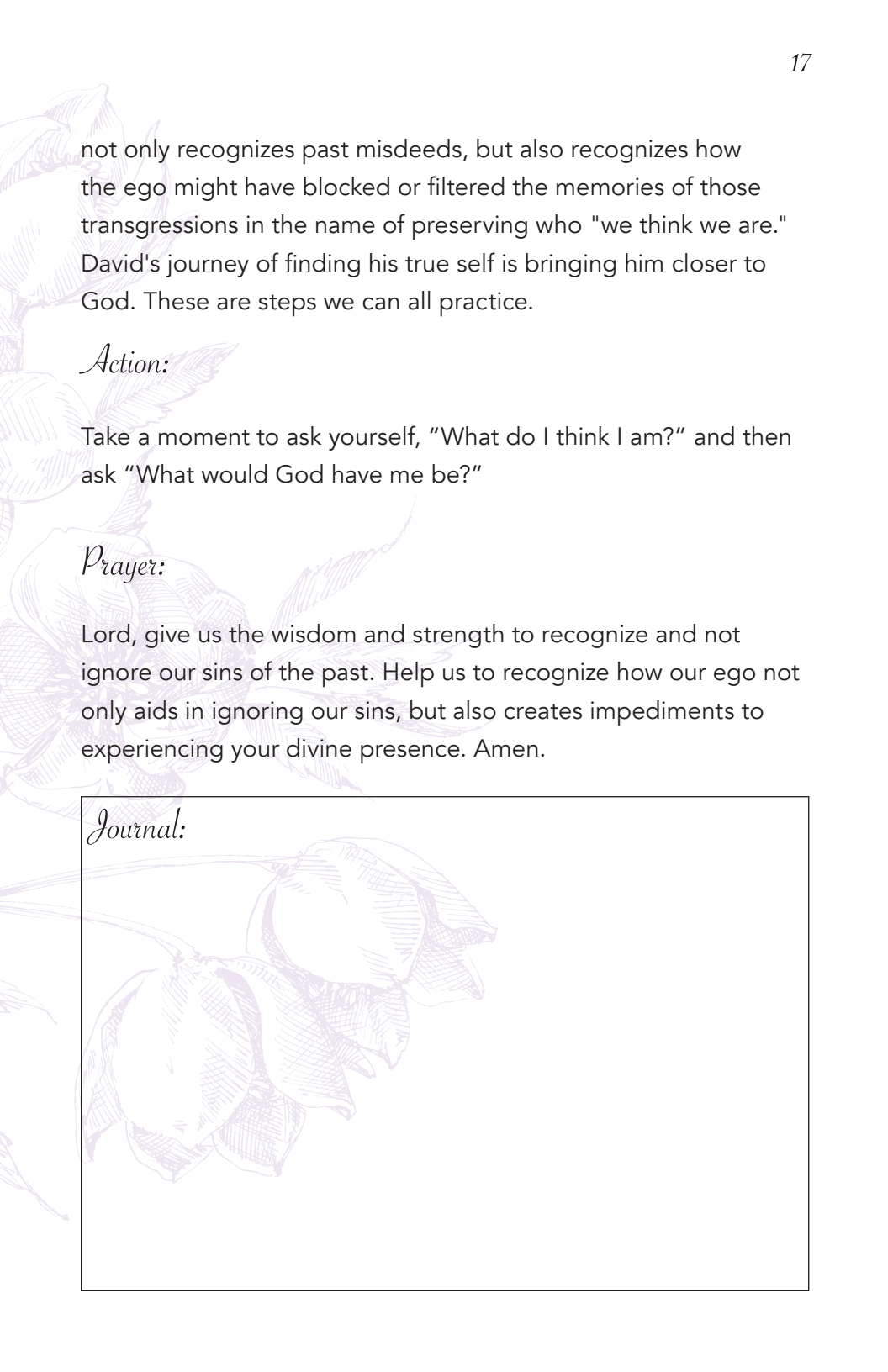
John Loacker

Psalm 51

Reflection:

As I age I am starting to shed some of the characteristics of my "younger self." Some of those no-longer-needed traits might fall under "my ego," or what one might call "pride." As I read Psalm 51, I believe David is shedding some of his former personality and exhibiting humility by recognizing his sins. What I recognize in myself, and what I feel David is expressing, is the need to transcend our "false self," the part of our ego or personality that can block our recognition of past transgressions and blur the values and ethics at work in our current lives. From my perspective, this shift is performed in the name of being "who we think we are, and who we think we want to become." Here David distances himself from the ego-centric perspective and expresses his desire to "create a clean heart." For David that could mean shedding the mindset that he is a superior person, surrounded by subordinates.

I interpret a "clean heart" to be a situation in which the individual



not only recognizes past misdeeds, but also recognizes how the ego might have blocked or filtered the memories of those transgressions in the name of preserving who "we think we are." David's journey of finding his true self is bringing him closer to God. These are steps we can all practice.

Action:

Take a moment to ask yourself, "What do I think I am?" and then ask "What would God have me be?"

Prayer:

Lord, give us the wisdom and strength to recognize and not ignore our sins of the past. Help us to recognize how our ego not only aids in ignoring our sins, but also creates impediments to experiencing your divine presence. Amen.

Journal:





8

March 2

...

Bruna Hygino

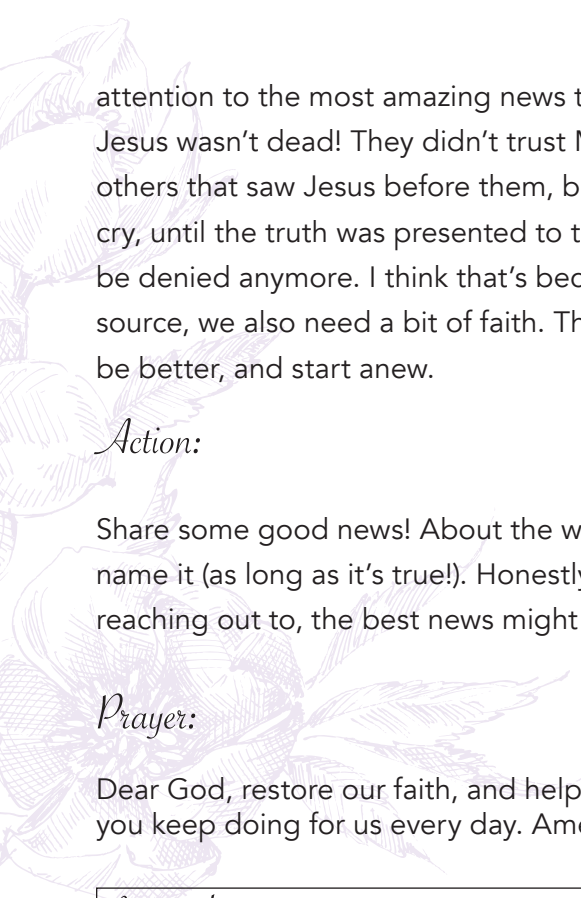
Mark 16: 9-15

Reflection:

We are surrounded by news these days, overwhelmed even. And, unfortunately, it is safe to say that most of this news isn't exactly good. I've caught myself asking more than once if the world is getting worse or if we just have more access to information. Adding to that, we still have some news that isn't exactly true. It's hard to find a trustworthy source, especially when the news is nothing like we might have seen before.

When I read and meditated on this passage, I thought about how many times I was so focused on the sad, worrying, infuriating news, and how that was what I decided to share when I had the chance. Instead I could have paid attention and shared good, positive news or information, especially when the information was really good!.

In this passage, Jesus persisted until he was seen by many people, until they stopped what they were doing and paid



attention to the most amazing news they could have received: Jesus wasn't dead! They didn't trust Mary Magdalene and the others that saw Jesus before them, but continued to mourn and cry, until the truth was presented to them in a way that couldn't be denied anymore. I think that's because in addition to a trusted source, we also need a bit of faith. That things can change, can be better, and start anew.

Action:

Share some good news! About the world, about yourself, you name it (as long as it's true!). Honestly, depending on who you're reaching out to, the best news might be just hearing from you.

Prayer:

Dear God, restore our faith, and help us see the amazing things you keep doing for us every day. Amen.

Journal:





9

March 3

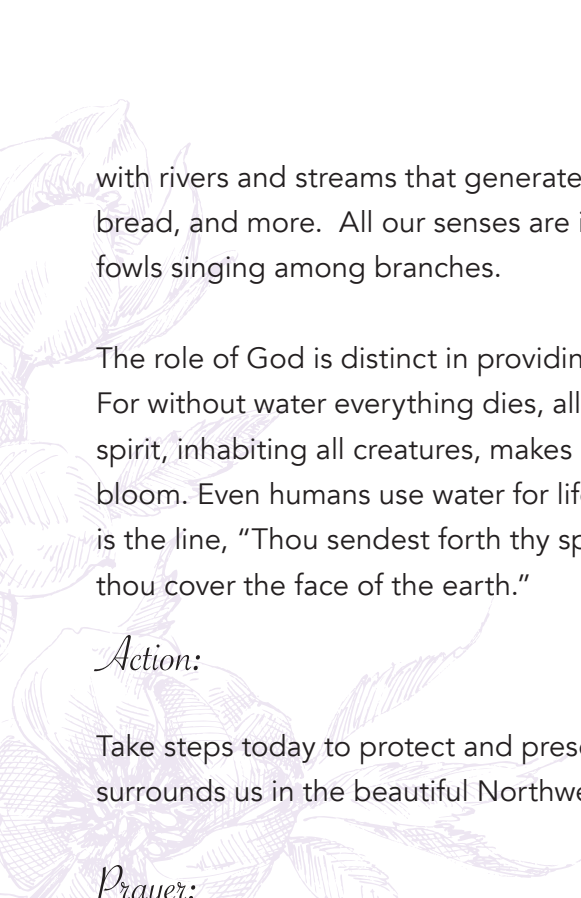
...
Peg Hall

Psalm 104: 1-4, 10-15, 27-30

Reflection:

These excerpts from Psalm 104 are beautifully written poetry that inspire the reader. I found them increasingly thrilling each time I read them. It paints a picture of an extravagant, wonderful world given to us for our enjoyment and our stewardship. The lush phrasing in the opening passage describes the glorious clothing worn by God, and the majesty God brings to the heavens has an especially strong impact. I love the imagery of the chariot of clouds. One can get swept up in the wind's wings and the metaphor of fire and flame. Most impressive is the theme of light throughout. An unforgettable picture is highlighted by God covering God's self with light like a garment.

While fire and light dominate the early section, the psalm goes on to stress the life-giving quality of water. Various forms of water, lakes and oceans and bays, contribute to the panorama. The scripture is dynamic, giving the reader a feeling of movement. Water is described as covering the earth's surface



with rivers and streams that generate grass, herbs, food, wine, oil, bread, and more. All our senses are involved when we read of fowls singing among branches.

The role of God is distinct in providing life by providing water. For without water everything dies, all turns to dust. God's spirit, inhabiting all creatures, makes everything come alive and bloom. Even humans use water for life giving. Most memorable is the line, "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou cover the face of the earth."

Action:

Take steps today to protect and preserve the water that surrounds us in the beautiful Northwest.

Prayer:

God, help us humans use our wisdom to nurture this world. Amen.

Journal:



10

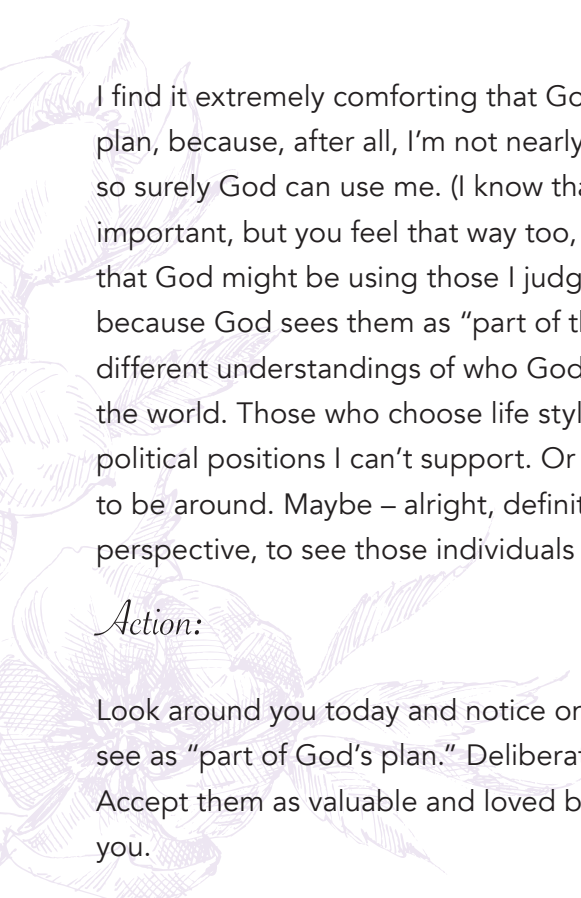
March 4
...
Anonymous

Matthew 3: 1-6

Reflection:

Did you ever notice how God often works in weird, peculiar ways? Like by sending wisdom in strange situations and help through the most unexpected people? How God seems to choose not the ones we think God should select – the educated, the pious, the socially acceptable – but instead works through the extremely strange. Like John the Baptist.

Picture John. Wearing a camel-hair tunic with a leather belt, scavenging what food was available in the Judean wilderness. Likely not smelling too good, not looking particularly approachable. Wandering from one “preaching spot” to another, shouting for the religious elite and common folks alike to repent of their sins because the kingdom of heaven is coming and it’s time to “get right with God.” (Perhaps the original televangelist, just without the cameras.) And Strange John was extremely effective. Folks from Jerusalem and the countryside were traveling to find him, confessing their sins and being baptized.



I find it extremely comforting that God used John in God's plan, because, after all, I'm not nearly as "out there" as John, so surely God can use me. (I know that sounds a little self important, but you feel that way too, right?) But it also means that God might be using those I judge as "extremely strange," because God sees them as "part of the plan." Those with very different understandings of who God is and how God works in the world. Those who choose life styles I don't understand or political positions I can't support. Or those I simply do not want to be around. Maybe – alright, definitely – I need to change my perspective, to see those individuals as God does.

Action:

Look around you today and notice one person you don't normally see as "part of God's plan." Deliberately acknowledge them. Accept them as valuable and loved by the same God who loves you.

Journal:



11

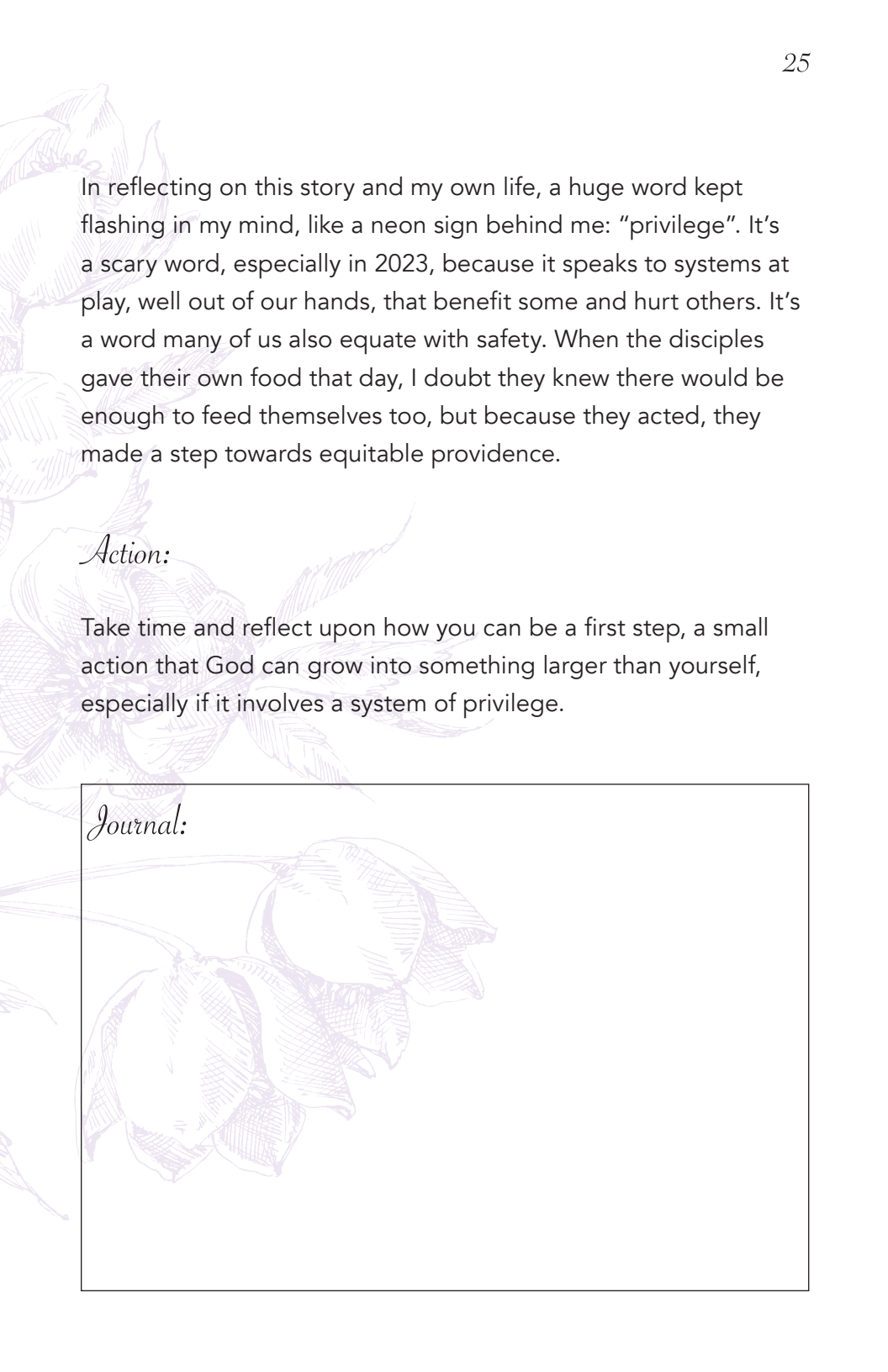
March 6
...
Isaac Pruden

Matthew 14: 13-21

Reflection:

Many times, when I've heard this story, I remember it being to support the platitude of "the Lord will provide." It's a miracle story that shines a light on Jesus' ability to transform a meager amount of food into an abundance to feed the masses. This time though, two things struck me. At the start, Jesus wants to be alone. I, as an introvert, feel seen in this moment. The second thing that hits me is Jesus' command to the disciples, telling them to give the people something to eat. Jesus doesn't say "Hold on, I've got this." Rather, he tells his very human posse to do it and, miraculously, there's more than enough for everyone.

What does it mean to be provided for in 2023? To have food and shelter, health and peace of mind? This story at times can be used as a way to tell people not to worry about dire or stressful situations and to let God do the work. "God will provide and ensure everyone is taken care of." But if anything, this story tells us there's a key first step for God's actions: us.



In reflecting on this story and my own life, a huge word kept flashing in my mind, like a neon sign behind me: “privilege”. It’s a scary word, especially in 2023, because it speaks to systems at play, well out of our hands, that benefit some and hurt others. It’s a word many of us also equate with safety. When the disciples gave their own food that day, I doubt they knew there would be enough to feed themselves too, but because they acted, they made a step towards equitable providence.

Action:

Take time and reflect upon how you can be a first step, a small action that God can grow into something larger than yourself, especially if it involves a system of privilege.

Journal:



12

March 7

...
Dana Birkby

Matthew 7: 15-20

Reflection:

As in the Jerusalem of Jesus's time, there is no shortage of false prophets among us.

Many are easily discerned by their transparent self-interest, their patent insincerity, their obvious falsehoods, or their plain meanness. Their fruits lie (so to speak) rotting on the ground where we can smell them. We can (and do) congratulate ourselves for dismissing these out of hand.

Less easily discerned are false prophets who embed themselves in our own causes, interest groups, or congregations. We value such groups because within them we trust more easily and engage more deeply: they magnify our own power and feed our sense of belonging. False prophets in this context abuse that trust (and that bond) to divert our efforts toward their own ends. Because they pretend to be on our side, and because of our own

emotional investment, it may be difficult and painful to discern the harm they do.

Most insidious, perhaps, are false prophets who set up shop inside our own minds. I do not mean ordinary bad habits or self-defeating actions, but a tendency to twist our best intentions away from their aim. The apostle Paul writes about his struggle with this tendency in Romans 7: "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand."

Action:

Read and meditate upon Romans 7 when you suspect there may be a false prophet at work around you.

Journal:



13

March 8

...
Alex Smith & Jean Braun

1 Kings 17: 8-16

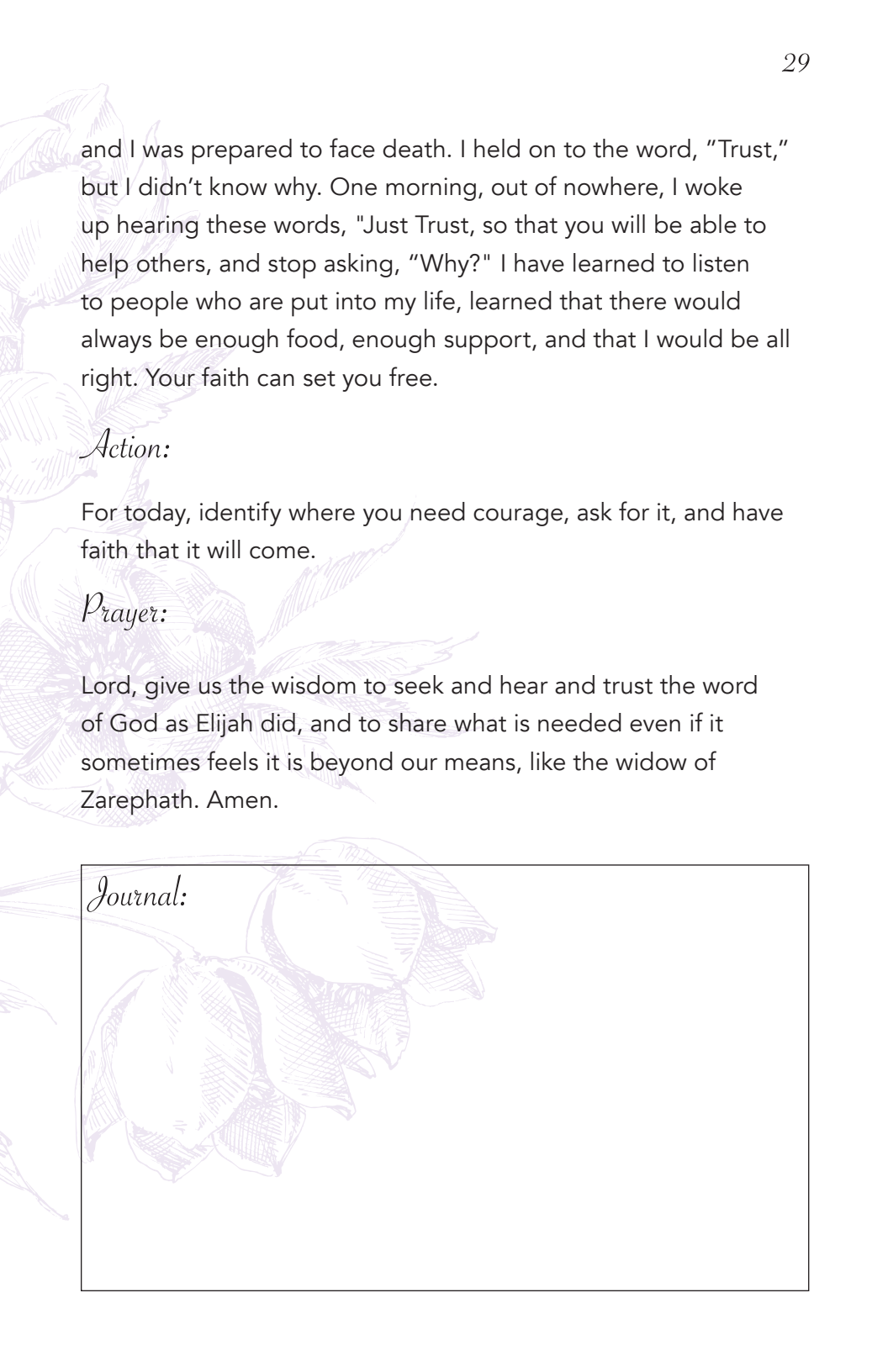
Reflection:

Alex Smith:

Elijah, under threat of death from Ahab, has listened to God and trusts the instructions to go and live by the wadi. He then trusts again when God directs him to Zarephath and the widow, who apparently also has heard from God, and she shares what little insufficient crumbs she has with Elijah. Her sacrifice is stunning. She shares what she has gathered not only for herself, but for her child. They are then provided for by God, as the widow's jar of meal and jug of oil "did not fail." It is only by faith that these events could have transpired, and by faith they are both saved from death.

Jean Braun:

I am a recovering Alcoholic. On September 29, 1979, I turned to Something Bigger that I could not see or hear. I gave my life to a Higher Power and trusted that my life would be different. Like the woman Elijah was told to find, I had already tried everything,



and I was prepared to face death. I held on to the word, "Trust," but I didn't know why. One morning, out of nowhere, I woke up hearing these words, "Just Trust, so that you will be able to help others, and stop asking, "Why?" I have learned to listen to people who are put into my life, learned that there would always be enough food, enough support, and that I would be all right. Your faith can set you free.

Action:

For today, identify where you need courage, ask for it, and have faith that it will come.

Prayer:

Lord, give us the wisdom to seek and hear and trust the word of God as Elijah did, and to share what is needed even if it sometimes feels it is beyond our means, like the widow of Zarephath. Amen.

Journal:





14

March 9
Sharon Perez

2 Corinthians 9: 6-13

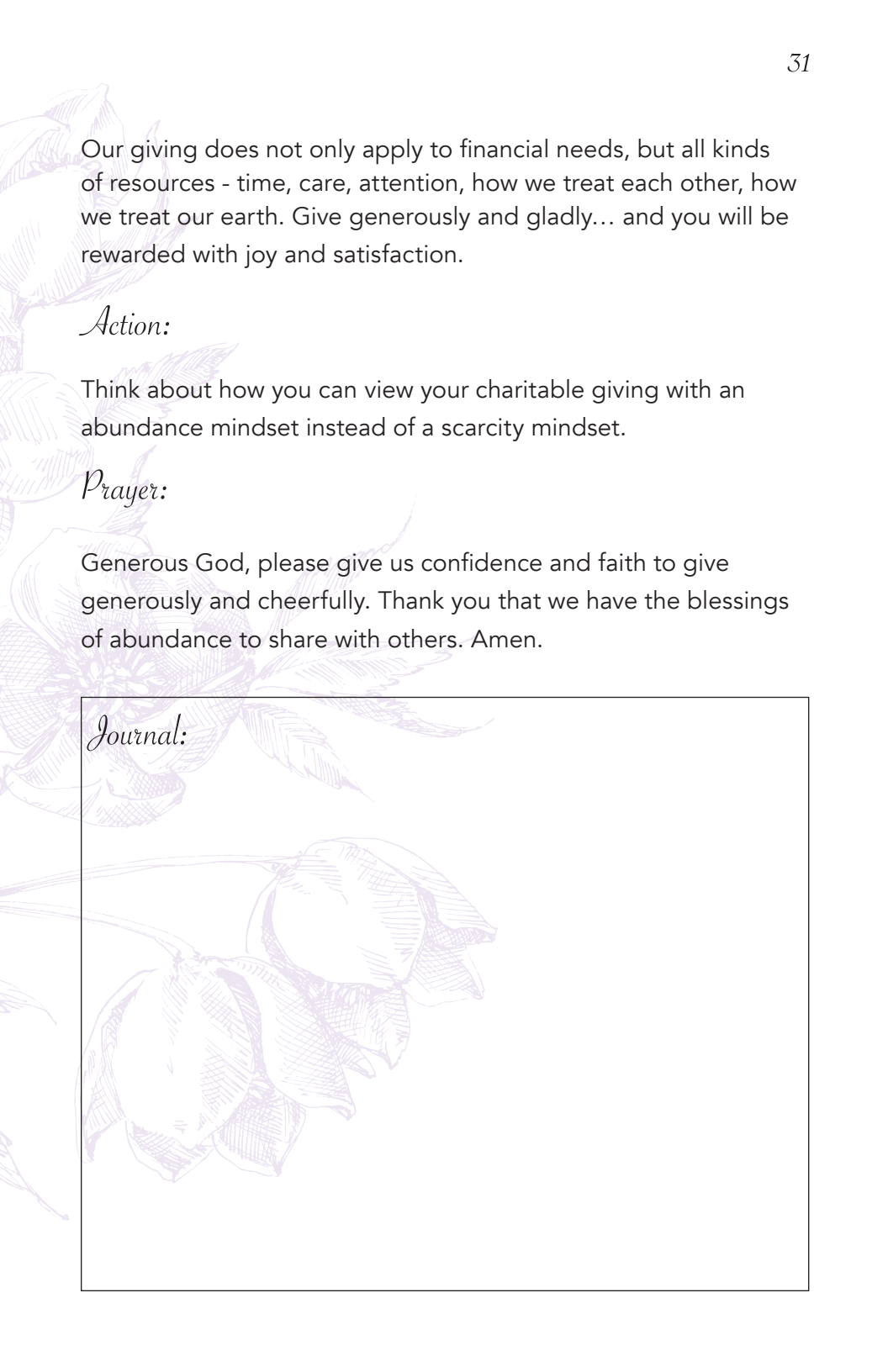
Reflection:

This passage resonates personally and professionally with me. As a professional fundraiser for decades, I embrace the notion of abundance instead of scarcity. And personally, I ascribe to the notion of giving gladly. Our richness is abundant in so many ways beyond just monetary wealth. We can give by volunteering our time, our expertise, our attention, our love.

As a child in Sunday school, we learned the song by Malvina Reynolds, about the Magic Penny:

Love is something if you give it away,
Give it away, give it away.
Love is something if you give it away,
You end up having more.

It's just like a magic penny,
Hold it tight and you won't have any.
Lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many
They'll roll all over the floor.



Our giving does not only apply to financial needs, but all kinds of resources - time, care, attention, how we treat each other, how we treat our earth. Give generously and gladly... and you will be rewarded with joy and satisfaction.

Action:

Think about how you can view your charitable giving with an abundance mindset instead of a scarcity mindset.

Prayer:

Generous God, please give us confidence and faith to give generously and cheerfully. Thank you that we have the blessings of abundance to share with others. Amen.

Journal:



15

March 10

...

Jerry Roberson

Psalm 111: 2-10

Reflection:

Recognizing God's greatness can feel like an exercise in the abstract. As persons of faith, we worship through our study of God's word and our attempts to put God's commands into holy action. However, making that connection between what we do and who God is can be unclear at times.

Today's scripture gives insight on how to make God more real to us. We read where God's grace and mercy are exemplified, where God's covenant to humankind is undergirded by provision and justice, and where God's love is powerful and unwavering. How can we sufficiently apply to our everyday actions what the Bible says about who God is? That's where Christ comes in.

I am often touched by art that depicts Jesus. Artists have a way of bringing the abstract into a realistic view. Whether it be the bold colors of Renaissance paintings, the unconventional lines of modern works, the two-dimensional figures of Eastern iconography, or the depths and shadows of Catholic sculpture,

the art of Christ leaps into my soul, connecting me to the person of God who gave everything for the sake of that connection.

The Old Testament gives us accounts of God's greatness that can, at times, be overwhelming. The Gospels distill that greatness into the human scale, whom our forebears in the faith could hear, touch, and experience first-hand. Through the example of Jesus, we have a relatable guide, not only to worship in a glorious realm, but also to follow on this dirty, complicated, and stressful path of life.

Action:

Discover a new way to hear, touch, and experience Christ, not just as God, but also as a human who walked and ministered on earth.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for giving us Jesus and the creative, never-ending ways he seeks a connection with us. Amen.

Journal:

16

March 11

...
Bola Babarinsa

Ephesians 2: 4-10

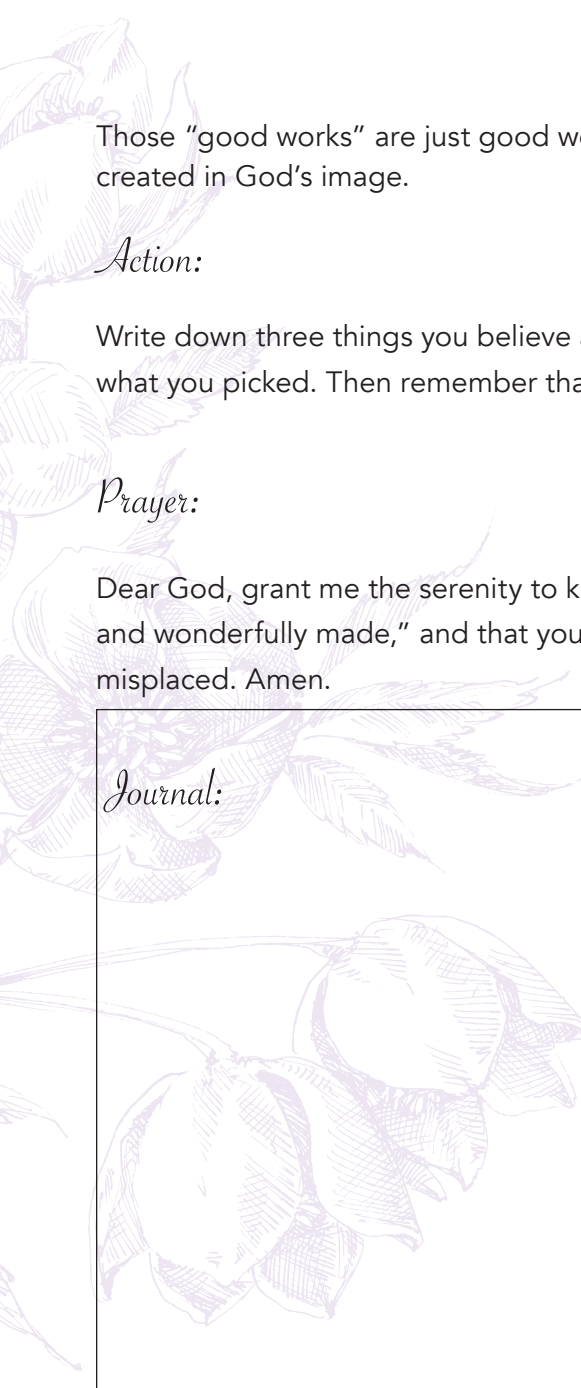
Reflection:

"Even when we were dead through our trespasses." This line stood out to me because I tend to fixate on negative things, mostly so I will improve or do better in the future. But this verse indicates that the trespasses or sins do not matter. And that there are no "results of works... [of my] own doing" that can impact God's love for me, for anyone.

This verse is hard for me to reconcile and accept. I've always felt unlovable. That my value lies in what I can do for others. That the more I excel, the more I show God I'm worthy to be loved. That the more "good works" I do, the less my sins will matter.

My view, that I could do something to impact God, I now see is hubris. God created us, Jesus Christ redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit sustains us. What could we do that would compare?

Once I see this, it follows that faith cannot come from us. Faith is not something that can be created or destroyed. It's simply a "gift of God." It is God's love.



Those “good works” are just good works. Expected of Christians, created in God’s image.

Action:

Write down three things you believe about yourself. Reflect on what you picked. Then remember that God loves you as you are.

Prayer:

Dear God, grant me the serenity to know that “I am fearfully and wonderfully made,” and that your faith in me is not misplaced. Amen.

Journal:

March 13

Greg Wallace

Matthew 5: 21-26

Reflection:

Today's text follows the Beatitudes to form the Sermon on the Mount. The passage contains no parables or high-tension Biblical scenes. It is straightforward teaching. Insightful and transformative, it is teaching at its best.

Recalling Jewish tradition, Jesus begins, "You have heard it said...but I say." Jesus first acknowledges Mosaic law and then seeks to expand and clarify to his disciples what those commandments really mean and how they apply to our lives. Like any good preacher, Jesus starts slowly, with a bit of diplomacy. "Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets." My goal is not that.

The message here is not replacement of the Old Testament teachings, but rather a more intense look. In modern discourse, Jesus offers what we would call a "deeper dive." Jesus invites us not to avoid or discard these calls to righteousness ("don't do this, don't do that"), but to look more closely at the abiding values which implicitly underly the commandments. The

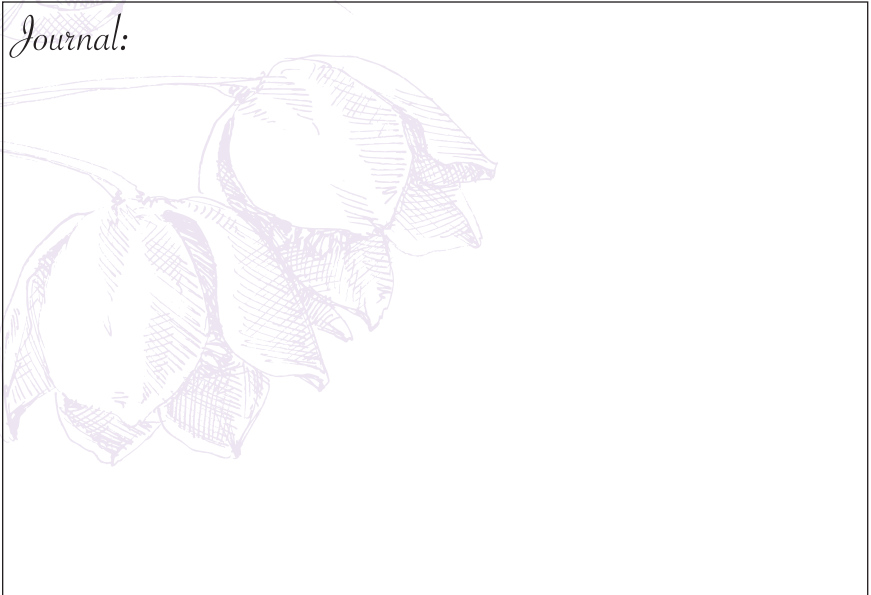
command not to murder extends far beyond the simple directive. Rejecting anger, insults, and destructive relationships are all part of the message.

The commandments are not a checklist of morality or a baseline of decency, but a starting point, an invitation to a flourishing life, where reconciliation, healthy relationships and love are the guideposts. Indeed, these guideposts are a prerequisite to an authentic relationship with God. On a broader level, Jesus is advocating for community based on respect, compassion and empathy, not power or privilege. In a world filled with unrelenting violence, conflict and partisan division, this message of peace and reconciliation is more relevant than ever.

Action:

During this season of Lent, let us each commit to one act of restoration and healing in our family, community, or workplace.

Journal:



March 14

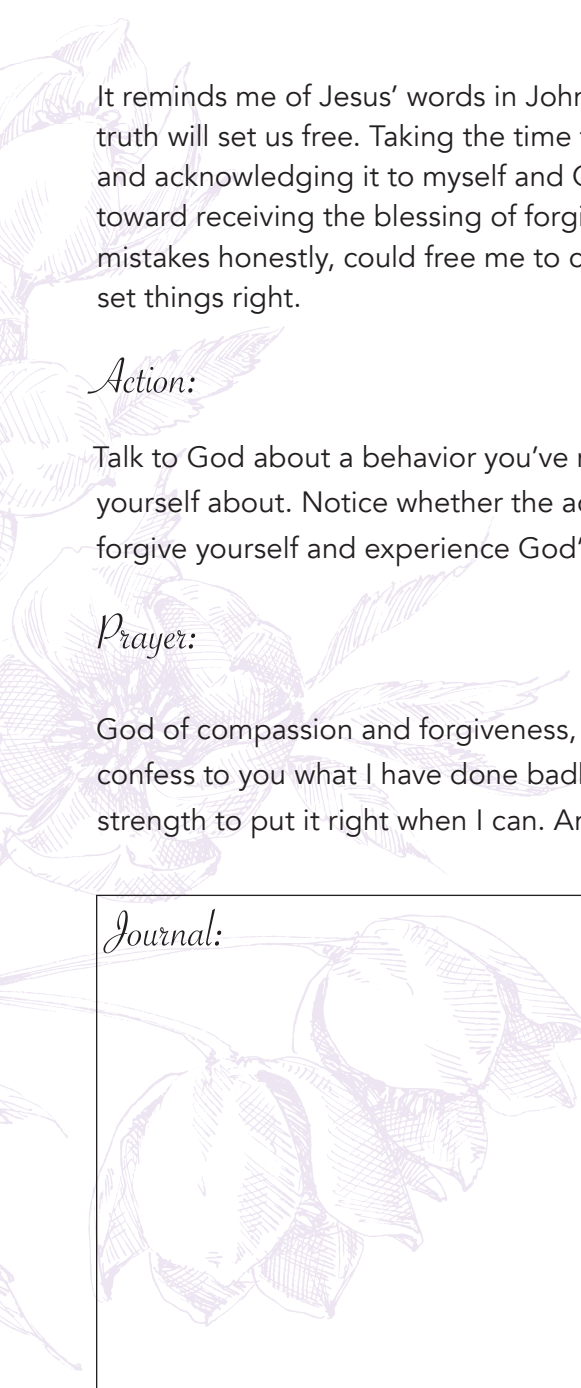
Teresa Canady

Psalm 32

Reflection:

"Keeping silent" is what drains the writer and weighs him down in this reading. Last Thursday after work, when my spouse asked me how my day went, I had to think for a minute. I was feeling a weight in my chest, but I couldn't put a finger on what was causing it. That simple question prompted me to pull up a memory I had buried about snapping at one of my colleagues that morning. This reminder prompted me to take an honest look at my actions, think through why I had reacted in this hurtful way, and what I might be able to do differently next time.

I wonder if the weight of un-dealt-with guilt is often what darkens our days and holds us back from taking constructive next steps. The message I hear in Psalm 32 is that we are blessed when we are forgiven, and the first step toward experiencing that forgiveness is talking about it – even just talking about it with God. The trust it takes to have this conversation helps us “rejoice in the Lord and be glad” as we are surrounded by God’s unfailing love.



It reminds me of Jesus' words in John when he says that the truth will set us free. Taking the time to look at a poor choice and acknowledging it to myself and God could be the first step toward receiving the blessing of forgiveness. Talking about my mistakes honestly, could free me to consider what I might do to set things right.

Action:

Talk to God about a behavior you've made that you are judging yourself about. Notice whether the act of praying helps you forgive yourself and experience God's unfailing love .

Prayer:

God of compassion and forgiveness, give me the courage to confess to you what I have done badly or selfishly, and the strength to put it right when I can. Amen.

Journal:





19

March 15
...
Joyce Frost

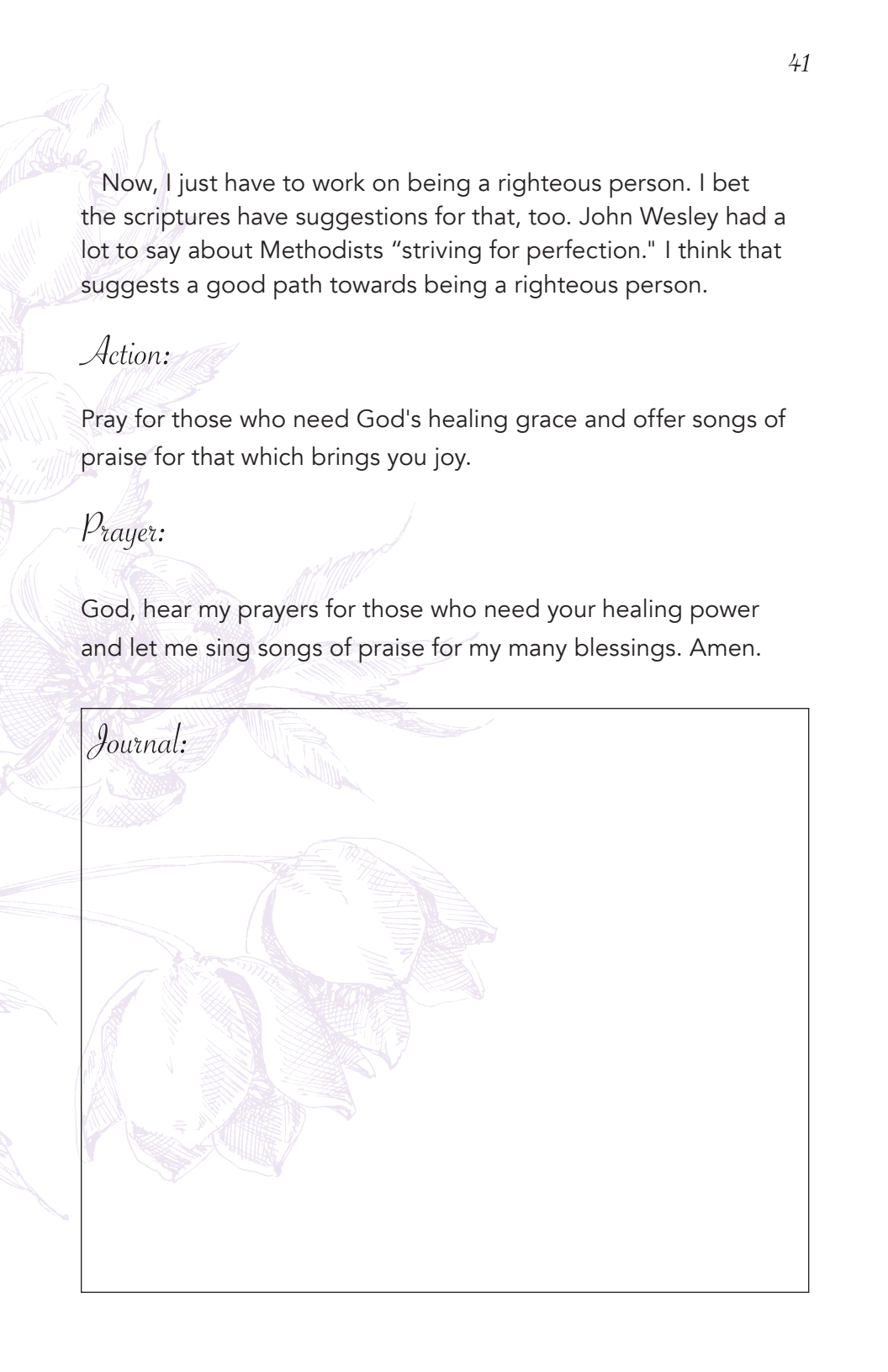
James 5: 13-18

Reflection:

For me, Lent is a time for reflection, a necessary and worthy task. However, I don't find it to be the most cheerful season of the church year, and I sometimes drag my feet in participating.

When I read my assignment for this Lenten season, I was happy and ready to "sing songs of praise" as verse 13 suggests. I have always been an optimist (it helps to have a name like "Joyce"). My faith is centered on doing good works and believing that most people really try to do their best. Since our best efforts aren't always great, the scriptures are important to help point us in the right direction.

Reading verse 15, "the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well" was music to the ears of someone interested in congregational care. Equally satisfying was verse 16, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." That sounds simple enough! It is easy to feel powerless in the face of illness and injury. It is comforting to think that my simple prayers for comfort and healing will be heard.



Now, I just have to work on being a righteous person. I bet the scriptures have suggestions for that, too. John Wesley had a lot to say about Methodists "striving for perfection." I think that suggests a good path towards being a righteous person.

Action:

Pray for those who need God's healing grace and offer songs of praise for that which brings you joy.

Prayer:

God, hear my prayers for those who need your healing power and let me sing songs of praise for my many blessings. Amen.

Journal:



20

March 16

...
Kathryn Everett

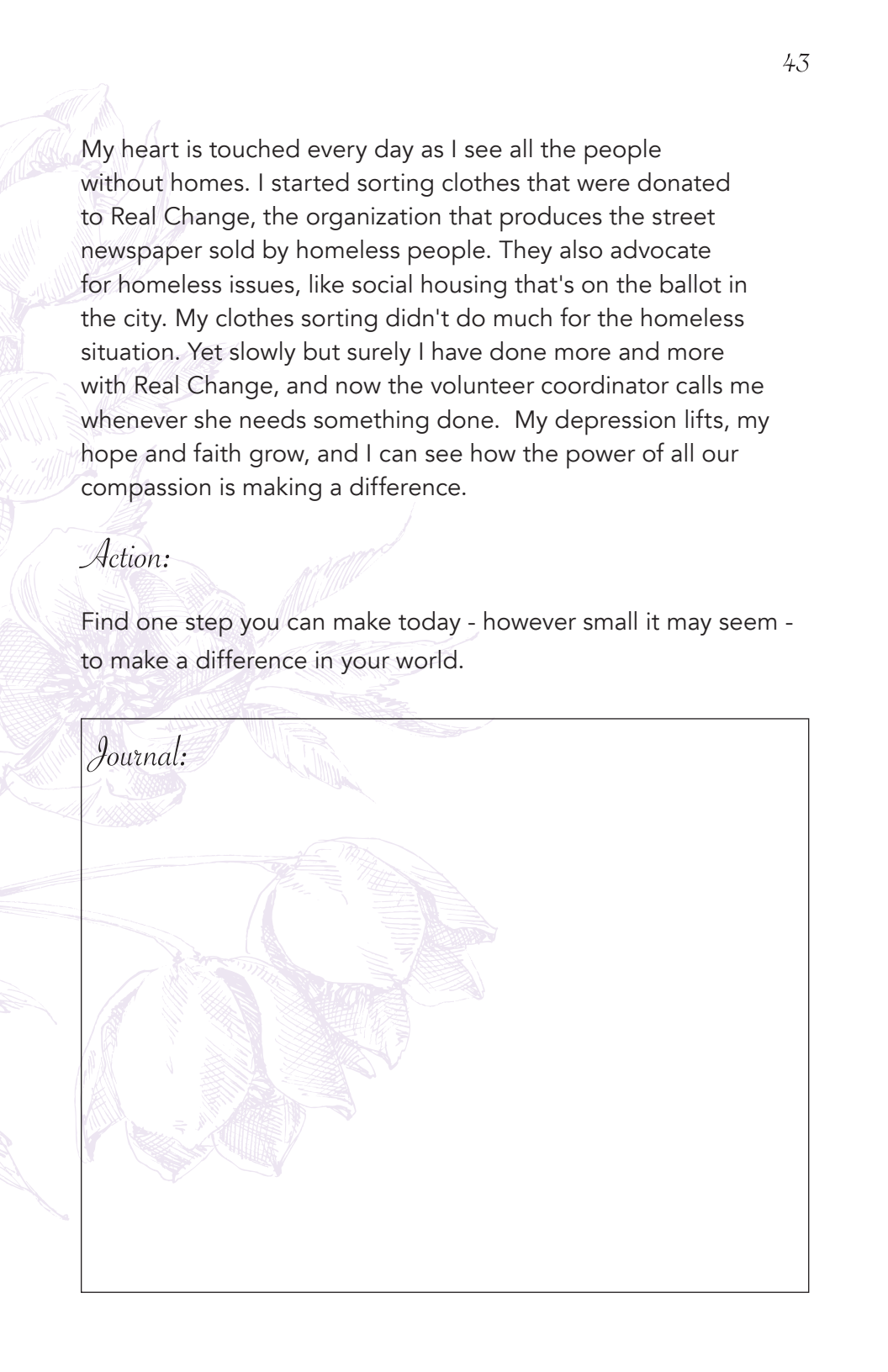
Mark 13: 14-22

Reflection:

As you read the first seven verses of this passage, did you think you were reading Revelation? I did! Our world is certainly looking like the apocalypse in many ways.

When I watch the news for very long I begin to get discouraged. Where is God in all this mess? Our world has so much going on that is life destroying. My go-to is often to read a fun book or go work out or plan an outing with a friend. Those are not bad things; in fact, they're good, healthy, and necessary. But they won't solve anything, and they won't help me be a part of needed changes.

When I get discouraged, instead of turning away, I need to sit down, be still, and pray for the people who are hurting. I need to ask myself what I can do. Maybe all I can do is pray for peace and justice, but often, if I am paying attention, I will see something more I can do. It may seem small, but little things add up.



My heart is touched every day as I see all the people without homes. I started sorting clothes that were donated to Real Change, the organization that produces the street newspaper sold by homeless people. They also advocate for homeless issues, like social housing that's on the ballot in the city. My clothes sorting didn't do much for the homeless situation. Yet slowly but surely I have done more and more with Real Change, and now the volunteer coordinator calls me whenever she needs something done. My depression lifts, my hope and faith grow, and I can see how the power of all our compassion is making a difference.

Action:

Find one step you can make today - however small it may seem - to make a difference in your world.

Journal:



March 17
...
Janet Crawley

Psalm 96

Reflection:

Psalm 96 says that strength and beauty are in God's sanctuary. Living on the Green River, I have an intimate experience with Nature's daily miracles.

- The honking of Canadian geese as they fly in formation following the curve of the river.
- The whistling wings of the Buffleheads skimming the water, taking flight, and then settling back into the river's eddy.
- Mysterious early morning fog drifting above the water, taking on a golden glow as the sun rays break over the treetops.
- And the glorious trees, rich in hues of yellow-green, emerald, and blue-green vibrating all around me.

God in all her glorious creation surrounds me.

Psalm 96 says, "all the trees of the forest sing for joy." I can imagine the clapping of trees in joy and the springing of green shoots being called forth from the cold soil by the sun's energy.

When I feel weighed down by the stories of humans oppressing others, violence done to each other or to the earth, lack of compassion and caring for those in need, I go to the woods or the river and allow Nature to be my healer. I walk among the trees, finding one whose energy calls for me to sit under her branches, lean on her trunk, and allow my tears to soothe my heart. The grief turns into a deep gratitude for the constant love that flows from all God's creation.

Action:

Today, take time to sit outside and let nature be your guide. Allow yourself to be fully present in the moment. Then take three deep breaths and let go of whatever does not serve you in that moment. Allow your senses to absorb the beauty of the natural world around you and fill your heart with joy. Then express gratitude for the miracle of all life.

Journal:





22

March 18
Jonathyn Kraig

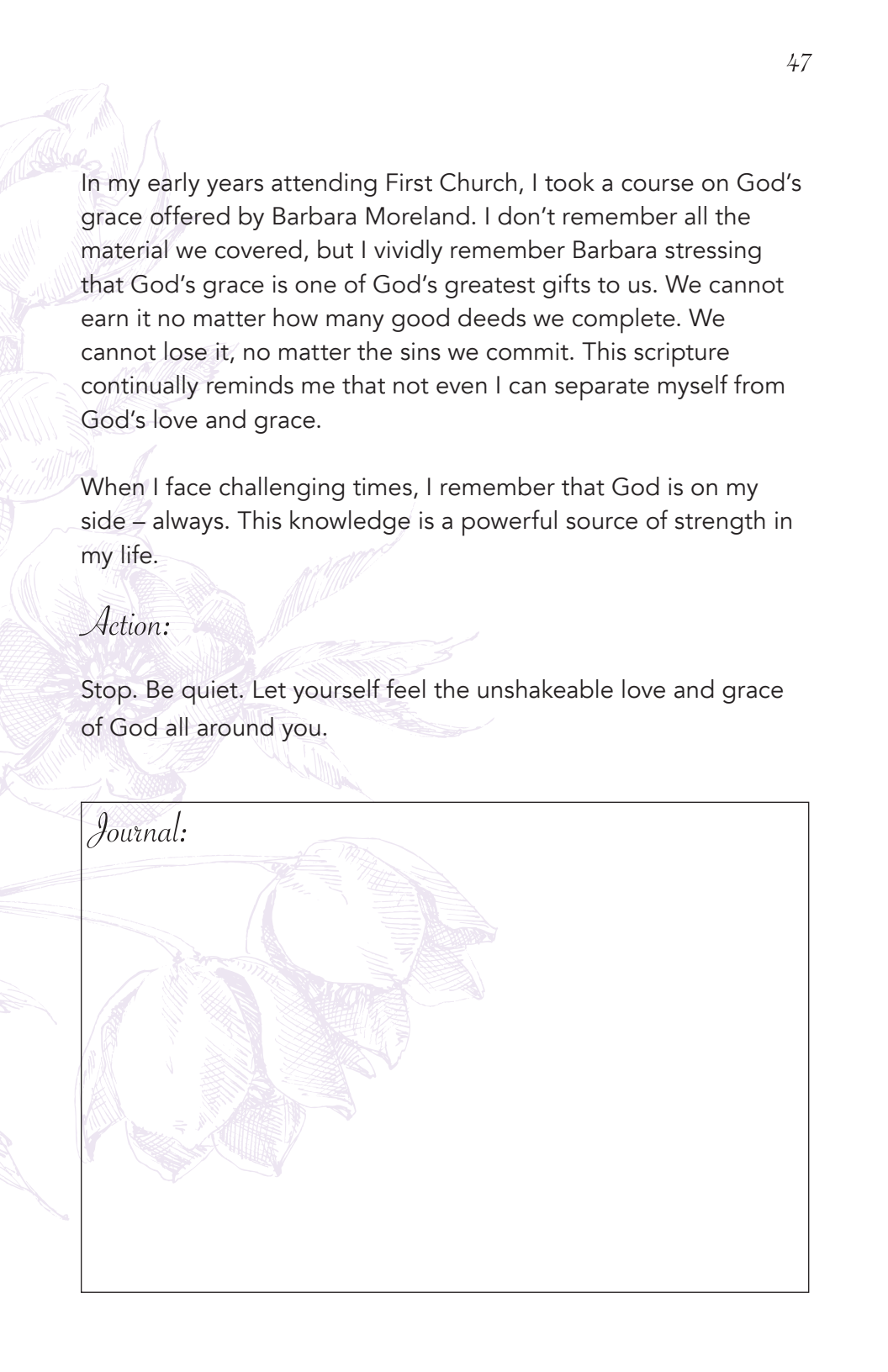
Romans 8: 31-39

Reflection:

Paul says that God “has our back.” And that absolutely nothing can come between us and the love of God. Nothing.

Paul makes a dramatic list of those things we might be afraid are stronger than God, but then dismisses each one. God’s love and grace is not affected by someone’s political power or economic status - or by the lack of these. (Think of all times Jesus shot down the rich and powerful.) God’s love is not affected by our mistakes. (Think of all the “sinners” Jesus healed and helped.) God’s love is not affected by our lack of understanding at times. (Think of the disciples who repeatedly didn’t get what Jesus was saying.) I get it: We cannot escape God’s love.

Still, this constant acceptance is sometimes hard for me to grasp. I think of times I make choices or take actions that I know are wrong, but I do it anyway. Then I begin to feel that God will abandon me because of my poor choices. But when I see verse 31, “Who can ever be against us?” I hear the scripture saying, “Not even you, Jonathyn!”



In my early years attending First Church, I took a course on God's grace offered by Barbara Moreland. I don't remember all the material we covered, but I vividly remember Barbara stressing that God's grace is one of God's greatest gifts to us. We cannot earn it no matter how many good deeds we complete. We cannot lose it, no matter the sins we commit. This scripture continually reminds me that not even I can separate myself from God's love and grace.

When I face challenging times, I remember that God is on my side – always. This knowledge is a powerful source of strength in my life.

Action:

Stop. Be quiet. Let yourself feel the unshakeable love and grace of God all around you.

Journal:





23

March 20

Em Rigler

Matthew 12: 46-50

Reflection:

I struggled for a bit with this piece of scripture. It's hard for me to not feel empathy for Mary and the rest of Jesus' family in this scene. Your eldest child, a miraculous child that you've watched grow and learn, a child promised to do wonderful things, one you've fiercely loved has now come into his full potential. And in doing so, while teaching to the masses, he appears to reject you, the family who have loved and supported him on his journey. Ouch. But is that exactly what's happening? I think it's more complicated than it seems.

The point Jesus is making is broader than rejection of his earthly family. I see his words as embracing the community he's building with his creation of a new family: a found family. He's pushing back against the expectation of the biological family being the most important relationship in a person's life, and he's identifying a new way of seeing the world.

As a queer person, that message connects with me; sometimes, the family you're born with is not the support system you need

to thrive as your truest, best self. Connecting with those outside of your established group can be enlightening. Of course, this message can be taken too far. Far too many cults separate members from their family and friends, preying on the loneliness and fear to suck people into unhealthy relationships.

For us as Christians, the goal is finding the balance between these two poles: staying close to the family that raised us, but also embracing our siblings in Christ. Healthy relationships are a key element of our human nature, something we should uphold. We are who we relate to.

Action:

Reach out today to someone in your family, whether biological or found. Check in with them and see how they are doing.

Journal:



24

March 21

Shawn Smith

Psalm 144: 3-4, 12-15

Reflection:

Do you have days when you wake up and think, “What’s the point? Why get up and go to work or school? What’s the point of doing chores or homework? Why should I be working so hard? No one notices me. Can’t I just go back to bed? What’s the point of my life? I am insignificant and nothing matters.”

Some days we look around at the world and feel like nothing we do makes any difference. We don’t have to look far to see injustice and unlawfulness. Sometimes it seems the only way to get ahead in this world is to cheat, steal, manipulate, and lie. Sometimes the pressure closing in on us is so great that we just want to give up. “Why try at all if my life is worth nothing?”

Verses 3 and 4 describe how fleeting our lives on this planet are: “Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.” Our lives are here one moment and gone the next. Why would God care about us at all? We are insignificant to him.

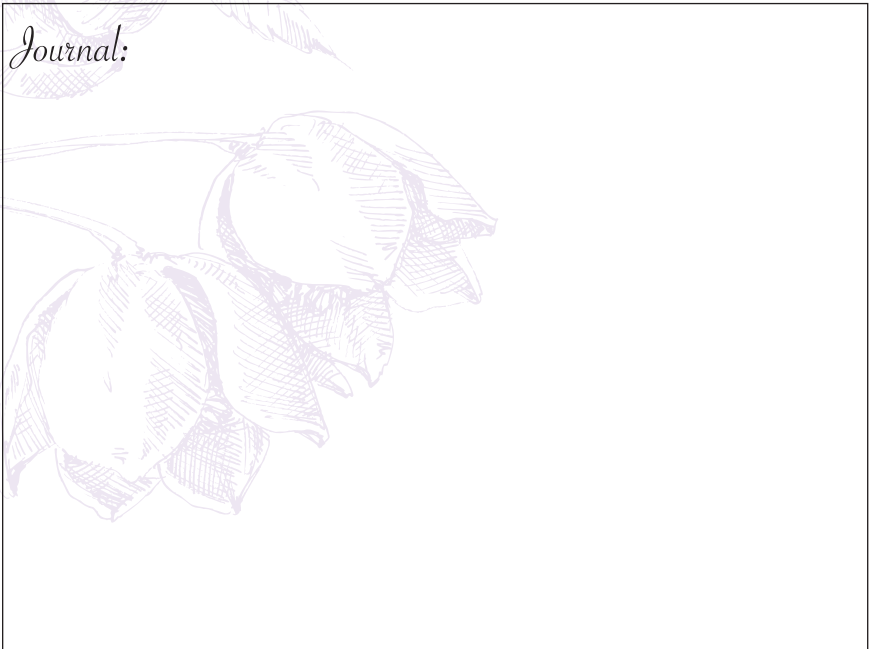
This attitude reminds me of the Mayfly. Mayflies have a short lifespan. Female mayflies usually live less than five minutes, while males can live a whopping two days. Crowds gather to witness the swarms that occur during hatching season. In some regions, the number of insects is so expansive that they show up on the local weather radar. That is not insignificant!

Verses 12-15 offer hope. God is with us. And the next generation can thrive as long as we don't give up.

Action:

What can you do today? Get out of bed. Put one foot in front of the other. Make a small difference in one person's life. A smile, compliment, or kind act can make all the difference. Believe that, like the Mayfly, your life has purpose and meaning.

Journal:





25

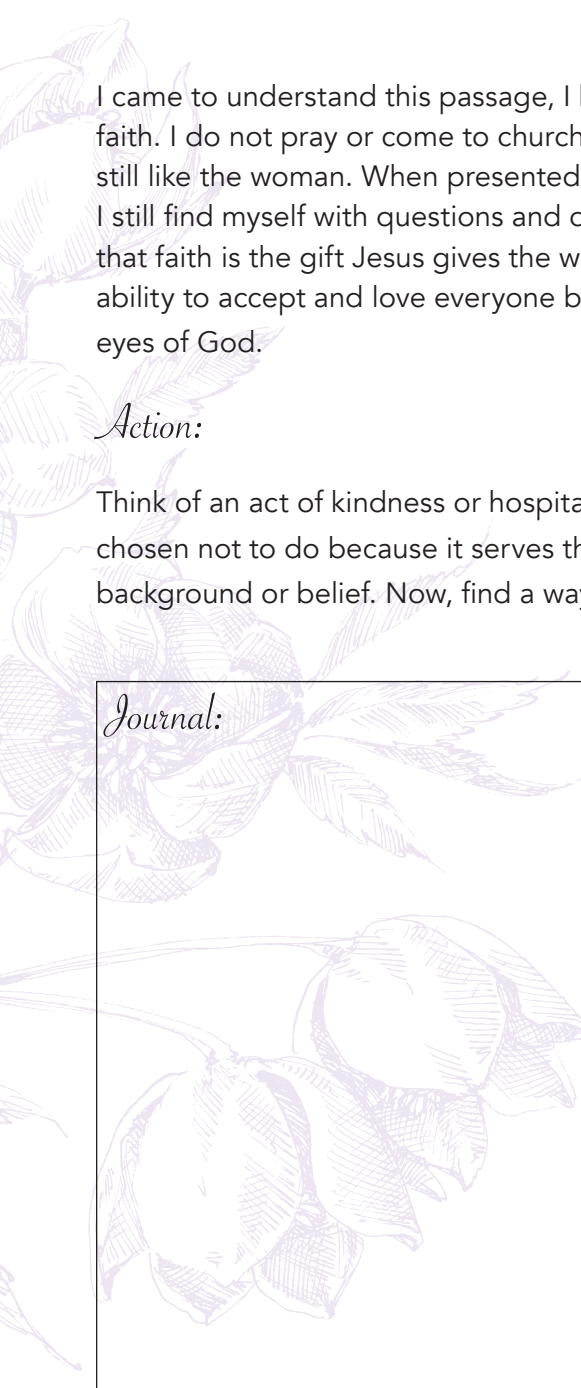
March 22
...
Julius Perez

John 4: 7-12

Reflection:

The Samaritan woman is much like me. We are both still on our journeys to find our own true faith. As I read and wrote about this passage numerous times, I found myself at a frustrating impasse. I was unable to produce anything that felt authentic to my own connection to Christ, the church, and my faith. I finally realized that I needed to analyze the meaning of faith and what faith means to me as I travel along my spiritual journey.

This passage is a powerful reminder of the love and acceptance offered by Jesus to all people, regardless of their background or social status. Despite the long-standing feud between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus teaches the woman about God's all-embracing love. Christ offers salvation and a new life to all who believe in him, regardless of their race, gender, or social status. This message of acceptance is fundamental to the Christian faith, and it serves as a reminder that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. Jesus' willingness to engage with the Samaritan woman and offer her the gift of living water challenges us to see those who are different from us with compassion, love, and acceptance. As



I came to understand this passage, I better understood my own faith. I do not pray or come to church as often as I should. I am still like the woman. When presented with the teachings of Christ, I still find myself with questions and doubt. But I have learned that faith is the gift Jesus gives the woman – and me. It is the ability to accept and love everyone because we are equal in the eyes of God.

Action:

Think of an act of kindness or hospitality that you have chosen not to do because it serves those who are different in background or belief. Now, find a way to give freely.

Journal:



26

March 23
...
Tom Bruhns

1 John 4: 13-21

Reflection:

Many places in the Bible we are commanded to love our neighbors. In Exodus 20, several commandments have us treat our neighbors well. In Leviticus 19: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all put loving your neighbor right below loving God, and all other laws follow from these two. Today's scripture binds them even more tightly together: "Whoever loves God must also love his brother and sister."

But how should we love our neighbors? Is it enough to greet them in peace and do them no harm? Is it enough to help them if they ask? No, that is not enough. We must begin by accepting that everyone on earth is my neighbor. And each of us must realize that our individual actions affect everyone else – sometimes in a positive way and others times by causing harm.

When there are millions of "just me," all taking the same small negative action, each thinking their action won't matter, the results can be catastrophic. Our combined actions have resulted

in glaciers melting, raising the ocean level, and displacing whole countries. Our actions today will have devastating impacts on our great-grandchildren, on and all our neighbors worldwide.

The first step in truly loving your neighbors is to hold them in your heart. Think about them as real individuals. Consider what you might do, even small things, to help them reach their full potential. Dream of a world where all are able to make positive contributions. Do what you can to make it so. Love thy neighbor - no exceptions!

Action:

Start small and be bold. Simply be present and actually see each person you pass. Learn their names. Invite them to tell you their story. Listen to what they have to say.

Prayer:

God, grant us the wisdom and vision to love our neighbors in ways we had not thought possible. Amen.

Journal:



27

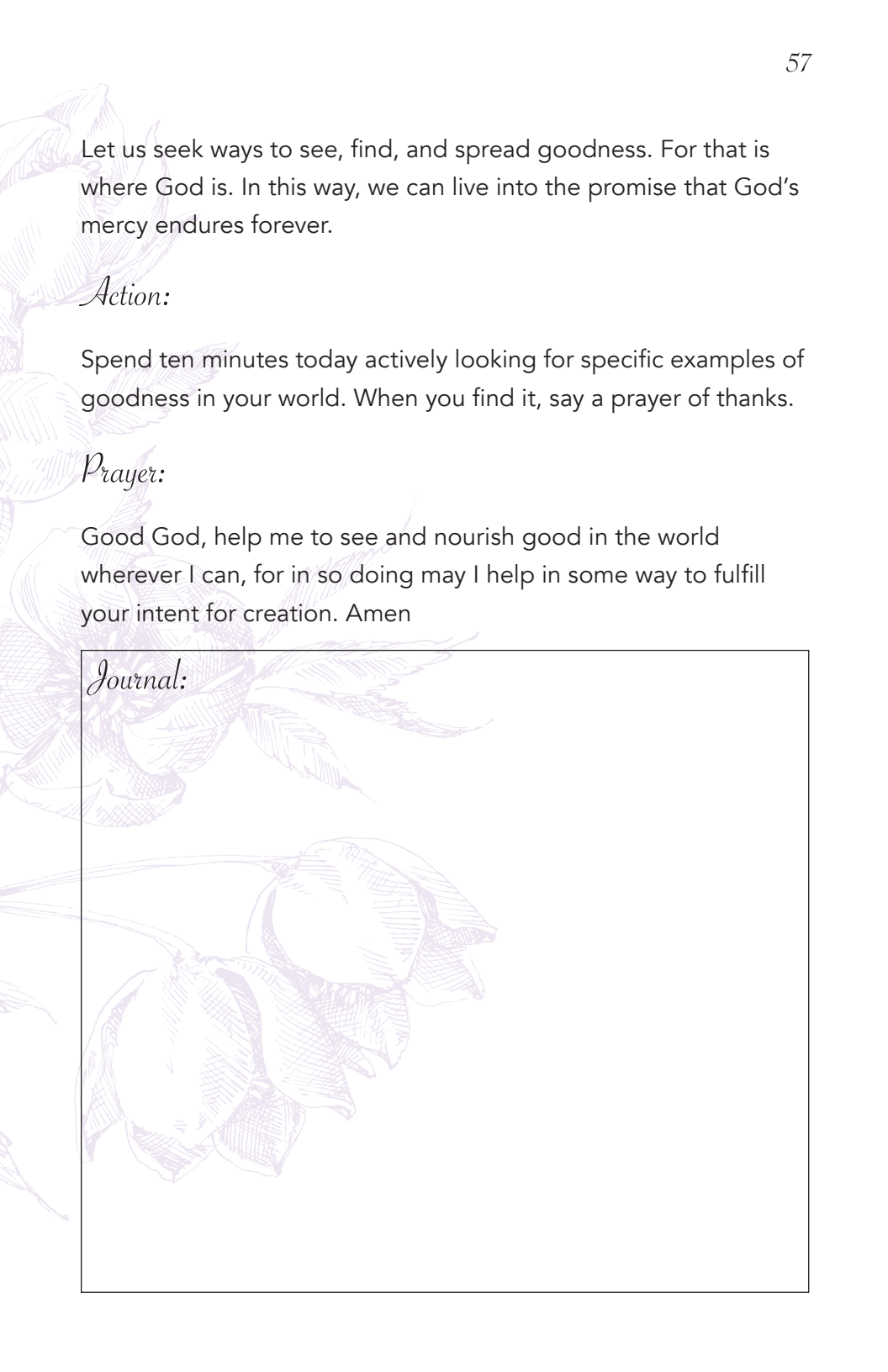
March 24
...
Tom Carlson

Psalm 136: 1-16

Reflection:

I often get overwhelmed by the state of the world these days. Lies. Demagoguery. Democracies in peril. The spread of authoritarian rule. Brutal wars. Resurgent racism. Gun carnage. Humanity running roughshod over nature. Rising temperatures. Devastating storms. Droughts. Floods. And an increasingly uninhabitable planet. This dire litany goes on and on. It's challenging to see good and keep hope alive.

We are used to saying God is love. However, when I read this Psalm, I think of God as good. God is the source of good. Wondrous acts of creation, liberation, and enduring mercy are demonstrations of God's goodness. It occurs to me that we might also say Good is God. Wherever we see good, find good, and do good—whether in a simple act of kindness, a courageous stand, or a big policy move for the public good—there is God.



Let us seek ways to see, find, and spread goodness. For that is where God is. In this way, we can live into the promise that God's mercy endures forever.

Action:

Spend ten minutes today actively looking for specific examples of goodness in your world. When you find it, say a prayer of thanks.

Prayer:

Good God, help me to see and nourish good in the world wherever I can, for in so doing may I help in some way to fulfill your intent for creation. Amen

Journal:

John 3: 11-17

Reflection:

I have mixed feelings about writing a Lenten devotional, so I felt lucky to be assigned this passage. I was not raised in the church, but I went to a few Vacation Bible School sessions with a friend during elementary school. Probably the only Bible verse I knew as a child was John 3:16. "For God so loved the world." What an amazing thought!

A recent Upper Room told the story of a teacher who asked her virtual third grade students to respond to her photograph. She asked, "What does it tell you?" She was touched by a shy student who said, "You love me." That led the teacher to think, "How wonderful! God loves me!"

Even on my best days, I'm far from perfect and not always lovable, but it doesn't matter! God loves me. And God loves you, too! I am drawn to the United Church of Canada's creed, which begins and ends with, "We are not alone." Therein are two of the

most important elements of my faith: God loves me, and I am not alone.

Sounds pretty self-centered! But, if we're honest, most of us can relate. And if we aren't taking care of ourselves, loving ourselves, it's unlikely we can really care for others. Like the reminder to passengers on an airplane: Secure your oxygen first, then you can help another person.

When we are confident in God's love, we are in a far better place to handle the problems we will encounter and to pass on love and care to others.

Action:

Look in a mirror and say out loud, "God loves me." Think about what that calls you to do in the world.

Prayer:

Loving God, help us be mindful of your love for us, so that we can respond to others with love. Amen.

Journal:



29

March 27

Debbie Cherry

Matthew 26: 6-13

Reflection:

A retelling of the scripture:

Jesus and his guy friends are hanging out at Simon's place after dinner having a casual conversation about Jerusalem politics when the singing telegram arrives. It's not just any singer – it's Adele, and she's singing the funeral song, "Time to Say Goodbye." She's carrying a \$40,000 bottle of wine, and she pours it out for Jesus and his friends.

Jesus's friends are furious. How can Jesus preach charity for the poor and accept this extravagant, wasteful gift? They don't even want wine tonight, and they resent the intrusion.

Jesus tells them not to give Adele a hard time. They are right about the virtues of stewardship and charity, but Adele made a grand gesture to honor Jesus, and this memorable act should be appreciated. Jesus reacts by encouraging her, not nitpicking what she may have done wrong.

How do I react to people who make grand gestures? Am I Larry David (“Curb your enthusiasm”) or Dumbledore (“Harry Potter”)? I want to be more sensitive to the intentions of others, less critical, and more encouraging.

Action:

Think about a grand gesture that you may have criticized too harshly. Considering the story of Jesus’s anointment of Bethany, what might you do differently next time?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, When someone does something nice for me, let me recognize what has been done and respond with gratitude and encouragement, not criticism. Amen.

Journal:





30

March 28

...

Sue Porter

Psalm 68: 4-11

Reflection:

These verses of Psalm 68 tell us to praise God, to sing of God's greatness, and to be triumphantly happy for all God does for us. They make me thankful for what God has done for me personally. I am blessed with a home, family, church, friends, and I live comfortably. I have been set free from some of my personal prisons by God's love and forgiveness.

But sometimes life just isn't all that good, and I wonder about others. Can they find God in their world? Can the hungry man on 3rd and Pine in Seattle sing God's praises? Or the whale tangled in plastic fishing net? Or the forests scorched by drought and wildfire? Do they sing out in happy triumph, or is theirs a song of despair, anger, and loneliness?

After the Last Supper Jesus sang "a hymn" with his disciples. The hymn was probably the Hallel from Psalms 113-118 which

expresses praise and gratitude to God. With all that Jesus suffered in life, and knowing he was about to die a horrific death, he still sang of God's greatness.

That is why the Psalms are so wonderful. They give voice to the range of thoughts and feelings we have – rage, despair, doubt, sorrow, joy, faith, hope and praise. The psalms speak of a God who is active in the world and can handle whatever we humans have to say. We can cry in sadness, shake our fists in anger, or dance and jump for joy because our Loving God knows our joys, foibles, and failures. Let us give thanks for a personal God who is alive and accessible at any moment.

P.S. I love that Psalm 68:11 includes "the women who proclaim it are a mighty throng!"

Action:

Today, revisit a favorite Psalm and take five minutes to meditate on the things you are grateful for.

Journal:





31

March 29

...
Cynthia Lockwood

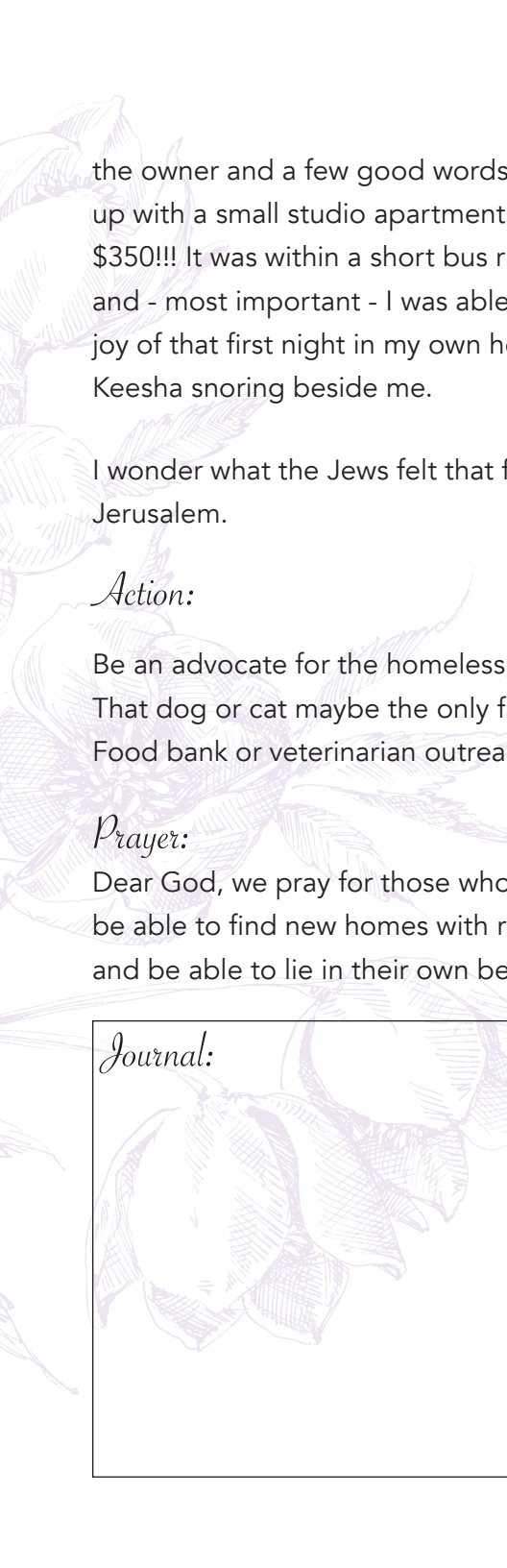
Isaiah 40: 9-11

Reflection:

Have you ever experienced good news that has changed the direction of your life? This is what Isaiah foretells the Jewish exiles in Babylonia in 530 B.C. God announced, through Isaiah, that liberation would be coming for the Jewish people. After 70 years of slavery and exile, they would be returning to their home, Jerusalem.

In one year, I lost my job, got another job, then lost my mom, and by December lost my home in Seattle. For a while, I had my friend's sofa. Then for a month a cheap SeaTac Motel. Eventually I found a room to rent in Tukwila. During all this time I had a good job, but I could find no place of my own because of that December eviction and having a pet. My possessions were a few personal belongings, and, of course, my dog Keesha.

One day at work, a co-worker said an apartment was coming open at his building. I jumped at the chance. After meeting with



the owner and a few good words from my coworker, I ended up with a small studio apartment on Capitol Hill for an amazing \$350!!! It was within a short bus ride from my downtown office, and - most important - I was able to keep my Keesha. Oh, the joy of that first night in my own home, laying in my own bed, with Keesha snoring beside me.

I wonder what the Jews felt that first night when they returned to Jerusalem.

Action:

Be an advocate for the homeless, especially those with pets. That dog or cat maybe the only family they have. Donate to a Pet Food bank or veterinarian outreach agency.

Prayer:

Dear God, we pray for those who have lost their homes. May they be able to find new homes with room for their pet companions and be able to lie in their own beds at night. Amen.

Journal:

Isaiah 51: 1-8

Reflection:

When we are going through tough times, we usually try to stop looking backwards and force ourselves to look forward into the future. In this passage, though, God is instructing us to look into the past and to recognize how God has worked during our hard times to create blessings.

Because hindsight is 20/20, this is often the easiest way to reflect on how God has walked with us into victory. We can use those past experiences, times when we know God was at work in our lives, to provide inspiration, encouragement, and faith during our current situation. God says "salvation is on the way" if we "pursue righteousness" and "take His instruction to heart." Our faith grows stronger when we remember how God has walked with us through the trials of the past to come safely to the other side.



Action:

Make a list of times when God has brought you through difficult situations and the experience has strengthened your walk with God.

Journal:



March 31

Deb Anderson

2 Corinthians 6: 16b-18

Reflection:

Be separate.

Well, that's confusing. Certainly not an inclusive command.

Upon first reading, this verse seems to come from the Old Testament prophets, citing rules regarding what you can and cannot eat and who you can and cannot marry. Maybe it's time to look at the scriptures from another side. To "flip that pancake" as a fellow Sunday School teacher used to say.

If we look to the healing and inclusive ministry of Jesus, this passage is telling us that we do need to be separate. Not necessarily from the world itself or from things we don't yet understand. But separate from the negativity and fear and hate that is aimed at keeping us all apart.

To grasp this idea, we may need to spend some time listening to the message God is trying to share with us. What would the caring parent want the child to know today? What is God sharing with you today? How do you need to separate yourself?

Action:

Find a time of quiet, away from distractions. Turn off your phone for 10 minutes. Take a walk. Sit quietly. You can do it. Focus on what it is that God wants you to know today.

Prayer by David Adam:

I weave a silence on to my lips
I weave a silence into my mind
I weave a silence within my heart
I close my ears to distractions
I close my eyes to attractions
I close my heart to temptations

Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled the storm
Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm
Let all the tumult within me cease
Enfold me Lord, in your peace. Amen.

Journal:

Luke 13: 18-21

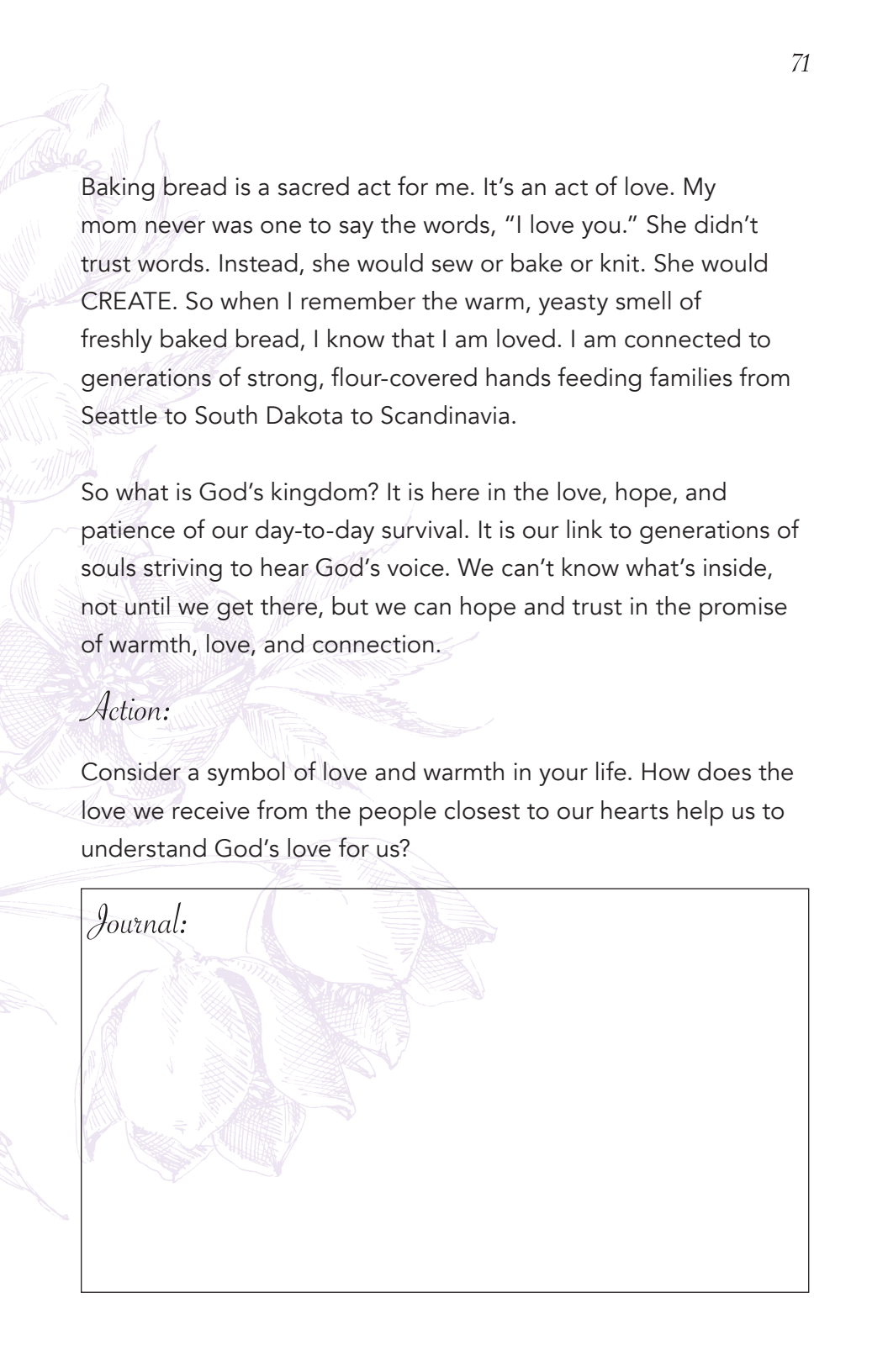
Reflection:

There is something miraculous about bread.

Get the yeast just right, care for it and nurture it with the nutrients and environment it prefers, and then step aside and watch. Or don't. Either way it will thrive and grow if given what it needs to survive.

The process isn't especially pretty. Flour dusts the air, yeast forms a yellowish scum as it bubbles into life. Bakers have to find a perfect balance between violence and tenderness when we knead the bread, sensing with our fingers when it reaches just the right texture and stretch.

Then there's the waiting. The endless waiting... and hoping. Will this batch rise? Did I work with it enough? Too much? We can never really know what we have until we cut into the browned crust and see what's inside.



Baking bread is a sacred act for me. It's an act of love. My mom never was one to say the words, "I love you." She didn't trust words. Instead, she would sew or bake or knit. She would CREATE. So when I remember the warm, yeasty smell of freshly baked bread, I know that I am loved. I am connected to generations of strong, flour-covered hands feeding families from Seattle to South Dakota to Scandinavia.

So what is God's kingdom? It is here in the love, hope, and patience of our day-to-day survival. It is our link to generations of souls striving to hear God's voice. We can't know what's inside, not until we get there, but we can hope and trust in the promise of warmth, love, and connection.

Action:

Consider a symbol of love and warmth in your life. How does the love we receive from the people closest to our hearts help us to understand God's love for us?

Journal:



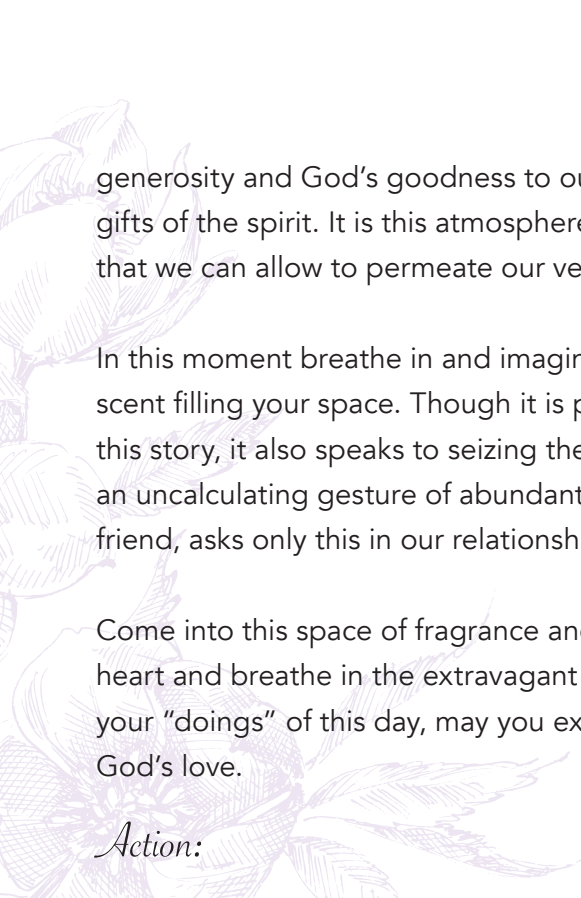
John 12: 1-7

Reflection:

Generosity and extravagance can be criticized and diminished as the head seeks to constrain the heart. Jesus freely accepts the very expensive gift from Mary as he understands the gratitude that she feels in relation to her brother's being brought back to life. Can you smell the "fragrance" of this beautiful act of gratitude that filled the whole house?

On the other hand, can you experience the mystery of evil and its influence in the world as reflected by the words of Judas? Even in the beauty of a selfless act, the naysayers intervene. We have both the generous givers and the ones who cry foul. Who have been the generous givers in your life? Can you also identify those who deny generosity for their own gain?

Mary was able to be extravagant and generous and was not held back by the opinions of those around her. We can reflect on her



generosity and God's goodness to ourselves as we share our gifts of the spirit. It is this atmosphere of extravagant generosity that we can allow to permeate our very being.

In this moment breathe in and imagine the smell of a precious scent filling your space. Though it is portrayed as extravagant in this story, it also speaks to seizing the moment of friendship with an uncalculating gesture of abundant love. Jesus, our beloved friend, asks only this in our relationships.

Come into this space of fragrance and holy wonder. Open your heart and breathe in the extravagant generosity of God's love. In your "doings" of this day, may you experience the abundance of God's love.

Action:

Look for opportunities to infuse someone with extravagant generosity. It can be as simple as a smile given to a stranger.

Journal:



Psalm 118: 19-29

Reflection:

This Psalm reminds me of the New Testament text in Ephesians 2:19-22: "...You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. God is using us all – irrespective of how we got here – in what God is building. God used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now God is using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together." (*The Message translation*)

As Christians, Jesus is our cornerstone. Our faith community is built up from the work we see the apostles and prophets doing all the way back in the book of Acts. We are connected with Christians everywhere through our shared belief in Christ.

On January 31, 2010, our faith community held a Cornerstone Laying Ceremony outside before dedicating our new building. A time capsule was sealed behind the cornerstone and we opened

the one from our previous building. These time capsules connect us with the past and future of our church, showing how we are more than just a building. We are a community of believers with Jesus living in each of our hearts.

At the end of this service, the Bishop knocked on the door with his crozier and said, "Let the doors be opened. Peace be to this house, and to all who enter here."

Action:

Create your own spiritual time capsule using a journal entry that describes how your faith community has informed who you are as a Christian today and how you would like to further develop your faith. Then set a time to revisit the journal entry.

Prayer:

Living Christ, May we all have peace in our hearts and at the core of our souls. May we open our hearts wide to share that peace with all, with you as the steady cornerstone of our faith always. Amen.

Journal:

37



April 5
...
Peter Jabin



Matthew 23: 37-39

Reflection:

Halfway through Holy Week, we reach a turning point. After the empowerment of the triumphal entry and the tender devotion in Jesus' anointing, we find ourselves just before the plot against Jesus is revealed, just before the insidiousness of empire reasserts itself.

Today's passage follows immediately upon the Seven Woes, in which Jesus lays into the Pharisees and Sadducees. "Hypocrites! Snakes! Brood of vipers!" Jesus is in a mood! He rails against Israel's all-too-willing collusion with empire and systems of oppression.

"You reject and destroy those whom God sends to free you from your bondage...to your own destruction. How I have longed to gather you as a loving mother, but you were not willing." Jesus' rage against Israel's hardheartedness gives way to poignant grief. Grief, I imagine, for his failure to reach Israel. Grief for the inevitability of the betrayal, humiliation, torture, and death to which he now turns.

In just these three verses, Matthew alludes to two histories (2 Chronicles and 1 Kings), one prophet (Jeremiah) and two psalms (57 and 118). Matthew uses the collected stories of the Hebrew people to make sense of Jesus' story, just as we use Jesus' story to make sense of our own. Matthew ends with the last verse of Psalm 118, a psalm his audience (hearers not readers) would have known by heart.

So all of these phrases would have resonated in their hearing as Jesus begins to accept his seeming defeat: "God's love endures forever...God is with me; I will not fear...The Lord is my strength and song...I will not die but live...The stone the builders rejected...This is the day the Lord has made...Blessed is the One..."

Action:

Today, consider watching or listening to the news with Psalm 118 at hand. Before, during, and after, repeat phrases from this psalm.

Prayer:

Cultivate within us, O God, equanimity and trust such as Jesus knew. Amen.

Journal:



38

April 6

Barbara Moreland

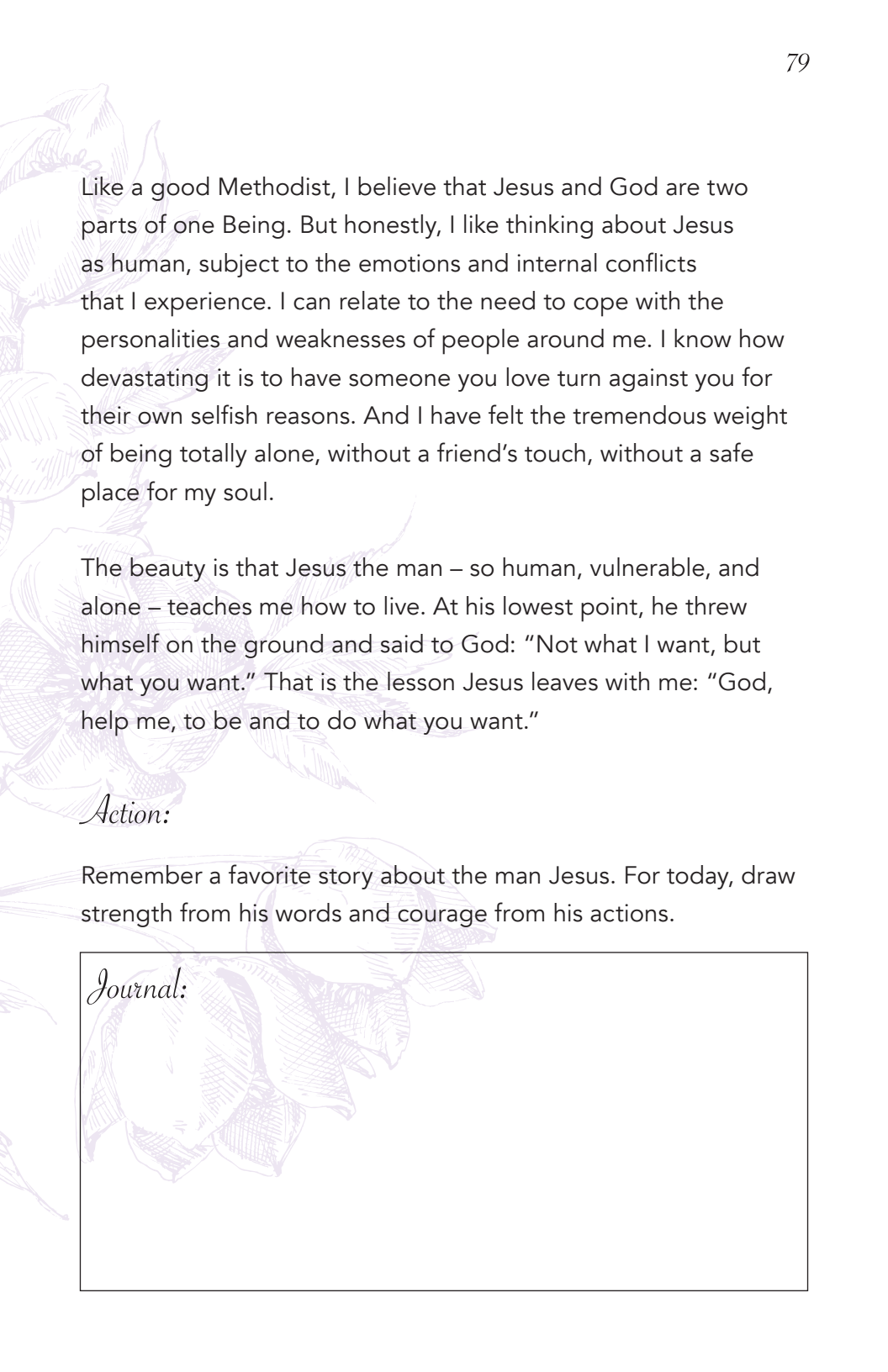
Mark 14: 32-42

Reflection:

No where in scripture is Jesus more human than in this passage. And no where is he more alone.

Jesus demonstrates in these verses the full range of human emotions. Joy at sharing a meal with his closest friends. Nervous concern that the betrayer was still in the room. Frustration that his “watchmen” kept falling asleep. Terror at knowing what lay ahead of him. Begging for mercy from the Father who held the power to change his future. Jesus was human.

Even with people physically around him, Jesus was left to face his future alone. His friend led the enemies to where Jesus waited, and those who swore they would protect him forever left him vulnerable when the enemies came. His Abba Father, who had been an inseparable part of Jesus throughout his human life, refused to honor his pleas. Jesus was alone.



Like a good Methodist, I believe that Jesus and God are two parts of one Being. But honestly, I like thinking about Jesus as human, subject to the emotions and internal conflicts that I experience. I can relate to the need to cope with the personalities and weaknesses of people around me. I know how devastating it is to have someone you love turn against you for their own selfish reasons. And I have felt the tremendous weight of being totally alone, without a friend's touch, without a safe place for my soul.

The beauty is that Jesus the man – so human, vulnerable, and alone – teaches me how to live. At his lowest point, he threw himself on the ground and said to God: "Not what I want, but what you want." That is the lesson Jesus leaves with me: "God, help me, to be and to do what you want."

Action:

Remember a favorite story about the man Jesus. For today, draw strength from his words and courage from his actions.

Journal:

Mark 14: 66-72

Reflection:

Peter denies Christ three times before the rooster crowed twice. It's an easy passage to dismiss if we want to. Likely we're never in the position to directly deny Christ as Peter did. But as the Faith in Action Bible notes, "Our denials of Christ take more subtle forms – like timid silence. Maybe we don't speak up when others sarcastically dismiss the Christian faith." OUCH! That hurts!

I have a great group of friends in Washington, D.C. They were all raised in the church, most in a conservative Southern Baptist church. They'll stand around the piano and sing old hymns from memory, but they have few good words about Christians.

When I visit, we'll have dinner at someone's house and eventually they'll get around to how hypocritical/stupid/insincere/harmful Christians are. They'll go on with example after example supporting their declaration, building on each other's outrage.

There I sit at the table, saying nothing. They know how important my faith and my church are to me. I tell myself I don't take them on because I won't change their minds. If I'm feeling particularly brave, I might draw to their attention that I am sitting at the table.

But, do we only engage in difficult discussions to change others' minds? Perhaps we'd be less divided if we had those difficult discussions simply to share another point of view, or at least to share with people we love that they are treading on our souls.

Action:

Find a way to share your relationship with God and Jesus with someone who feels and believes differently. Don't do it to "save their souls", but to share something profound of yourself with them. Have no expectations of their response. And if you do it, please let me know, so I can take strength from you to do better myself.

Prayer:

God, make me brave enough to speak up. Amen.

Journal:

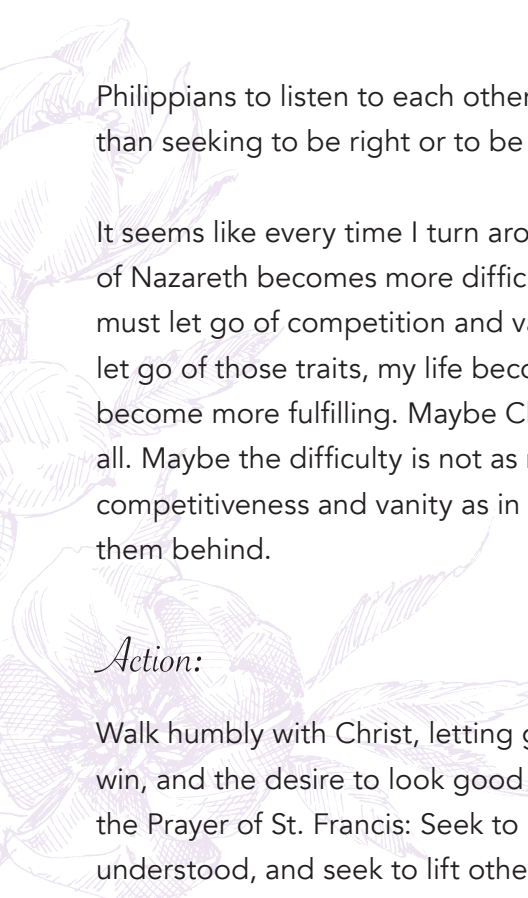
Philippians 2: 1-8

Reflection:

Being a Christian is no easy endeavor. It's hard work for a mere mortal to be Christ-like. In this passage Paul commands us to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Wait! I'm supposed to just give them up? Seriously? What about Gordon Gecko's quote that greed is good?

This passage commands us to act with compassion and sympathy, thinking not of our own interests, but the interests of others. But wait, here in America, we're a nation of self-made success stories, aren't we? Yet Paul is suggesting that a collectivist mindset is something to aspire to and that an individualist mindset is to be avoided.

Paul also tells the Philippians to act with humility and unity in the body of Christ, "Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Paul is telling the



Philippians to listen to each other and seek understanding, rather than seeking to be right or to be the winner.

It seems like every time I turn around, the path to following Jesus of Nazareth becomes more difficult. If I am to follow Christ, I must let go of competition and vanity. Paradoxically, when I do let go of those traits, my life becomes easier and my relationships become more fulfilling. Maybe Christianity isn't so difficult after all. Maybe the difficulty is not as much in the act of giving up competitiveness and vanity as in making the decision to leave them behind.

Action:

Walk humbly with Christ, letting go of judgement, the need to win, and the desire to look good in the eyes of others. Recall the Prayer of St. Francis: Seek to understand more than to be understood, and seek to lift others up in unity.



Journal:



firstchurchseattle.org