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Disillusionment: An Unexpected Friend of Spiritual Formation

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

DISILLUSIONMENT:
AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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To my mom, who worked sacrificially so I could study freely and who has believed in me as a writer since I placed a short story in her hands at the age of eight.

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ABSTRACT

Is spiritual disillusionment a foe or a friend? Avoidable or inevitable? A failure or a teacher? Our answer will greatly impact our spiritual journeys. This dissertation defines spiritual disillusionment as the act (*-ment*) of removing (*dis-*) false spiritual ideas (*illusions*), and explores the origin, substance, and purpose of spiritual disillusionment through the insights of scholars and Christian writings. Far from being a foe, spiritual disillusionment is a welcome, ancient ally of spiritual formation.

Throughout the ages, mystics have viewed disillusionment as a wise mentor toward intimacy with God. By abrasively removing layers of inaccuracy and self-protection, spiritual disillusionment can sensitize souls to Christ's mysterious, indwelling Presence. Redefined and respected, spiritual disillusionment can be experienced as an unexpected friend of spiritual formation that frees us to relish God's Presence in mystery and pain.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

A Story

In hindsight, it was unwise for me to sit alone on that park bench. The Texas sun sizzled with suffocating heat in a small park long forgotten by shiny families in their shiny cars. The few park benches remaining were chipped, faded, and unstable. They looked like I felt as I sat with my head in my hands, willing in vain for my faith to stay put, willing in vain for my mind to stay still. On that sunny day, I was struggling with a matter of belief. There was no blood. There had been no tragedy. Yet I was wrestling with what would be the first of many faith crises. Any passerby would have thought, “That girl needs to be careful—she’s too vulnerable at that park alone.” But my spiritual vulnerability that day was so alarming to me that I lacked the reserves to monitor any physical vulnerability.

Almost four years earlier, Jesus had interrupted my atheistic existence with an experience so tangible that only an act of intellectual and emotional suicide could have denied its reality. In the span of ninety minutes, I transitioned from calm certainty that humankind was God’s creator to amazed awareness that God was my Creator. In the span of ninety minutes, I journeyed from being an atheistic realist (who preferred unanswered questions to fairy tales) to a Jesus-follower (who claimed to know precious little apart from Jesus’ love and mercy).

Those first years with Christ were glorious. The secular university served as a greenhouse of growth for me because every time I stood to say “I believe,” some smart someone would stand and ask “Why?” The continual questioning helped my

new faith grow lean and muscular. But on this day, my faith felt frail and vulnerable. I had thought myself into a cold corner in which I could find no door. Weeping, I was about to lose an illusion. Desperate, I was about to gain a reality. Disillusioned, I feared that I had somehow failed my faith and that my faith was about to fail me.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Regent College Professor of Spiritual Theology James M. Houston describes ongoing spiritual formation as “the personal sacrifice of self-giving. It is the exchange of self-management for surrender to a life lived ‘in Christ,’ no longer to please one’s self, but to be well pleasing to God. It requires our dying for his living in us.”¹

Through the unexpected friend of disillusionment, God-followers are invited to exchange “self-management” for a deeper experience “in Christ” through the often-agonizing process of losing illusions and gaining realities.

Yet many God-followers mistakenly view spiritual disillusionment as a form of spiritual formation failure. In our generation, we lack a framework for processing disillusionment as a spiritual friend and, consequently, assume that spiritual growth prefers the light over the dark. A student of both John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Gerald G. May concurs with John’s understanding of darkness as sacred formational space:

In speaking of *la noche oscura*, the dark night of the soul, John is addressing something mysterious and unknown but by no means sinister or evil. It is instead profoundly sacred and precious beyond all imagining. John says the dark night of the soul is “happy,” “glad,” “guiding,” and full of “absolute grace.” It is the secret way in which God not only liberates us from our attachments and idolatries, but also brings us to the realization of our true nature. The night is the means by which we find our heart’s desire, our freedom for love.²

¹ James M. Houston, “The Future of Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 4, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 132.

² Gerald G. May, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*, reprint ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005 [2003]), 67.

Though disillusionment and the dark night of the soul are not always concurrent experiences, John of the Cross's perspective on darkness serves this study well. In the dark, Jesus-followers are invited into a depth of love that simply cannot be realized in the light. As May said, in the night we "find our heart's desire, our freedom for love."

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the believer's journey into and through the often-dark loss of illusions and to examine the process, challenges, and benefits of spiritual disillusionment as an unexpected friend of spiritual formation.

Research Question and Definition of Terms

What insights do scholars and Christian writings offer regarding the origin, substance, process, and purpose of spiritual disillusionment? Whereas this research question will be considered in the literature review of Chapter 2, two prior questions warrant attention.

First, is there precise agreement by scholars or within the Christian Scriptures regarding the usage of the word *disillusionment*? No. As a word, disillusionment appears in scholarly writing relatively infrequently and where it does appear—either originally in English or translated from other languages into English—its meaning varies across the centuries, as will be briefly discussed in the next section. Further, in a search of over forty English translations of the Bible, the words *disillusion*, *disillusioned*, and *disillusionment* make no appearances whatsoever in the New Testament and a total of seven appearances in four translations of the Old Testament canon. Only once, in Isaiah 20:5, do any two of these four versions agree on the use

of the word disillusion as an accurate translation from the Hebrew, as demonstrated in

Table 1.³

Table 1. Occurrences of *disillusion* in English translations of the Bible

Verse	Version	Quotation	Word Analysis
Ps. 7:14	NIV, 1978	Whoever is pregnant with evil, conceives trouble, and gives birth to disillusionment .	שָׁרָר (šě-qēr): Deception, misleading falseness, i.e., a state or condition which is utterly false, and causes a mistaken belief. ⁴ šě-qēr appears 113x in the NIV and is most often translated as <i>lie/lying</i> (52x), <i>false</i> (27x), and <i>deception</i> (12x). ⁵
Isa. 20:5	Good News Trans., 1966	Those who have put their trust in Ethiopia and have boasted about Egypt will be disillusioned , their hopes shattered.	חָתַתָּ (hā-tāt): Be dismayed, i.e., have a feeling of discouragement, implying fear and terror, and/or panic and confusion, as an extension of the shattering of an object. ⁶ NIV translates as “will be afraid.”
Isa. 20:5	Expanded Bible, 2011	People who looked to Cush for help [trusted/put hope in Cush] <i>will be afraid</i> [dismayed; disillusioned].	Same as above.
Jer. 10:14	Good News Trans., 1966	At the sight of this, people feel stupid and senseless; those who make idols are disillusioned , because the gods they make are false and lifeless.	בָּזָר (bā-‘ār): Be senseless, i.e., to think and act as a fool. ⁷ NIV translates as “every goldsmith is shamed by his idols.” bā-‘ār appears 120x in the NIV and is translated with <i>shame</i> 87x and <i>disgrace</i> 17x. ⁸

³ Two additional English translations make use of *disillusion/disillusioned/disillusionment*, but as a chapter title (See RSV, Eccles. 7:1, “A Disillusioned View of Life”) and in study notes (see *The Voice*, Isa. 60:19).

⁴ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

⁵ Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 1647.

⁶ Swanson.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Goodrick and Kohlenberger, *ibid.*

Jer. 48:13	Good News Trans., 1966	Then the Moabites will be disillusioned with their god Chemosh, just as the Israelites were disillusioned with Bethel, a god in whom they trusted.	בוֹשׁ (<i>bôš</i>): Be ashamed, i.e., to have a painful feeling and emotional distress (sometimes to the point of despair) by having done something wrong, with an associative meaning of having the disapproval of those around them (Judg 3:25; Jer 14:4). Note: This wrong can refer to a social mistake, or a serious sin. ⁹ NIV translates <i>bôš</i> in Jer. 48.13 as <i>ashamed</i> .
Jer. 51:17	Good News Trans., 1966	At the sight of this, people feel stupid and senseless; those who make idols are disillusioned because the gods they make are false and lifeless.	See Jer 10:14 above.
Hosea 9:3	The Message, 2002	At this rate you'll not last long in God's land: Some of you are going to end up bankrupt in Egypt. Some of you will be disillusioned in Assyria.	NIV, ASV, RSV translation: "eat unclean food in Assyria." Peterson translates the outcome, whereas the text speaks of the means.

Second, without strong historical consistency in definition, how can this dissertation's stated research question regarding the insights of scholars and Christian writings on disillusionment be addressed? This challenge will be attempted by a two-step process: the establishment in Chapter 1 of a dictionary-based working definition of disillusionment *as a term*, and the examination in Chapter 2 of writings related to disillusionment *as a concept*.

The English Word

The first known occurrence of a variant of the word disillusionment is found in the 1598 English translation of *Los Siete Libros de la Diana*, a romance about shepherds originally written in Spanish by Jorge de Montemayor: "What slights, what

⁹ Swanson.

disillusions...have risen from such sorrows?”¹⁰ The second occurrence, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is in *Casa Guidi Windows*, a poem written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1851. Browning, reflecting upon the broader implications of the discrepancy between the first and second part of her poem, which were written three years apart, states,

Such discrepancy we are called to accept at every hour by the condition of our nature...the discrepancy between aspiration and performance, between faith and dis-illusion, between hope and fact.

“O trusted, broken prophecy,
O richest fortune sourly crost,
Born for the future, to the future lost!”¹¹

Whereas Montemayor seems to use disillusion as a synonym for slights, Browning contrasts disillusion with faith. As mentioned above, in order to discuss the concept with some measure of consistency, we will establish a working definition of the word as opposed to seeking in vain for a historically consistent usage of the word.

Technically, the English word *disillusionment* is constructed from the prefix *dis*, the noun *illusion*, and the suffix *ment*, as follows according to the Oxford English Dictionary:

¹⁰ OED Online, s.v. “disillusion,” accessed August 26, 2014, <http://0-www.oed.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/Entry/54534>.

¹¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Casa Guidi Windows: A Poem (1851)* (Kessinger Legacy Repr., New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), vi–vii.

Table 2. Semantic views of disillusionment

dis	Latin prefix implying reversal, aversion, removal, or negation. ¹²
illusion	<p>A mental state involving the attribution of reality to what is unreal; a false conception or idea, a deception, delusion, fancy.</p> <p>The action, or an act, of deceiving the bodily eye by false or unreal appearances, or the mental eye by false prospects, statements, etc.¹³</p>
ment	From French <i>-mentum</i> ; a suffix forming nouns from verbs in order to denote the result or product of the action of the verb. ¹⁴

Illusion deserves further focus, as it is key to any understanding of *disillusionment*. Words are letters wrapped around concepts and concepts are always in motion and the motion of the Western understanding of *illusion* over time is of interest. Consider the following definitions of *illusion* from the first American dictionary.

¹² OED Online, s.v. “dis-, prefix,” accessed August 26, 2014, <http://0-www.oed.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/Entry/53379>.

¹³ Ibid., s.v. “illusion, n,” accessed August 26, 2014, <http://0-www.oed.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/Entry/91565?redirectedFrom=illusion>.

¹⁴ Ibid., s.v. “-ment, suffix,” accessed August 26, 2014, <http://0-www.oed.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/Entry/116535?redirectedFrom=-ment>.

Table 3. 1806, 1828, 1980, and 2014 definitions of *illusion*

Webster, 1806	A false show, mockery, cheat, error. ¹⁵
Webster, 1828	Deceptive appearance; false show, by which a person is or may be deceived, or his expectations disappointed; mockery. ¹⁶
Webster, 1980	The act of deceiving or imposing upon; deception; mockery; a deceptive appearance; an unreal vision presented to the bodily or mental eye; hallucination. ¹⁷
Webster, 2014	<i>Obsolete:</i> the act of deceiving. An incorrect idea: an idea based on something that is not true. ¹⁸

In 1806, illusions were evil deceptions. In 2014, illusions were inaccurate ideas.

Ironically, though this thought-provoking evolving definitional shift could certainly be reflective of the secularization of Western culture, the de-demonization of the concepts of *illusion* in general and *disillusionment* in particular could serve the Church well.

Dis-illusion-ment, therefore, is the act (*-ment*) of removing or negating (*-dis*) false ideas (*illusions*). Unlike *illusion*, *disillusion* is listed in neither the 1806 or 1828 editions of Webster's Dictionary. In 1913, *disillusion* was defined as "the act or

¹⁵ *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster, 1806, s.v. "illusion," accessed July 14, 2014, <http://www.premierathome.com/library/Reference/Webster's%201806%20Dictionary.txt>.

¹⁶ *Noah Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "illusion," accessed July 14, 2014, <http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/word/illusion>.

¹⁷ Virginia S. Thatcher, *The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "illusion" (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1980), 422.

¹⁸ *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "illusion," accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

process of freeing from illusion.”¹⁹ In 1980, *disillusion* was defined as “to disenchant or to free from illusion.”²⁰ In 2014, *disillusion* was defined by *Merriam-Webster* as “the condition of being disenchanted,”²¹ and by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the action of freeing or becoming freed from illusion; the condition of being freed from illusion; disenchantment.”²²

Disillusionment—the act of removing false ideas—describes the often-painful process of “dissing illusions.”²³ The spiritually disillusioned experience the loss of confidence in an idea or ideal. Something assumed to be true is revealed to be false. However, disillusionment is not all loss, for to lose an illusion is to gain a reality; to remove a false idea is to encounter a truer idea.

Herein lies my claim that disillusionment is an unexpected friend of spiritual formation. However painful the loss of illusions may seem, reality is a friend of intimacy with God. As Robert F. Taft states, “Life is a celebration of reality.”²⁴ Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III add, “Ignoring our emotions is turning our back on reality; listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. And reality is where we meet God.”²⁵ God is profoundly present. The more we are mentally, emotionally,

¹⁹ *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. “disillusion,” accessed July 14, 2014, <http://machaut.uchicago.edu/?resource=Webster%27s&word=disillusion&use1913=on>.

²⁰ Thatcher, s.v. “disillusion,” 249.

²¹ *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. “disillusion,” accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

²² OED Online, s.v. “disillusion, n.,” accessed August 26, 2014, <http://0-www.oed.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/view/Entry/54534?rskey=LMiklH&result=1>.

²³ I first heard this clever and succinct definition of disillusionment as “dissing illusions” from Joe Zickafoose (d. 2008) while I was teaching a small group on the subject.

²⁴ Robert F. Taft, “Lent: A Meditation,” *Worship* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983): 125.

²⁵ Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 24.

and spiritually present to what is real, the greater our capacity to be present to God actively and intentionally.²⁶

Related Concepts of Mourning, Disappointment, Agony, and Suffering

For the purpose of clarity in discussion, disillusionment must also be considered in relationship to other concepts such as mourning, disappointment, and agony. Peter Homans states, “The personal but also universal experience of object loss underlies [all] these.”²⁷ Without question, these concepts overlap in their mutual attempt to give voice to the many layers of object loss experienced by humanity. However, disillusionment is not a certain synonym for these other states.

Though disillusionment is often experienced by those who mourn, those who mourn are not always disillusioned. Though disillusionment is often initiated by a deep disappointment, disappointment does not inevitably lead to disillusionment. Though often agonizing, disillusionment can equally be numbing. Further, though often preceded by a crisis, disillusionment can occur in the absence of a crisis.²⁸ Though often accompanied by suffering, disillusionment is not tantamount to suffering. Though often expressed by the emotions, disillusionment is not exclusively sourced in the emotions. As the loss of false ideas, disillusionment is a mental and

²⁶ Speaking of the power of reality, happiness psychologist Dr. Gordon Livingston states that if we view the past as “a theater of experience, some good and some bad, [it] opens up the possibility of growth and change.” As quoted by Diana Butler Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), loc. 38650, Kindle.

²⁷ Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1989), 24.

²⁸ Of his own experience, Yancey writes, “Disappointment with God does not come only in dramatic circumstances. For me, it also edges unexpectedly into the mundaneness of everyday life. . . . I have found that petty disappointments tend to accumulate over time, undermining my faith with a lava flow of doubt. I start to wonder whether God cares about everyday details—about me. I am tempted to pray less often, having concluded in advance that it won’t matter. Or will it? My emotions and my faith waver. Once those doubts seep in, I am even less prepared for times of major crisis.” Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 22–23.

spiritual experience. Disillusionment originates—and is either resolved or unresolved—in the mysterious connection between the mind and the spirit.

Distinguishing Disillusionment from Skepticism: A Definitional Contribution from Turgenev

Eight years after Browning contrasted disillusionment with faith in *Casa Guidi Windows*, Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev contrasted disillusionment with skepticism in a novel published in 1859. In Turgenev's *A Nest of Gentry*,²⁹ Mikhavelich—an old friend of the novel's protagonist—describes his own experience of spiritual disillusionment through poetry and then mentions skepticism as related to, but distinct from, disillusionment:

“I’ve changed in many ways. The waves of life have broken over my breast—who said that?—although I haven’t changed in the important, essential ways. I still believe in goodness and truth. But I don’t merely believe in them, now I have faith—yes, I have faith, I have faith.

“Let me read my most recent poem aloud to you—I’ve expressed my deepest convictions in it.” Mikhavelich began to read his poem. It was rather long, and ended with the following lines:

I gave myself over to new feelings with all my heart.
My soul became childlike.
And I’ve burned everything I once worshiped.
And now worship everything I once burned.

Laveretskii listened to him at length...and a spirit of antagonism arose within him...a heated argument broke out between them, one of those arguments only Russians engage in.

“What are you then, after all this? Disillusioned?” Mikhavelich demanded to know at one o’clock in the morning.

“Do disillusioned people look like this?” Laveretskii replied. “They’re usually quite pale and sickly. Would you like me to pick you up with one hand?”

²⁹ Also known as *A Home of the Gentry*.

“Well if you aren’t disillusioned, then you’re a *skeptek*, which is even worse.”³⁰

Though care must be taken in drawing twenty-first-century insights from a twentieth-century translation of a nineteenth-century Russian novel,³¹ the loss communicated through the phrase, “I’ve now burned everything I once worshipped,” transcends time and culture. Additionally, the contrast between *disillusioned* and *skeptek* is perhaps easier to assent to than explain. Though skepticism can refer in its simplest form to doubt, a professional skeptic is somewhat of a philosophical agnostic, someone who ascribes to the “doctrine that true knowledge or knowledge in a particular area is uncertain.”³²

Perhaps Mikhavelich describes the *skeptek* as “worse” because for the skeptic, loss only leads to more loss. However, for the disillusioned, loss can lead to gain. Yes, the disillusioned burn things they used to worship. But that is not their end: the disillusioned also worship things they used to burn. As ideas and ideals are reduced to ashes, something ancient is reborn. Such is the power and promise of spiritual disillusionment. As Mikhavelich celebrates, “But I don’t merely believe in them, now I have faith—yes, I have faith, I have faith.”

The Gains of Disillusionment: A Definitional Contribution from Chambers

Writing in 1924, Oswald Chambers also speaks of the gains of disillusionment:

Disillusionment means that there are no more false judgments in life. To be undeceived by disillusionment may leave us cynical and unkindly severe in

³⁰ Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev, *The Essential Turgenev*, ed. Elizabeth Cheresch Allen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 397–398.

³¹ Originally, this novel was translated into English by Constance Clara Garnett (1861–1946).

³² *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. “skepticism,” accessed July 16, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

our judgment of others, but the disillusionment which comes from God brings us to the place where we see men and women as they really are, and yet there is no cynicism, we have no stinging, bitter things to say.³³

According to Chambers, a clean realism is a fruit of God-inspired disillusionment.

The disillusioned journey toward a place where they can see others “as they really are.”

One of the many challenges of the disillusioned state is that though it includes, by definition, the loss of illusions, the gaining of reality is not automatic. The gaining of reality requires both choice and risk. To some, this shadowy process may feel like anti-faith. In a sense it is a form of anti-faith in human understanding, in tidy equations, and in tamed theology.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 presents a story to illustrate the ministry problem, states the problem and purpose of the study, poses the research question, establishes a dictionary-based, working definition of disillusionment, and briefly considers related concepts.

Chapter 2 presents a non-exhaustive literature review of disillusionment and related concepts. The contributions of historians, neurologists, monks, pastors, philosophers, priests, professors, psychologists, rabbis, sociologists, and theologians will be explored. Terms such as mourning, disenchantment, pining, de-idealization, theological despair, iconoclasm, the dark night, a ray of darkness, sickness unto death, agony of soul, unhappy consciousness, the absence that sanctifies, the pain of betrayal, and disappointment will be considered in Chapters 2 and 3.

In Chapter 3, I will offer and discuss an illustration of the cycle of disillusionment with emphasis upon the identification of the process and substance of what is lost and gained in disillusionment. Then I will offer a contribution regarding

³³ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 1991), 212.

the connection between disillusionment, self-protection, and the love of God which will include a consideration of the Fall's role in the birth of self-protection. Finally, five objections to this dissertation's claim that disillusionment is an unexpected friend of spiritual formation will be addressed:

1. There is no God with whom to be disillusioned. Therefore, disillusionment's true purpose is the shedding of religious beliefs.
2. Claiming that disillusionment is a friend could place a tool in the hands of oppressors.
3. Faith is a proclamation of the positive. Therefore, treating disillusionment as an unexpected friend encourages negative thinking.
4. Suicide is the ultimate manifestation of disillusionment. Therefore, disillusionment should be viewed as an enemy, not a friend, of spiritual formation.
5. Disillusionment is self-imposed. Therefore, it can be avoided by right thinking.

The artifact description will be presented in Chapter 4, followed by a book proposal in Chapter 5 and concluding thoughts in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONCEPT OF DISILLIONMENT

Though this dissertation will focus primarily upon the contribution of religious scholars and Christian writings to the concept of spiritual disillusionment, our generation's ability to process the loss of spiritual illusions has been deeply affected by the formational thoughts of secular scholars and psychologists. Without question, starting points matter: Is there a God, or is God an illusion? Since objectivity is mythical for humanity, the premises with which we start directly affect the conclusions with which we end. Some of the psychologists and scholars encountered through research were religious in their early years, but as adults perceived themselves to have intellectually progressed beyond the illusion or fantasy of God or gods. Within such a framework, spiritual disillusionment is viewed as a means to psychological and social evolution.

For the agnostic or atheist, spiritual disillusionment is a means by which god-concepts are released. For the Jesus-follower, spiritual disillusionment is a means by which God-concepts are refined. Nonetheless, both secular and religious scholars have much to offer to the Christian experience of disillusionment. In an attempt to organize the various terms employed to discuss disillusionment in part or in whole, Table 4 is offered as an incomplete summary of scholars consulted in this dissertation, listed chronologically by date of birth.¹

¹ As the bibliography confirms, many more scholars were consulted than are listed in Table 4. The reason for this is that not all scholars offered further contributions to the subject, but rather were summarizing or commenting upon the offerings of other scholars already listed.

A Review of Related Concepts

On any given day, I am referred to as Alicia, Mommy, Mylee, Alicia Lynn, Prima, Mija, and Mrs. Chole. All these terms refer to one entity. I cannot overstress the absence of a similarly existing correlation for the entity of disillusionment. Several terms and phrases will be considered in this review, not as related to one entity—disillusionment—but as an extended family of concepts related in some way to disillusionment.

Table 4. Contributions of theologians, philosophers, and scholars to disillusionment and/or related concepts

Name	Profession	Term: definition
Pseudo-Dionysius (6th Century)	Theologian, Philosopher	<i>A Ray of Darkness</i> ² : “Unto this Darkness which is beyond all Light we pray that we may come, and may attain unto vision through the loss of sight and knowledge, and that in ceasing thus to see or to know we may learn to know that which is beyond all perception and understanding (for this emptying of our faculties is true sight and knowledge).” ³
Anonymous author of <i>The Cloud of Unknowing</i> (14th Century)	Monk, Mystic	<i>Darkness, a cloud of unknowing</i> : “a lacking of knowing; as all that thing that thou knowest not, or else that thou hast forgotten, it is dark to thee.” ⁴
John of the Cross (1542–1591)	Priest, Mystic, Saint	<i>La Noche Oscura, The Dark Night</i> : Consisting of the Passive Night of the Senses and the Passive Night of the Spirit, the Dark Night is a soul’s pilgrimage toward oneness with God. “[T]his dark night of contemplation should first of all annihilate and undo [the

² May, 201. May notes that in addition to being quoted in John of the Cross’s *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Dionysius’s well-known writings were also referenced two hundred years earlier by the unnamed author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the Augustinian monk Walter Hilton.

³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names: And, the Mystical Theology* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 1992), 194. Available through CCEL, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/rold/dionysius.v.html>.

⁴ Evelyn Underhill, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing: The Classic of Medieval Mysticism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), loc. 576, Kindle.

	<p>soul] in its meannesses, bringing it into darkness, aridity, affliction, and emptiness. For the light which is to be given to it is a Divine Light of the highest kind which transcends all natural light and which by nature can find no place in the understanding.”⁵</p>
<p>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)</p> <p>Philosopher</p>	<p><i>Unhappy Consciousness (unglückliches Bewußtsein) or Soul of Despair</i>: “the ‘grief and longing’ of the self which yearns for unity (‘aims to be absolute’) but experiences only inner division at every turn.”⁶</p> <p>“the disunity of the <i>self</i> before God.”^{7 8}</p>
<p>Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)</p> <p>Philosopher, Theologian, Poet</p>	<p><i>Sickness unto Death or Despair</i>: “Despair is a sickness in the spirit, in the self.”⁹ “The despairing man cannot die, no more than ‘the dagger can slay thoughts’ can despair consume the eternal thing, the self, which is the ground of despair, whose worm dieth not, and whose fire is not quenched.”¹⁰</p> <p>“[D]espair is the ‘agonizing contradiction’ internal to the self in which the basic elements of selfhood stand in fundamental ‘disrelationship.’”¹¹</p> <p>“not merely as incompleteness of the self, but</p>

⁵ John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, ed. and trans. E Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1990), Chapter IX, paragraph 2, accessed August 15, 2014, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/john_cross/dark_night.viii.ix.html.

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller and J. N. Findlay, A Galaxy Book (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1977), 455–457, quoted in Daniel Berthold-Bond, “Lunar Musings? An Investigation of Hegel’s and Kierkegaard’s Portraits of Despair,” *Religious Studies* 34 no. 1 (March 1998): 36.

⁷ Berthold-Bond, 41.

⁸ For an interesting comparison of Hegel’s and Kierkegaard’s concepts of despair, see Berthold-Bond, 33–59.

⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, vol. 19 of *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton pbk., with corrections (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 148–151.

		as incompleteness <i>before God</i> , as sin... a ‘Christian discovery...only the Christian knows what is meant by the sickness unto death.’” ¹²
C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892)	Preacher, Pastor	<i>Agony of Soul</i> : despair, the “doubting [of] God’s gracious character and the promises of his word.” ¹³
Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)	Neurologist, founding father of psycho-analysis	<i>Mourning</i> : “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal and so on.” ¹⁴ “Mourning as Freud conceived it was essentially conservative, only consolidating, repairing, and rescuing lost parts of the ego from the wreckage inflicted upon it by the commands of reality.” ¹⁵
Max Weber (1864–1920)	Sociologist, historian, philosopher, economist, one of founders of sociology	<i>Disenchantment</i> : the decline in Western culture in beliefs in magic.
Melanie Klein (1882–1960)	Psychoanalyst, coined the term <i>reparation</i>	<i>Pining</i> : mourning, originating in early mother-infant relationship and resurfacing periodically in adulthood
C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)	Scholar, Novelist, Apologist	<i>Iconoclasm</i> : the shattering of God-ideas by God Himself.

¹² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 145.

¹³ Peter J. Morden, “C. H. Spurgeon and Suffering,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 306–325. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost, accessed December 3, 2012.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” *Standard Edition* 14:243–260 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 243.

¹⁵ Homans, 26.

Bela Vassady (1902–1992)	Theologian, Historian	<i>Despair</i> : “For there are two kinds of despair or sorrow. The first one St. Paul calls the ‘sorrow of the world’ which sweeps man into the turbulent waters of disillusionment, lethargy, desire for death, and suicide, and thus inevitably ‘worketh death.’ The other kind of despair St. Paul calls ‘godly sorrow’ which prepares the soil for the outlook involved in the statement, ‘Whom the Lord loveth, he reproveth.’ From this soil springs that ‘repentance unto salvation’ which branches out into a new hope and a new obedience.” ¹⁶
Julian Norse Hartt (1911–2010)	Theologian	<i>Despair</i> : (as a theological motivation) “a feeling or sense of hopelessness.... A person in despair may be doing a great deal, but all that he does is under a sentence of hopelessness.” ¹⁷
Heinz Kohut (1913–1981)	Psychoanalyst, developed self- psychology	<i>De-idealization</i> : as described by Homan, “refers to the pre-oedipal line of development, the figure of the mother more than that of the father, and to issues of unconscious self-esteem, merger, self-cohesion, grandiosity, and the loss of ideals.” ¹⁸
Thomas Merton (1915–1968)	Trappist Monk	<i>The Absence that Sanctifies</i> : when God “is present and His presence is affirmed and adored by the absence of everything else... In the absence that sanctifies, God empties the soul of every image that might become an idol and of every concern that might stand between our face and His.” ¹⁹
Peter Homans (1930–2009)	Psychologist, Professor	<i>De-idealization</i> : “an inner psychological sequence of states, characteristic of adult life,

¹⁶ Béla Vassady, “A Theology of Hope for the Philosophy of Despair,” *Theology Today* 5, no. 2 (July 1, 1948): 159, accessed November 26, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷ Julian Norris Hartt, “Significance of Despair in Contemporary Theology,” *Theology Today* 13, no. 1 (April 1, 1956): 47, accessed November 26, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

¹⁸ Homans, 24.

¹⁹ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, Harvest/HBJ ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1983), 237.

		with a beginning, middle, and end. It is developmentally grounded” ²⁰ and “an essential component in normal development, and like melancholia, it includes emptiness in the inner world, as well as a sense of loss in the external environment...de-idealization is progressive in its outcome, leading as it does to new values and new psychological structure.” ²¹
David R. Blumenthal (1938–)	Rabbi, Professor of Judaic Studies at Emory University	<i>Theological Despair</i> : “a distrust of the holiness of our history, a doubting of the One Who lends meaning to that history.” ²² “Despair is more profound than doubt. It runs much deeper than distress. Despair is a questioning of the very frame of meaning in our lives.” ²³
Gerald G. May (1940–2005)	Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Theologian	<i>The Dark Night</i> : “The dark night is a profoundly good thing. It is an ongoing spiritual process in which we are liberated from attachments and compulsions and empowered to live and love more freely.” ²⁴
Jerome T. Walsh (1942–)	Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies	<i>Qoheleth</i> : used by Walsh to represent one who, like Qoheleth, the writer of Ecclesiastes, sincerely arrives at an isolating conclusion that God is “arbitrary” or “undecipherable.” God is the “personal, willful power behind all of life’s unfairness.” ²⁵
James S. Reitman (1949–)	Theologian	<i>Disillusionment</i> : “when our deeply held aspirations or expectations are decisively frustrated....such disillusionment may well

²⁰ Homans, 24.

²¹ Ibid., 26.

²² David R. Blumenthal, “Despair and Hope Late in the Twentieth Century,” *Bridges* 6, no. 3–4 (1999):127.

²³ Ibid., 128.

²⁴ May, 4-5.

²⁵ Jerome T. Walsh, “Despair as a Theological Virtue in the Spirituality of Ecclesiastes,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12, no. 2 (April 1982): 47.

		reflect an existential angst that in the end God will remain silent and/or absent.” ²⁶
Philip Yancey (1949–)	Author	<i>Disappointment</i> : “when the actual experience of something falls far short of what we anticipate.” ²⁷ <i>The Pain of Betrayal</i> : “The pain of a lover who wakes up and suddenly realizes it’s all over. He had staked his life on God, and God had let him down.” ²⁸
Gene Edwards Veith (1951–)	Provost, Professor of Literature at Patrick Henry University	<i>Disillusionment</i> : the unfortunate and potentially faith-shattering experience of those who have not understood the doctrine of sin.
Daniel Berthold-Bond (1954–)	Professor of Philosophy	<i>Despair</i> : “the inability to reconcile opposites internal to the self.” ²⁹
Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz (1954–)	Rabbi, Professor of Philosophy	<i>Despair</i> : a “deep and dark, heavy and desperate” experience that “comes from the cumulative weight of burdens—losses, wounds, responsibilities, and questions of purpose.” ³⁰
John H. Coe (1956–)	Professor of Philosophy and Spiritual Theology	<i>Dark Night of the Soul</i> : times “in which the Spirit secretly does a deep work in the human spirit—a work that is so profound but feels so foreign to the Christian’s experience that it is often interpreted as the absence of God.” ³¹

²⁶ James S. Reitman, “God’s ‘Eye’ for the *Imago Dei*: Wise Advocacy amid Disillusionment in Job and Ecclesiastes,” *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 115–116, accessed November 26, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

²⁷ Yancey, 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁹ Berthold-Bond, 36.

³⁰ Elie Kaplan Spitz, *Healing from Despair: Choosing Wholeness in a Broken World* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2008), 35.

³¹ John H. Coe, “Musings on the Dark Night of the Soul: Insight from St. John of the Cross on Developmental Spirituality,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28, no. 4 (2000): 293.

Simon D. Podmore (1977–)	Professor of Systematic Theology	<i>Despair</i> : an experience through which “the self...can die to itself and be reborn through faith in the blessed impossibility of the resurrection of the dead God.” ³²
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Mystical Literature and the Concept of Darkness

The term that most consistently through the centuries overlaps our working definition of disillusionment is *darkness*. Darkness is referenced innumerable times, starting with the first lines of the book of Genesis. In the beginning, “darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen. 1:2, NIV). God, evidently, sees quite well in the dark. Before humankind took a God-given breath, God and darkness were at home together on earth. Pre-fall, pre-sin, and pre-humanity, darkness is one of the original inhabitants of earth. Fourteen chapters later, we find God at home again in a “thick and dreadful darkness” within which He makes a covenant with Abraham.³³ Scripture and mystical literature through the ages have acknowledged the relationship between darkness and intimacy with God.

Darkness is used metaphorically for seasons in which reason stumbles so that our spirits may advance. In a similar way, in disillusionment reason stumbles as false ideas are removed and new realities are gained. In the sixth century, Pseudo-Dionysius spoke of being “led upwards toward the ray of divine darkness that

³² Simon D. Podmore, “Lazarus and the Sickness unto Death: An Allegory of Despair,” *Religion and the Arts* 15, no. 4 (January 1, 2011): 487, accessed November 26, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

³³ Gen. 15:12 (NIV).

exceedeth all existence.”³⁴ In the first paragraph of *The Mystical Theology*, Dionysius offers the following prayer:

Guide us to that topmost height of mystic lore which exceedeth light and more than exceedeth knowledge, where the simple, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty!³⁵

The darkness that “outshines all brilliance” is a God-initiated spiritual formation experience. Such divine darkness reveals that intimacy with God is beyond the work of humanity. When the intellect cries for mercy, God answers by revealing a deeper measure of His love.

Eight centuries later, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* likewise wrote of

darkness and this cloud, howsoever thou dost, betwixt thee and thy God, and letteth thee that thou mayest neither see Him clearly by light of understanding in thy reason, nor feel Him in sweetness of love in thine affection. And therefore shape thee to bide in this darkness as long as thou mayest, evermore crying after Him that thou lovest.³⁶

Echoing the triad of divine darkness, the limits of human understanding, and the invitation to greater intimacy with God, *Dark Night of the Soul* and *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* were offered two centuries later by John of the Cross. According to John, love guides us through the darkness into union with God. As Gerald G. May summarizes, John’s “dark night” is a “a mystical co-participation between God and person”³⁷ which “helps us become who we are created to be: lovers of God and one

³⁴ Dionysius, Chapter 1, paragraph 192.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Underhill, loc. 507, Kindle.

³⁷ May, 75.

another.”³⁸ Like Dionysius and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, John taught that the path to greater love and spiritual insight often wended its way through darker seasons of mental obscurity.

The Emergence of Psychoanalysis and the Concept of De-Idealization

From the mystical literature on darkness, we now turn toward a different era increasingly marked by the elevation of the very faculty mystical writers felt must be darkened to experience greater depths of the knowledge of God: the intellect. Sigmund Freud, who is considered to be the brilliant founding father of psychoanalysis, developed theories that have influenced centuries of thought. Freud’s concept of mourning—as the loss of a person, abstraction, or ideal³⁹—clearly overlaps with disillusionment as defined in this dissertation. However, another Freudian concept has even greater overlap: de-idealization. Freud is well known for his thoughts on the mother-infant relationship: specifically the uncomfortable, dawning, infantile disappointment of transition from oneness with the mother in the womb to separateness at the breast. According to Freud and many who followed him, this unavoidable separation and the subsequent experiences of de-idealization affect and shape the developing self.

Whereas Freud seems to primarily address the mourning and de-idealization of individuals, Homans layers Weber’s sociological thoughts over those of Freudian psychotherapy and offers an additional communal lens through which to process de-idealization. In fact, Homans claims that psychoanalysis is humanity’s “creative response” to “a long historical mourning process begun centuries ago, with roots in

³⁸ Ibid., 47.

³⁹ Freud, 243.

the origins of physical science in the seventeenth century and in the theology of the fourteenth.”⁴⁰ In other words, secularization—the steady shedding of religious meaning—replaced Judeo-Christian belief systems with psychoanalysis. By explaining why religion was needed in the past, psychoanalysis rendered further need of religion superfluous. As summarized by Homans, “Freud and Jones accepted this metaphor of a war [between science and theology]...which was prominent in their day, and they conceived of the psychoanalytic movement as a kind of ‘D-Day,’ the final, decisive victory of the forces of good over those of evil.”⁴¹ For those aligned with Freud, the de-idealization, or loss, of Western religious “illusions” of a monotheistic God frees humanity to evolve into higher forms of thought.

Robert Merton, however, points out that theology was initially a generous benefactor, not a stingy detractor, of science,⁴² and that the first scientists were most often men of deep faith who

laud[ed] the faculty of reason....Reason is praiseworthy because man, chosen of God, alone possesses it; it serves to differentiate him from the beasts of the field... it possesses still another exemplary characteristic; it enables man more fully to glorify God by aiding him to appreciate His works....Hence, it becomes imperative for them who would rationalize these doctrines to “prove” that reason and faith—two such highly exalted virtues of the Puritan—are not inconsistent.⁴³

Surely few could foresee that this seventeenth-century theological celebration of reason would one day undermine the very belief systems that offered the celebration

⁴⁰ Homans, 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., 212.

⁴² Merton states, “The study of Nature in a ‘convincing, scientific way’ furthers a full appreciation of the Creator’s power, so that the natural scientist must needs be better equipped than the casual observer to glorify Him. In this direct fashion, religion sanctioned science and raised the social estimation of those who pursued scientific investigation.” Robert K. Merton, “Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Osiris* 4 (1938):430-431, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0369-7827%281938%291%3A4%3C360%3ASTASIS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>.

⁴³ Ibid., 425–426.

credibility. As Homan succinctly summarizes, “As they rationalized and disenchanting the biblical Christian world of spirit, the Puritan scientists turned to nature and matter. ... [Later in] the hands of psychoanalysis, spirit becomes psyche and, still further, psyche becomes ego. The ego of psychoanalysis is simply the naturalization of the soul.”⁴⁴

Though uniquely applied to psychological human development, de-idealization serves as a near synonym for spiritual disillusionment for it involves the loss of ideals and the interaction of mind and soul. However, as addressed in this dissertation, spiritual disillusionment is not the loss of oneness with another human but the journey to oneness with God. Spiritual disillusionment is not a crucible for self-consciousness but a crucible for God-consciousness. Obviously, self-consciousness and God-consciousness grow together in a human soul. But a fundamental definitional difference exists when one believes that there is a God to become conscious of and, further, that through God-consciousness, the God-follower emerges into a truer self. This view is in direct conflict with a more secular perspective that considers God-consciousness as the true illusion and, consequently, as a hindrance to the development of a healthy self.

Religious Scholars and the Concept of Despair

As demonstrated in Table 4, several scholars consulted in the formation of this dissertation speak of theological despair. The distinction between despair and disillusionment may be well expressed by their antonyms. Consistently, *hope* is considered to be the antonym of despair whereas *enchanted*, *enthusiastic*, and

⁴⁴ Homans, 213–214.

encouraged are offered as antonyms of disillusion.⁴⁵ James S. Reitman, linking despair and disillusionment, states: “Despair [is] the ultimate logical outcome of profound disillusionment.”⁴⁶

Theologian Julian Norse Hartt discusses despair in terms of illusions and actualities:

Such a time is the occasion we have called despair, in which men reflect on the actualities of the human situation, and cower before a threatening world. We can no longer pretend that the threats are illusions, we can no longer deny that despair is well-grounded.⁴⁷

As a motivation, despair is both an “apprehension of the world that threatens personal existence” and the apprehension of “discontinuity” of “being.”⁴⁸ Discontinuity is when reason—defined by Hartt as “our will to domesticate the world, to tame its powers and harness its potencies”⁴⁹—must bow to actualities. Utilizing a poetic description of Egypt’s pyramids, Hartt offers an example of a cultural acknowledgment of discontinuities:

Egypt’s pyramids celebrate dramatically the scientific, artistic and political accomplishments of that world; but they are also a gesture of despair, they are tombs in the land of the living; and they are then at one and the same time acts of defiance and confessions of despair.⁵⁰

In Hartt’s words, I hear familiar shades of Reitman’s suggestion (which will be discussed in Chapter 3) that disillusionment gifts us with the opportunity to come to the end of—and renounce—self-sufficiency. We can build, and build beautifully, but

⁴⁵ Philip Lief Group 2009, *Roget’s 21st-Century Thesaurus, Third Edition*, s.v. “disillusioned,” accessed July 23, 2014, <Thesaurus.com <http://thesaurus.com/browse/disillusioned>>.

⁴⁶ Reitman, 122.

⁴⁷ Hartt, 57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

in all our building we cannot give life nor can we prevent death. All human strength will one day bow to the actuality of the grave. As Hartt states, “Revelation is something and Someone sweeping in over our well-mannered expectations.... God has the last word, and dams enough and strong enough cannot be erected against its shattering utterance.”⁵¹

Hungarian theologian Bela Vassady associates disillusionment with the “sorrow of the world”—a despair that leads to death. Referring to despair as a philosophy, Vassady crafts a theological offering to post-World War II Europeans. His theology of hope stands in contrast to the “human self-delusion” of “atheistic existentialism [in which the human person seeks to] rescue himself from his own despair.”⁵² With insight for post-WWII Europe and today, Vassady asserts,

Speaking in theological terms, the Christian refers to the fact that we cannot free ourselves “horizontally,” i.e. by any amount of merely human endeavors. No human achievement, whether individual or collective, can ever bring us peace of mind. We must be lifted from above, from the vertical dimension. And it is Christ, who lifts us through his Word and Holy Spirit. The responses he expects on our side, i.e. faith and hope, are passive and yet most active. We shall call them “existential responses.” Christian life is nothing else but an unceasing series of such “existential responses.”⁵³

For those suffering despair, hope is a vertical gift, not a horizontal achievement.

Peace is found as we are “lifted from above.”

Another offering from the ashes of World War II comes from Rabbi David R. Blumenthal. In a deeply moving contribution, Rabbi Blumenthal addresses theological despair by pressing readers to decide who bears responsibility for the Holocaust:

⁵¹ Ibid., 54.

⁵² Vassady, 162.

⁵³ Ibid., 163.

Most religious folk, and most religious thinkers and clergy along with them, do not want to ask this question. They do not want to know that God is responsible for history, that is, for the bad parts.⁵⁴

If you are religious, what do you think? Are you among the pious avoiders? Among those who say that God could not have been involved, because God gave humankind a free will, an act which relieves God of all responsibility? Are you among those who believe that God is too good to be responsible? That God was absent? Or, are you among the heretical avoiders? Among those who deal with this question by denying God? You must take a stand, if God is integral to who you are.⁵⁵

Blumenthal argues that, if unprocessed, theological despair leads to secularization.

Unprocessed, theological despair leads to heresy, an avoidance of Jewishness, and a “new form of self-hatred.”⁵⁶ In Chapter 3 we will address how Vassady’s hope in the vertical and Blumenthal’s discussion on unprocessed despair correlate with the cycle of disillusionment.

A Philosopher and a Monk on the Concepts of Sickness unto Death and the Absence that Sanctifies

Related to disillusionment’s loss of false ideas and gaining of reality is the Kierkegaardian concept of Sickness unto Death, or Despair. Writing under the name of Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard asserts that “through the very experience of loss, ‘there is also an essential advance made in the consciousness of the self.’”⁵⁷

Kierkegaardian despair⁵⁸ seems sourced less in the loss of illusions about God and more in the gaining of reality about self and, more specifically, in Kierkegaard’s own

⁵⁴ Blumenthal, 121.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 194.

⁵⁸ Podmore interestingly points out that “in Kierkegaard’s Danish, as well as the German of Luther and Holbein, the etymological root of ‘despair’ (Dan. *Fortvivelse*; Ger. *Verzweifeln*) is in ‘doubt’ (Dan. *tivl*; Ger. *zweifel*), while the prefixes denote intensification [*for-/ver-*]; as such, *Fortvivelse* and *Verzweifeln* both literally mean ‘intensified doubt.’ Kierkegaard’s personal despair seems to, at least in part, be related to doubt that he could be truly forgiven. Podmore, *Lazarus*, 489.

personal search for the divine rest that only forgiveness can bring. Dr. Simon D. Podmore insightfully identifies the “dialectical polarities of forgiveness and despair” in Kierkegaard’s writings that reflect his “need and desire to be delivered from despair and reconciled with forgiveness.”⁵⁹

Even closer, perhaps, to this dissertation’s definition of disillusionment is Kierkegaard’s concept of existential *Angest* or *Anfægtelse*, which Podmore describes as a spiritual trial in which one becomes “conscious of the fact that one exists before God” and aware of the “‘infinite qualitative difference’ between self and God.”⁶⁰ This gaining of reality—of the humanly insurmountable difference between the sinful self and a holy God—can lead to despair. Podmore explains that

if guilt over sin advances into depressive, fantastic, or pathological realms, then it risks giving birth to supplementary but no less harrowing forms of despair: namely, that which Kierkegaard himself had evidently labored under, despair over sins and despair of the forgiveness of sins.⁶¹

Kierkegaard experiences an application of disillusionment not discussed in this dissertation: disillusionment with self. When illusions about one’s ability to follow God collide with the reality of human sinfulness, the soul—if not able or willing to receive the grace of forgiveness—can easily spiral toward theological despair.

Twentieth-century Trappist Monk Thomas Merton also addresses the spiritual pain that sometimes accompanies disillusionment in his writing on the two absences of God, which will be quoted from at length:

God, who is everywhere, never leaves us. Yet He seems sometimes to be present, sometimes absent. If we do not know Him well, we do not realize that He may be more present to us when He is absent than when He is present.

⁵⁹ Simon D. Podmore, “Kierkegaard as Physician of the Soul: On Self-Forgiveness and Despair,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 178, accessed November 26, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

There are two absences of God. One is the absence that condemns us, the other is the absence that sanctifies us.

In the absence that is condemnation, God “knows us not” because we have put some other god in His place, and refuse to be known by Him. In the absence that sanctifies, God empties the soul of every image that might become an idol and of every concern that might stand between our face and His.

In the first absence, He is present, but His presence is denied by the presence of an idol. God is present to the enemy we have placed between ourselves and Him in mortal sin.

In the second absence, He is present, and His presence is affirmed and adored by the absence of everything else. He is closer to us than we are to ourselves, although we do not see Him.⁶²

Perhaps the pain of disillusionment’s losses is reflected best in Merton’s depiction of how “God empties the soul of every image that might become an idol...[and] stand between our face and His.” Surely the pain is well worth a clearer view of our Savior’s face.

A Popular Thinker on the Concept of Disappointment

Lastly,⁶³ the contribution of Philip Yancey will be specifically considered. Our generational working theology—for good or for ill—is being shaped via mass-marketed trade books, as a brief glance of bestseller lists affirms.⁶⁴ Though an esteemed editor and author, Yancey writes as an everyman, not as a scholar. His

⁶² Thomas Merton, 237–238.

⁶³ Several of the scholars not mentioned in the brief literature review will be referenced in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ In making this claim, I acknowledge the dissenting view of James Davidson Hunter, who asserts that cultures change when an idea or belief is embraced and championed by elite and scholars near the “center” of cultural power who (1) forge the idea into an “intellectual framework,” (2) network intentionally with one another, (3) communicate with (and are consequently supported by) institutional influencers, and (4) write and distribute their writings in such a way that the concepts reach the masses. See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75–96. However, if we were to ask the American church to identify what influences have shaped their working theology of suffering, I believe that popular songs, paperback books, and downloadable podcasts would top the list of felt influences. While it may be quite true that culture only changes by the movement of elites and scholars, the daily life of Jesus-followers is deeply affected by popular media.

popular contributions are both thoughtful and substantial, and his writings have influenced the theology of millions, many of whom have yet to read the offerings of the above-mentioned scholars.

Via a walk through the Scriptures and his personal experiences, Yancey addresses three disappointment-inducing questions: Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden? From Yancey's perspective, our ability to be disappointed with God—our capacity to experience and verbalize disillusionment—is only possible because of the “risk” God took in creating us “free.”⁶⁵ God has paid dearly for this risk.⁶⁶ We are free to love God. We are free to not love God and “true, unbribed, freely offered faith...has an intrinsic value to God that we can barely imagine.”⁶⁷ Human freedom is what was on trial through Job's life, as “a stark reenactment of God's original question in creation: Will the humans choose for or against me? From God's point of view that has been the central question of history, beginning with Adam and continuing on through Job and every man and woman who has ever lived.”⁶⁸

Yancey draws our attention to the unseen world. When disappointed, our choices affect invisible realms:

Our choices matter, not just to us and our own destiny but, amazingly, to God himself and the universe he rules. ... Our very existence announces to the powers in the universe that restoration is under way. Every act of faith by

⁶⁵ Yancey, 60.

⁶⁶ Douglas John Hall stated, “God's problem is not that God is not able to do certain things. God's problem is that God loves. Love complicates the life of God as it complicates every life. Without love, [God could] behave towards the world in a way...that many other people think desirable—punishing the evil-doers and rewarding the good (except that then, given the previous discussion about ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ we might find a good deal more suffering in the world than we do now!). But, ‘like as a father pitieth his children,’ the biblical God is prevented from such direct action by a love which is ready to suffer with and for the beloved before it will give way to strict justice.” Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 156.

⁶⁷ Yancey, 209.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

every one of the people of God is like the tolling of a bell, and a faith like Job's reverberates throughout the universe.⁶⁹

Yancey's emphasis on freedom and the unseen world calls to mind the insightful dialogue between an elder demon and a younger demon in C.S. Lewis's *The*

Screwtape Letters:

The Enemy allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavor. . . . [He] takes this risk because He has a curious fantasy of making all these disgusting little human vermin into what He calls His "free" lovers and servants—"sons" is the word He uses. . . . Desiring their freedom, He therefore refuses to carry them, by their mere affections and habits, to any of the goals which He sets before them. . . . remember, there lies our danger. If once they get through this initial dryness successfully, they become much less dependent on emotion and therefore much harder to tempt.⁷⁰

Dionysius, John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, C.S. Lewis, and Philip Yancey agree that purpose of the darkness, the dark night, the absence, and the disappointment is to purify and empower the soul to know a new dimension of intimacy with God.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 173–174.

⁷⁰ C S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters: With Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1982), 13–14.

CHAPTER 3

THE THESIS

Allow me to restate the ministry problem and proposed solution identified in Chapter 1. Many God-followers mistakenly view spiritual disillusionment as a form of spiritual formation failure. In our generation, we lack a framework for processing disillusionment as a spiritual friend and, consequently, assume that spiritual growth prefers the light over the dark. In response to this ministry problem, I will first illustrate a framework for spiritual disillusionment and secondly offer a contribution regarding how disillusionment—as an unexpected friend of spiritual formation—ushers us through the dark into deeper intimacy with God. I propose that disillusionment is an inevitable spiritual exfoliate that, by abrasively removing layers of inaccuracy and self-protection, can sensitize souls to Christ’s mysterious, indwelling Presence. Redefined and respected, disillusionment can be experienced as a gift that frees the disillusioned to relish God’s Presence in mystery and pain. Redefined and respected, disillusionment can be entered as a holy darkness in which we encounter the God of Moses. In the words of Dr. Abraham J. Twerski,

The Talmud says that Moses asked God why there is suffering, and God answered that as long as a person inhabits a physical body, he cannot possibly understand this. Following the revelation at Sinai, the Torah says, “Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.” One might think that God’s immanent presence would be in brightness, but Moses knew better. It is in darkness of life that we may find God.¹

An Illustration

Any illustration of life is at some level a simplification. The following illustration of the cycle of relationship provides a simple yet supportive framework for processing disillusionment. Though the framework will be specifically applied to

¹ Quoted in Spitz, xv.

spiritual disillusionment, the illustration also provides insight for relational disillusionment in general. Relationships often begin with a bright substance I will refer to as delight, which can range in maturity from infatuation to admiration. Relationally, delight is when a girl meets a boy and there are stars in their eyes, or when someone greatly anticipates learning from a mentor who clearly walks on water, or when a sinner meets the forgiving God and all seems right and lovely in the world. The eye-stars, the water-walks, and the global optimism are delightful illusions or, from a psychological perspective, idealizations.

The second stage in the cycle of relationship is the focus of this dissertation: disillusionment, or again from a psychological perspective, de-idealization. The young married couple's first financial crisis, the mentee's first glimpse of the mentor's humanity, and the new Jesus-follower's first unanswered prayer all initiate the loss of illusions: dear ones can place "I" before "we," leaders are still sinners, and God is not tame. Shiny yet shallow ideals are lost and a dull yet deeper reality is gained. Albeit unpleasant, it is logical to assume that imperfect humans will act imperfectly. However, when the college student is tormented by unanswered questions, when a faithful soul has not sensed God's presence for years, when the miracle pregnancy miscarries, when close friends commit suicide...the Jesus-follower is left staring into empty space, searching the horizon for a perfect God who evidently feels precious little need to defend or explain Himself.

Whatever the circumstances, spiritual disillusionment presents a grave challenge because we lack a framework for pressing through the loss of illusions in life. Our global culture prematurely calls delight "love"² and, therefore, mistakenly calls disillusionment "failure." When love fails, what does our generation do? We

² Space sadly does not permit the exploration of correlations between delight in particular and the illustration in general, with Teresa of Avila's first three mansions and Bernard of Clairvaux's first two degrees of love.

bail. Then we continue our search for a love that lacks pain whilst our spirits starve on a diet of delight. However, when we refuse to bail and exercise the strength of commitment, the gaining of reality leads us into a new dimension of love. Further, love itself is continually strengthened and deepened as the cycle repeats like a spiral with the loss of more illusions, the gaining of more reality, and the renewed commitment not to bail, as illustrated in Figure 1.

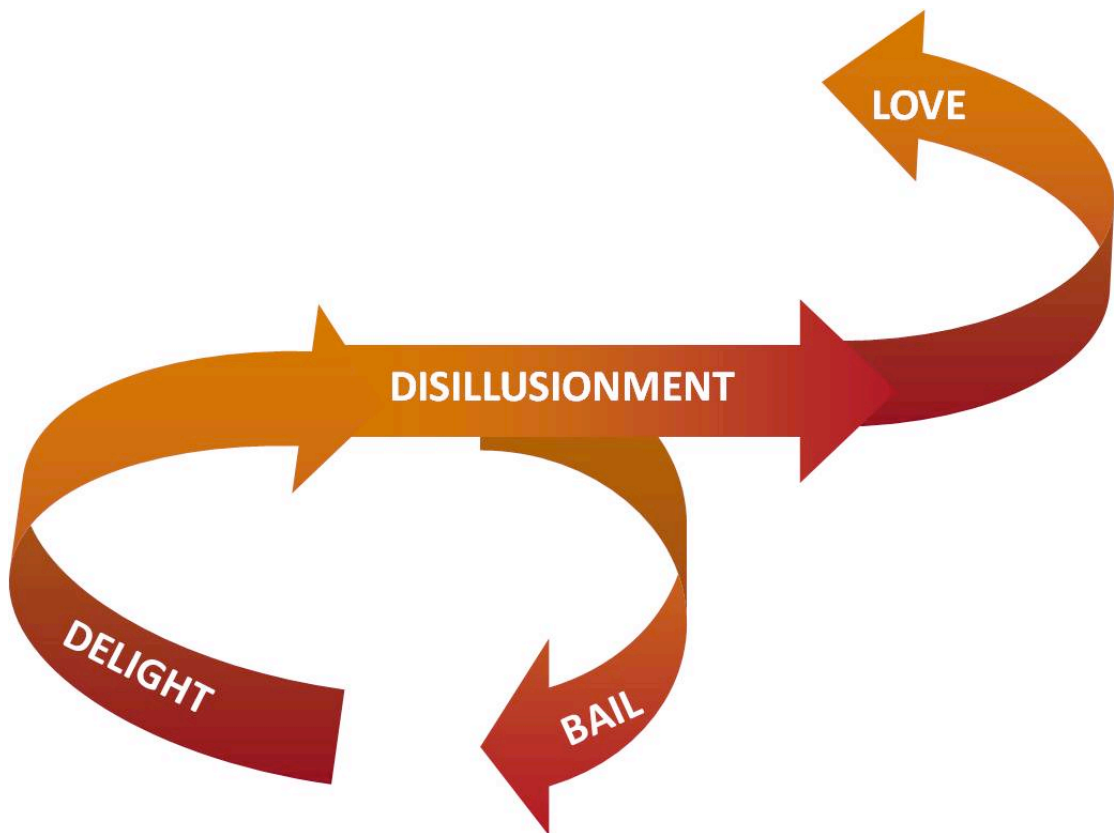


Figure 1. Disillusionment in the cycle of relationship

The Inevitability of Illusions and Disillusionment

Illusions—defined as inaccurate ideas—are the natural outcome of finite creatures in relationship with an infinite Creator in an earth (not to mention a

universe) too complex to fully comprehend. The apostle Paul acknowledges the limits of a believer's understanding:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13:12–13 (NIV))

Paul states, “we know in part.” The rest is somewhat of a guess. Apart from illusions that arise from psychological trauma (which is beyond the scope of this dissertation), most illusions arise from either the “guess” or from the assumptions we make about what we “know in part.” For example, we know that God is love. We then assume that “God is love” must mean that God will not allow our children to be molested or our faith to flounder. Certainly it is possible to create illusions willfully, as when a child asks, “Mommy, is it okay if I believe in Santa a little while longer?” However, most illusions are not chosen; they are simply reflective of Paul’s “now I know in part” reality.

Therefore, if possessing illusions is natural and unavoidable, experiencing disillusionment is also natural and unavoidable.³ If we think of God as the ultimate reality, then faith in God is a continual journey toward what is real. Along the way, we shed illusions and gain reality—not as failure, nor as something demonic or punitive, but as the healthy growing pains of spiritual maturity. In *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis speaks to this experience of spiritual illusions being shattered by God Himself as He mentors us through and toward reality:

My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? The Incarnation is the supreme example; it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins. And most are offended by the iconoclasm, and blessed are those who are not.

³ An objection to the contrary is addressed later in Chapter 3.

All reality is iconoclastic. The earthly beloved, even in this life, continually triumphs over your mere idea of her. And you want her to; you want her with all her resistances, all her faults, all her unexpectedness.⁴

The Dissing of Illusions and the Gaining of Reality

Lewis' description of how God shatters human-made, inaccurate God-concepts vividly describes the process of disillusionment: "All reality is iconoclastic." Reality is a merciful illusion-breaker. Even though the shattering process is God-designed, it can still be deeply unsettling to experience. Psychologist Peter Homans explains,

Since history rarely optimally facilitates psychological development, such mergers are eventually challenged by interpersonal, social, and historical circumstances. As a result, the idealizations lose their firmness and may even crumble, leading to a wakened sense of self, a sense of betrayal, a conviction that an important value has been lost, moments of rage at the object (subsequently perceived as having failed the self in some way or other), and a consequent general sense of inner disorganization and paralysis.⁵

In the dawn of disillusionment, we may seek to dispel the "inner disorganization" and gathering darkness with the feeble light of human understanding. As medical doctor and spiritual formation professor James S. Reitman states, "Humans are prone to resist disillusionment by attempting to either explain their adversity or control the circumstances that led to the crisis."⁶ Even this dissertation's opening story illustrates the vanity of looking to reason to hold faith in place. Kierkegaard writes in *Sickness unto Death* that as a substance, faith "is precisely to lose one's understanding in order to win God."⁷ Contrasting Kierkegaard's movement away from reason and Hegel's movement toward reason (i.e., philosophical thought) to "cure" religious despair,

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 78.

⁵ Homans, 24–25.

⁶ Reitman, 116.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 171.

philosophy professor Daniel Berthold-Bond notes that both “therapeutic leaps entail an act of sacrifice or renunciation or surrender” of the self, the will, and “I” which is where authentic faith, in Hegel’s words, “first finds its turning point.”⁸

The disillusionment process invites us to lose illusions and to surrender self. We resist in part because we are dearly attached to our illusions: “since the night involves relinquishing attachments, it takes us beneath our denial into territory we are in the habit of avoiding.”⁹ Gerald G. May further explains why this process can be so agonizing:

We cling to things, people, beliefs, and behaviors not because we love them, but because we are terrified of losing them. The classical spiritual term for this compulsive condition is attachment. . . . All major spiritual traditions have long understood that attachment binds the energy of the human spirit to something other than love. Each of us has countless attachments. We are attached to our daily routines, our environments, our relationships, and of course our possessions. We are also attached to our religious beliefs and to our images of ourselves, others, and God.¹⁰

John H. Coe concurs, adding that spiritual nights seek to

purge the believer of false attachments and the false self. . . . [T]he Spirit wants them to be open to the possibility that it is he who is responsible for this dry time. He is purging them and inviting them into deeper fellowship with him in the truth of their character and of his love.¹¹

From his extensive study of the writings of John of the Cross, Coe draws attention to one of the primary illusions lost in the dark night: the illusion that our efforts fuel, and therefore can fix, our spiritual lives—a belief which John of the Cross refers to as the deadly sin of spiritual pride.¹² In the words of Coe: “The soul is

⁸ Berthold-Bond, 51.

⁹ May, 70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹ Coe, *Musings*, 304.

¹² *Ibid.*, 299.

made dizzy in a dark night with its own inability to make the spiritual life work.”¹³

Reitman adds, “Disillusionment plays a key role in displacing such autonomous self-sufficiency with the fear of God.”¹⁴ The work of disillusionment, from Reitman’s perspective, is to “deflate” self-sufficiency to open up the way for a soul to know true satisfaction via God’s relentless pursuit of the *imago Dei* within them.¹⁵

Before considering more specifically how the gaining of reality leads to greater unity with God, we will briefly look to Peter Homans to summarize the options available to the disillusioned, or de-idealized, soul:

The final disposition of the de-idealization experience usually takes one of three directions: (1) it may move toward new knowledge of self, new ideals, and consequent new ideas, or (2) the paralysis can persist, leading to apathy, cynicism, and chronic discontent, or (3) one may disavow the experience entirely and instead attack, often fiercely and rebelliously, the events or persons producing the de-idealization.¹⁶

The third direction is in the bitter form of “bail” identified earlier. The second direction, if maintained, can lead to a theological despair. The first direction—the discovery of new meaning—will be addressed below.

The Journey from Disillusionment to Love

Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz notes that the Hebrew word *mashber* means both *crisis* and *birthing stool*. Weaving imagery of birth with the history of the Jews, Spitz eloquently concludes that “birth may follow crisis.”¹⁷ The birth Spitz describes in his writing is the discovery of world-repairing purpose. In a similar way, the crisis of disillusionment is also followed by a birth of intimacy with God. Though the

¹³ Ibid., 205.

¹⁴ Reitman, 119.

¹⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹⁶ Homans, 24–25.

¹⁷ Spitz, 85.

terminology varies, Christian theologians, philosophers, and psychologists express general agreement that the experience of disillusionment is designed to move a soul God-ward. As May states, “This deepening of love is the real purpose of the dark night of the soul.”¹⁸ Or in the words of John H. Coe, “The soul must learn to love God just for Himself in such a manner that He, and not the need to be loved, is the center of all things.”¹⁹ Some depths of love can only be realized through trust. By limiting the efficacy of human knowledge and control, the disillusionment process invites a soul to trust in the God who does know and is truly in control. C. S. Lewis cleverly speaks of the “moral beauty” of such trust:

Complete trust is an ingredient in that relation—such trust as would have no room to grow except where there is also room for doubt. To love involved trusting the beloved beyond the evidence, even against much evidence. No man is our friend who believes in our good intentions only when they are proved. No man is our friend who will not be very slow to accept evidence against them. Such confidence, between one man and another, is in fact almost universally praised as moral beauty, not blamed as a logical error. And the suspicious man is blamed for a meanness of character, not admired for the excellence of his logic.²⁰

To trust—“even against much evidence”—is the inherent invitation in disillusionment. The loss of illusions guides believers “into the painful reality that apart from God, they can do nothing. . . . The Spirit is interested in giving them a real experience of themselves, their pain, their psychological material, their neediness. They are now ready for real love.”²¹ On the other side of the loss of illusions is trust-birthed love.

¹⁸ May, 47.

¹⁹ Coe, *Musings*, 295.

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night: And Other Essays*, A Harvest Book (1952; repr., San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1988), 26.

²¹ Coe, *Musings*, 301–302.

What then is the believer's responsibility when disillusioned? If God Himself shatters our inaccurate illusions of Him to ready us for "real love," and if trust is the invitation sounding in the shattering disillusionment, how do we move with grace through the loss of illusions? Again, Coe mentors us:

The Christian life is more about Christ and less about our efforts. It is about what He has done, and about our life "in Christ," and how to open our hearts to this New Covenant life dependent upon the Spirit. This is an obedience of abiding in the Vine and opening to the Life of God living within.

As I grow in the Christian faith, I find that I am invited by the Spirit to give up on the project of moralism, of trying to fix myself by my spiritual efforts. Rather, I want to open more deeply to Christ's work on the cross, and the Work of the Spirit in my deep for my daily bread.²²

The strength to journey from delight through disillusionment into love is found in something relational, not informational. Answers do not carry us through the darkness; love does. Always God's love is first. It precedes our birth, not to mention our faith. Then, like a sagging sail found by the wind, our choice to keep loving begins to move us forward. We love, not because we understand, but in response to His prior love. We love, not because we see evidence, but because His very existence is weightier evidence than anything our eyes could see. What is unknown becomes mystery and mystery becomes a freeing friend. In the words of Dr. Gerald G. May,

The darkness, the holy unknowing that characterizes this freedom, is the opposite of confusion and ignorance. Confusion happens when mystery is an enemy and we feel we must solve it to master our destinies. And ignorance is not knowing that we do not know. In the liberation of the night, we are freed from having to figure things out, and we find delight in knowing that we do not know.²³

Vassady's thoughts here bear repeating: "[W]e cannot free ourselves 'horizontally,' i.e., by any amount of merely human endeavors. No human achievement, whether individual or collective, can ever bring us peace of mind. We must be lifted from

²² Coe (2008), 57.

²³ May, 133.

above, from the vertical dimension.”²⁴ We are not alone in this journey through the dissing of illusions and the gaining of reality. Neither is our hope in, as Vassady says so well, any “horizontal” efforts. Like an unseen wind current, God Himself—not human positivism or intellect or accomplishment—is moving our faith upward.²⁵ God is pulling us into Himself. Our responsibility is to yield to the pull and commit again to follow.²⁶

A Continuous Cycle of Commitment

Whereas I have chosen to speak of *disillusionment* and *love* bridged by *commitment*, psychologist Peter Homans speaks of *mourning* and *meaning* bridged by *individuation*. Homan explains that individuation is

the fruit of mourning. Somehow, in a way that is not really understood, the experience of loss can stimulate the desire “to become who one is.” That in turn can throw into motion a third process, what should be called “the creation of meaning.” This action is at once a work of personal growth and a work of culture. In it, the self both appropriates from the past what has been lost and at the same time actually creates for itself in a fresh way these meanings.²⁷

As mentioned previously, other options besides commitment—or, to use Homans’ term, individuation—are available to the disillusioned. Reality can be denied and illusion can be preferred. The upward pull can be ignored and its accompanying offer

²⁴ Vassady, 162.

²⁵ Reading distinguishes between faith and hope as follows: “Faith, a variant of hope, is based on belief rather than knowledge. Like hope, it involves positive expectations about the future and generates behavior designed to help make its expectations come true. But the future-oriented behaviors that faith generates, such as prayer and ritual, require the intervention of a deity to achieve their desired outcome, in addition to the individual’s own efforts. . . . While there is a certain logic to hope, albeit one that may often be apparent only to the beholder, faith does not require the same type of rationality to sustain it.” See Anthony Reading, *Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 8.

²⁶ A poignant addition to this thought comes from Gregory of Nyssa in *Life of Moses*, 2.251-252, who said, “Moses, who eagerly seeks to behold God, is not taught how he can behold him: to follow God wherever he might lead is to behold God.” Everett Ferguson, *Inheriting Wisdom: Readings for Today from Ancient Christian Writers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 217.

²⁷ Homans, 9.

of intimacy can be rejected. Rabbi Blumenthal explains that if unprocessed, the loss of illusions can end in the abandonment of religious beliefs, i.e., bailing. In his discussion on God's responsibility for the Shoah (holocaust), Rabbi Blumenthal offers guidance for processing the painful gaining of reality:

Despair is a loss of logo-centric orientation.... Dealing with despair requires re-centering. Dealing with despair requires activating our anger and expressing our rage.... Protest—social protest, but also and perhaps more importantly, theological protest—is the first step. “Fear God”—in protest. Tremble, but say and pray the protest... In a word, persistence in covenant.... Persistence, not hope.... I am not sure I hope, but I persist in the face of despair.²⁸

Together, *re-center* and *persist* form a fitting synonym for *commit*. Rabbi Blumenthal emphasizes expressing the pain in protest with anger, rage, and the fear of God: “Say and pray the protest.” He calls for real emotions in response to real pain.

Re-centering is active and emotional. Commitment is willful and vocal.

Blumenthal interestingly encourages “persistence, not hope.” The colloquial use of hope at times mutates biblical hope into an altogether different substance: a passive form of denial used to justify present pain (ours or others’) as a down payment on a future gain or even as a penance for a past lack. Such pale hope can quickly faint in the dark of disillusionment. Biblical hope, in contrast, is anchored in a Person. This is the hope exemplified by the persecuted saints listed in the latter half of the Hebrews 11 hall of faith, who responded to the painful gaining of reality with the power of commitment and “were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned *something better* for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”²⁹ Sowing commitment in the soil of

²⁸ Blumenthal, 128–129.

²⁹ Heb. 11:26–40. Emphasis mine.

despair might be the most powerful spiritual weapon believers possess. As Screwtape advised his mentee demon, Wormwood:

Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.³⁰

Disillusionment in Ecclesiastes and Job

As discussed in Chapter 2, as an English word *disillusion* appears a scarce seven times in four out of forty English translations. However, disillusionment as an experience is represented throughout the Scriptures. This section will briefly address disillusionment in the words of Ecclesiastes and in the story of Job.

The writer of Ecclesiastes (*Qoheleth* in the Hebrew), most probably Solomon, pens his despair over the meaninglessness of life on earth. James T. Reiter and Jerome T. Walsh both write insightfully regarding the source and outcome of Qoheleth's spiritual pain. Reitman notes that the Hebrew concept of disillusionment is carried in the original language of Eccles. 5:17, which he translates, "All his days he eats in darkness and *is greatly disillusioned* in his sickness and anger."³¹ Reitman states that the "concept of 'disillusionment' is conveyed by the root סַחַח but this is not obvious in most English translations."³² From Reiter's perspective, the illusion lost by the writer is that of self-sufficiency: "Qoheleth's reflections are designed to leave self-sufficient readers with no hope of fulfilling their foolish and presumptuous

³⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 40.

³¹ Reitman, 121.

³² *Ibid.*

schemes.”³³ In both Job and Ecclesiastes, Reiter sees compelling examples of the rocky journey from self-reliance to wisdom.³⁴ Reitman explains:

For those readers who finally “get” the ultimate futility of self-sufficiency, the rhetorical goal in both books is to *provoke sufficient disillusionment* that they might *relinquish self-reliant strategies for meaning, fear God, accept their God-given portion in life, and invest wisely in God’s ongoing redemptive purpose*.³⁵

Jerome T. Walsh identifies a different illusion lost in Ecclesiastes: the expectation that genuine spirituality will be vibrant spirituality. In a thought-provoking article entitled, “Despair as a Theological Virtue,” Walsh addresses this agonizing form of disillusionment. After asserting that the tenets of Christianity still do not answer the core questions of Ecclesiastes, Walsh borrows the name *Qoheleth* to refer to the hidden souls in the church who have chosen faithfulness to a God they do not feel. Their “dryness in prayer and sense of divine-absence” isolate them, and from Walsh’s perspective, the untraditional spirituality of the author of Ecclesiastes can comfort them, for “to support another traveler in the darkness and from the darkness, to share one’s own growing trust of darkness, is to offer, like Qoheleth himself, the consolation of companionship if not of explanation.”³⁶ Though most are familiar with what Podmore so eloquently describes as faith that “feel[s] at a melancholy distance from its savior,”³⁷ Walsh gives voice to the souls for whom felt distance is normative, souls for whom commitment to and intimacy with God is real, but not felt.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 118: “As with Job, a growing nihilism culminates in utter disillusionment at the pivot of the argument with the rhetorical question ‘Who knows what is good for man...?’ (6:12a). This leads Qohelet to turn to *wisdom* as the only viable means of finding any meaning in life (7:1–14).”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Walsh, 48.

³⁷ Podmore, “Lazarus,” 491.

For insight into the disillusionment of Job, we turn to the writings of Philip Yancey, Diane Jacobson, and Charles Spurgeon. Yancey states that the “point of the book is not suffering: Where is God when it hurts? The prologue dealt with that issue. The point is faith: Where is Job when it hurts?”³⁸ Jacobson rephrases this primary question as, “Does Job—does anyone—worship God for nothing without wanting something in return? What makes the relationship of humans to God tick?”³⁹ Jacobson, who counts Job among the “crushed theologians...who cannot think their way to God but who are finally grasped by the cross”⁴⁰—points out that Job and his friends share the same illusion that suffering is the result of sinning:

Job knows he is suffering, but he also knows that he is not “evil” in a way that deserves such punishment. Therefore, because suffering is the result of punishment and the punishment should fit the crime, God is breaking the law. Like his friends, Job thinks that the world operates (or at least should operate) in an orderly manner.⁴¹

As Job loses his illusion and gains a new reality, he journeys from statements of faith to lamentations and from short declarations to agony-filled questions. His anger-inspired, painfully honest truth-telling, opens the way to greater intimacy with God. Jacobson explains,

What he screams and laments for is relationship with God. He thinks perhaps that what he wants is some abstract revelation of truth and some answers as to why he is suffering. We share with Job his unquenchable desire to be given explanation and reasons for suffering. What Job gets is a relationship with God hidden within his remarkably odd encounter with God. ...The final logic of Job is not the logic of justice but rather the logic of relationship. Knowing God, for Job, is deeply a matter of faith through suffering within the void. Chaos is taken up into the promise of God, and the only doorway is cloaked in

³⁸ Yancey, 165.

³⁹ Diane Jacobson, “Job as a Theologian of the Cross,” *Word and World* 31, no. 4 (September 1, 2011): 375.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 379. On the phrase “crushed theologians,” Jacobson notes: “This marvelous phrase comes from Fred Reisz in an unpublished presentation at a conference of teaching theologians of the ELCA.”

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 376.

darkness.⁴²

In his study of Job, Spurgeon's conclusions concur: sorrow and weakness open the way to greater intimacy with God via a "fuller revelation of God."⁴³ Spurgeon explains that God "draws the curtain about the bed of his chosen sufferer and, at the same time he withdraws another curtain which before concealed his Glory!"⁴⁴

Spurgeon biographer Peter Morden offers the following from Spurgeon's message on the book of Job:

In a sermon entitled "Job Among The Ashes," he insisted that a believer's suffering could lead to a clearer sight of God. Prosperity was a "painted window" which shut out "the clear light of God." Only when the paint was removed did the window become "transparent," enabling God to be seen with a new clarity. This had been Job's experience: he had lost everything and this "paved the way" to his receiving a fuller revelation of God.⁴⁵

Yancey also concurs regarding the outcome of Job's disillusionment, offering that "Paradoxically, the most perplexing, Job-like times may help 'fertilize' faith and nurture intimacy with God."⁴⁶ Illusions are lost. Reality is gained. Commitment in the dark opens the way to deeper intimacy with God. Such is the work of disillusionment.

A Contribution

John H. Coe speaks for many Christian scholars and mystics from Job's time to today when he asserts that the dark awakens us to "the conscious presence of the Spirit within, the presence of the indwelling Lover of the soul."⁴⁷ I propose that one of

⁴² Ibid., 379.

⁴³ Morden, 320.

⁴⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Pitifulness of the Lord the Comfort of the Afflicted," Bible Hub Online Bible Study Suite, accessed August 26, 2014, http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/spurgeon/the_pitifulness_of_the_lord_the_comfort_of_the_afflicted.htm.

⁴⁵ Morden, 319.

⁴⁶ Yancey, 170.

⁴⁷ Coe, *Musings*, 306.

the reasons this deeper awakening is possible is that disillusionment directly addresses a substance that hinders intimacy: spiritual self-protection. Spiritual self-protection refers to the many ways in which we consciously and unconsciously hide ourselves from God. In every cycle of losing illusions and gaining reality, each choice to commit to God in the dark is simultaneously a choice to not self-protect. In this way, disillusionment is like a spiritual exfoliate that steadily removes layers of self-protection and leaves us more sensitive to God's indwelling Spirit. Rowan Williams notes, "In suffering, the believer's self-protection and isolation are broken."⁴⁸ This is a sacred work of spiritual darkness for often our deepest self-protective defaults can only be exposed, examined, and abandoned through pain.

As will soon be considered, spiritual self-protection is as old as the Fall. Psychiatrist Anthony Reading explains that in relationships in general "[i]ndividuals who have been hurt by lost hopes tend to protect themselves against future disappointment by lowering their sights and dimming their aspirations."⁴⁹ The same is true in our relationship with God. Uncertain that God will protect us, we proactively protect ourselves. To avoid further emotional and theological pain, we lower our expectations and edit our dreams. To give ourselves enough space to, as Henri Nouwen states, "prepare ourselves for the future, and to arm ourselves against impending threats,"⁵⁰ we emotionally shrink back from God through fear-driven planning, worry, or hyper-vigilance. With each choice to self-protect, another layer is added to insulate our hearts from God's presence. With each disillusioning

⁴⁸ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2003), 21.

⁴⁹ Reading, 17.

⁵⁰ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 15–16.

experience, God offers us the opportunity to have these layers removed. May, speaking from the writings of John of the Cross, describes this process:

In spiritual matters it is precisely when we do think we know where to go that we are most likely to stumble. Thus, John says, God darkens our awareness in order to keep us safe. When we cannot chart our own course, we become vulnerable to God’s protection, and the darkness becomes a “guiding night,” a “night more kindly than the dawn.”⁵¹

On the Origin of Self-Protection

In CE 79, a succession of six mudslides triggered by a volcanic eruption smothered the town of Herculaneum on the Gulf of Naples. Life was suddenly and irreversibly terminated for the town’s prosperous inhabitants. All their wealth was buried in one tragic day. In the same way, for Adam, Eve, and their descendants, the Fall—like a mudslide—buried the spiritual, physical, and social wealth of the Garden of Eden through a succession of tragic choices:

1. Eve held a conversation with the serpent.
2. Eve made the serpent’s words an option.
3. With Adam, Eve stood close enough to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to see and touch its fruit.
4. Eve took and ate some of the tree’s fruit.
5. Eve gave the fruit to her husband.
6. Adam ate the fruit.⁵²

As the ensuing volcano erupted, pure spiritual and interpersonal intimacy was buried beneath layers and layers of a substance that handicaps spiritual formation: self-protection.

The Creation of Coverings

For an undisclosed era, humanity knew nothing of the spiritual static of self-protection. Adam and Eve were spiritually formed through unguarded intimacy with God and each other. In the Garden, there was nothing to protect their “selves” from.

⁵¹ May, 72.

⁵² Gen. 3:1–6.

Self was simply and profoundly *known*. As their act of disobedience imparted sudden knowledge of good and evil, “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”⁵³ Though a fig tree provided the raw materials, shame volunteered as the first tailor. As John Coe explains,

The first human experience after sin and the Fall was...*shame*, an “eye opening” experience of their own corruption or badness in the presence of one another....The true distortion in their nature, however, is seen in their first response to their shame: rather than fleeing to God for a solution to their problem, *they took it upon themselves* to find an appropriate cover for their disturbing nakedness.⁵⁴

[Today] this shame experience also results in persons feeling uncomfortable being seen as they are, with the subsequent penchant to cover this experience as did the first couple (Genesis 3:7).⁵⁵

Adam and Eve’s coverings were not sudden criticisms of their Creator’s handiwork, but rather clear evidence of shame’s contamination of all the eye could see. Though thin and light physically, the coverings were thick and heavy interpersonally. Shame now weighed down Adam and Eve’s spiritual formation, separating them from each another and their God. Yancey explains, “An awkward separation had crept in to spoil the intimacy. And every quiver of disappointment in our own relationship with God is an aftershock from their initial act of rebellion.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Gen. 3:7.

⁵⁴ John H. Coe, “Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation: Opening to Spiritual Formation in the Cross of the Spirit,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 61.

⁵⁵ John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 287.

⁵⁶ Yancey, 62.

Spiritual Concealment

After creating coverings, Adam and Eve “hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”⁵⁷ Whereas the coverings were inspired by shame, hiding seems to have been inspired by fear-laden guilt. Lewis Smedes offers a clear distinction between these emotions: “We feel guilty for what we *do*. We feel shame for what we *are*. A person feels guilt because he *did* something wrong. A person feels shame because he *is* something wrong.”⁵⁸

Prior to the Fall, the “sound of the Lord as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day”⁵⁹ was a spiritual formation summons to live in step with the One who gave all breath. Following the Fall, the same sound triggered an urgent need for concealment. Addressing the effects of fear-laden guilt today, Coe states, “The ubiquitous human response to the existence of God is to imitate the first human couple, who feared the presence of God and hid from him (Genesis 3:8–10). These are the saddest verses in the Bible, for they mimic our penchant to hide from our maker, who alone is capable of loving us and opening us to true happiness.”⁶⁰ Hiding, obviously, hinders spiritual formation. In relation to a God who is omnipresent, any perceived physical distance from him is an illusion. However, the spiritual distance created by the effort of hiding is all too real.

Self-Perpetuating Self-Protection

Coverings and concealments are our spiritual formation inheritances from The Fall. Both are manifestations of self-protection. With the knowledge of good and evil,

⁵⁷ Gen. 3:7, 8.

⁵⁸ Lewis B. Smedes, *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (New York: HarperOne, 1994), 9.

⁵⁹ Gen. 3:8.

⁶⁰ Coe and Hall, 288.

we no longer feel safe with God or one another. Perhaps the study of God, theology itself, has at times throughout the ages been motivated by self-protection. Certainly, our interpersonal landscape has been shaped by this default. Shultz and Sandage note, “Formed for the sake of self-protection, our egoistic love is not powerful enough either to bring us into right relations with others or to keep them from crushing or abandoning us.”⁶¹ Barring an intervention of grace, self-protection is self-perpetuating.

As The Fall demonstrates, the serpent’s goal is distance, not pain. Satan’s agenda was (and still is) to create distance between humans and God. Toward that end, he can use pain or pleasure equally. With distance as the goal, Adam and Eve’s coverings and concealments were—and our coverings and concealments still are—Satan’s trophies. But every time a disillusioned believer recommits to God in the dark, a layer of coverings and concealments is removed. The dark itself then becomes an unexpected friend of spiritual formation, for within it, layers of self-protection are removed, leaving us more vulnerable to God’s glorious presence and love.

Objections

Five objections (one fundamental, one definitional, and three primary) to my claim that disillusionment is an unexpected friend of spiritual formation will now be considered.

There Is No God with Whom to Become Disillusioned

The fundamental objection stems from a negation of the core premise of the research question, namely, that a God exists with whom we can be disillusioned. As

⁶¹ F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 117.

mentioned in Chapter 1, starting points matter. Those who begin with a starting point of atheism consider belief in the existence of God to be an illusion and, therefore, view disillusionment as a means of dising religious beliefs entirely. As a former atheist, this objection is familiar. As a current Jesus-follower, this objection cannot be countered without entering into a discussion of proofs for the existence and non-existence of God, which is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Therefore, I acknowledge the objection that from a non-theist's perspective, committing to love God through the experience of disillusionment is considered a step backwards in psychological and social evolution.

*Claiming That Disillusionment Is a Friend
Places a Tool in the Hands of Oppressors*

As stated previously, those who suffer are not always disillusioned.

Disillusionment, defined in this dissertation as the act of removing false spiritual ideas, is not synonymous with suffering. However, the relationship between disillusionment and suffering is too porous to exempt the concept of disillusionment from being misused in the same way that the concept of suffering has been misused, hence, the description of this objection as definitional. Some understandably will hesitate to accept the claim that disillusionment is a friend of spiritual formation because they fear that such a claim could be used as a tool of oppression. As feminist theologian Deanna A. Thompson asserts,

From blaming the Jews for Jesus' death, to the Crusades, to invoking the cross as justification for the silent suffering of women, Christianity must confront the ways in which its theology and resulting practices glorify and even cause undeserved suffering.⁶²

⁶² Deanna A. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), ix.

...no doctrine is more problematic, and no symbol more potentially destructive to women and other marginalized persons, than the doctrine of Christology and the symbol of the cross.⁶³

“Suffer,” the oppressor mocks, “it is good for your soul.” Were I able to universally redeem disillusionment as a concept, some distance from this objection could be purchased. However, given the certainty that disillusionment will continue to be viewed by many as a form of suffering and a cross to bear, this objection stands.

Greed and power defile holy spaces. Since I view disillusionment as a holy space, with sadness I accept that disillusionment cannot escape the potential of such defilement. However, my confidence in defining disillusionment in terms of losing illusions and gaining realities is that the disillusioned will be interiorly and interpersonally strengthened. Illusions are tools of oppression. Let us celebrate their loss. Reality is a champion of interior freedom and social change. Let us celebrate its gain.

Faith Is a Proclamation of the Positive: Therefore, Treating Disillusionment as an Unexpected Friend Encourages Negative Thinking

The first of three primary objections to be considered is popular but perhaps not academic. In other words, though I encountered no scholars who voiced this objection, one stroll through a Christian bookstore testifies to its popular presence. This objection holds that since “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,”⁶⁴ and since “the tongue has the power of life and death,”⁶⁵ we should only verbalize positive thoughts and perspectives. For example, regardless of how you actually feel, speaking in faith that you are healthy confesses, and consequently brings into existence, health in your body. Understandably, such a

⁶³ Thompson, Deanna A., 100.

⁶⁴ Heb. 11:1.

⁶⁵ Prov. 18:21.

perspective would avoid most words that begin with *dis-*, including disease, disability, discouragement, and disillusionment. Philip Yancey discusses this objection in

Disappointment with God:

Some Christians, I know, would reject the phrase “disappointment with God” out of hand. Such a notion is all wrong, they say. Jesus promised that faith the size of a grain of mustard seed can move mountains; that anything can happen if two or three gather together in prayer. The Christian life is a life of victory and triumph. God wants us happy, healthy, and prosperous, and any other state simply indicates a lack of faith.⁶⁶

A visit to a church that held this view contributed to Yancey’s decision to write his classic trade book. In this church, parents were encouraged to proclaim the positive as an act of believing-faith for their sick children’s healing. As they buried their children, “they blame[d] themselves for weak faith. Meanwhile, the tombstones multiply.”⁶⁷

Without hesitation, I agree that words are powerful and that faith is the substance of things hoped for. However, I disagree with this objection’s understanding of *faith-filled* speech. In the above example, I contend that *faith-filled speech* manifested as a form of psychological denial and intentional, albeit benevolent, alignment with untruth. If faith-filled speech means positivity over reality, then the writer of Hebrews as well as every writer in the biblical canon is guilty of faithless negativity, for the Scriptures are filled with expressions of despair, accounts of failure, and chronicles of pain. Theologian Julian Norris Hartt adds,

We people of the Church feel impelled to convert the Church into a cheering-squad; and we go about with our own patented short-run assurances and nostrums... Perhaps the people of this age do not quite know that the people of the Church are largely with them in the land of deep confusion and comprehensive fears. Well, let the fact be known. Our willingness to confess that we too have put feet upon the ice-bound shores of despair identifies us wholly with them. Our confession that God in Jesus Christ has found us there

⁶⁶ Yancey, 24.

⁶⁷ Yancey, 26.

and has wrought resurrection, identifies us as at one with him, in hope and in love.⁶⁸

Faith is the overflow of humility, not positivity. Faith is a mysterious muscle that, according to New Testament writers, is strengthened through trials and life's negatives.⁶⁹ Jesus' example on the cross of uttering, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"⁷⁰ and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"⁷¹ demonstrate that "negative" emotions and biblical faith co-exist in committed souls. As Peter L. Steinke states, "Those who insist on a 'pure' faith unstained by human emotionality make the denial of reality a condition of faith."⁷² Disillusionment is not the abandonment of faith-filled speech, but rather the movement of faith toward what is real.

Suicide Is the Ultimate Manifestation of Disillusionment: Therefore, Disillusionment Should Be Viewed as an Enemy, Not a Friend, of Spiritual Formation

This objection negates the friendship of disillusionment based upon the premise that suicide is an outcome of disillusionment: How can disillusionment be a friend of spiritual formation when its presence can trigger the tragedy of suicide?⁷³ My response to this objection addresses the soundness of its underlying premise.

⁶⁸ Hartt, 61.

⁶⁹ See 1 Thess. 1:4; James 1:2–4,12; and 1 Pet. 1:6–7; 4:12–14.

⁷⁰ Matt. 27:46.

⁷¹ Luke 23:46.

⁷² Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2006), loc. 126, Kindle.

⁷³ Coe offers the following on distinguishing between a dark night and depression: "From an objective standpoint, the dark night is a movement of the Spirit on behalf of the believer, whereas clinical depression can have a more historical or biological etiology. From a subjective viewpoint, depression may involve no particular object or focus other than a diffused sense of loss of pleasure, a difficulty in sleep, a generally depressed mood, and overall energy loss. The dark night, on the contrary, has a more refined focus, namely, upon one's relationship with God, which is particularly brought into view in the practice of the spiritual disciplines (prayer, reading the Bible, fellowship, hearing preaching, worship). If there is a generally depressed mood while in a dark night, it can be brought into sharper focus to distinguish between feelings that emerge in relation to the spiritual life alone and those that persist in general. Interestingly, a believer in a dark night, instead of feeling

Psychiatrist Anthony Reading in *Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior* describes several mental states as represented in Table 5.

depressed, may feel quite energized in life's activities in general and, as a result, repress the religious dimension in light of the fact that this is the objective focus of the internal turmoil." Coe, *Musings*, 306–307.

Table 5. Anthony Reading's description of disillusioned, sadness and unhappiness, grief and depression, and suicide as relates to expectations

Disillusioned	The result of expecting "either too much or too little of themselves or the world." ⁷⁴
Sadness and unhappiness	<p>"Current-state emotions that indicate that things are not presently going as we would like."</p> <p>"Sadness, a normal part of everyday living, is characterized by a mildly depressed mood without any change in our future hopes or expectations."⁷⁵</p>
Grief and depression	<p>"Prospective emotions signifying to us that some or all of our future expectations are no longer attainable and prompting us to review the assumptions on which they were based."⁷⁶</p> <p>"Grief is a temporary, self-healing response to a specific loss, such as occurs with death, divorce, or abandonment. It can also be triggered by the loss of material possessions or important beliefs."⁷⁷</p> <p>"Grief signifies the loss of a circumscribed source of expectations which temporarily disturbs our everyday activities, while depression involves a more pervasive loss of hoped-for eventualities which disrupts our sense of well-being so greatly that we no longer know what to do or where to turn."⁷⁸</p>
Suicide ⁷⁹	"Represents the ultimate expression of despair, the absolute inability to foresee a tolerable future for oneself." ⁸⁰

For Reading, disillusionment is the experience of having unrealistic expectations (i.e., illusions) shattered by reality. Suicide, however, is prompted not by unmet

⁷⁴ Reading, x.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁷⁹ For an intriguing diagram of the relationship between hope and depression, see Reading, 19.

⁸⁰ Reading, 155.

expectations but by the absence of any hope-filled expectations.

What Reading calls sadness and unhappiness, Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz—who speaks of despair on a continuum—refers to as common depression, an experience which “occurs during day-to-day living in the space between contentment and angst, between expectations met and disappointments encountered.”⁸¹ Related to Spitz’s despair is Hegel’s “ascetic unhappy consciousness” and Kierkegaard’s description of a “demonic” form of despair, which, if unresolved by faith, places “suicide [as] the danger nearest him.”⁸² Medical doctor Abraham J. Twerski explains that the despair that can lead to suicide is a “feeling [of being] utterly useless [which] goes beyond pain, resulting in total numbness. The absence of all feeling puts one’s very existence into question. A person in despair may feel that there is no place for him or her on the planet Earth.”⁸³

Rabbi Spitz writes both as a counselor and as one intimately familiar with theological despair.⁸⁴ Spitz, who illustrates his teaching with personal experiences of clinical depression and suicidal thoughts, states with humility, “I am aware that each one of us is capable of spiraling into darkness, of undergoing the emotional unraveling that leads to chaos. I understand that we cannot explain our emotions with our intellect.”⁸⁵ He adds, “The truth is that although suffering is an inevitable part of the human condition, even in the face of such suffering we have the power to

⁸¹ Spitz, 42.

⁸² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 200.

⁸³ Spitz, xiii.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 20–21. Rabbi Spitz writes as a Jewish mystic who ascribes to the teachings of the Zohar as taught by Rabbi Luria. Luria spoke of a world “filled with contradictions.” In the beginning, God’s divine light shattered his vessels and the light, creating chaos and scattered “divine sparks” into the whole earth. As summarized by Spitz, “[w]e are called to gather the lost holy sparks by engaging in sacred acts of living” to engage in *tikkum olam*, the “repair of the world.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

choose.”⁸⁶ The challenge is to “be open to messages of hope, to form an identity of purpose, and to perceive the goodness in the world,” as opposed to experiencing “our struggles as burdens, identifying as victims in a world of sorrow,” which leads us to “compromise the capacity of our spirits to bear weight.”⁸⁷

Is suicide the outcome of disillusionment? As demonstrated above, psychologists and psychiatrists concur that suicide is the manifestation not of disillusionment as the loss of illusions, but of extreme despair as the loss of hope. I assert that disillusionment—the act of removing false ideas—does not cause suicide in the same way that a road does not cause a fatality. Disillusionment and roads are both paths: their navigation is in the hands of those who tread them and their surfaces are often made more slippery by elements beyond the treader’s control.

Disillusionment Is Self-Imposed: Therefore It Can Be Avoided by Right-Thinking

Gene Edward Veith, Provost and Professor of Literature at Patrick Henry College, views disillusionment as a state experienced by those who have not yet understood a key Christian doctrine. He believes, “It should not be possible for Christians to be disillusioned. We should have no illusions in the first place. Our faith is in Jesus Christ alone.”⁸⁸ Describing a pattern he has often observed in others’ descent into disillusionment, Veith observes the following:

Many people who lose their intellectual grip on their faith, do so because they have become disillusioned.... They become aware of some of the more shameful parts of the history of the Church... Or, what can be even more devastating, they have had a bad experience in their own church.... They start assuming that the great doctrines of the faith, including the Incarnation and the Redemption, are nothing but dogmas of the Church. They drift further and

⁸⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁸ Gene Edward Veith, *Loving God with All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 49.

further away until their faith, which once may have been extremely ardent, dwindles to a memory.⁸⁹

Veith proposes theology as a solution to disillusionment: “Christians must fully understand the doctrine of sin so that they themselves do not become disillusioned. Offenses will indeed come (Matt. 18:7). Christians must take care not to be disillusioned by them. The doctrine of sin should insure that they have no illusions to lose.”⁹⁰ A strong grasp of the doctrine of sin can, from Veith’s perspective, immunize believers from disillusionment via “Christian realism” which, “tough-minded and compassionate at the same time, can give a Christian an illuminating perspective on all of life.”⁹¹ His logic progresses as follows: *if* one believes that all are sinners, *then* one will not be surprised when sinners sin; *therefore* one will not distance oneself from God as a response to unnecessary disappointment.

My response to this objection is three-fold. First, though I agree that an understanding of the doctrine of sin is useful toward the development of more reasonable expectations of one another, I disagree with Veith’s assertion that disillusionment with God can be preempted theologically by avoiding disillusionment with humans. Was Job disillusioned with people or with God? Was Solomon disillusioned with people or with God? On that park bench, was I disillusioned with people or with God? Not all disillusionment is sourced in interpersonal pain. Even for spiritual disillusionment that is sourced in disillusionment with people, Veith’s statement that we “should have no illusions” reveals an assumed premise that such a continually objective state is possible. To be objective is to base decisions upon facts as opposed to feelings or opinions: to see things truly as they exist “outside of the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁹¹ Ibid., 49.

mind.”⁹² Though one may be able to approach objectivity in certain areas, absolute objectivity is somewhat mythical.⁹³ Subjectivity—not objectivity—is our natural state as humans. As such, illusions—inaccurate ideas—are inevitable. With regard to the painful loss of such illusions, Reading explains, “The various forms of sadness and despair that afflict our spirits and give us pause are, unfortunately, unavoidable parts of the human condition.”⁹⁴ Rabbi Spitz adds that the “ancient heroes and healers from the Bible offer us comfort by demonstrating that despair is ancient and eternal.”⁹⁵ Is it therefore realistic to assume that finite beings seeking to interact with and interpret an infinite God—and all that an infinite God has created—will instinctively do so accurately?

Second, I grant that in my description of disillusionment as inevitable, allowance must be made for the fact that not all disillusionment is inevitable. Allowing our expectations to be adjusted by wisdom gleaned from personal experience and the Spirit’s mentoring can successfully dismiss some experiences of disillusionment with a preemptive acceptance of reality. Such is exemplified in a story recounted by Philip Yancey of a man named Douglas, whose life resembled that of a modern-day Job. When asked if he was disappointed with God, Douglas replied,

⁹² *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2014 ed., s.v. “objective,” accessed July 21, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

⁹³ From a psychiatric perspective, Reading adds that the “mental models we construct can never fully apprehend reality because our systems of knowledge and understanding are all built on initial beliefs that cannot themselves be proven. We have to take something for granted before we can understand something else, to start with an initial point of reference that we accept implicitly before we can institute logical operations.” Reading, 32.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹⁵ Spitz, 14.

I have learned to see beyond the physical reality in this world to the spiritual reality. We tend to think, “Life should be fair because God is fair.” But God is not life. And if I confuse God with the physical reality of life—by expecting constant good health, for example—then I set myself up for a crashing disappointment. God’s existence, even his love for me, does not depend on my good health.⁹⁶

Expectations are powerful forces deserving of careful monitoring. Douglas was not disillusioned because Douglas did not possess the expectation (i.e., illusion) that “life should be fair because God is fair.” As referenced previously, psychiatrist Anthony Reading speaks of how those who “expected either too much or too little of themselves or the world...ended up being disillusioned and dispirited.”⁹⁷ Un-critiqued expectations can create dangerous illusions, for, in the words of Screwtape, “Whatever men expect, they soon come to think they have a right to; the sense of disappointment can, with very little skill on our part, be turned into a sense of injury.”⁹⁸ Therefore, I agree with Veith in part: some experiences of disillusionment can be self-imposed via un-critiqued expectations.

Third, though I agree that faith from the start is a reciprocal embrace by the Greater Reality that is God, I suggest that we awaken to God much as does a child to her mother. In other words, our grasp of reality is ever-evolving. If an infant could talk, she might say that Mom is milk; and perhaps later that Mom is hands and eyes. Even when the toddler could describe Mom head-to-toe as a distinct person, she would still spend her life discovering—through interpreting and reinterpreting, through hypothesis and correction or confirmation—Mom’s inner being. After Mom has died, the daughter would still be pondering the complex depths of Mom and considering, in her own final breath, much of Mom as a lovely mystery. Technically

⁹⁶ Yancey, 183.

⁹⁷ Reading, x.

⁹⁸ Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 141.

speaking, the infant's thought that "Mom is milk" is an illusion: an inaccurate idea. Yet, in all its inaccuracy, "Mom is milk" reflects the infant's healthy development. From birth to death, life is a continual shedding of illusions.

In conclusion, I offer an example from the life of C.H. Spurgeon that illustrates right-thinking's inadequacy as a deterrent for all disillusionment. Although Spurgeon suffered physically for decades, it was the pain of the October 19, 1856 Royal Surrey Garden Tragedy that prompted the phrase "furnace of mental suffering" in his autobiography.⁹⁹ Spurgeon was preaching that night to a crowd of over 10,000 when an unknown voice cried, "Fire!" In the ensuing panic, seven people died and Spurgeon's anguish over the event cast a long and deep shadow over his life.

By Veith's reasoning, Spurgeon's commitment to the doctrine of sin should have sufficiently shielded him from excessive spiritual despair. Humans are sinners, and sinners sin. Therefore, whether the Music Hall stampede and resulting deaths were caused by intentional malice or fear-inspired panic, Spurgeon should have had no illusions that such things could not or would not occur. Few, however, would question Spurgeon's theological thoughtfulness and perhaps even fewer would question the reality of his mental and spiritual anguish following the experience. Historian Dr. Peter J. Morden notes, "Following the disaster Spurgeon spoke of his thoughts being like a 'case of knives' cutting his heart 'in pieces.' It was a time of unrelenting 'misery' and 'darkness.'"¹⁰⁰

Spurgeon spoke from his anguish in a sermon entitled, "A Question for the Questioner" on Psalm 77:9:

Pain of body, when it is continuous and severe, is exceedingly trying to our

⁹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records by His Wife and his Private Secretary*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-99), 220.

¹⁰⁰ Morden, 309.

feeble spirits; but agony of soul is worse still. Give me the rack sooner than despair... When Asaph prayed for relief, and the relief did not come, the temptation came to him to ask, “Am I always to suffer? Will the Lord never relieve me?” It is written, “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds”; has he ceased from that sacred surgery? “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”¹⁰¹

In these words are heard the ache-spring of spiritual disillusionment. The variations are many but the manifestation is similar: an illusion, an interrogative, a woeful wonder at reality’s seeming misalignment of God’s character and God’s ways. The mind loses its footing in the incongruence. Through disillusionment, thinking and theology bow to, and then are reshaped by, God Himself.

¹⁰¹ C.H. Spurgeon, “A Question for the Questioner,” *MTP*, Vol. 31, S. No. 1843, Psalm 77.9, delivered 31 May 1885, 303.

CHAPTER 4

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The great weakness of American spirituality is that it is all about us: fulfilling our potential, getting the blessings of God, expanding our influence, finding our gifts, getting a handle on principles by which we can get an edge over the competition. The more there is of us, the less there is of God.¹

Though speaking with reference to his own culture, Eugene Peterson's words have global relevance for he describes the spiritualization in the Church of a narcissism that is insatiable. Self cannot satisfy self no matter how frequently it feasts. In an age that is obsessed with such self-serving, visible, measurable, manageable, and tweetable increase, disillusionment as an unexpected friend of spiritual formation is a hard sell. Even though reality and intimacy are disillusionment's middle and end, disillusionment's starting point, the loss of illusions, is still a loss and humanity is, generally speaking, more fond of gain.

40 Days of Decrease will call upon an ancient tradition to confront this modern obsession and introduce disillusionment as a friend of spiritual formation. In *40 Days of Decrease*, participants will experience Lent and the holiness of loss and less as they interact with Jesus and His disciples' journey cross-ward. At least since the Council of Nicea in AD 325, Lent has been a forty-day, thoughtful, communal focus upon Jesus' passion week—which, of obvious relevance to this dissertation, was the most disillusioning week of the first disciples' lives. Jesus, having confessed to be the Messiah, prophesies His soon-coming death. Jesus, who commands winds and waves, allows Himself to be arrested. Jesus, who bests the brightest Pharisees and Sadducees, refuses to defend Himself when falsely accused. Jesus, who raised others from the dead, chooses to not save Himself.

¹ Eugene Peterson, "Transparent Lives," *The Christian Century*, November 29, 2003, 20–27, accessed August 16, 2014, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2941>.

In the Passion Week, the disciples' illusions of what Jesus could and should do with His power were shattered by the reality of what Jesus actually did with His power. In the Passion Week, the disciples' personal illusions of commitment-unto-death were shattered by the reality of fear-inspired self-protection. Lent, in very focus, is a natural mentor through disillusionment. Meditating upon Jesus' suffering and the disciples' disillusionment creates a framework within which we can spiritually process our own loss of illusions. As Rabbi Spitz affirms, "Finding despair in the lives of our biblical heroes normalizes and adds context to our own life stories."² In the words of Robert F. Taft, during Lent we

enter into the desert of our hearts where, removed from side issues, we can face what we are, and in compunction, *penthos*, over that reality, let us "do penance"—that is, *metanoia*—dying to self so that we may live for others, as we make vigil before the coming of the Lord.³

40 Days of Decrease will be presented as a 40,000-word daily journey for communities and individuals. Each day will feature five components: a reading based upon Jesus' cross-ward life, guidance for reflection, an inspiring Lenten quote, a daily fast, and a sidebar on the history of Lent. As interest in Lent has reemerged in the evangelical Church, it has become common for Jesus-followers to fast social media, designer coffee, or chocolate "for Lent." Though God is gracious with all sincere offerings, such polite fasts alone are perhaps incomplete preparations to appreciate the wonder and cost of Easter. In addition to guiding participants in modern applications of ancient Lenten practices such as almsgiving and visual simplicity, *40 Days of Decrease* will invite participants to experience the fasting of comparison, accumulation, revenge, and entitlement in the hope that as illusions (of how God defines strength) are lost, and reality (of Jesus' multitude of sacrifices) is gained,

² Spitz, 24.

³ Ibid., 132.

hearts will open vulnerably to a greater commitment to love and be loved by the Savior for, in the words of Alexander Schmemmann, “the purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to ‘soften’ our heart so that it may open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden ‘thirst and hunger’ for communion with God.”⁴

⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 31.

CHAPTER 5

COVER LETTER TO PUBLISHER

January 15, 2015
Alicia Britt Chole
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Greetings!

“If you write like you speak, I’d like to talk with you!” said the gracious VP of acquisitions at Thomas Nelson Publishing after I had spoken at a church.

Since that surprising meeting, I have had the joy of publishing two gift books (both with Nelson) and three trade books (Nelson, Bethany, and Revell). The book that is closest to my heart, *Anonymous: Jesus’ Hidden Years and Yours*, has received generous reviews from leaders around the world, including Mark Batterson (*The Circle Maker*), Darlene Zschech (Hillsong), Jennifer Rothschild (*Lessons I Learned in the Dark*), Joanna Weaver (*Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*), Bishop Dr. Claude Alexander (President of Hampton University Minister’s Conference and Senior Pastor of The Park Church), and Dr. Kenneth Boa (*Conformed to His Image*).

40 Days of Decrease is a Lenten journey for those hungry for a different kind of fast. Each day is carefully crafted to prepare readers to more fully appreciating the wonder and cost of Easter. *40 Days of Decrease* invites readers to fast regret, comparison, accumulation, and self-pity. Designed specifically for church-wide usage, *40 Days of Decrease* meets the needs of a waiting niche in today’s Church.

Decrease is a spiritual necessity (John 3:30). *40 Days of Decrease* guides today’s Church into rediscovering decrease’s practice and power. Thank you for taking the time to consider the potential of this offering.

With gratitude (and great hope),

Alicia Britt Chole



BOOK PROPOSAL

*40 Days of Decrease:
For a Generation Hungry for a Different Kind of Lenten Fast*



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**BRIEF DESCRIPTION:**

“What are you giving up for Lent?” we are asked. Our minds begin to whirl: *Chocolate? Designer coffee? Social media?* Forty days later, some feel disappointed in their efforts (*it was a limited-time blend...*), some feel surprised by their success (*didn't even miss it...*), but perhaps precious few feel spiritually renewed.

Can such fasts alone truly prepare us to celebrate Easter?

Or could it be that before we can be duly awed by resurrection, we need to daily honor crucifixion?

40 Days of Decrease emphasizes a different type of fast. What if your church fasted comparison? What if your family fasted accumulation? What if your office fasted revenge?

40 Days of Decrease guides readers through a study of Jesus' uncommon and uncomfortable call to abandon the world's illusions, embrace His kingdom's reality, and journey cross-ward and beyond.

40 Days of Decrease invites readers to walk with the early disciples as Jesus prepares them for that first Easter morning!

Each daily, 1,000-word entry will include:

- A devotional based on Jesus' cross-ward life
- A reflection question to guide journaling or group discussion
- A fast to inspire a tangible response
- A thought-provoking Lenten quote
- A sidebar into the historical development of Lent

PURPOSE:

- To encourage readers to reframe spiritual disillusionment as the shedding of earthly illusions and the gaining of God's reality.
- To provide churches with a substantial, life-engaging Lenten guide for their members.
- To prepare readers to be duly awed by Christ's resurrection by being duly available to daily crucifixion.
- To enrich Lenten practices through brief windows into the historical development of Lent.
- To increase readers' appreciation for the depth and breadth of the Body of Christ through a variety of Lenten quotes.

PROMOTION and MARKETING:

40 Days of Decrease attends to the intersection of three growing and related trends. First, there is a revival of interest in the Church's ancient practices, as the surge of spiritual-formation language makes evident. Second, church-wide curriculums uniting congregants in a common theme or goal are increasingly in demand. Third, churches that have historically viewed Lent in particular, and fasting in general, as capital-C "Catholic" are beginning to openly honor these traditions as

lower-C “catholic”: that is, universal. Across the nation, non-liturgical churches are calling members to corporate fasts in preparation for Easter.

40 Days of Decrease is a dream answer to small group, community, spiritual formation, and lead pastors searching for meaningful ways to awaken their church families to the wonder and the cost of Christ’s resurrection. The testing phase will invite key churches, campus leaders, and spiritual formation bloggers to test drive the *40 Days of Decrease* experience and join the ground level spread-the-word effort. Networks of churches (such as Hillsong) and equipping conferences (such as Catalyst) will be approached as key sneezers for *40 Days of Decrease*. For a list of those who may be called upon to “sneeze” about the author’s next offering, please see Endorsements below.

COMPETITION:

Several 40-Day (but not specifically Lenten) theme books are available, including *40 Days to Discovering the Real You: Learning to Live Authentically* by Cindy Trimm; *Writing to God: 40 Days of Praying with My Pen* (Active Prayer Series) by Rachel G. Hackenberg; *The 40 Day Soul Fast: Your Journey to Authentic Living* by Cindy Trimm and T. D. Jakes; *40 Days of Prayer and Fasting* by Mahesh Chavda; *The Way: 40 Days of Reflection* by Adam Hamilton; *Stories of Jesus: 40 Days of Prayer and Reflection* by Joseph Girzone; and *Forty Days of Fruitful Living: Practicing a Life of Grace* by Robert Schnase.

An Amazon search for 40-Day Lenten offerings generated a few books of interest, the first five of which I have listed in order of their respective current Amazon rankings: [Show Me the Way: Daily Lenten Readings](#) by Henri Nouwen (31,095); [40 Days, 40 Ways: A New Look at Lent](#) by Marcilliano D’Ambrosio (206,181), [The Lent Factor: Forty Companions for the Forty Days of Lent](#) by Graham

James (778,667), [*40 Days of Lent: From Ashes to Hope*](#) by John Windell (4,217,861), and [*Lent: 40 Day LoveFest for Christians*](#) by Tina Nies (6,995,961). Further searches revealed the following works: [*Disciples on the Way: 40 Days of Lent*](#) by Carol Meade (an emphasis on Christian discipleship through reflections from the Book of Common Prayer); [*The Ignatian Workout for Lent*](#) by Tim Muldoon (on being a hearer and doer of the Word); [*Follow: 40 Days of Preparing the Soul for Easter*](#) by Daniel Ethan Harris (on Jesus' Passion Week); [*Once-A-Day 40 Days to Easter Devotional*](#) by Kenneth D. Boa (on Jesus' Passion Week); [*Simplifying the Soul: Lenten Practices to Renew Your Spirit*](#) by Paula Huston (on actively de-cluttering life and soul); and [*Living Lent: Meditations for These Forty Days*](#) by Barbara Hawthorn Crafton (which leads readers in meditating upon great devotional hymns).

Of these, Huston and Muldoon most closely parallel *40 Days of Decrease* with their emphasis upon reflection-inspired action. Roughly half of these works are fewer than 100 pages (booklet form), while most of the rest have 112 to 192 pages. Most appear self-published and/or from denominational presses. Few broke the 400,000 Amazon seller's ranking. All had fewer than eighteen reviews, with most having fewer than five reviews.

In other words, none have captured the market; but the presence of all points to a niche of readers hungry for Lenten meditation that produces a tangible change in living.

UNIQUENESS:

40 Days of Decrease will be uniquely suited for large-scale church use. In content, *40 Days of Decrease* intentionally departs from the traditional devotional emphases and focuses upon the fasting of illusions and earthly value systems.

Additionally, *40 Days of Decrease* infuses readers' pre-Easter journeys with connections to the Church's historical practice of Lent.

ENDORSEMENTS:

"Alicia's heartfelt and thoughtful words penetrate the soul and make you think and feel in new ways." —[Mark Batterson](#), author of *The Circle Maker*

"*Anonymous* bristles with the wisdom that instructs us to treasure times of solitude in the desert places and conditions of life, since pain does not define us—it refines us." —[Dr. Kenneth D. Boa](#), author of *Conformed to His Image*

"This book will truly lift your spirits. *Anonymous* is for you." —[Darlene Zschech](#), author, singer, songwriter

"I shared the platform with Alicia, heard her speak, and realized how much she loved the Lord and His Word...I read [*Sitting in God's Sunshine*, Nelson 2005] in awe. I thought, *I wish I could write like this—so succinctly, so powerfully, so practically!*" —[Kay Arthur](#), author and founder of Precepts International

"Within the working of God, there are lives that God develops to entrust revelation that is so powerful that it can literally change the course, not just of an individual, but of a people, and set in motion a movement based upon a transformed understanding. God has developed such an individual in the person of Alicia Chole and has entrusted her with a gift rare and precious in its nature." —Bishop Dr. Claude R. Alexander, author and senior pastor of The Park Church

"Alicia's book, *Anonymous*, sits on my shelf next to C. S. Lewis and I am convinced that someday she will rise to a similar prominence if given the platform and freedom to express her full God-given potential." —[Jennifer Rothschild](#), author and speaker

"Alicia has a tremendous passion to communicate the wholeness of God's purpose for broken people in broken communities, and shine a light on that path to wholeness and peace." —[Sara Groves](#), singer and songwriter

"Alicia is a gifted wordsmith." —[Dr. William David Taylor](#), author and speaker

"I cannot think of anyone who so embodies the passion and the intellect to reach this lost generation." —[Joanna Weaver](#), speaker and author of *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*

"In a culture obsessed with 15 Minutes of Fame, Alicia brings ancient truth to life in her work *Anonymous*. Her insights on Jesus' 'hidden years' serve as a map through the essential times of spiritual deserts where true character is forged and revealed. This book reminds us that—in the wastelands—nothing is ever wasted. This is a modern classic from the pen of the seeker's companion." —[Anita Renfroe](#), author, comedian, fellow pilgrim

BOOK FORMAT and CHAPTER OUTLINE:

40 Days of Decrease can be published online and/or as a 40,000-word workbook with four-color cover. Each day can span two pages of approximately 1,000 words, and contain the following: a Scripture-based reading on Jesus' crossward life and teachings, a guide for reflective discussion or journaling, a relevant quote, a fast to apply the reading, and a sidebar on the historical development of Lent.

INTENDED READERS:

40 Days of Decrease will appeal to churches actively pursuing the spiritual formation of their members.

MANUSCRIPT:

The entire manuscript is scheduled for completion by March 2015.

AUTHOR BIO:

As a young atheist, Alicia Britt Chole's existence was dramatically interrupted by Jesus, "the God who pursues even those who deny Him." Today, Alicia is an author and spiritual mentor who speaks nationally and internationally to leaders, pastors, professionals, college students, women, and churches. All who have heard her agree: Alicia is an

unusually disarming combination of realism and compassion, intellect and vulnerability, humor and art.

Leaders and learners alike describe Alicia's messages as piercing but welcome surgeries. Golden-year believers comment: *"I've been in church for decades and am somewhat of a retreat junkie. But I've never heard truth presented in this way."* Twenty-somethings say, *"Alicia writes like she speaks and speaks like she writes: poetry that cuts to the heart. Her words cut through a lot of religious junk, in a creative, humble, authoritative way and connect the soul to the Father."*

After hearing Alicia at a church, an acquisitions VP at a division of Thomas Nelson asked her to write her first book, *Pure Joy*, in 2003. In 2006 she released her first "heart" book, entitled [*Anonymous: Jesus' Hidden Years and Yours*](#), which has received breathtaking reviews from leaders around the world. In all, Alicia has authored six books, three DVD studies, and a 52-week spiritual formation journey [*The 7th Year*](#). Alicia is active on Facebook and Twitter, and launches each new project with a high-quality video and social media viral campaign.

Alicia's articles and writings have appeared in *Spirit-led Woman*, *Enrichment Journal*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Jennifer Rothschild's *Self Talk*, *Soul Talk*, Dianne Wilson's *Gone*, and a variety of Thomas Nelson's devotional books. She has been a featured expert blogger on Conversant Life and a voice on Wired Parish of LeadershipBuzz. Alicia has been interviewed by dozens of radio stations and a variety of programs, including KTIS, Premiere Drive UK, The Bob Duktoko Show, Thor Tolo, Georgean Rice, Mark Daniels, Moody with Prime Time Chicago, Moody Radio South, Ron Meyers, Jennifer Keitt, and Brian Mason. TV appearances include The Harvest Show and At Home Live.

Alicia has been facilitating the spiritual formation of leaders and learners for 30 years. She is the founder and CEO of *onewholeworld, inc* (whose mission is to provide substantial resources for the globally minded) and the co-founder of [*Leadership Investment Intensives*](#) (a 501c3 devoted to investing in the life and legacy of leaders). Additionally, along with her incredible husband, Dr. Barry Chole, Alicia designed [*Rivendell*](#), a prayer retreat home in Branson, MO, which has been a haven to thousands.



Alicia lives with her husband of 24 years, their three amazing children (all Choles through the miracle of adoption), four somewhat less than amazing dogs, one truly strange cat, and eight confused chickens off of a dirt road in a country home devoted to writing and reflection.

Alicia is an ordained minister. She holds a BA in Plan II pre-law and an MA in Education from UT-Austin. She is currently a doctoral student at George Fox University, pursuing a DMin in Spiritual Formation and Leadership (2015).

BOOK PUBLISHING CREDITS:

Pure Joy (Nelson 2003)

- Generously hailed by *Christian Retailing* and *Nelson Publishers* as the discovery of another Max Lucado.

Sitting in God's Sunshine: Resting in His Love (Nelson 2005)

- Foreword by Kay Arthur

Anonymous: Jesus' Hidden Years and Yours (Integrity 2006, Nelson 2008)

- 24,000+ sales to date.
- Translated into Korean and Braille.

Finding an Unseen God: Reflections of a Former Atheist (Bethany, May 2009)

- Nominated by Bethany for the following awards: the Christianity Today Book Awards and the ECPA (Evangelical Christian Publishers Association) Christian Book Awards. The cover was also submitted for the ECPA cover award.
- May 3, 2009 "Top Pick" by *Christian Retailing* magazine.

Intimate Conversations (Revell, September 2009)

- First printing of 6000 sold out by September 23rd, 2009.
- A MOPS International annual devotional.
- Foreword by Jennifer Rothschild.

Alicia's writings have also been featured in:

- *The Beauty of God's Blessings* (Nelson, 2003)

- *God's Promises Day by Day* (Nelson, 2003)
- *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* by Greg Ogden (IVP Books, 2003)
- *Soul Talk, Self Talk* by Jennifer Rothschild (Harvest House, 2007)
- *2009 Inspirational Daily Planner* (Nelson, 2008)
- *Chicken Soup for the Adopted Soul: Stories Celebrating Forever Families* (HCI 2008)
- *Angel Kisses: A Book of Comfort and Joy* by Lisa Jane (Nelson, 2009)
- *When Love Ends and The Ice Cream Carton is Empty: What You Need to Know about Your New Beginning* by Jackie Johnson (Moody, 2010)
- *Replenish: Leading from a Healthy Soul* by Lance Witt and John Ortberg (Baker Books, 2011)
- *Progress Notes: A Bible Study for Medical Students and Residents* by Dr. M. Jane Goleman (CreateSpace, 2012)
- *Gone* by Dianne Wilson (2013)
- *Joy for the Journey* (Nelson 2013)
- *Joy for the Journey: Morning and Evening* (Nelson 2014)

FUTURE PROJECTS:

A dozen books are simmering in Alicia's soul! Within the next five years, she hopes to write:

- *Through the Wetlands: Strength from the Shadows* (A book flowing from my dissertation research on the formational power of uncertainty.)
- *Influence Redefined: For a Generation with Eyes to See the Invisible* (Based upon character studies of Deborah, Jezebel, Solomon, Judas, and Jesus, *Influence Redefined* will equip readers keep power pure in an age that craves fame.)
- *GodSense: Living in the Plural* (A book that seeks to pass on Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach's legacy of *Practicing God's Presence* to a new generation.)
- *Unexpected Friends* (52 short chapters exploring the rich spiritual formation potential of unwanted and underestimated experiences such as aging, being passed over, restricted freedom, betrayal, and physical pain.)
- *Purposeful Proximity: Spiritual Mentoring Made Practical* (A handbook to enrich the service of a new generation of spiritual mentors and directors.)
- *Mark 365* (Alicia has spent four years studying the book of Mark. *Mark365* will provide readers with the opportunity to soak for an entire year in one book of the Bible.)

CHAPTER 6

POSTSCRIPT

In an interview for this doctoral program, when asked about potential dissertation topics, I shared my desire to explore the theme of disillusionment as a spiritual exfoliate that sensitizes a soul to God's presence. Though my interest has remained relatively steady, the doctoral experience has greatly affected any offering I now make. This dissertation journey has been immeasurably enriched by exposure to psychology, leadership theory, spiritual formation history and practice, the history of the Church, and cancer. The process has plunged the depths of my heart and stretched me to read brilliant writings from pain-weathered souls. Surprisingly, I resonated immediately with the writings of psychiatrists. Not surprisingly, I felt at home among the mystics. Through wise mentoring, a long-held idea now has both legs and wings.

Had there been more space and time, I would have cherished the opportunity to explore two additional areas. First, a careful crafting of metaphors that could communicate disillusionment's unexpected friendship would be a valuable contribution to the spiritual health of a generation that is driven more by images than by text. Secondly, the relationship between disillusionment and mystery begs further consideration. Anglican clergyman Jeremy Taylor is quoted as saying, "[a] religion without mystery must be a religion without God."¹ Mystery and disillusionment are both givens in a relationship between the Infinite and the finite. Where they overlap and diverge would be a fascinating follow-up study.

One contribution of this dissertation is bringing to the same table the concepts of disillusionment, self-protection, and intimacy with God. My hope is that the

¹ Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), loc. 1630, Kindle.

artifact—through careful, communal, and personally-applied consideration of disillusionment in the lives of the disciples and of Jesus’ journey cross-ward—will mentor many in the establishment of a framework within which to value the relatedness of these three concepts. Once established, the framework can encourage us cycle upon cycle to abandon self-protection and anticipate a greater depth of love made available through the unexpected friend of spiritual disillusionment; for, as Mays notes about the dark night,

The process just keeps going on. As far as I can tell, the dark night of the soul is endless. This is, for me, the most hopeful thing about it; the dark night is nothing other than our ongoing relationship with the Divine. As such, it must always remain mysterious, dark to our understanding and comprehension, illuminated only by brief moments of dawning light. And as such it never ends; it just keeps deepening, revealing more and more intimate layers of freedom for love.²

In conclusion, I return to that park bench sizzling under the Texas sun.

Grieving my utter inability to resolve the spiritual angst mentally, God brought to mind a true story about my friend, Kyle, and his son, Joel. Little Joel loved holding his daddy’s hand. His hand was small and he was only able to grip his dad’s pinky, but he gripped that pinky with all his might. Kyle would smile and secure his thumb and index finger tightly around Joel’s wrist. Joel thought proudly that he was holding onto his dad but the reality was that his dad was holding onto him. One day as they were crossing a parking lot hand in hand, a pick-up truck raced out of control around a corner and came straight toward them. In fear, Joel did what he thought he never would: he let go of his dad’s hand. Kyle, his grip still tightly around Joel’s wrist, pulled Joel out of the truck’s path and into safety. Little Joel thought daddy was

² May, 132.

in his grip. It took a time of helplessness to realize that he was actually in his dad's grip.³

Collapsing on the picnic table, I released my fear of spiritual failure. Wherever loss led me, deep within I somehow trusted that Jesus would still be there. Too exhausted mentally and emotionally to grip faith myself, I discovered that Another—the Object of my faith—had always been gripping me. God's Spirit reminded me that faith was not my creation. His breath sustains the flame of faith even when my mind cannot and my emotions will not. Through the friend of disillusionment, I lost the illusion of a self-sustained faith and gained the reality of a faith-imparting God. The picnic table became an altar as I quietly began a life-long celebration of a sweet, vulnerable intimacy described by a psalmist long ago: "You, Lord, keep my lamp burning. My God turns my darkness into light."⁴

³ Alicia Britt Chole, *Finding an Unseen God* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2008), 111.

⁴ Ps. 18:28.

APPENDIX A

40 DAYS OF DECREASE: A DIFFERENT KIND OF LENTEN FAST

40 DAYS OF DECREASE by Alicia Britt Chole

Prologue: The Grand Reduction

The sabbatical started more suddenly and violently than anticipated. A high fever, a few scans, multiple masses, possibly a lethal abscess...the specialists convened, conferred, counseled me to cancel all engagements, and began cutting.

The reduction had begun.

Waking from surgery, my first memory was seeing a dear friend place a hand over her mouth. Later she told me, "I'd never seen anyone that color, alive." The masses, thankfully, were all benign. But my body did not respond well to the invasion. The area's organs went into hibernation and for the first time in my life, I became familiar with breathtaking pain.

I would not trade that desert of pain for the world. My desert decrease was divine.

Deserts unclutter the soul. The hot desert sun vaporizes all manner of luxuries. Then the cold shelterless nights expose the essential guts of life. I needed to eat, to sleep, to be protected, and to not be alone. Lent had come half a year early. God asked me to fast mental and physical strength. He invited me into holy weakness.

I found Jesus there.

We often think of Jesus' fast beginning when he stepped into the Judean wilderness. But the fast actually began three decades earlier when the Glory of heaven was wrapped in plain paper and given as a gift to mankind.

The Grand Reduction had begun.

Jesus fasted omnipresence and clothed himself with flesh. He fasted being worshiped by angels and accepted the disregard of man. He fasted the Voice that birthed planets and submitted to the silence of thirty hidden years:

How must it have felt—knowing he had the power to heal—to have to walk past children suffering with leprosy? What would it have been like—knowing that his conception was miraculous—to be unable to defend his mother when others whispered about her past? And how agonizing would it be—when his Word could one day raise the dead to life again—to stand by while those he loved (perhaps even Joseph his father) died?¹

We are duly thankful, challenged, and inspired by Jesus' forty-day fast from food in the Judean wilderness. Perhaps we should likewise be grateful, awed, and humbled by His thirty-year fast from praise, power, and potential in Nazareth.

It takes a great deal of strength to choose weakness.

Jesus chose voluntarily. I did not possess the courage or wisdom to volunteer. So God, for the sake of my soul, took me there involuntarily. His drafts are merciful indeed.

When he calls us to fast strength—when he drafts us into decrease—God's purposes are clear:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.
(Deuteronomy 8:2–3)

To humble us, to test us, to know what is in our hearts...such is the sifting power of helplessness. In our daily lives, we may prefer self-reliance. But perhaps utter dependence is the truer friend of our souls.

After eight days in the hospital, the doctors sent me home. “At this point, I give you a 50/50 chance that the organs will come back online,” the specialist offered. With those words, my entire recovery-time “to do” list vaporized in the desert heat. All I could do was sit and be loved—a need that my family filled extravagantly.

Two weeks past the surgery, I picked up my journal and wrote, “I used to think I could do just about anything. Now I know I can’t.” Through the fasting of strength, God was “causing me to hunger.” Helplessness exposed the contents of my heart. God began to feed me.

As He nourished me, my eyes were opened to see an invisible danger that had been growing within me. Prior to surgery, God was not absent. The challenge was that self was so very present. Though I had purposed to live simply, clutter was collecting around my faith. I was becoming more vulnerable to sin, but sin of a slightly different strain than in earlier years.

We all guard against sins of commission and we are vigilant toward sins of omission. But achievements—even in small doses—can make us vulnerable to sins of *addition*: adding niceties and luxuries to our list of basic needs, adding imaginations onto the strong back of vision, adding self-satisfaction to the purity of peace.

Jesus emerged from his thirty-year fast armored to resist such sins of addition. He walked into the Judean desert and with each “It is written” affirmed the sacredness of decrease. He walked out of the Judean desert and with each step fulfilled his calling without compromise. Jesus lived a truly uncluttered life and died a focused, eternally fruitful death. How I long to follow his example.

May this Lenten season provide us the opportunity to pause and be grateful for reductions. Ultimately we are grateful for the Grand Reduction, when Jesus came from heaven to earth. But we can also be thankful for the lesser reductions, when God drafts us into deserts.

Throughout our collective *40 Days of Decrease*, let us rest assured that when Father God calls us to fast strength, weakness will purify our souls.

About

What might be the fruit of fasting stinginess? What would happen if our churches fasted religious profiling? What might occur if our families fasted accumulation? What could change if our offices fasted revenge? What might erupt if a new generation fasted entitlement? Such fasts could trigger a spiritual revolution.

40 Days of Decrease guides readers through a study of Jesus' uncommon and uncomfortable call to abandon the world's illusions, embrace His kingdom's realities, and journey cross-ward and beyond. A life-engaging Lenten guide for communities and individuals, each day of *40 Days of Decrease* features a devotional based upon Jesus' life, guidance for reflection, inspiring quotes for prayerful meditation, suggested (and occasionally surprising) daily Lenten fasts, a somewhat academic sidebar chronicling the historical development and practices of Lent, and journaling space.

As you begin your Lenten experience, consider setting aside thirty minutes or an hour every morning to read, reflect, and prepare your heart for each day's fast. Each fast could theme an entire week or month, but in *40 Days of Decrease*, I offer forty different fasts in the hope that collectively they will prepare us to be duly awed by Christ's resurrection by being duly available to daily crucifixion. With carefully selected quotes from a variety of Jesus-centric traditions and readings crafted to engage our modern minds with the most disenchanting days of the first disciples' lives, *40 Days of Decrease* seeks to present Lent as a mentor that encourages us to reframe unanswered questions, darker seasons, and spiritual disillusionment as the shedding of earthly illusions and the gaining of God's reality.

In Catholic and Protestant traditions, the counting of Lent's forty days excludes Sundays.² Likewise, *40 Days of Decrease* offers Lenten readings and exercises exclusive of

Sundays for six days a week, beginning with Ash Wednesday. As we experience Lent and the holiness of loss and less in Jesus' journey cross-ward, may our hearts open vulnerably to a greater commitment to love and be loved by the Savior. For, in the words of Greek Orthodox Reverend Alexander Schmemmann, "The purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to 'soften' our heart so that it may open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden 'thirst and hunger' for communion with God."³

Let such softening begin!

Day One

We ache deep within to meaningfully honor Christ's resurrection Easter morning. Yet, in practice, this focal point in the liturgical calendar is often a celebration of *public holiday* more than it is of *humanity's hope*. At day's end, we fall asleep well-fed and perhaps even grateful, yet still somehow something short of *awed*. Inspired by the Church's ancient tradition of Lent, we then add discipline to the celebration, voluntarily adopting a form of temporary discomfort to self with the intention of bringing to mind the discomfort of the cross (which is unspeakable). And still, our twenty-first century discomfort remains mild and our first-century remembrance remains meager.

Though what is specifically "given up" for Lent shifts from generation to generation, the broad categories of entertainment, pleasure, and food have remained constant through the centuries. Caffeine, chocolate, designer coffee, carbs, and social media currently rank among the more popular offerings. In an age suffocating in self, any willful fast from what much of the planet would deem a luxury is to be commended. However, since commendation cannot be confused with preparation, I must ask: Can such polite fasts alone truly prepare us to be awed by Easter?

In English, the Latin *Mortem tuam annuntiámus, Dómine, et tuam resurrectionem confitémur, donec vénias* is translated as, “Your death we proclaim, Lord, and your resurrection we confess, until you come.”⁴ This generation is, perhaps, more familiar with the popular adaption:

Christ has died.
 Christ has risen.
 Christ will come again.⁵

Indeed. So, are we awed?

God seems more interested in what we are becoming than what we are giving up. As David sang,

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. (Psalm 51:16–17)

Faith, in general, is less about the sacrifice of stuff and more about the surrender of our souls.

Lent, in kind, is less about well-mannered denials and more about thinning our lives in order to thicken our communion with God.

Decrease is only holy when its destination is love.

Reflection

Reflect upon your personal engagement with Lent to date. How were you introduced to Lent? If this is not your first experience with Lent, in what ways have you thinned your life in order to thicken your communion with God in previous Lenten seasons?

Now consider a key question: Why are you honoring Lent this year?

Today's Fast: Lent As Project

Lent is often, and understandably, described with project language. Lent has a starting date, an ending date, and clear, quantifiable goals “to accomplish” in between. After Easter, consequently, we evaluate Lent with project language. We “did okay” or “only made it two weeks” or “kept our commitment” or “totally failed.”

From Day One, I invite you to consider Lent as less of a project and more of a sojourn. A sojourn is a “temporary stay at a place.”⁶ And a “stay” is about presence, not productivity. For the next forty days, fast measuring your Lenten “success” statistically—i.e., evaluating how well you keep your commitment to do without meat or sugar or your favorite shows. Instead, invest your energy in seeking to remain present to the sacred history of Jesus’ walk to the cross. With each reading, dust off your childhood imagination and “stay” in each story. Observe Jesus’ response to John’s death. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples trying in vain to hush blind Bartimaeus. Throw your only cloak under the hooves of Jesus’ colt as He enters Jerusalem. Taste the mounting tension as Jesus offends leaders with parables. Hear Jesus predict Peter’s denial.

Fast Lent as project and enter Lent as experience, as a sojourn with your Savior.

Quotes

“Christian spirituality is not a life project for becoming a better person.”⁷

—*Eugene Peterson*

“Spiritual disciplines do not transform, they only become relational opportunities to open the heart to the Spirit who transforms.”⁸

—*John H. Coe*

Sidebar: On Lent

“What is your commitment this year, Mommy?” my daughter inquired with discerning eyes. The previous year, we both made Lenten commitments to honor the poor. Keona did what she loved and baked to raise funds for children in need. I devoted the year to simplicity, choosing to abstain from spending money on adding anything physical to my personal life—from shampoo to shoes. “This year I am fasting sugar and desserts,” I replied. Then Keona offered one word that connected my then-ten-year-old with the wisest of ancient thinkers: “Why?”

Why, indeed.

My annual fasts, seasonal forty-day fasts, and weekly twelve- to twenty-four-hour fasts are more love offerings than disciplines, though it certainly requires discipline to maintain them. In short, I ache. I ache for my Bridegroom. I ache to live every waking moment conscious of His presence. I ache to live aware of His past and present suffering. I ache to live unattached to what man counts and measures. In many ways, all fasts are Lenten experiences, and as with the history of Lent, it is difficult for me to discern which came first: the discipline of fasting or the journey of Lent. Did they grow up together? Did one mature into the other? Are they two distinct experiences that fused over time? These are the questions that, in part, make the early origins of Lent difficult to discern.

Day Two

Christian spirituality, the contemplative life, is not about us. It is about God. The great weakness of American spirituality is that it is all about us: fulfilling our potential, getting the blessings of God, expanding our influence, finding our gifts, getting a handle on principles by which we can get an edge over the competition. The more there is of us, the less there is of God.⁹

Though uttered with reference to his (and my) culture, Eugene Peterson's insight has global relevance, for it reveals the Church's spiritualization of an insatiable narcissism. Self cannot satisfy self no matter how frequently it feasts. Lent is a much-needed mentor in an age obsessed with visible, measurable, manageable, and tweetable increase. Lent invites us to walk with Jesus and His disciples through darker seasons that we would rather avoid: grief, conflict, misunderstanding, betrayal, restriction, rejection, and pain. Then Easter leads us in celebration of salvation as the stunningly satisfying fruit of Jesus' sacred decrease. A thoughtful Lenten journey directly confronts our modern obsession with increase and introduces us to unexpected friends of spiritual formation.

At least since the Council of Nicea in AD 325, Lent has been a forty-day, communal focus upon the most disillusioning season of the first disciples' lives. Jesus, having confessed to be the Messiah, prophesies His soon-coming death. Jesus, who commands winds and waves, allows Himself to be arrested. Jesus, who bests the brightest Pharisees and Sadducees, refuses to defend Himself when falsely accused. Jesus, who raised others from the dead, chooses to not save Himself.

In Jesus' journey cross-ward, the disciples' illusions of what Jesus could and should do with His power were shattered by the reality of what Jesus actually did with His power, and their personal illusions of commitment-unto-death were shattered by the reality of fear-inspired self-protection. Meditating upon Jesus' suffering and the disciples' disillusionment creates a framework within which we can spiritually process our own loss of illusions and gaining of realities. This is critical, because "reality is where we meet God."¹⁰ Therefore, as Jesuit Robert F. Taft eloquently said, through Lent let us:

enter into the desert of our hearts where, removed from side issues, we can face what we are, and in compunction, *penthos*, over that reality, let us...[die] to self so that we may live for others, as we make vigil before the coming of the Lord.¹¹

Reflection

Twelfth-century French monk Bernard of Clairvaux spoke of “four degrees of love” in his little book, *On the Love of God*: love of self for self’s sake, love of God for self’s sake, love of God for God’s sake, and love of self for God’s sake.¹² In light of Eugene Peterson’s quote that began today’s reading, ponder the difference between Clairvaux’s first and fourth degrees of love.

Today’s Fast: Regrets

Approaching a fresh endeavor can be both energizing and stressful. New is inspiring. New is enlightening. And new is, oddly enough, a reminder of what is now old. When fresh beginnings are stalked by the memories of stale endings, a sickly substance can steal our strength: regret. Regret empties anticipation, flattens dreams, and suffocates hope, because regret is a form of self-punishment. Whereas hindsight helps us learn from the past, regret beats us up with the past.

So for one entire day (or go for forty), I invite you to fast regret. Do not feed it. Do not give it space. Let it go: God’s mercies are “new every morning” (Lamentations 3:23). And meditate on Jesus’ glorious promise from Revelation 21:5, “Behold, I am making all things new!”

Quotes

“A thought comes to me that troubles me and gives me no rest. It is not strong enough to make me act; it only hinders my progress toward virtue. A vigilant man would shake it off and arise for prayer.”¹³

—*Abba Theodore of Scetis*

“The triumph of grace is that we accept the humiliation of failure, which is indeed a triumph, a greater triumph than external success. In actual fact, the experience of failure in ministry teaches us in the long run how to do it, which is with complete dependence on God.”¹⁴

—*Thomas Keating*

Sidebar: On Lent

Before us lies a two-thousand-year-old heirloom quilt. Some portions are missing. They have slipped into the dark chasm of lost history, leaving nothing but space and speculation. Other portions are obviously unoriginal. They bear the loving evidence of being a repatching, a rezoning, an offering of newer fabric sown by less ancient hands.

Much work has been done by many scholars to reconstruct what is now absent, to track the origin of what remains, to trace the source of each worn, faith-sewn thread back to its beginnings. However, beginnings are mysterious things: part breath, part hope, part fumble, part grace. Roots are, historically, perhaps the most humble of God’s creations on earth. They require neither acknowledgment nor praise. Their reward is reaped when the living stand upon them and reach for the fruit the roots made possible. Such is the story of Lent. The weighty beauty of this

heirloom rests not in its satisfyingly discernible beginnings, but in the warmth of soul it still offers to communities and individuals today.

Day Three

“He must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3:30)

Decrease is a spiritual necessity. John the Baptist was the first among Jesus’ followers to grasp its counter-cultural power. “Less is more” is a popular simplicity mantra in our day. But John’s understanding of “less is more” was spiritually profound. Gabriel had announced John’s life-calling to Zechariah before John was even conceived: John was the one who, “in the spirit and power of Elijah...[would] make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). In many ways, John lived a Lenten lifestyle 365 days a year. His diet was narrow, his possessions were minimal, and his focus was eternal. But decrease for John was less about assets and more about attention. His longing was to draw his generation’s attention and allegiance to the Messiah. From John’s perspective, the true value of people seeing him was that people would then be positioned to see through him and gaze at Jesus. By willingly decreasing, John increased others’ view of the Savior.

Attention is not innately evil. It becomes evil when used as a self-serving end instead of a God-serving means. Those who steward attention as means and not end stand tall and serve strong, knowing that all gifts come from God and can therefore draw attention to God. Praise slides off such souls like water off a window into a cup that is offered to God alone. Surrounded by swelling crowds, John directed his fans to Jesus.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the

reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” (John 3:29–31)

John decreased so others could see the Lamb. John decreased so others could follow the One who preceded and surpassed him (John 1:30). John decreased so that the Messiah would be revealed in John’s lifetime. May our Lenten decrease likewise increase our generation’s view of Jesus.

Reflection

In his day, a psalmist sang: “Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” (Psalm 115:1) Think of models in your lifetime of individuals who—like the Psalmist in the Old Testament and John the Baptist in the New Testament—used the attention they received to increase others’ view of God. Then reflect on ways that you are following (or in the future can follow) their example.

Today’s Fast: Keeping the Flowers

Biographer Carole C. Carlson said of Corrie Ten Boom:

Her remarkable ministry became known to millions through both the book and movie version of *The Hiding Place*. She never looked at fame as being the culmination of personal triumph. To Corrie it was simply a result of God’s plans. Her way of handling adulation was to take each compliment as a flower, and then gather them all in a bouquet and give them back to Jesus by saying, “Here Lord, they belong to You.”¹⁵

Make an effort today to follow Corrie’s example. Sincerely receive any affirmation without apology (after all, you know Who it is really for) and tonight, offer Jesus a bouquet of praise. If at day’s end you find your intended bouquet sparse, fill it in with gratitude for God’s work in your life.

Quotes

“The Lenten season begins...I am still so divided. I truly want to follow you, but I also want to follow my own desires and lend an ear to the voices that speak about prestige, success, human respect, pleasure, power, and influence. Help me to become deaf to these voices and more attentive to your voice, which calls me to choose the narrow road to life...I know that Lent is going to be very hard for me. The choice for your way has to be made every moment of my life. I have to choose thoughts that are your thoughts, words that are your words, and actions that are your actions. There are no times or places without choices...Give me the strength and the courage to live this season faithfully, so that, when Easter comes, I will be able to taste with joy the new life that you have prepared for me. Amen.”¹⁶

—*Henri Nouwen, prayer for Ash Wednesday*

Sidebar: On Lent

The etymology of the word *Lent* enjoys an easy consensus among scholars. In earlier times, the English word *Lent* carried the meaning of “springtime.” As *The Lenten Triodion* poetically states, “Lent signifies not winter but spring, not darkness but light, not death but renewed vitality.”¹⁷ According to Fr. William P. Saunders, professor of catechetics and theology at Christendom’s Notre Dame Graduate School in Alexandria, the Anglo-Saxon word *lectentid* “literally means not only ‘springtide’ but also was the word for ‘March,’ the month in which the majority of Lent falls.”¹⁸ In Greek, *Lent* is *tessarakosti*, and in Latin, *quadragesima*, both of which emphasize the number forty, a number rich in biblical significance.

In origin, however, Lent’s history is far less obvious. Fifty years ago, the history of Lent could have been penned with greater certainty...and with greater error. Scholars affirm that we

simply know less than we used to about Lent. Catholic scholar Nicholas V. Russo explains that “today the history of Lent’s origins is far less certain because many of the suppositions upon which the standard theory rested have been cast into doubt.”¹⁹

Day Four

Whereas decreasing in attention is evident at the beginning of John’s public ministry, decreasing in confidence is evident toward the end. The latter is infinitely more trying than the former. When mumblers came to John asking how he could have possibly overlooked requiring the new guy to sign a non-compete clause, John’s Jordan River proclamation was a manifesto:

“The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.” (John 3:29)

John refused to compete with Jesus. Instead of collecting attention, John directed attention back to the Bridegroom. We heard no hesitation in John’s voice from the Jordan: Jesus was the One he had been waiting for. However, a year later John’s voice from prison sounded less certain. Surrounded by paid guards instead of volunteer crowds, John sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Matthew 11:3)

Only Jesus and John know what fully prompted John’s question. But perhaps Jesus’ response offers us a glimpse into the source of John’s uncertainty. After reminding John (via the witness of John’s disciples) of His ministry of healing and hope, Jesus said, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me” (Matthew 11:6). At first glance, this statement seems oddly out of place following a mention of Messiah-endorsing miracles. Yet somehow Jesus’ actions were not matching John’s expectations. And that distance between what John thought

Jesus would do and what Jesus actually did was straining John's certainty of who Jesus was. In this sense, Lent came early for John. He experienced from prison what the first disciples later would experience throughout Jesus' Passion, and what we still ponder two millennia later.

Jesus' ways are often unexpected. Jesus' words can seem oddly out of place. From within prisons of pain or persecution, injustice or accusation, limitations or unmet longings, we too can wonder if Jesus is truly who we thought He was. A key invitation of our Lenten journey is to be emotionally honest about our uncertainties. Questions such the one asked by John are signs of a living, growing, active faith, not evidence of a dying one. Jesus' calm response to John echoes to us today: "Recall what I have done in the past. Accept me as the Great I Am of your future."

Reflection

Has the distance between what you thought Jesus would do and what Jesus actually did ever caused tremors of uncertainty in your soul? How did you respond to the uncertainty? Today, follow John's example: ask Jesus frank questions and then wait for His response.

Today's Fast: Artificial Light

In the Greek Orthodox tradition there is a moving moment on Cheese-fare Sunday in which all lights in the church are extinguished. In the subsequent darkness, the community begins to "wander forty days through the desert of Lent."²⁰ Picture John the Baptist in prison. Imagine what he might have seen, heard, and felt. Then unplug from the power grid and read Hebrews 11 aloud by candlelight.

Quotes

“[The dark night of the soul] strengthens and purifies the love that is of God, and takes away and destroys the other.”²¹

—*John of the Cross*

“God needs nothing, asks nothing, and demands nothing, like the stars. It is life with God which demands these things.... You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that the darkness is necessary. But the stars neither require nor demand it.”²²

—*Annie Dillard*

“There are two absences of God. One is the absence that condemns us, the other is the absence that sanctifies us. In the absence that is condemnation, God ‘knows us not’ because we have put some other god in His place, and refuse to be known by Him. In the absence that sanctifies, God empties the soul of every image that might become an idol and of every concern that might stand between our face and His.”²³

—*Thomas Merton (1915–1968)*

Sidebar: On Lent

Several ancient pre-Nicene texts are consistently referenced by Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical scholars alike in the search for the origins of Lent. In Table 1 I have attempted to list and organize these texts by approximate dates and key phrases.

Table 1. Pre-Nicene texts referenced in scholarship regarding the origin of Lent

Approximate dates	Ancient work or author	Key concepts and phrases
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c. 120–c. 202	St. Irenaeus of Lyons (Gaul)	fast, variety, one day or two, forty hours
c. 150–c. 212	Tertullian (North Africa), <i>Concerning Baptism</i> 19; <i>On the Fasts</i> 2, 13–14 (<i>Patrologia Latina</i>] ii, 956, 971–974.	one day, forty hours
2nd C	<i>Didache</i>	fast, baptism, preparation for the sacrament ²⁴
2nd C	Justin Martyr in <i>First Apology</i> , 61	fasting, baptismal candidates ²⁵
c. 185–c. 254	Origen, <i>Homilies on Leviticus</i> 10.2:5–6	forty days, fasting
c. 215 (if authored by Hippolytus)	<i>Apostolic Tradition</i> 2, 30, 2-9; 21, 1–5	Final examination and preparation in the days before Baptism (ch. 20), fasting (ch. 23), fasting at Easter (ch. 33)
50 years after Origen?	<i>Canons of Hippolytus</i>	fast, the forty, God fasted on our behalf
d. 264	Dionysius of Alexandria	fast of up to six days
c. 313	<i>Canon 1 of St. Peter of Alexandria</i>	other forty days, bewailing their faults
3rd C	<i>Didascalía Apostolorum</i>	fast, days of Pascha, from the second day of the week

In between the “one day,” “two days,” or “forty hours” seen in the *Apostolic Tradition*,²⁶ Tertullian,²⁷ and Irenaeus and the “forty days” of *Canon 1 of St. Peter*,²⁸ *Canons of Hippolytus*,²⁹ and Origen,³⁰ Dionysius of Alexandria³¹ and the *Didascalía Apostolorum* refer to a six-day “fast in the days of Pascha from the second day of the week.”³² At first glance, then, ancient pre-Nicene texts speak of a one- to two-day or forty-hour fast immediately preceding Resurrection Sunday; a six-day pre-paschal fast; and fasts of forty days.

Day Five

Jesus’ response assured John of more than Jesus’ identity. Jesus’ words affirmed John’s identity as well. Returning to their mentor, John’s disciples testified, “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matthew 11:5). In other words, Isaiah 61 was being fulfilled. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus. Jesus was who John thought he was: the Messiah. Which

meant, conversely, that John was who God said he was: the prophet sent to prepare the way for the Lord.³³ Such a calling is understandably easier to believe by the waters of the Jordan than from within the walls of a prison.

Perhaps that is in part what can make questioning so painful. For the faithful Christ-follower, self-concept is inextricably connected to God-concept. We are valuable because God is Creator. We are forgiven because God is Redeemer. If God is not who we thought He was, then who are we? Many of us dare not ask the question. Do we fear that God will fail the test? Dr. Leonard Sweet teaches that in the Jewish culture,

It's an act of reverence to ask questions of the story. The Jews are confident that the story is strong enough to be tried and tested....Around the table, a Jewish child has "That's a good question!" drummed into his or her soul, not, "You don't ask that question"....Questions are as sacred as answers.³⁴

We weaken—not strengthen—our faith when we silence sincere questions. Faith in Christ is not an airy substance that rests on unquestioning souls. Biblical faith is muscular: thickened more through trials than ease. The Author of our faith is more than able to address the identity crises His unexpected words and ways may trigger.

John heard within Jesus' response the same stunning answer that we hear today: Who is Jesus? Jesus is more than we thought, hoped, or imagined. His wildness is a source of wonder, not of worry. His righteousness is deeper than the oceans. His goodness is higher than the heavens. His faithfulness exceeds our comprehension. So what does that make us? Loved. Who are we? Christ's beloved. We are loved when making bold proclamations near cool waters under sunny skies. We are loved when asking sincere questions in dark cells and darker times. We are loved.

Reflection

Jesus described John as “more than a prophet” and the greatest man “born of women” after, not before, John posed his please-confirm-your-identity interrogative (Matthew 11:9, 11). John’s question did not make Jesus nervous. Reflect on the questions patriarchs, prophets, and kings have asked God throughout the ages, such as Jeremiah’s respectful questioning of God’s justice below:

You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice; Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? (Jeremiah 12:1)

Today’s Fast: Tidy Faith

If we view faith and doubt as antonyms, we will be tempted to interpret John’s question as something other than spiritual uncertainty. Perhaps, we may reason, John was confident but wanted his disciples to hear about the miracles from the source, or perhaps John sent his disciples with the hope that they would start following Jesus themselves, or...

Or, perhaps, John had doubts. Theologian Peter Abelard (1079–1142) stated, “By doubting we come to inquiry, by inquiry we come to truth.”³⁵ Today let your faith be messy. Fast tidying it up to make it more tame and meditate upon Jesus’ peaceful (and even affirming) response to John’s uncertainty.

Quotes

“No intellectual answer will solve suffering. Perhaps this is why God sent his own Son as one response to human pain, to experience it and absorb it into himself. The Incarnation did not

“solve” human suffering, but at least it was an active and personal response. In the truest sense, no words can speak more loudly than the Word.”³⁶

—*Philip Yancey*

“We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.”³⁷

—*C. S Lewis*

Sidebar: On Lent

Irenaeus’ words come to us through Eusebius’ chronicles of church history. Mentored by Polycarp, who sat at the feet of the Apostle John, Irenaeus has understandably been cited repeatedly on the subject of Lent’s origins:

The dispute is not only about the day, but also about the actual character of the fast. Some think that they ought to fast for one day, some for two, others for still more; some make their ‘day’ last forty hours on end.³⁸

Upon reading the surrounding text in Eusebius’ *History of the Church*, it appears that from Eusebius’ perspective—writing over a hundred years after Irenaeus’ death—“the dispute” referred to a serious disagreement between churches in Asia and the church in Rome over when “the paschal fast”³⁹ should end. An assembly of bishops ruled in favor of what Eusebius described as, “the practice which, *from apostolic tradition*, has prevailed to the present time, of terminating the fast on no other day than on that of the resurrection of our Saviour.”⁴⁰

Day Six

Fifteen months⁴¹ after John the Baptist was imprisoned, Herod Antipas—the son of Herod the Great who reigned at the time of Jesus’ birth—beheaded John to save face at a

banquet.⁴² John's decrease was now complete. All eyes turned to Jesus. Matthew records that "when Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place" (Matthew 14:13). In the manna-for-multitudes and gravity-defying miracles that follow, it is easy for us to overlook and underestimate Jesus' grief. But after Jesus healed and fed the thousands who awaited him in the no-longer-solitary place and before Jesus and Peter walked on water in a storm, Jesus

made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. (Matthew 14:22–23)

At this point in Jesus' life, few remained alive of those who had witnessed His angel-celebrated birth and grasped at least in part the heavenly weight of His Messianic anointing. Zechariah and Elizabeth, righteous Simeon and the prophetess Anna, the Magi, the shepherds, and probably even Joseph had died. The crowds were curious as well as clueless. The disciples were devoted as long as there was little danger. But John knew who Jesus was. John attested to Jesus' divine Son-ship when he leaped in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's greeting, when he baptized Jesus and heard God's voice through the open heavens at the Jordan, and when he asked Jesus to confirm His identity from within the prison that would be John's last home on earth.

Now, John was gone and Jesus needed solitude to pray. John's death marks a turn toward the cross in Jesus' ministry. From this point forward, Jesus more intensely taught upon and demonstrated the revolutionary nature of His "upside down" kingdom.⁴³ Consequently, the religious tension that eventually nailed him to the cross dramatically escalated. Alone on that mountain, as Jesus grieved John's death, He anticipated His own.

Reflection

Bring to mind the names and faces of loved ones who have died. What deposits did they make in your life? How did you feel when you first learned of their deaths? Allow your experiences to infuse feeling into the written account of Jesus' prayerful mourning on the mountainside.

Today's Fast: Speeding Past Sorrow

Jesus sets an example for us all to sit with our sorrow. He could have easily kept moving in an attempt to distance Himself from sadness. Instead, Jesus sent everyone away and carved out space to pray in solitude. Deaths are defining moments in our lives. It serves us ill to hurry past them. Today, honor the losses in your life. Instead of speeding past sadness, slow down and be present to your emotions. With Jesus, sit with your sorrow and let loss do its eternal work in your soul.

Quotes

“We have never reaped such a harvest from any seed as from that which fell from our hands while tears were falling from our eyes.”⁴⁴

—*C. H. Spurgeon (1834–1892)*

“The various forms of sadness and despair that afflict our spirits and give us pause are, unfortunately, unavoidable parts of the human condition.”⁴⁵

—*Anthony Reading*

“Ancient heroes and healers from the Bible offer us comfort by demonstrating that despair is ancient and eternal.”⁴⁶

—*Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz*

“[God] draws the curtain about the bed of his chosen sufferer and, at the same time, he withdraws another curtain which before concealed his Glory!”⁴⁷

—*C. H. Spurgeon*

Sidebar: On Lent

After the assembly’s ruling, Bishop Polycrates wrote a letter defending the Asian church’s continued observance of ending the fast at Passover, based upon the practices of many “great lights”⁴⁸ who had served and died in Asia.⁴⁹ In context, Irenaeus’ oft-quoted words were written as a response to an escalation in this conflict. His letter was penned to rebuke and correct the actions of Victor I, Bishop of Rome, who dramatically excommunicated the churches of Asia in response to Polycrates’ letter. To what extent Victor’s reaction had to do with exerting the supremacy of the church of Rome, movements away from traditional Jewish customs, or the actual practice of fasting, we are left to wonder. However, Irenaeus’ words of correction are clarion: his concern was peace, not practice.

Day Seven

Rising from prayer, Jesus descended the mountainside and walked on water toward His storm-tormented disciples. Fear, by nature, distorts reality. Terrified, the disciples mistook Jesus for a ghost. We know the story well. Eyewitnesses Matthew and John affirm that as soon as

Jesus stepped into the boat, the storm subsided and the boat reached the shore (Matthew 14:32 and John 6:21). The miracles prompted a revelation. Still in the boat, the disciples worshipped Jesus, confessing, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33). Shortly afterwards, Peter exclaimed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). In each synoptic gospel,⁵⁰ Peter’s proclamation is followed by Jesus’ first prediction of His coming death:

“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” (Luke 9:21–22)

Revelations are often followed by trials. Perhaps they are preparation for them. Still, this was unexpected: manna for multitudes, water-walking, silencing storms and...death? No wonder Peter rebuked Jesus! But wait, there is more:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” (Luke 9:23–24)

It is probably impossible for us to comprehend—in a culture of dazzling, diamond-studded crosses—what images Jesus’ words projected into the minds of the disciples. In Jesus’ day, crucifixion was considered to be the cruelest possible form of punishment.⁵¹ Without question, *Take up Your Cross and Die* was not the slogan the Twelve were hoping to champion when they became Jesus’ followers. In that regard, precious little has changed.

Reflection

As you read Leonard Sweet’s quote below, reflect upon what taking up your cross means to you today.

On the cross, leadership dies. On the cross, success dies. On the cross, skills die, and excellence dies. All of my strengths—nailed to the cross. All of my weaknesses—nailed to the cross. All of my yearnings for bigger and better, for anything other than Christ himself—nailed to that same cross.⁵²

Today's Fast: A Meal

Earlier, John's disciples had asked why Jesus' disciples did not observe the customary fasts. Jesus replied, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast" (Matthew 9:15). In His response, Jesus associated fasting with mourning. Though there are numerous motivations and methods of fasting, today I invite you to experience what some refer to as a Bridegroom Fast⁵³ as we reflect on the first time Jesus' told His disciples of His soon-coming death. In this type of fast, the ache to eat an earthly meal serves to kindle an ache to partake of what the Apostle John called the "wedding supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). During the time you would be eating, read Revelation 22:1–16, and then slowly read verse 17 multiple times.

Quotes

"To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity."⁵⁴

—*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

"In a world where people are afraid to fast because it may seem too difficult, inconvenient, and burdensome, the Church reminds us of the meaning of fasting: to hunger and tire to the point of physical exhaustion for the sake of uniting with our heavenly Bridegroom."⁵⁵

—*John Paul Abdelsayed*

“What then is fasting for us Christians? It is our entrance and participation in that experience of Christ Himself by which He liberates us from the total dependence on food, matter, and the world... All this means that deeply understood, fasting is the only means by which man recovers his true spiritual nature.”⁵⁶

—*Father Alexander Schmemmann*

Sidebar: On Lent

Of interest is the difference in tone between Irenaeus’ actual words below and the historical context supplied by Eusebius.

And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time; but long before in that of our ancestors. It is likely that they did not hold to strict accuracy, and thus formed a custom for their posterity according to their own simplicity and peculiar mode. Yet all of these lived none the less in peace, and we also live in peace with one another; and the disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith.⁵⁷

Irenaeus, writing closer to the day of the Apostles, emphasized a long history of living in peace with varied fasting practices. Eusebius, writing closer to the day of unprecedented favor for Christians, identified two “customs,” and grants one the status of “apostolic tradition.” Perhaps focus on manifest customs flourishes in times of favor. Or, conversely, perhaps focus on faith-fueled unity flourishes in times when the church is regularly reminded that they are aliens and strangers on this earth.

Day Eight

I wonder if Peter rebuked Jesus as the spokesman for all the Twelve. Surely, Jesus’ talk of crosses and death would have been deeply unsettling for His followers, especially in light of the miracles they had witnessed. Approaching their two-year mark as Jesus’ inner circle, the

disciples had seen a dead girl come back to life, a demon-possessed man returned to peaceful sanity, storms calmed, bodies healed, manna from heaven materialize, and, most recently, the Messiah walk on water.

Miracles, evidently, had not adequately prepared them to welcome crucifixion. The problem, of course, is not with the miracles themselves but rather with our perception of the miracles. We tend to view a miracle as a divine deposit on more miracles. We like our miracles to be perpetual, thank you. Once raised, we want Lazarus to live forever. But he cannot. So we are bewildered when the recipient of the miracle still dies. It seems to me that miracles are less of a promise for tomorrow and more of a manifestation of God's love and power for today. Today, God provides bread. Today, God calms the storm. Tomorrow's needs and storms cannot void the reality of today's miracles any more than today's miracles can void the potential of tomorrow's needs and storms.

I too have been bewildered by miracles big and small. With the latter, I have watched "only-God" miracle writing opportunities produce beautiful books that collected dust in forgotten warehouses. With the former, I have accompanied friends whose "only-God" miracle pregnancies ended in miscarriage. The Church in general panics when miracles miscarry. We scurry clumsily about to prop up God's sagging reputation. *There must have been a problem, honey*, we offer. *God must have something even better around the corner, dear*, we propose. Must He? Here, then is my Lenten plea for the day: let the mourning mourn. Grant those who grieve the dignity to ask questions. Bestow upon the bewildered permission to not edit their honesty.

Crucifixion is, after all, serious work.

Reflection

Recall miracles that ended in heartbreak: the faith venture that went bankrupt, the pregnancy that miscarried, the new job with the monster boss. When, if ever, have you felt the need to “prop up God’s sagging reputation”?

Today’s Fast: Fixing It

Six years before I met my husband, his first wife died in a tragic car accident. The two loved God and one another and were headed back to seminary from celebrating Christmas with their families when they hit an ice-covered stretch of road. Barry explained that following the accident the greatest gift people gave him was their supportive presence. The most hurtful offerings came from those who tried to fix Barry’s pain with platitudes such as *God picks His favorite flowers for His heavenly garden*. Or *You’re young; you will remarry*. Such clumsy attempts to fix someone else’s pain reflect the probability that we are uncomfortable facing our own. So today, fast fixing things. Let the broken be broken for a day—be that a tool or a heart.

Quotes

“I do not want to fix myself. I cannot fix myself. My natural fortitude served me well as a young believer and it was inevitable that I was habituated from birth to live in the power of self. But as I grow older in the faith, I find that I am invited by the Spirit to learn to give up the project of moralism, of trying to fix myself by my spiritual efforts. Rather, I want to open more deeply to Christ’s work on the cross and the work of the Spirit in my deep for my daily bread.”⁵⁸

—*John H. Coe*

“Lord, make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred let me bring your love; where there is injury your pardon; where there is doubt, true faith in you. Where there is despair in life, let me bring hope; where there is darkness only light; where there is sadness, ever joy. Grant that I may never cease so much to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand, to be loved, as to love with all my soul. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, in giving to all men what we receive, and in dying that we are born to eternal life.”⁵⁹

—*Popularly attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)*

Sidebar: On Lent

At first glance, then, ancient pre-Nicene texts speak of a one- to two-day or forty-hour fast immediately preceding Resurrection Sunday; a six-day pre-paschal fast; and fasts of forty days. Fr. William P. Saunder asserts that “Lent became more regularized after the legalization of Christianity in AD 313.”⁶⁰ Late nineteenth-century Anglican minister Herman Lilienthal Lonsdale agrees, theorizing that the “tendency of thought within the Church now led to centralization and some seat of authority. The influence of the State upon the Church became paramount, and it looked to the State for models of its constitutions, division, usages.”⁶¹ Or as Dr. Leah Payne suggests, “As the Church grew, it needed uniformity in practice to keep uniformity in orthodoxy.”⁶² By motivations that, no doubt, ranged from the pursuit of doctrinal purity to the pursuit of positional power, an historic council in 325 A.D. profoundly affected Lent as it is experienced and honored today.

Day Nine

Any hope the disciples may have had for Jesus' curious cross talk to fade as He gained distance from His cousin's cruel demise was short-lived. Now that they knew who He was—the Son of God, the Christ—Jesus regularly reminded them where He was going. Throughout the subsequent year, Jesus spoke often and openly about the cost of following Christ cross-ward into His upside-down kingdom. His illustrations were startling: good Samaritans, Nineveh judging future generations, the first being last, narrow doors, great banquets given away to strangers, lost sheep, a found son, rich men in hell, and poor men in heaven. And then, days before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He once again made His path as plain as possible:

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. (Luke 18:31-34)

Why does Jesus speak words that He knows we cannot understand? Would it not be more logical for God to conserve His voice—i.e., be silent—when our comprehension is frail and offer His voice—i.e., with amplified explanations—when our comprehension is strong? Welcome, once again, to the surprising kingdom of God. Though I can only guess about God's motives, I do know mine: as a parent I speak as an investment in my children's futures, even when they cannot understand. My eldest, who has Asperger's Syndrome, has often said, “I'm sorry, Mom. I know what you're saying is important. But all I hear is ‘blah, blah, blah, blah.’” “It's okay,” I reply. “I know you're trying. So I'll write down what I'm saying for you in case you need it in the future.” Jonathan posts my words on his walls and tapes my illustrations to his closet doors.

And when on occasion I have offered to take them down, he replies, “No, Mom. I still need them.”

Be they plain or shrouded in mystery, God’s words are infinitely more needful. So let us post them on our minds and hide them in our hearts. Let us honor God’s words and be encouraged: Our lack of understanding cannot sabotage the power or the purpose of His voice.

Reflection

Thankfully, human reasoning neither leads nor limits God’s love. Consider passages in Scripture in which God’s words escape your understanding. What would it be like if God withheld His voice until humankind could fully comprehend it?

Today’s Fast: Rationalism

This may be impossible, but today we are going to attempt to fast the belief that reason is king. Rationalism, a child of the Enlightenment, is the “practice of treating reason as the ultimate authority in religion.”⁶³ Robert K. Merton explains that the early champions of rationalism were men of deep faith who

laud[ed] the faculty of reason. . . . Reason is praiseworthy because man, chosen of God, alone possesses it; it serves to differentiate him from the beasts of the field. . . . it possesses still another exemplary characteristic; it enables man more fully to glorify God by aiding him to appreciate His works. . . . Hence, it becomes imperative for them who would rationalize these doctrines to “prove” that reason and faith—two such highly exalted virtues of the Puritan—are not inconsistent.⁶⁴

However, it is not possible to prove with the mind what is born of the spirit. Early Puritan scientists reduced nature to matter and, as Peter Homan succinctly summarizes, “rationalized and disenchant[ed] the biblical Christian world of spirit.”⁶⁵

Which brings us to a day in which believing anything that cannot be reproduced and verified in a laboratory is considered a “leap of faith.” No. It is just faith—the same faith that gave reason wings. Respectful consideration of the deep intimacy with God experienced by some whose faculties of reason are considered “impaired” should inspire humility of mind within us. As you consider today to what extent reason is king to you, reflect upon the following two quotes from anthropologist Paul Stoller and King Solomon:

No matter the logical consistency of our propositions and semipropositions, no matter how deeply we think we have mastered a subject, the world, for the embodied scholar, remains a wondrous place that stirs the imagination and sparks creativity. Those who struggle with humility, no matter their scholarly station, admit willingly that they have much to learn from forgetful old men and women who, at first glance, seem to have little knowledge to impart.⁶⁶

Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

Quotes

“No matter how we rationalize, God will sometimes seem unfair from the perspective of a person trapped in time.... Not until history has run its course will we understand how ‘all things work together for good.’ Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.”⁶⁷
—*Philip Yancey*

Sidebar: On Lent

For two months in 325 A.D., bishops convened for the First Council of Nicea, which was convoked by Constantine. Christology was the critical discussion of the hour and amidst the prayerful days and months, a decision was made that set a cornerstone for the development of Lent. As Dr. Nicholas V. Russo of the University of Notre Dame succinctly summarizes,

The Council of Nicea issued canons intended to bring general alignment on matters of liturgical practice and church organization. Among these was the establishment of a common date for the Easter feast that, up until that time, had been commemorated on different days in a given year depending on the method of calculation.⁶⁸

We can surmise that Lent's establishment before Easter was part of a broader movement toward alignment and standardization begun at the Council of Nicea and continued throughout the fourth century.⁶⁹

Only following the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. did the length of Lent become fixed at forty days, and then only nominally.⁷⁰

Day Ten

Following Jesus' most recent reminder of His coming death, Matthew and Mark recorded a story about the sons of Zebedee that has often been explained as a bold, but naïve, attempt to secure leadership spots in Jesus' coming kingdom. However, since gospel writers sequenced stories with intentionality, I wonder if, in context, the brothers' request was motivated in part by a search for some semblance of control. With a perspective reminiscent of a cosmic game of musical chairs, John and James called dibs on the spots to the right and left of Jesus during his Messianic reign. While Matthew stated that the brothers' mom championed the maneuvering, Mark laid responsibility for the religious positioning squarely upon the shoulders of John and James. Approaching Jesus, the sons of Zebedee requested a "favor." With a question He would—not coincidentally—soon pose verbatim to a blind beggar,⁷¹ Jesus replied, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:36) The two then said, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory" (Mark 10:37).

Uncertainty is quite revealing. The unknown triggers different reactions in different hearts and exposes our souls' defaults. Ambiguity reveals where we instinctively go to feel the illusion of security again. In response to a yet-unnamed but imminent storm, some hide, some run, some live in denial, some escape into fictional worlds, some feast, and some stake out their

territory. The latter we see in John and James' response to Jesus' continued cross-talk. All the uncertainty triggered something deep within the brothers. As they wrestled with the seemingly mixed messages of *Jesus as Messiah* and *Jesus crucified*, they reasoned it time to take control.

What does uncertainty trigger within us? What defaults do we gravitate toward when facing the unknown? As the example of John and James clearly demonstrates, defaults by and large are self-serving. They take but do not give to those around us. Matthew records, "When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers" (Matthew 20:24).

To change our defaults we must first address our theology of uncertainty. And to address our theology of uncertainty, we must first befriend mystery. Anglican clergyman Jeremy Taylor is quoted as saying, "[A] religion without mystery must be a religion without God."⁷² Mystery is a given for relationship between the Infinite and the finite. As we follow Jesus into uncertainty, we are free, in the words of Gerald G. May, to "join the dance of life in fullness without having a clue about what the steps are."⁷³

Reflection

To dance when we do not know the steps requires us to value our Partner above our performance. To dance in the dark demonstrates a lavish display of trust. Lent, in its mystery, is an invitation to dance. In what areas of your life do you sense God's invitation to embrace mystery?

Today's Fast: Avoidance

Today, pay attention to avoidance mechanisms that surface when you face the unknown, unknowable, uncomfortable, or unavoidable. Do you eat more? Sleep more? Domineer more?

Disappear more? Why? Ask God's Holy Spirit to sensitize you today to the existence of avoidance defaults in your life. Prayerfully consider what beliefs might underlie any avoidance that emerges when you are facing uncertainty. Return to John the Baptist's words, "He must increase and I must decrease" (John 3:30), and consider what relevance John's wisdom might have as a guide through the unknown.

Quotes

"The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it has established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild."⁷⁴

—*G. K. Chesterton*

"When we were children most of us were good friends with mystery. The world was full of it and we loved it. Then as we grew older we slowly accepted the indoctrination that mystery exists only to be solved. For many of us, mystery became an adversary; unknowing became a weakness. The contemplative spiritual life is an ongoing reversal of this adjustment. It is a slow and sometimes painful process of becoming "as little children" again, in which we first make friends with mystery and finally fall in love again with it."⁷⁵

—*Gerald G. May*

Sidebar: On Lent

In Day Eleven and Day Twelve, I will share Table 2 within which I have sought to compile the post-Nicene writings that reference the continuing development of Lent. When considered side-by-side, Tables 1 and 2 visually hint at the development of both fasting and pre-

paschal practices in the fourth- and fifth-century church. References to one-day, two-day, and forty-hour fasts fade, and references to forty-day fasts become clearly prominent. The six-day fast, spoken of by Dionysius of Alexandria and in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, seems to develop into (or be renamed as) a pre-paschal Holy Week (or Great Week) fast.⁷⁶ Further, the post-Nicene forty-day fast references are distinctly associated with Pascha and/or baptism and/or penance. Please note that in Table 2, original document text is identified with quotations and the works that reference the original texts are endnoted.

Day Eleven

With the toxic fumes of religious positioning lingering in their minds, Jesus' puzzled disciples packed their few belongings and continued traveling toward Jerusalem via Jericho and Bethany. Last steps and last stops are weighty indeed. What we do with our final breaths reflects the values we hold dear in life. So I find myself fascinated by what Jesus did and said between Jericho and Jerusalem.

Luke, as both doctor and historian, focused upon Jesus' interaction with two lives in that telling space: a blind beggar (whom Mark identified as Bartimaeus) and a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus. Both were at the bottom of the culture's class system. Both desperately wanted to see Jesus. In response, Jesus invested in them some of the final hours of what would be His final days. We know nothing of their backstories. But then, in many ways, backstories matter little once Jesus enters the room. Like these two men, whatever the cause of our physical and spiritual blindness, whatever family we did or did not have, whatever sins or successes we count as our own, Jesus' presence makes *this moment* the most important moment of our lives.

This moment for the blind beggar occurred on a dusty, dirty roadside. Hearing that Jesus was passing by, Bartimaeus ignored everyone's attempts to coach him or, perchance, intimidate him into a respectful silence. Instead he shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:38–39) Luke records that Jesus heard the shout and had the beggar brought "near." How beautiful. *Near* is the fruit of perseverance, not passivity. Evidently, beggars can be choosers. This beggar chose Jesus. And now, Bartimaeus was also asked by Jesus to choose his heart's dearest request: "Lord, I want to see" (Luke 18:41). So see he did! What he *did not do* with his sight is notable. He did not return to the roadside to grab his stuff. He did not rush to the Temple to have his stigma removed. He did not run ahead alone into the city and draw attention to himself. Bartimaeus used his sight to follow, praise, and draw attention to Jesus. In this, he demonstrated for centuries to come the way followers multiply miracles.

Reflection

As mentioned previously, the gospel writers sequenced their stories with intentionality. Consider Luke's ordering of the surrounding text:

- Jesus tells the Parable of the Persistent Widow, who kept crying out for justice until she received it. (Luke 18:1–8)
- Jesus tells the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, in which the tax collector is described as justified before God. (Luke 18:9–14)
- People bring children to Jesus and the disciples rebuke and try to stop them. (Luke 18:15–17)
- A rich ruler asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life and the disciples do not interfere. (Luke 18:16–30)

- Jesus once again predicts his death. (Luke 18:31–34)
- A blind beggar cries out for Jesus to help him and the disciples rebuke him, telling him to be quiet. (Luke 18:35–43)
- A tax collector climbs a tree to see Jesus and the disciples are silent. (Luke 19:1–9)

Jesus taught on the power of persistent supplication, and then Luke recorded four pop quizzes for the disciples: children, a rich ruler, a blind beggar, and a tax collector. All demonstrated persistence in their pursuit of Jesus. And how did the disciples respond? Not only did they not honor the children's and blind beggar's pursuit of Jesus, they made vigorous attempts to turn them away and silence them. However, no such resistance from the disciples is documented with regard to the rich ruler or tax collector. Granted, they might not have seen Zacchaeus up in the tree until it was too late, but Luke's record begs a question. As you reflect upon today's reading, list as many possibilities as you can of reasons why the disciples sought to silence and turn away children and a blind beggar from Jesus.

Today's Fast: Religious Profiling

Whom do we spiritually underestimate? The elderly? The young? The poor? The wealthy? The beautiful? The handicapped? What group or class of people would we have turned away from Jesus? Are we guilty of classism, defined as “the belief that people can be distinguished or characterized, esp. as inferior, on the basis of their social class”?⁷⁷ Today, ask God to shine His light upon any form of religious profiling in which you are dismissing those whom Jesus would welcome.

Quotes

“While fasting with the body, brethren, let us also fast in spirit. Let us loose every bond of iniquity; let us undo the knots of every contract made by violence; let us tear up all unjust agreements; let us give bread to the hungry and welcome to our house the poor who have no roof to cover them, that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God.”⁷⁸

—From *The Wednesday in the First Week Vespers, Tone Eight*, in *The Lenten Triodion*.

Translated by Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware.

Sidebar: On Lent

Table 2. Post-Nicene texts referenced in scholarship regarding the origin of Lent

Approximate dates	Ancient work or author	Key words and phrases
c. 335	St. Athanasius in his “Festal Letters” for the years 329–334 ⁷⁹ <i>Canons of Athanasius</i>	“holy fast,” forty-day fast prior to Holy Week ⁸⁰ forty days of penance fasting for readmission to Eucharist ⁸¹
381–384	Egeria in <i>Itinerarium</i> 30.1 or <i>Egeria’s Travels</i> [London 1971], pp. 128–139	forty-day fast, ⁸² “Great Week” distinct from rest of Lent ⁸³
385	Siricius, Bishop of Rome, letter to Himerius of Terragona in Spain	“forty day” reference to a prepaschal program for preparation of baptismal candidates ⁸⁴
387	St. John Chrysostom in Antioch in <i>Homilies on Genesis</i> , 30.1–3 Epiphanius for Cyprus	forty days of fasting ⁸⁵ forty days of fasting ⁸⁶
387	Augustine is baptized at the Easter Vigil April 24–25, 387 ⁸⁷	

Day Twelve

In celebration, the no-longer-blind beggar joyously followed Jesus into Jericho.

Bartimaeus’ praise must have been contagiously evident to all because Luke tells us that “When all the people saw it, they also praised God” (Luke 18:43). Everyone the group passed heard the

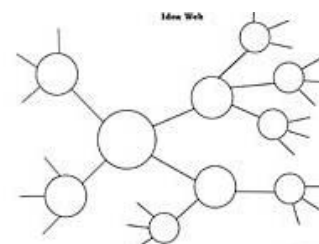
praise and witnessed the celebration. One soul in particular desperately wanted a clearer view of the Jesus at the center of the people's joy.

Imagine with me the now-sighted beggar standing near Jesus, as Jesus looked up into the sycamore tree and said, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). We tend to read these stories as stand-alone narratives, but Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus were citizens of the same city. And though I feel rather confident stating that poor blind beggars and wealthy chief tax collectors did not eat at the same table, I have other questions that remain unanswered. Did Zacchaeus recognize Bartimaeus from the countless times he had walked past the same roadside? Did these two know each other's names? Did tax collection have anything to do with the beggar's poverty? Did Bartimaeus' praise inspire Zacchaeus to accept Jesus as the Messiah? Is it possible that the beggar helped make spiritually rich the man (or category of men) who made him financially destitute? Was Bartimaeus among the recipients of Zacchaeus' exuberant, repentant act of restitution?

As I picture Jesus, Bartimaeus, and Zacchaeus celebrating the miracles of physical and spiritual sight, a reality resounds: though following Jesus is most often an individual act of faith, that act always has communal repercussions. We are interrelated. In the words of Thick Nhat Hanh, "*To be is to inter-be. We cannot just be by ourselves alone.*"⁸⁸ Our stories, though unique, are woven of shared thread. I can only imagine the glorious tapestry Zacchaeus and the Bartimaeus presented their city after that day when Jesus stood still at a roadside and then under a tree to welcome lost brothers home.

Reflection

Do you remember in school how we were instructed to utilize idea webs to sketch out essays? We placed ideas in circles and connected them to one another through lines to visually organize the story we wanted to tell. Mentally or on paper, draw a web of the people in your faith story.



Today's Fast: Isolation

Each holiday season, the classic *It's a Wonderful Life* warms hearts as we once again witness George Bailey's revelation of how his unapplauded Bedford Falls life had changed the world one interconnected act of selfless kindness at a time. As George stands bewildered in front of his brother's tombstone, his angel explains:

Clarence: Your brother, Harry Bailey, broke through the ice and was drowned at the age of nine.

George: That's a lie! Harry Bailey went to war! He got the Congressional Medal of Honor! He saved the lives of every man on that transport!

Clarence: Every man on that transport died. Harry wasn't there to save them because you weren't there to save Harry. Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives.⁸⁹

And so we tear up when George realizes the vast network of people his valuable life has affected. We consider for a glowing moment the possibility that our lives also matter that profoundly. We smile as Clarence gets his wings...and then continue in our non-holiday isolated ways, underestimating the interconnectivity of humankind and life itself.

Almost two decades before the release of this classic film, Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy penned a short story in 1929 entitled *Chain-Link*, in which he postulated a theory that is

now known as Six Degrees of Separation.⁹⁰ A key concept in city planning and social networking, the Six Degrees theory asserts that all humans can be connected by a maximum of six steps. Spiritually, the theory highlights the truth that each life needs and in turn affects all other lives.

Today, then, fast isolation: Meet a friend for coffee, call a cousin, visit a neighbor, or connect with a colleague. Purpose to link and be linked, to need and be needed, to see and be seen. Refuse to discount your influence, especially in seemingly small acts, and intentionally nurture your God-given web of relationships.

Quotes

“It seems that what St. Basil identified as a danger lurking behind some of the practices of late antiquity, namely the dangers of isolationism, individualism, and self-pleasing, still remain. The temptation of our own time seems to be the same, a spirituality focused upon the self as its ultimate *telos*.”⁹¹

—George Kalentzis

Sidebar: On Lent

Table 2. Post-Nicene texts referenced in scholarship regarding the origin of Lent

(continued)

Approximate dates	Ancient work or author	Key words and phrases
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Approximate dates	Ancient work or author	Key words and phrases
c. 380–c. 450	Byzantine historian Socrates in <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> 5.22	“fasts before Easter,” “three weeks excepting Saturdays and Sundays,” “keeps the fast for six weeks,” “Forty Days,” “fast seven weeks before the feast” ⁹²
d. 444	St. Cyril of Alexandria in his “Festal Letters”	forty-day period of fasting ⁹³
d. 461	Pope St. Leo	“fulfill with their fasts the Apostolic institution of the forty days” ⁹⁴
late 4 th C	<i>Apostolic Constitutions</i> (V.13.3–4)	fast “of the Holy Week of Pascha” after the forty-day fast ⁹⁵
5 th C	Sozomen in <i>Histo.Eccl</i> , 7, 19	“the so-called Forty Days before Pascha...some begin at 6 weeks... others at 7 weeks.” ⁹⁶

Day Thirteen

Leaving Zacchaeus’ joyful Jericho party behind them, Jesus and his disciples made their way to yet another dinner held in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Bethany was Jesus’ place of calm before the coming tempest. Arriving six days before the Passover, Jesus sat down at a dinner held in His honor, and:

Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:3)

Each gospel writer records an anointing of Jesus. In three of the four experiences, Jesus explained that the anointing was in preparation for His burial.⁹⁷ With details so similar, many over the centuries have viewed the accounts as different perspectives of the same story. However, the possibility exists that Jesus was actually anointed with expensive perfume three times during His public ministry. Consider the contrasts:

Reference	Time frame	Venue	Woman	Focus	Et Al.
Mt 26:2, 6–13	2 days before the Passover, after Palm Sunday	Simon the Leper’s home in Bethany	Unnamed	Jesus’ head	The disciples were indignant

Mk 14:1–9	2 days before the Passover, after Palm Sunday	Simon the Leper's home in Bethany	Unnamed	Jesus' head	The disciples rebuke her harshly
Lk 7:36–50	Before John the Baptist was beheaded	Simon the Pharisee's home in Nain (?)	A sinful woman	Jesus' feet	Simon questions Jesus' discernment
Jn 12:1–8	6 days before the Passover, before Palm Sunday	Lazarus' home in Bethany	Mary	Jesus' feet	Judas objects

Two of these accounts were from eyewitnesses. Mark's and Matthew's versions obviously mirror each other. Luke was a historian. All of which currently leads me to a delightful hypothesis: In addition to being anointed early in His ministry (by a sinful woman who loved much because she had been forgiven much), Jesus was anointed twice during Passover Week in preparation for His burial. Six days before the Passover, a well-known woman, Mary, anointed His feet in her home; and two days before the Passover, an unnamed woman anointed His head at the home of Simon the Leper.

Which means that as he journeyed cross-ward Jesus was—head to toe—rather smelly. Nard was serious stuff. The mob could have possibly just followed their noses to find Jesus in the olive grove. Well, perhaps that is an exaggeration, but Judas most probably would have been confronted by the perfume when he kissed Christ. And as Jesus hung on the cross, the fragrance would have reminded Him that Father God prepares all things well.

Reflection

Jesus spent a significant part of His last days at tables resting in the company of old and new friends. If you had only six days to live, how, and with whom, would you live them? Why?

Today's Fast: Stinginess

Pliny the Elder (23-79AD), in his encyclopedic work, *Natural History*, mentions twelve species of Nard.⁹⁸ Nard refers to thick essential oil created by crushing the roots of a plant that grows in the Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India.⁹⁹ The costliness of the ointment is attested to historically as well as in all Scriptural occurrences:

The alabaster flask of ointment mentioned in the Gospels was a very costly one containing spikenard (*Nardostachys jatamansi*). This herb, related to valerian, was imported from North India and used widely by Hebrews and Romans alike in the anointing of the dead.¹⁰⁰

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. (Mark 14:4-5)

Why this waste? Because love does not calculate. What an honor: to be remembered as one who loved lavishly. Today, fast stinginess: seek an opportunity to be irrationally lavish toward someone who cannot possibly return the favor. Give because you love. Give without letting reason ration out your love in stingy portions.

Quotes

I am not moved, my God, to love you
By the heaven you have promised me.
Neither does hell, so feared, move me
To keep me from offending you.
You move me, Lord, and I am moved seeing you
Scoffed at and nailed on a cross.
I am moved seeing your body so wounded.
Your injuries and your death move me.
It is your love that moves me, and in such a way
that even though there were no heaven,
I would love you, and even though there were
no hell I would fear you.
You do not have to give me anything
so that I love you,
For even if I didn't hope for what I hope,

As I love you now, so would I love you.¹⁰¹

—*Anonymous Spanish poet, often attributed to John of the Cross*

Sidebar: On Lent

As previously mentioned, Table 1 and Table 2 together cite ancient documents and voices examined by scholars in their collective pursuit of the historical origins of Lent. Many of these sources were deemed relevant for the development of Lent specifically because they referenced fasting. However, consider the following far more ancient mention of fasting:

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” (Joel 2:12–13)

Joel, clearly, was not writing about Lent. I make this obvious point to emphasize that prior to the dawn of the Church, fasting served multiple purposes in multiple contexts and, from God’s perspective, was valuable to the extent that it reflected a posture of the heart. As ministers and scholars of previous centuries sought to discern the early roots of Lent, an assumption guided some that ancient mentions of fasting were part of a larger discussion on preparation for baptism, and that the season preferred for baptism was Easter. Therefore, writings about fasting in general, and forty-day fasts in particular, were assumed to shed light upon the development of Lent. That assumption, however, is now considered quite questionable.

Day Fourteen

Leaving Bethany, Jesus’ nard-adorned feet carried Him the short two-mile distance to Jerusalem. The Apostle John described two distinct “crowds” that surrounded Jesus on what we now call Palm Sunday. The Greek word translated “crowds”—ὄχλος (*ochlos*)—referenced multitudes, large groups, or mobs consisting mostly of commoners, i.e., not the ruling class.¹⁰²

The night before, in Bethany, as Jesus enjoyed the warmth of Lazarus' hospitality and Mary anointed His feet, "a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead" (John 12:9).

According to Luke's account, it seems that some part of this crowd—which Luke 19:37 further identified as a "crowd" of μαθητής (*mathētēs*), i.e., "disciples"—followed Jesus into Jerusalem the next day.

Entering the City of David with a crowd of followers and disciples, Jesus is then further surrounded by a crowd already in the city. John explained, "The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" (John 12:12–13) Around 550 years earlier, Zechariah had prophesied:

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

Though the disciples "did not understand all this [until] after Jesus was glorified,"¹⁰³ Jesus, in fulfillment of the prophecy, entered Jerusalem riding a borrowed colt and as the crowd of His followers met the crowd at the Feast, Messianic joy erupted! The scene that follows still inspires celebration when remembered two thousand years later. For a moment, for one beautiful moment, the crowds of Jerusalem honored their King. Covering the road in a royal carpet of palm branches and cloaks, the multitude shouted Messianic praises: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9)

And Jesus did not stop them.

In fact, when anxious leaders told Jesus to rebuke his fans, Jesus said, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:39–40). Within a few short days, some of these same voices would exchange shouts of “Hosanna!” for shouts of “Crucify him!” Yet, even though He knew that the people would soon reject Him, Jesus still showed up for the parade they held in His honor. Jesus did not let the rejection of tomorrow cause Him to reject the love of today.

Reflection

Activate your God-given imagination to picture Jesus riding on a colt into Jerusalem. See the crowds of followers and disciples with Him and rush to meet Him with the crowd that had gathered for the feast. Decide whether you will be among those who throw their only cloak on the ground for His colt to walk upon. Observe the objecting leaders. Hear the shouts of children. Add your voice to the cries of “Hosanna!” Taste the Messianic anticipation and then look into Jesus’ eyes. What emotions might you have witnessed as He journeyed into the City of David?

Today’s Fast: Withholding Joy

The religious leaders paused on Palm Sunday. They withheld their joy, sacrificing it to something they deemed greater be that propriety, suspicion, or, perhaps, jealousy. I wonder if I too would have paused, because I am by nature overly cautious. At times, the combination of trouble-shooting, discernment, and introversion reduce me to a spectator instead of a participant. I too can sacrifice joy to over-think. Any of us who leap without looking can consider this a free day for fasting. But for those who are more like me—for whom considerations can lead to hesitations—today fast pausing and withholding and hyper-caution, and celebrate the moment with abandon.

Quotes

“Joy and sadness are born at the same time, both arising from such deep places in your heart that you can’t find words to capture your complex emotions. But this intimate experience in which every bit of life is touched by a bit of death can point us beyond the limits of our existence. It can do so by making us look forward in expectation to the day when our hearts will be filled with perfect joy, a joy that no one shall take away from us. Let me therefore now reflect on expectation, first about expectation as patience, and then about expectation as joy.”¹⁰⁴

—*Henri Nouwen, for Palm Sunday*

“There is no one-size-fits-all crucifixion. Jesus said each one of us must pick up our own cross, and pick it up each day. For some, martyrdom might be fame. For some, martyrdom might be anonymity. Regardless of what it is, first followers ask daily, ‘Lord, what is my cross today, and where shall I carry it?’”¹⁰⁵

—*Leonard Sweet*

Sidebar: On Lent

In addition to the assumption that ancient mentions of fasting were linked via baptism with Easter, many earlier scholars also assumed that Lent’s origins were apostolic. Highly respected spiritual leaders and scholars affirmed the apostolic roots of Lent, including Robert Bellarmine¹⁰⁶ (1542–1621), Bishop Lancelot Andrewes¹⁰⁷ (1555–1626), John Cosins¹⁰⁸ (1594–1572), Herman Lilienthal Lonsdale¹⁰⁹ (1858–1940), and in 2006, Fr. William P. Saunder¹¹⁰ (1957-). Since the spiritual grandson of the Apostle John (Ireneaus) spoke of fasts in connection

to Resurrection Sunday and referred to varying practices dating back to the time of his “ancestors,”¹¹¹ Russo explains that,

Many of the theology handbooks of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century confidently claimed that Lent was established by the apostles themselves or in the immediate post-apostolic period at the latest. They assumed this season of fasting was closely connected with preparation for Easter baptisms—a practice likewise considered to be of apostolic foundation (cf. Romans 6) and observed everywhere throughout the Church since its earliest days.¹¹²

Day Fifteen

Yesterday we pictured Jesus riding on the colt through Jerusalem with exuberant crowds shouting “Hosanna!” Recall what emotions He might have experienced. Surely few of us picture Him stern and stoic, ignoring the joy all around Him, or anxious and jittery, waiting for the other shoe to drop, or rolling His eyes in dismissal of the nonsense. I picture Jesus smiling, looking around Him at the radiant faces of the Twelve and the hope-filled eyes of the masses. Knowing that the Twelve would soon run for their lives and the masses would soon reject Him, Jesus still stayed fully present for the party.

This quality of Christ strikes me as utterly remarkable. Honestly, I probably would have silenced all except for the small group of Jesus’ faithful followers, but not for the reasons that motivated the Pharisees. I would have insulated myself from the crowds’ favor because their favor would soon falter: crowds are fickle that way. In contrast, throughout His ministry and in amplified form during His Passion Week, Jesus consistently displayed an ability to receive from people in the moment what He knew would not endure. In the Triumphal Entry, Jesus permitted the crowds’ support, knowing it would soon sour. Jesus still lovingly and fully affirmed Peter’s future leadership immediately after prophesying Peter’s denial. Jesus still welcomed Judas to the communion table knowing that betrayal was in his heart. In short, Jesus did not emotionally self-

protect. His love did not shrink back even when His love—for a moment or, sadly, for a lifetime—would ultimately be rejected.

Lent mentors us in following Christ's example. As we consider Jesus' response to suffering, we become attentive to our own. Psychiatrist Anthony Reading explains that in relationships in general, "Individuals who have been hurt by lost hopes tend to protect themselves against future disappointment by lowering their sights and dimming their aspirations."¹³ The same is true in our relationship with God. Uncertain that God will protect us, we proactively protect ourselves. To avoid further emotional and theological pain, we lower our expectations, edit our dreams, and shrink back from God through fear-driven planning, endless worry, hyper-vigilance, or the numbing of hope. With each choice to self-protect, another layer is added to insulate our hearts from attentiveness to God's presence. Rowan Williams notes, "In suffering, the believer's self-protection and isolation are broken."¹⁴ This is a sacred work of our Lenten journey cross-ward, because our deepest self-protective defaults can often only be exposed, examined, and abandoned through suffering.

With all our inconsistencies, God does not shrink back from us. In turn, may we seek to never shrink back from God.

Reflection

Actions reveal beliefs because beliefs inspire actions. Consider Jesus' choice at the Triumphal Entry knowing all that was to come. What must Jesus have believed in order to stay present to the party?

Today's Fast: Spiritual Self-Protection

Self-protection is not always unhealthy. For instance, when we brace ourselves for an impending car accident or run when chased by an angry animal, we are instinctively self-protecting our physical bodies. Even some forms of emotional self-protection are healthy, such as when we self-differentiate from a toxic relative. Self-protection in these examples is a response to danger: we self-protect when we do not feel safe. Therefore, when we spiritually self-protect, is it because we do not feel safe with God?

He is, after all, rather big and unpredictable and “wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.”¹⁵ But I venture a guess that our disappointments fuel this unhealthy form of self-protection more than does His wildness. Spiritual leaders in our lives have abused power, prayer requests have gone unanswered, dreams have died, others experience greater results for the same spiritual efforts, stepping out in faith backfired... and so we maintain a polite distance from deeper levels of intimacy with God. God said of His people that He had “engraved [them] on the palm of [His] hands.” (Isaiah 49:16) Well, we conclude, He may write the names of His favorites on His hands but we suspect that He has our initials somewhere less favored, like the back of His left heel.

Crazily enough, favor is not what frees us from self-protection: suffering is. Not suffering itself, but the choice within suffering to trust, to hope, and to love. Fasting self-protective habits is a lifetime commitment, but today we can take a step. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to alert you when you are shrinking back from God. Take note of the situation and later attempt to process the “why?” This is an exercise that you can carry with you daily throughout the Lenten season as we continue to see how pain, for Jesus, prompted an increase, not a decrease, in His vulnerability toward man and His heavenly Father.

Quotes

“A direct experience of union or deep intimacy may be beautiful beyond words, but it also requires a certain sacrifice of our self-image as separate and distinct. We become vulnerable, less in control. We can no longer maintain the illusion that we are the master of our destiny.”¹¹⁶

—*Gerald G. May*

Sidebar: On Lent

Whereas some believed that the apostles honored a forty-day Lenten fast, others believed that the forty-day fast grew gradually from an apostolic tradition of a one-day, two-day, or forty-hour fast such as referenced by Irenaeus and Tertullian.¹¹⁷ According to this theory, these shorter, pre-Easter fasts—coinciding with Jesus’ time in the tomb—then evolved into the pre-Nicene mention of a six-day pre-paschal fast.¹¹⁸ This in turn evolved into a “three-week fast before baptism...[and a] six-week fast for catechumens that would be baptized on the Feast of the Resurrection”¹¹⁹ (thirty-six days—six weeks minus Sundays—being considered by some as a “tithe” of the year).¹²⁰ Finally, an extra four days were added to arrive at a forty-day Lenten fast¹²¹—forty being a number weighted with biblical significance. This hypothesis came to be known as the *backwards extension* theory.¹²²

Day Sixteen

Jesus’ emotions and actions in the days following the Triumphal Entry were something less (far less) than placid. He wept over Jerusalem, forcefully cleared the Temple, cursed a fig tree, confounded religious leaders, told pointed parables, and experienced emotional distress.

This is not the carefree Jesus with soft backlit curls and spotless, wrinkle-free garments sitting beside a bubbling brook depicted in the old family Bible. Frankly, I like this Jesus better and I am going to guess that you do too. But in order for us to let Jesus be Jesus we must make room in His life, and in our own, for a broader range of emotions and actions in our working definition of *holy*.

Holy grieves. (Think ugly cry.) Embedded in his account of the Triumphal Entry, Luke relays Jesus' guttural response when He sees the city of Jerusalem: Jesus wept at the sight. Luke chose the word κλαίω (*klaiō*) to express Jesus' grief. Also translated *lament*, *wail*, and *cry*, *klaiō* is used to express "grief at parting, remorse, [and] sorrow for the dead."¹²³ *Klaiō* is a mourning cry. When the King on a colt saw Jerusalem, He wailed:

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (Luke 19:41)

Jesus treasured the City of David. When He was eight days old, Jesus entered Jerusalem for the first time to be circumcised and the elders Simeon and Anna recognized Him as the Messiah. But now, over thirty years later, Jesus entered the city to be crucified, and the elders would recognize Him not. Jesus grieved for a people who would not know peace. Jesus grieved for the city that would pay for its spiritual blindness with destruction. *Holy grieves.*

Reflection

The word translated *wept* in Luke 19 is the same word Jesus used in the Beatitudes when He said, "Blessed are you who weep now" (Luke 6:21). Recall any personal moments in your life when weeping was "blessed."

Today's Fast: Halos

Halos, coiffured hair, and even the beloved *Away in the Manger's* “no crying he makes” reflect our theological struggle with Jesus’ incarnation. What does it mean to be holy *and* human? Though I respect the purpose and appreciate the symbolism of nimbuses in religious art, when the “Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14), He was not born with a halo. Of course He cried. Crying is not sin. Of course He did not have perfect backlit hair. Messy is not sin.

One of the reasons we must wrestle with the mystery of the Incarnation is because if we are not seasoned with the wrestling, we tend to offer utterly unhelpful things to others and to ourselves such as, “You shouldn’t cry, grieve, wail, or weep *especially* in Temples. God is in control. He works all things for the good of those who love Him...so there’s no need to feel ____.” No one understood God’s goodness and control more than Jesus, and He still wept. Which means we can too.

Today, fast the halos of false definitions of holy. Ask God where He is weeping in your life and in the world and join Him there. It is never weakness to grieve where God is grieving.

Quotes

“[Jesus cries,] ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.’ God holds back; he hides himself; he weeps. Why? Because he desires what power can never win. He is a king who wants not subservience, but love. Thus,

rather than mowing down Jerusalem, Rome, and every other worldly power, he chose the slow, hard way of Incarnation, love, and death. A conquest from within.”¹²⁴

—*Philip Yancey*

Sidebar: On Lent

Along with the apostolic roots of Lent, the backwards extension theory seemed sound until research called into question the historical integrity of the bridge connecting fasting and baptism to Easter. Several scholars reconsidered key premises upon which previous theories had been based. After discussing evidence from Rome, Jerusalem, Spain, North Africa, Naples, and Constantinople, Maxwell Johnson (cited in many of the peer-reviewed articles¹²⁵ as a leading source on this issue) concluded that “in its origins, therefore, ‘Lent’ has nothing to do with Easter at all but everything to do with the final training of candidates for baptism.”¹²⁶ Orthodox scholars John Paul Abdelsayed and Moses Sammaan agreed:

It is now believed that the theory of a single origin of the Great Lent cannot be sustained. It is more likely that the emergence of the pre-Paschal Lent is due to the fusion and confusion of several pre-Nicene patterns of fasting, penitence, and pre-baptismal preparation.¹²⁷

Day Seventeen

Not only does Holy grieve, *Holy gets angry*. Like you, I have heard masterful sermons explaining the “why” of Jesus’ Temple Clearing. At the age of twelve, Jesus called the Temple “my Father’s house” (Luke 2:49), so as an adult the Father’s only Son came to put that house in order. The moneychangers had set up their tables in the Court of the Gentiles, thus turning the very space that enabled the Temple to be “a house of prayer for the nations” (Isaiah 56:7) into a

“den of robbers” (Jeremiah 7:11). So Jesus purged the Temple in fulfillment of prophecy (Malachi 3:2), confronting religious corruption that profited and prospered at the expense of the poor and the foreigner.

For our Lenten journey, instead of considering in greater depth the more commonly addressed *why* of the Temple Clearing, we will focus upon the far-less-comfortable *how* of the Temple Clearing. Jesus was upset by what He saw in the Temple and He responded with physical protest. Scholarly consensus leans toward two Temple Clearings: one at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (recounted by John) and one at the end (attested by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.) Below, I have drawn from both events to detail the holy “how” of the Temple Clearing. As you read, imagine yourself in the Temple that day.

- “So he **made a whip** out of cords...” (John 2:15)
- “...and **began driving out** those who were buying and selling there.” (Mark 11:15, Luke 19:41, John 2:15)
- “...he **scattered the coins** of money changers...” (John 2:15)
- “He **overturned the tables** of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.” (Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, John 2:15)
- “...and he **would not allow anyone to carry merchandise** through the temple courts.” (Mk 11:16)
- He said, “**Get these out of here!** How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:16, Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46)

How would you have felt about Jesus in the Temple that day if you were a Gentile? A moneychanger? A religious leader? His disciple? Does what you imagine sync with your definition of *sinless*? If not, your definition may be too small. *Holy gets angry*. So does this mean

we need to buy ropes and start making whips? No. But perhaps we need to stop hiding safely behind hashtag campaigns and instead show up and speak out. And perhaps the next time we feel angry about corruption and injustice, instead of stifling the anger we should ask God what He wants us to do with the anger. Odds are, He probably feels angry too.

Reflection

Jesus' first visit to the Temple was on the 8th day for His circumcision. Thereafter his family would have returned each year for Passover.

Moneychangers were in the area with vendors who sold animals, birds, and other items used in temple worship and sacrifices. Such transactions were numerous and required the service of brokers who knew the value of foreign money. Some exchangers profited greatly and loaned their money along with what others invested with them. Their interest rates ranged from 20 to 300 percent per year.¹²⁸

This practice was not new. Jesus witnessed the corruption for years as faithful Jews from outside Judea journeyed to the Temple and exchanged their currency for the required Temple shekel at unfair rates. Why do you think Jesus waited to address the injustice?

Today's Fast: Apathy

apathy, n. /'æpəθi/

1. Freedom from, or insensibility to, suffering; hence, freedom from, or insensibility to, passion or feeling; passionless existence.¹²⁹

Apathy describes an emotional disconnect from life in general and suffering in particular. In a society drowning in bad “news,” apathy can seem an attractive alternative to absorbing the insane amount of planetary pain that the Internet brings to our attention every waking moment. However, the antonyms of *apathy* are not *absorption*, *activism*, or even *emotionalism*: they are *sympathy*, *sensitivity*, and *concern*.¹³⁰

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

What then is our responsibility as concerned—i.e., non-apathetic—Jesus followers when we witness injustice? The fact that Jesus witnessed injustice in the Temple Courts years before His protest confirms the spiritual principle that “can ≠ should.”¹³¹ Timing matters. Taking action because there is a need is a very different motivation than taking action because there is a God. In addition to being exhausting, the former is led by what our eyes see and what our hearts feel. The latter is led by loving listening and dependence-inspired discipline.

A dear friend, Dr. Beth Grant, once said, “Choose carefully what you are willing to die for because you can only die once.”¹³² Jesus, no doubt, witnessed many injustices during His life on earth; but He did not turn over many tables. As we fast apathy today, let us ask God to awaken us from our numb slumber and reveal to us His where, when, and how of any tables that need to be overthrown in our generation.

Quotes

“To love righteousness is to make it grow, not to avenge it... Throughout His life on earth, He resisted every impulse to work more rapidly for a lower good.”¹³³

—*George MacDonald*

Sidebar: On Lent

How did centuries of semi-certainty regarding the historical development of Lent dissolve? Allow me to quote at length from the excellent work of Catholic scholar, Nicholas V. Russo:

First, scholars no longer take for granted the antiquity and ubiquity of Paschal baptism. Tertullian, admittedly, indicates that Easter was a “most solemn day for baptism,” but he is only one of a handful of writers in the pre-Nicene period (that is, before 325 A.D.) who indicates this preference and even he says that Easter was by no means the only favored day for baptisms in his locale. Easter baptism does not become widespread until the mid-fourth century...

Second, the fasts observed before baptism described in many pre-Nicene sources are no longer presumed to be pre-paschal or related in any way to Lent.... Previously, scholars assumed these and other pre-baptismal fasts were pre-paschal and related to, if not identical, with the early Lent. With Easter baptism no longer the ancient and widespread custom once thought, these baptismal fasts too were reexamined. Rather than being part of a proto-Lent, they are now interpreted simply as free-floating periods of fasting undertaken whenever baptisms were administered.

Third, developing research on Holy Week and the Triduum has shown that these periods are not the cores of a gradually lengthening pre-Easter fast, but are actually separate periods to which the forty-day Lent has been joined or overlaps.¹³⁴

In other words, if fasting is most often associated with baptism but baptism is not always associated with Easter, then the bridge is out between ancient mentions of fasts and Resurrection Sunday.

Day Eighteen

Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered. (Matthew 21:18–19, Mark 11:13–14)

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” (Mark 11:20–21)

Holy...curses? Yes, I searched the thesaurus: a more palatable synonym does not exist.

Yes, taken out of context this could be this is disastrous. Yes, even within the context, this is troublesome. This was Jesus’ only “destructive miracle.”¹³⁵ The word that is translated *curse*, καταράομαι (*kataraoimai*), appears four additional times in the New Testament as follows:

In the parable of the sheep and the goats: “Then he will say to those of his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthew 25:41)

Jesus teaching on loving one’s enemies: “Bless those who curse you.” (Luke 6:28)

Paul teaching on love: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” (Romans 12:14)

On taming the tongue: “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness...this should not be.” (James 3:9–10)

So, being cursed is a bad thing.¹³⁶ Clearly, we should never curse humans. If people curse us, we are to bless them instead of responding in kind. And, Jesus cursed the poor fig tree. Why? Certainly the fig tree’s withering demonstrated the sheer authority of Jesus’ voice and Jesus used the event to teach the disciples about the power of believing prayer.¹³⁷ But additionally, some scholars believe that the fig tree was the unfortunate prop in one of Jesus’ more vivid illustrated sermons on the fate of His fruitless nation.¹³⁸ Matthew and Mark positioned the fig tree incident after the Temple Clearing and immediately preceding a confrontation in which the religious leaders (who obviously had not seen the fig tree yet) questioned Jesus’ authority. Following that confrontation, Jesus shared a series of parables, many of which contained thinly veiled commentaries on the religious leaders’ lack of fruitfulness. At that time of year, fig trees would be filled with green leaves and unripe, green, disagreeable fruit.¹³⁹ However, this green, leafy fig tree had no fruit whatsoever. While Jesus did not expect the fruit to be ripe, He did expect the fruit to exist and to be in formation.

Evidently, Jesus finds utter fruitlessness frustrating. His judgment on the fig tree echoes His sobering words for those who refuse to remain in Him:

“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” (John 15:5–6)

Reflection

Read Luke 13:6–9 below and consider the parallels between the parable and Jesus' response to the fig tree.

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

Today’s Fast: Appearances

In an early confrontation with the Pharisees and teachers of the law, Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 and said: “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men’” (Matthew 15:7–9). Consistently throughout Scripture, God expresses His frustration with religiosity. The appearance of faith without the fruit of faith and worshipful words without a worship-filled heart are, in Jesus’ words, “vain.”

Today, fast all appearances. Fast facades. Be fiercely attentive to when, where, and with whom you are tempted to inflate or deflate, exaggerate or belittle your real self via speech or silence. Discuss your observations with Jesus. Ask Him to help you understand why you are investing energy in an illusion. Our reality does not frustrate Jesus. Our hypocrisy does.

Quotes

The Lenten spring has come
the light of repentance!
O brothers, let us cleanse ourselves from all evil,

crying out to the Giver of Light:
Glory to Thee, O Lover of man.¹⁴⁰

—*Traditional hymn by which Orthodox believers greet Lent
on the Wednesday before Cheese-Fare Sunday*

Sidebar: On Lent

What then remains in our search for the origins of Lent? Russo poses three options: (1) Lent inexplicably appeared as a new custom after the Council of Nicea, (2) The “alleged Egyptian post-Theophany fast” was the “dominant antecedent to Lent,” or (3) Lent grew from a fusion of several different fasts.¹⁴¹ In my research, I found no proponents of option one. However, among the scholars who acknowledged the collapse of earlier, simpler, backward extension Lenten origin theories, most shared rather strong agreement on the prominent role baptismal preparation played in the origins of what came to be known as Lent. On Lent’s continuing connection with baptism, Schmemmann’s words are simply beautiful:

But even when the Church rarely baptized adults and the institution of the catechumenate disappeared, the basic meaning of Lent remained the same. For even though we are baptized, what we constantly lose and betray is precisely that which we received at Baptism. Therefore, Easter is our return every year to our own Baptism, whereas Lent is our preparation for that return—the slow and sustained effort to perform, at the end, our own ‘passage’ or ‘pascha’ into the new life in Christ.¹⁴²

Day Nineteen

Holy is feisty. If feisty *stretches* you too much, feel free to substitute *spirited* or *plucky*.

All three are apropos to describe Jesus’ retort to the chief priests and elders when they questioned His credentials. Increasingly huffy about Jesus’ escalating influence, these leaders challenged Jesus to identify the source of His authority.

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” (Matthew 21:23)

Jesus responded to their question with another question and I see more in His strategy than a nod to the Socratic method of discussion. Of all the recorded interactions of Jesus, this is the only time Jesus instituted if-then ground rules. He said, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” (Matthew 21:24)

Peer-to-peer, we might frame this interaction as a lively debate. But from a poor, thirty-something Nazarene to the rich, religious, ruling class in Jerusalem? As I said, holy is feisty. Jesus made His answering the leaders’ question conditional upon the leaders answering whether John’s baptism was “from heaven or from men” (Matthew 21:25). In addition to linking Himself with John’s message and ministry, Jesus’ challenge exposed a disconnect between inquiry and honesty in these leaders’ lives. Placing their well-groomed heads together, the leaders pondered their dilemma:

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” (Matthew 21:25–26)

The chief priests and elders processed Jesus’ question like a game of chess, calculating the outcomes of potential moves. When they could not figure out how to secure an advantageous position, they abdicated their turn and said, “We don’t know.” They thought strategically, but not honestly. They examined “Where do we want to end up?” but not “What do we believe to be true?” When the leaders refused to answer—let alone to answer honestly—Jesus also issued a refusal: “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” (Matthew 21:27, Mark 11:33, Luke 20:8) These leaders valued positioning more than truth, and Jesus closed the question.

I repeat: Jesus closed the question. Evidently, valuing something more than truth limits our interaction with Jesus. Taken seriously, this is rather sobering. Do we value something more than truth? Have control and position become more precious to us than sincerity? Are we committed to the pursuit of emotional and intellectual honesty in God's presence? Jesus did not ask the leaders for polite acquiescence or polished theology. He simply asked them to be true.

Reflection

Lent is a time to ask ourselves if we, like the leaders in Matthew 21, value anything more than truth. Is Jesus awaiting honesty from us? Is there any question Jesus could ask, that we would rather not answer?

Today's Fast: Revisionism

Have you ever interacted with a chronic revisionist? The motivational root of revisionism seems to be either the fear of losing power or the compulsion to avoid pain. Both are pursuits of control. Pain-avoiders change the story to absolve themselves from responsibility: they revise history because the weight of reality is too crushing to bear. Power-seekers, such as the above religious leaders, revise history to maintain their dominant status. Either way, revisionism starts with a desired outcome and then works backward to fabricate an origin story. In other words, "truth" is created retroactively—which, obviously, makes it no truth at all.

Revisionism is a deadly form of self-deception and a formidable foe of intimacy with God. Today, be brutally honest with yourself: are you spinning the real story to your advantage? Have you grown comfortable with "white lies"? Do you find yourself exaggerating or

underestimating reality? Why? May God help us all, this Lenten season and beyond, to walk in truth.

Quotes

“What matters is *participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today*, and in doing so in such a way that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world, nor the reality of the world without the reality of God.”¹⁴³

—*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Sidebar: On Lent

Allow me at this point to return to my personal musings from Day One. *Which came first, the discipline of fasting or the journey of Lent? Did they grow up together? Did one mature into the other? Are they two distinct experiences that fused over time?* From this vantage point, it appears that in origin, Lent—as an extended period of fasting—is more related to preparing for baptism than preparing for Easter. Ancient pre-baptismal fasts have remained an integral part of Lenten observance even long after their ancient baptismal context lessened in universal emphasis. Which means that Lent, as we know it today, emerged through the sacred and sober remembrance of John the Baptist’s cries by the waters of the Jordan River:

“Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 3:2)

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11)

“Make straight the way for the Lord.” (John 1:23)

Day Twenty

Between this point and the accounts of the Last Supper, the gospel writers devoted the majority of their ink to the retelling of Jesus' final parables and teachings. As shown in table 3 below, one-third of Jesus' parables and two-thirds of the Jesus' teachings during this critical Passion Week space were spoken *to* or directed *at* religious leaders. After He closed the question posed by the chief priests and elders, Jesus opened a few questions of His own via the Parable of the Two Sons and the Parable of the Tenants. Teaching in the temple courts, Jesus told the story of a father who asked his two sons to go work in his vineyard. One son said "yes" and lived "no," while the second son said "no" and lived "yes." Jesus then asked: "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" (Matthew 21:31) When the leaders verbalized the obvious, Jesus linked His new question with their closed one and said:

"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him." (Matthew 21:31–32)

In His response, Jesus answered His own question clearly: Was John's baptism from heaven or from men? It was from heaven. Further, those who repented after listening to John showed themselves to be God's obedient children.

Before the leaders could regroup, Jesus told them another parable that was even more pointed. A landowner rented his well-situated vineyard to some farmers. Yet when he sent his servants to collect what was due him, the tenants beat, stoned, and killed them. Finally, the landowner sent his son hoping that he would be respected, but the tenants killed the heir as well. Then Jesus boldly asked the leaders what the owner would do to such tenants. Seemingly oblivious to whom they were in the story, they replied, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end [and] rent the vineyard to other tenants" (Matthew 21:41). So Jesus spoke plainly:

“I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matthew 21:43). When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them (Matthew 21:45).

Holy rebukes. And this was just a warm-up to the painfully public critique Jesus made of the teachers of the law and Pharisees recorded in Matthew 23. Jesus’ message rang clear in this interim: God’s love language is not words alone. We can talk all we want, but at the end of the day, we will be judged by what we did. “Where then is mercy?” some might ask. For them then and for us now, mercy is inherent within Jesus’ rebukes because to hear them is to still have breath to respond to them with repentance.

Reflection

Oh, if this book were titled *100 Days of Decrease* I would have loved to linger in each parable and teaching! Select a parable or one of the teachings aimed at the religious leaders below and ask God to give you the strength to find yourself in the story.

Table 3: Between the Questioning of Jesus and the Last Supper

Parables

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Parable of the Two sons	21:28-32			
Parable of the Tenants	21:33-41	12:1-12	20:9-18	
Parable of the Wedding Banquet	22:1-14		14:16-24	
<i>Parable of the Wise Servant</i>	24:45-51	13:34-37		
<i>Parable of the Ten Virgins</i>	25:1-13			
<i>Parable of the Talents</i>	25:14-30		19:12-27	
<i>Parable of the Fig Tree</i>			21:29-36	
<i>Parable of the Sheep and Goats</i>	25:31-46			
<i>Parable of the Seed</i>				12:24

Teachings

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
On paying taxes to Caesar	22:19-22	12:13-17	20:20-26	

On marriage after the resurrection	22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-40
On the greatest commandment	22:34-40	12:28-34	
On whose Son is the Christ	22:41-46	12:35-37	20:41-44
On seven woes	23:1-32	12:38-39	20:45-47
<i>On the widow's offering</i>		12:41-44	21:1-4
On Jesus' lament for Jerusalem	23:33-39		13:34-35
<i>On signs of the end of the age</i>	24:1-44	13:1-33	21:5-28
<i>On walking in the light</i>			12:35-50

Today's Fast: Leavened Bread

During the Exodus, God's people hurriedly left Egypt and "took the dough before the yeast was added" (Exodus 12:34, 39). Yeast became a symbol of what was to be left behind in Egypt: hypocrisy, corruption, and bondage. Post-Exodus, "possibly because fermentation implied disintegration and corruption, leaven was excluded from all offerings placed on the altar to be sacrificed to God (Ex. 23:18; 34:25)."¹⁴⁴ Jesus used leaven as a metaphor of false teaching and hypocrisy: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1). And to this day during the Jewish Passover, leavened breads are fasted to commemorate the Israelites' deliverance from slavery.

Today, I invite you to fast leavened breads as a symbol of rejecting hypocrisy. Feel free to take up the challenge of buying or making unleavened breads, or simply fast flour entirely. Before each yeast-free meal, pause quietly and ask God to search your heart for any remnants of hypocrisy.

Quotes

"God desires that his people cease their unjust practices, and their neglect of the poor and hungry. Depriving oneself of food is not necessarily laudable in God's eyes, but depriving others of food is indeed culpable. Tearing one's garments as a sign of repentance does not atone for failing to provide clothing to those who need it."¹⁴⁵

—Marianne Meye Thompson

Sidebar: On Lent

Today we transition from an examination of the historical origins of Lent to an exploration of historical practices of Lent. One of my most delightful discoveries in writing *40 Days of Decrease* was the mosaic of practices associated with Lenten observance. Obviously, not all practices were manifest in all ages by all who honored Lent. Of Lent's many traditions, only a few—most of which were more frequently substantiated in the research¹⁴⁶—will be listed alphabetically in Table 3 tomorrow. Space and time limit all that could be considered in this area, so allow me to preempt disappointment in the not-remotely-exhaustive nature of what follows. First, it is well beyond the scope of this work to create a timeline for each practice (though such a chronology would be fascinating). Second, in the same way, it is also sadly beyond the scope of this work to contrast the practices and liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox¹⁴⁷ and Western Roman Catholic Churches preceding and following the Great Schism of 1042 A.D.¹⁴⁸

Notes

Prologue

¹ Alicia Britt Chole, *Anonymous: Jesus' Hidden Years and Yours* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2006), 89–90.

About

¹ In Eastern Orthodox Churches, the forty days of Great Lent begin on a Monday and are inclusive of Sundays. The six weeks of Great Lent conclude on Palm Sunday when Holy Week begins. “Balancing the seven weeks of Lent and Holy Week, there follows after Easter a corresponding season of fifty days of thanksgiving, concluding with Pentecost.” *The Lenten Triodion*, Service Books of the Orthodox Church (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon, 1994, 1977), 13–14.

¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 31.

Day 1

¹ From The Center for Liturgy at St. Louis University, http://www.liturgy.slu.edu/romanmissal/christ_has_died.html. Accessed December 15, 2014.

¹ This first of three acclamations making up the Memorial Acclamation in the first English version of the *Roman Missal* has been described as more of a Latin adaption than a Latin translation. As of 2008, the first acclamation of what is now called the Mystery of Faith reads, “Dying you destroyed our death. Rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.” See <http://content.ocp.org/shared/pdf/general/TL-NewRomanMissal-MysteryofFaith.pdf>.

¹ OED Online, s. v. “sojourn, n.” December 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/184006?rkey=8IRiLR&result=1> (accessed December 22, 2014).

¹ Eugene Peterson, “Transparent Lives,” *The Christian Century*, November 29, 2003, 23 (accessed August 16, 2014).

¹ John H. Coe, “Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation: Opening to Spiritual Formation in the Cross of the Spirit,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 77.

Day 2

¹ Peterson, 23.

¹ Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 24.

¹ Robert F. Taft, “Lent: A Meditation,” *Worship* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983): 132.

¹ See chapters 8–10. The entire text can be read online at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bernard/loving_god.

¹ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Alphabetical Collection, Poemen 15, as quoted in Everett Ferguson, *Inheriting Wisdom: Readings for Today from Ancient Christian Writers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 217.

¹ Thomas Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit* (New York: Lantern Books, 2000), 67.

Day 3

¹ Carole C. Carlson, *Corrie Ten Boom, Her Life, Her Faith: A Biography* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1983), as cited in chapter 9 of Thomas E. Hollingsworth, *The Effective Christian*, 2001. <http://www.theeffectivechristian.org/index.htm>.

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Show Me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 13–14.

¹ Mother Maria and Diokleia Kallistos, *The Lenten Triodion* (South Canaan, PA: Saint Tikhon’s Seminary Press), 23.

¹ William P. Saunder, “The Origins of Lent,” *Catholic Herald*, March 2, 2006.

¹ Nicholas V. Russo, “The Early History of Lent,” *Lent Library* (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013):19, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193181.pdf>.

Day 4

¹ Schmemmann, 29–30.

¹ John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 370.

¹ Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 43.

¹ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, Harvest/HBJ ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1983), 237.

¹ Nicholas V. Russo, "The Early History of Lent," *Lent Library* (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013):19, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193181.pdf>.

¹ Ibid.

¹ John Paul Abdelsayed, "A History of the Great Lent," *Coptic Church Review* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 19.

¹ Russo, "Early History," 18; Abdelsayed, 19.

¹ Abdelsayed, 22–23.

¹ Nicholas V. Russo, "A Note on the Role of Secret Mark in the Search for the Origins of Lent," *Studia Liturgica* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 196; Abdelsayed, 23.

¹ Abdelsayed, 22, quoting Origen: "They fast, therefore, who have lost the bridegroom; we having him with us cannot fast. Nor do we say that we relax the restraints of Christian abstinence; for we have the forty days consecrated to fasting, we have the fourth and sixth days of the week, on which we fast solemnly."

¹ Russo, "Early History," 18.

¹ Schmemmann, 135.

Day 5

¹ See Isaiah 40:3 and Matthew 3:4.

¹ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 101–102, Kindle.

¹ Abelard, *Sic et Non*, quoted in Burge, *Heloise and Abelard*, 54. As cited in Diana Butler Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), loc. 1475, Kindle.

¹ Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 192.

¹ Warnie Lewis, ed., *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 285.

¹ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, vol. 5, chapter 24, no. 12. New Advent. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250105.htm>.

¹ Ibid., chapter 23, no. 2.

¹ Ibid., chapter 23, no. 1. Emphasis mine.

Day 6

¹ Since dates of antiquity are understandably difficult to assert with certainty, Throughout *40 Days of Decrease*, I have chosen to reference time between events, as there seems to be more scholarly agreement with regard to the general ordering of events than the precise dating of events. Johnston, Ellisen, and Cheney suggest the

dates of December AD 29 for John's imprisonment and March AD 31 for John's beheading, hence my estimate of fifteen months. See Johnston M. Cheney and Stanley A. Ellisen, *Jesus Christ the Greatest Life: A Unique Blending of the Four Gospels*, Logos Edition (Eugene, OR: Paradise Publishing Inc., 1999), 47, 65.

¹ See Matthew 14:3–12 and Mark 6:14–29.

¹ Gayle Erwin, *The Jesus Style* (Cathedral City, CA: Yahshua Publishing, 2011), loc. 113, Kindle.

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour: The Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus* (1857; repr., London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 419. See also Spurgeon, "The Pitifulness of the Lord the Comfort of the Afflicted," Bible Hub Online Bible Study Suite, accessed August 26, 2014, http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/spurgeon/the_pitifulness_of_the_lord_the_comfort_of_the_afflicted.htm.

¹ Anthony Reading, *Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 150.

¹ Elie Kaplan Spitz, *Healing from Despair: Choosing Wholeness in a Broken World* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2008), 14.

¹ Spurgeon, "Pitifulness."

¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 24, no. 2.

¹ As a side note, I found the excerpts from Bishop Polycrates' letter fascinating and wondered if they reflected second-century foreshadowing of the East/West schism to come, and/or the transition away from Jewish customs.

Day 7

¹ See Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, and Luke 9:21-22.

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 337.

¹ Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 153, Kindle.

¹ I first heard of Bridegroom Fasts through the teachings of Basilea Schlink, German intellectual, author, and founder of a Lutheran order called the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 88.

¹ John Paul Abdelsayed, "A History of the Great Lent," *Coptic Church Review* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 32.

¹ Schmemmann, 96.

¹ Eusebius, chapter 24, no. 13.

Day 8

¹ John H. Coe, "Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation: Opening to Spiritual Formation in the Cross of the Spirit," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 57

¹ *Lent with the Saints* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2006), 37.

¹ Saunder.

¹ Herman Lilienthal Lonsdale, *Lent, Past and Present: A Study of the Primitive Origin of Lent, Its Purpose and Usages* [facsimile] (New York, NY: Thomas Whittaker, 1895), 68.

¹ Leah Payne, PhD, comments on *On the History of Lent*, essay by Alicia Britt Chole for CHTH 511 and CHTH 512/Christian History and Theology, George Fox University, August, 2013.

Day 9

¹ OED Online, s. v. “rationalism, n.” Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/158504?redirectedFrom=rationalism> (accessed December 22, 2014).

¹ Robert K. Merton, “Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Osiris*, 4. (1938):425–426, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0369-7827%281938%291%3A4%3C360%3ASTASIS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>.

¹ Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1989), 213–214.

¹ Paul Stoller, “Rationality,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 253

¹ Yancey, 200–201.

¹ Russo, “Early History,” 25.

¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

Day 10

¹ See Matthew 20:29–34, Mark 10:46–52, and Luke 18:35–43.

¹ Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), loc. 1630, Kindle.

¹ Gerald G. May, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 133.

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New Jersey: J.P. Piper Books, 2014), 99.

¹ May, 132–133.

¹ Maria and Kallistos, 30.

Day 11

¹ OED Online, s. v. “classism, n.” Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/33906?redirectedFrom=classism> (accessed December 23, 2014).

¹ Maria and Kallistos, 235.

¹ Russo points out in “Early History,” 19, that in Athanasius’ “first five letters (329–333 AD), [he] indicates that the ‘holy fast’ spans only the six days before Pascha, perhaps revealing that Lent had not yet been observed in Egypt. When he introduces the forty-day Lent in his sixth letter (334 A.D), [he] continues to note the beginning of the more ancient six-day fast of ‘the holy days of Pascha,’ even though it is now part of the new six-week fast.”

¹ Saunder; Schmemmann, 136; Talley, Thomas J., *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books Liturgical Press, 1986), 214; Abdelsayed, 40.

¹ Russo, “Early History,” 23.

¹ Maria and Kallistos, 30.

¹ Russo, “Early History,” 20.

¹ Talley, 214; Patricia M. Mann, “How Rituals Form and Transform: The Scrutiny Rite from Medieval to Modern Times” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2011), 50, http://aladinrc.wrlc.org/bitstream/handle/1961/9309/MANN_cua_0043A_10153display.pdf?sequence=1; Dominic E. Serra, “New Observations about the Scrutinies of the Elect in Early Roman Practice,” *Worship* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983), 519.

¹ Schmemmann, 136; Russo, “Early History,” 20.

¹ Schmemmann, 136.

¹ Mann, 120.

Day 12

¹ Yes, I just quoted a Buddhist monk’s musings on ecosystems. No, I am not remotely a Universalist. Please, do not send me letters of concern. All who live, whether they acknowledge Jesus as God or not, are wonderfully saturated with God’s fingerprints. We are all the work of His hands. Therefore, I believe that I can learn from everyone who lives, because everyone who lives was created by my God. Thich Nhat Hanh, “Interbeing,” in *Seeing Systems: Peace, Justice, and Sustainability* (Portland, OR: Northwest Earth Institute, 2014), 18.

¹ *It’s a Wonderful Life*, directed by Frank Capra, Liberty Films (II), 1947.

¹ For more on Karinthy’s role in the Six Degrees of Separation theory, see Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Science, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 25ff.

¹ George Kalantzis, “From the Porch to the Cross: Ancient Christian Approaches to Spiritual Formation,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 81, accessed December 3, 2012, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

¹ Abdelsayed, 20; Schmemmann, 136.

¹ Saunder.

¹ Ibid.

¹ Russo, “Early History,” 20.

¹ Schmemmann, 136.

Day 13

¹ See Matthew 26:12, Mark 14:8, and John 12:7.

¹ The full text of *Pliny’s Natural History* can be read online at The University of California, California Digital Library, https://archive.org/stream/plinysnaturalhis00plinrich/plinysnaturalhis00plinrich_djvu.txt

¹ Andrew Dalby, *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices*, vol. 1 of *California Studies in Food and Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 83–88.

¹ J. D. Douglas and N. Hillyer, *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 855.

¹ Thomas Walsh's English translation of the anonymously penned Spanish poem *Soneta a Cristo Crucificado*, often attributed to John of the Cross. *Hispanic Anthology: Poems Translated from the Spanish by English and North American Poets*, collected and arranged by Thomas Walsh (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920). <http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/POESIA/ACRISTEN.HTM>.

Day 14

¹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*, Logos edition (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

¹ See John 12:16.

¹ Nouwen, *Show Me the Way*, 153.

¹ Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus*, 153, loc. 2627–2634, Kindle.

¹ Stephen Hampton, "'Welcome Dear Feast of Lent': Rival Understandings of the Forty-Day Fast in Early Stuart England," *Journal of Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (October 1, 2012): 623.

¹ *Ibid.*, 632.

¹ *Ibid.*, 623.

¹ Lonsdale, 16, 30.

¹ Saunder, writing for the Catholic Herald, spoke of the weight of Irenaeus' words: "The importance of the passage, nevertheless, remains that since the time of 'our forefathers'—always an expression for the apostles—a 40-day period of Lenten preparation existed. However, the actual practices and duration of Lent were still not homogeneous throughout the Church."

¹ Eusebius, chapter 23, no. 1.

¹ Russo, "Early History," 18.

Day 15

¹ Anthony Reading, *Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 17.

¹ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2003), 21.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, book 2, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Pub., 2003), 107.

¹ May, 45.

¹ Russo, "Secret Mark," 183, summarizes: "It was a long-held assumption among liturgical scholars that the post-Nicene emergence of a forty-day pre-paschal Lent owed its *origins* to the gradual backward extension of the primitive one- or two-day Easter fast of the kind known to Tertullian (*De ieiunio* 13–14)." See also Russo, "Early History," 19, which states: "Accordingly, it was assumed that the forty-day Lent that we encounter almost

everywhere by the mid-fourth century must have been the result of a gradual lengthening of the pre-Easter fast by adding days and weeks to the original one- or two-day observance.”

¹ Maria and Kallistos, 29.

¹ Abdelsayed, 18.

¹ Thomas Hopko, *The Lenten Spring: Readings for Great Lent* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 81; Lonsdale, 18, 33, 35.

¹ For a modern example of this line of reasoning, consider Mann, 50.

¹ Russo, “Secret Mark,” 74.

Day 16

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985).

¹ Yancey, 115

¹ Another frequently mentioned source was Thomas J. Talley. However, Talley’s theory (how a post-theophany fast attached to Pascha to form Lent) was based in part upon Talley’s confidence in the highly controversial Secret Mark. For a strong but respectful critique of that confidence that maintains the contribution of Talley to this subject, please see Nicholas V. Russo, “Secret Mark,” 181–197.

¹ E. Johnson, “From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent,” *Studia Liturgica* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 196.

¹ Abdelsayed 18–19.

Day 17

¹ Elmer L. Gray, “Money Changers,” edited by Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1149.

¹ OED Online, s.v. “apathy, n.” Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/9052?redirectedFrom=apathy> (accessed December 26, 2014).

¹ *Roget’s 21st Century Thesaurus, Third Edition*, s.v. “apathy.” Thesaurus.com, <http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/apathy> (accessed Dec. 26, 2014).

¹ Alicia Britt Chole, “Week 32: The Discipline of Restraint,” in *The 7th Year*, (Rogersville, MO: Onewholeworld, Inc., 2011).

¹ Informal conversation with Dr. Beth Grant, co-founder of Project Rescue, www.projectrescue.org.

¹ George MacDonald, *The Hope of the Gospel* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 19 as quoted in Yancey, 116.

¹ Russo, “Early History,” 19.

Day 18

¹ Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, The Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001).

¹ As an interesting aside, in his commentary, Matthew Henry points out that Jesus' curse reverses the very first blessing God gave: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful.'" See Matthew Henry, "Genesis 1:28," *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994, Logos).

¹ See Matthew 21:21–22 and Mark 11:23–24.

¹ H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Bible Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997).

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, Logos).

¹ Traditional hymn by which Orthodox believers greet Lent on the Wednesday before Cheese-Fare Sunday. Quoted in Schmemmann, 27.

¹ *Ibid.*, 25. For further consideration, please see Talley, 214; Robert B. Kruschwitz, "The Early History of Lent," in *Study Guides for Lent*, ed. Robert B. Kruschwitz (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013), 4, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193431.pdf>; Russo, "Early History," 20; Abdelsayed, 20–23; Johnson, 195; Schmemmann, 135; and Maria and Kallistos, 30–31. Additionally, for Russo's respectful evaluation of Talley's conclusions based upon Secret Mark, see Russo "Early History," 21.

¹ Schmemmann, 14.

Day 19

¹ Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Albrecht Schönherr, eds., *Ethics*, vol.6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, English-language edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996–2014).

Day 20

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 807.

¹ Marianne Meye Thompson, "Turning and Returning to God: Reflections on the Lectionary Texts for Lent," *Interpretation* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 6.

¹ One of the most fascinating practices was, unfortunately, only mentioned in Lonsdale without references through which more research could have been pursued. Lonsdale states that in the Lenten season, civil law "forbade all prosecution of men in criminal actions which might bring them to corporal punishment and torture;" lawsuits were postponed; "bodily punishment such as flogging and branding" were forbidden; and that "imperial indulgences [were] shown especially during this great week by the Emperors to all prisoners—criminals as well as debtors." Lonsdale, 73–74, 120–121.

¹ For a readable summary of Orthodox Lenten practice by week and focus, see Schmemmann, 17–29. Also of interest is Hopko, 9.

¹ For more on this contrast, consider Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), loc. 8085 and 8520; Maria and Kallistos, 15, 17; Schmemmann, 137; and Abdelsayed, 31–32.

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¹ Alicia Britt Chole, *Anonymous: Jesus' Hidden Years and Yours* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2006), 89–90.

About

² In Eastern Orthodox Churches, the forty days of Great Lent begin on a Monday and are inclusive of Sundays. The six weeks of Great Lent conclude on Palm Sunday when Holy Week begins. "Balancing the seven weeks of Lent and Holy Week, there follows after Easter a corresponding season of fifty days of thanksgiving, concluding with Pentecost." *The Lenten Triodion*, Service Books of the Orthodox Church (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon, 1994, 1977), 13–14.

³ Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 31.

Day 1

⁴ From The Center for Liturgy at St. Louis University, http://www.liturgy.slu.edu/romanmissal/christ_has_died.html. Accessed December 15, 2014.

⁵ This first of three acclamations making up the Memorial Acclamation in the first English version of the *Roman Missal* has been described as more of a Latin adaptation than a Latin translation.

As of 2008, the first acclamation of what is now called the Mystery of Faith reads, “Dying you destroyed our death. Rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.” See <http://content.ocp.org/shared/pdf/general/TL-NewRomanMissal-MysteryofFaith.pdf>.

⁶ OED Online, s. v. “sojourn, n.” December 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/184006?rskey=8IRiLR&result=1> (accessed December 22, 2014).

⁷ Eugene Peterson, “Transparent Lives,” *The Christian Century*, November 29, 2003, 23 (accessed August 16, 2014).

⁸ John H. Coe, “Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation: Opening to Spiritual Formation in the Cross of the Spirit,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 77.

Day 2

⁹ Peterson, 23.

¹⁰ Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 24.

¹¹ Robert F. Taft, “Lent: A Meditation,” *Worship* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983): 132.

¹² See chapters 8–10. The entire text can be read online at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bernard/loving_god.

¹³ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Alphabetical Collection, Poemen 15, as quoted in Everett Ferguson, *Inheriting Wisdom: Readings for Today from Ancient Christian Writers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 217.

¹⁴ Thomas Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit* (New York: Lantern Books, 2000), 67.

Day 3

¹⁵ Carole C. Carlson, *Corrie Ten Boom, Her Life, Her Faith: A Biography* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1983), as cited in chapter 9 of Thomas E. Hollingsworth, *The Effective Christian*, 2001. <http://www.theeffectivechristian.org/index.htm>.

¹⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Show Me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 13–14.

¹⁷ Mother Maria and Diokleia Kallistos, *The Lenten Triodion* (South Canaan, PA: Saint Tikhon’s Seminary Press), 23.

¹⁸ William P. Saunder, “The Origins of Lent,” *Catholic Herald*, March 2, 2006.

¹⁹ Nicholas V. Russo, “The Early History of Lent,” *Lent Library* (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013):19, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193181.pdf>.

Day 4

²⁰ Schmemmann, 29–30.

²¹ John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 370.

²² Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 43.

²³ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, Harvest/HBJ ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1983), 237.

²⁴ Nicholas V. Russo, "The Early History of Lent," *Lent Library* (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013):19, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193181.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John Paul Abdelsayed, "A History of the Great Lent," *Coptic Church Review* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 19.

²⁷ Russo, "Early History," 18; Abdelsayed, 19.

²⁸ Abdelsayed, 22–23.

²⁹ Nicholas V. Russo, "A Note on the Role of Secret Mark in the Search for the Origins of Lent," *Studia Liturgica* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 196; Abdelsayed, 23.

³⁰ Abdelsayed, 22, quoting Origen: "They fast, therefore, who have lost the bridegroom; we having him with us cannot fast. Nor do we say that we relax the restraints of Christian abstinence; for we have the forty days consecrated to fasting, we have the fourth and sixth days of the week, on which we fast solemnly."

³¹ Russo, "Early History," 18.

³² Schmemmann, 135.

Day 5

³³ See Isaiah 40:3 and Matthew 3:4.

³⁴ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 101–102, Kindle.

³⁵ Abelard, *Sic et Non*, quoted in Burge, *Heloise and Abelard*, 54. As cited in Diana Butler Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), loc. 1475, Kindle.

³⁶ Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 192.

³⁷ Warnie Lewis, ed., *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 285.

³⁸ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, vol. 5, chapter 24, no. 12. New Advent. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250105.htm>.

³⁹ Ibid., chapter 23, no. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., chapter 23, no. 1. Emphasis mine.

Day 6

⁴¹ Since dates of antiquity are understandably difficult to assert with certainty, Throughout *40 Days of Decrease*, I have chosen to reference time between events, as there seems to be more scholarly agreement with regard to the general ordering of events than the precise dating of events. Johnston, Ellisen, and Cheney suggest the dates of December AD 29 for John's imprisonment and March AD 31 for John's beheading, hence my estimate of fifteen months. See Johnston M. Cheney and Stanley A. Ellisen, *Jesus Christ the Greatest Life: A Unique Blending of the Four Gospels*, Logos Edition (Eugene, OR: Paradise Publishing Inc., 1999), 47, 65.

⁴² See Matthew 14:3–12 and Mark 6:14–29.

⁴³ Gayle Erwin, *The Jesus Style* (Cathedral City, CA: Yahshua Publishing, 2011), loc. 113, Kindle.

⁴⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour: The Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus* (1857; repr., London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 419. See also Spurgeon, “The Pitifulness of the Lord the Comfort of the Afflicted,” Bible Hub Online Bible Study Suite, accessed August 26, 2014, http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/spurgeon/the_pitifulness_of_the_lord_the_comfort_of_the_afflicted.htm.

⁴⁵ Anthony Reading, *Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 150.

⁴⁶ Elie Kaplan Spitz, *Healing from Despair: Choosing Wholeness in a Broken World* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2008), 14.

⁴⁷ Spurgeon, “Pitifulness.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter 24, no. 2.

⁴⁹ As a side note, I found the excerpts from Bishop Polycrates’ letter fascinating and wondered if they reflected second-century foreshadowing of the East/West schism to come, and/or the transition away from Jewish customs.

Day 7

⁵⁰ See Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, and Luke 9:21-22.

⁵¹ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 337.

⁵² Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 153, Kindle.

⁵³ I first heard of Bridegroom Fasts through the teachings of Basilea Schlink, German intellectual, author, and founder of a Lutheran order called the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary.

⁵⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 88.

⁵⁵ John Paul Abdelsayed, “A History of the Great Lent,” *Coptic Church Review* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 32.

⁵⁶ Schmemmann, 96.

⁵⁷ Eusebius, chapter 24, no. 13.

Day 8

⁵⁸ John H. Coe, “Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation: Opening to Spiritual Formation in the Cross of the Spirit,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 57

⁵⁹ *Lent with the Saints* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2006), 37.

⁶⁰ Saunder.

⁶¹ Herman Lilienthal Lonsdale, *Lent, Past and Present: A Study of the Primitive Origin of Lent, Its Purpose and Usages* [facsimile] (New York, NY: Thomas Whittaker, 1895), 68.

⁶² Leah Payne, PhD, comments on *On the History of Lent*, essay by Alicia Britt Chole for CHTH 511 and CHTH 512/Christian History and Theology, George Fox University, August, 2013.

Day 9

⁶³ OED Online, s. v. “rationalism, n.” Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/158504?redirectedFrom=rationalism>
 (accessed December 22, 2014).

⁶⁴ Robert K. Merton, “Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England,”
Osiris, 4. (1938):425–426, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0369-7827%281938%291%3A4%3C360%3ASTASIS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>.

⁶⁵ Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1989), 213–214.

⁶⁶ Paul Stoller, “Rationality,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 253

⁶⁷ Yancey, 200–201.

⁶⁸ Russo, “Early History,” 25.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

Day 10

⁷¹ See Matthew 20:29–34, Mark 10:46–52, and Luke 18:35–43.

⁷² Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), loc. 1630, Kindle.

⁷³ Gerald G. May, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 133.

⁷⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New Jersey: J.P. Piper Books, 2014), 99.

⁷⁵ May, 132–133.

⁷⁶ Maria and Kallistos, 30.

Day 11

⁷⁷ OED Online, s. v. “classism, n.” Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/33906?redirectedFrom=classism> (accessed December 23, 2014).

⁷⁸ Maria and Kallistos, 235.

⁷⁹ Russo points out in “Early History,” 19, that in Athanasius’ “first five letters (329–333 AD), [he] indicates that the ‘holy fast’ spans only the six days before Pascha, perhaps revealing that Lent had not yet been observed in Egypt. When he introduces the forty-day Lent in his sixth letter (334 A.D), [he] continues to note the beginning of the more ancient six-day fast of ‘the holy days of Pascha,’ even though it is now part of the new six-week fast.”

⁸⁰ Saunder; Schmemmann, 136; Talley, Thomas J., *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books Liturgical Press, 1986), 214; Abdelsayed, 40.

⁸¹ Russo, “Early History,” 23.

⁸² Maria and Kallistos, 30.

⁸³ Russo, “Early History,” 20.

⁸⁴ Talley, 214; Patricia M. Mann, “How Rituals Form and Transform: The Scrutiny Rite from Medieval to Modern Times” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2011), 50, http://aladinrc.wrlc.org/bitstream/handle/1961/9309/MANN_cua_0043A_10153display.pdf?sequence=1; Dominic E. Serra, “New Observations about the Scrutinies of the Elect in Early Roman Practice,” *Worship* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983), 519.

⁸⁵ Schmemmann, 136; Russo, “Early History,” 20.

⁸⁶ Schmemmann, 136.

⁸⁷ Mann, 120.

Day 12

⁸⁸ Yes, I just quoted a Buddhist monk’s musings on ecosystems. No, I am not remotely a Universalist. Please, do not send me letters of concern. All who live, whether they acknowledge Jesus as God or not, are wonderfully saturated with God’s fingerprints. We are all the work of His hands. Therefore, I believe that I can learn from everyone who lives, because everyone who lives was created by my God. Thich Nhat Hanh, “Interbeing,” in *Seeing Systems: Peace, Justice, and Sustainability* (Portland, OR: Northwest Earth Institute, 2014), 18.

⁸⁹ *It’s a Wonderful Life*, directed by Frank Capra, Liberty Films (II), 1947.

⁹⁰ For more on Karinthy’s role in the Six Degrees of Separation theory, see Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Science, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 25ff.

⁹¹ George Kalantzis, “From the Porch to the Cross: Ancient Christian Approaches to Spiritual Formation,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 81, accessed December 3, 2012, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

⁹² Abdelsayed, 20; Schmemmann, 136.

⁹³ Saunder.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Russo, “Early History,” 20.

⁹⁶ Schmemmann, 136.

Day 13

⁹⁷ See Matthew 26:12, Mark 14:8, and John 12:7.

⁹⁸ The full text of *Pliny’s Natural History* can be read online at The University of California, California Digital Library, https://archive.org/stream/plinysnaturalhis00plinrich/plinysnaturalhis00plinrich_djvu.txt

⁹⁹ Andrew Dalby, *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices*, vol. 1 of *California Studies in Food and Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 83–88.

¹⁰⁰ J. D. Douglas and N. Hillyer, *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 855.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Walsh’s English translation of the anonymously penned Spanish poem *Soneta a Cristo Crucificado*, often attributed to John of the Cross. *Hispanic Anthology: Poems Translated from*

the Spanish by English and North American Poets, collected and arranged by Thomas Walsh (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920). <http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/POESIA/ACRISTEN.HTM>.

Day 14

¹⁰² James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*, Logos edition (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

¹⁰³ See John 12:16.

¹⁰⁴ Nouwen, *Show Me the Way*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus*, 153, loc. 2627–2634, Kindle.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Hampton, “‘Welcome Dear Feast of Lent’: Rival Understandings of the Forty-Day Fast in Early Stuart England,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (October 1, 2012): 623.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 632.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 623.

¹⁰⁹ Lonsdale, 16, 30.

¹¹⁰ Saunder, writing for the Catholic Herald, spoke of the weight of Irenaeus' words: “The importance of the passage, nevertheless, remains that since the time of ‘our forefathers’—always an expression for the apostles—a 40-day period of Lenten preparation existed. However, the actual practices and duration of Lent were still not homogeneous throughout the Church.”

¹¹¹ Eusebius, chapter 23, no. 1.

¹¹² Russo, “Early History,” 18.

Day 15

¹¹³ Anthony Reading, *Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 17.

¹¹⁴ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2003), 21.

¹¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, book 2, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Pub., 2003), 107.

¹¹⁶ May, 45.

¹¹⁷ Russo, “Secret Mark,” 183, summarizes: “It was a long-held assumption among liturgical scholars that the post-Nicene emergence of a forty-day pre-paschal Lent owed its *origins* to the gradual backward extension of the primitive one- or two-day Easter fast of the kind known to Tertullian (*De ieiunio* 13–14).” See also Russo, “Early History,” 19, which states: “Accordingly, it was assumed that the forty-day Lent that we encounter almost everywhere by the mid-fourth century must have been the result of a gradual lengthening of the pre-Easter fast by adding days and weeks to the original one- or two-day observance.”

¹¹⁸ Maria and Kallistos, 29.

¹¹⁹ Abdelsayed, 18.

¹²⁰ Thomas Hopko, *The Lenten Spring: Readings for Great Lent* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 81; Lonsdale, 18, 33, 35.

¹²¹ For a modern example of this line of reasoning, consider Mann, 50.

¹²² Russo, “Secret Mark,” 74.

Day 16

¹²³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985).

¹²⁴ Yancey, 115

¹²⁵ Another frequently mentioned source was Thomas J. Talley. However, Talley’s theory (how a post-theophany fast attached to Pascha to form Lent) was based in part upon Talley’s confidence in the highly controversial Secret Mark. For a strong but respectful critique of that confidence that maintains the contribution of Talley to this subject, please see Nicholas V. Russo, “Secret Mark,” 181–197.

¹²⁶ E. Johnson, “From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent,” *Studia Liturgica* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 196.

¹²⁷ Abdelsayed 18–19.

Day 17

¹²⁸ Elmer L. Gray, “Money Changers,” edited by Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1149.

¹²⁹ OED Online, s.v. “apathy, n.” Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/9052?redirectedFrom=apathy> (accessed December 26, 2014).

¹³⁰ *Roget’s 21st Century Thesaurus, Third Edition*, s.v. “apathy.” Thesaurus.com,
<http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/apathy> (accessed Dec. 26, 2014).

¹³¹ Alicia Britt Chole, “Week 32: The Discipline of Restraint,” in *The 7th Year*, (Rogersville, MO: Onewholeworld, Inc., 2011).

¹³² Informal conversation with Dr. Beth Grant, co-founder of Project Rescue,
www.projectrescue.org.

¹³³ George MacDonald, *The Hope of the Gospel* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 19 as quoted in Yancey, 116.

¹³⁴ Russo, “Early History,” 19.

Day 18

¹³⁵ Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, The Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001).

¹³⁶ As an interesting aside, in his commentary, Matthew Henry points out that Jesus’ curse reverses the very first blessing God gave: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful.’” See Matthew Henry, “Genesis 1:28,” *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994, Logos).

¹³⁷ See Matthew 21:21–22 and Mark 11:23–24.

¹³⁸ H. L. Willmington, *Willmington’s Bible Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997).

¹³⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, Logos).

¹⁴⁰ Traditional hymn by which Orthodox believers greet Lent on the Wednesday before Cheese-Fare Sunday. Quoted in Schmemmann, 27.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 25. For further consideration, please see Talley, 214; Robert B. Kruschwitz, “The Early History of Lent,” in *Study Guides for Lent*, ed. Robert B. Kruschwitz (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013), 4, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193431.pdf>; Russo, “Early History,” 20; Abdelsayed, 20–23; Johnson, 195; Schmemmann, 135; and Maria and Kallistos, 30–31. Additionally, for Russo’s respectful evaluation of Talley’s conclusions based upon Secret Mark, see Russo “Early History,” 21.

¹⁴² Schmemmann, 14.

Day 19

¹⁴³ Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Albrecht Schönherr, eds., *Ethics*, vol.6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, English-language edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996–2014).

Day 20

¹⁴⁴ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 807.

¹⁴⁵ Marianne Meye Thompson, “Turning and Returning to God: Reflections on the Lectionary Texts for Lent,” *Interpretation* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 6.

¹⁴⁶ One of the most fascinating practices was, unfortunately, only mentioned in Lonsdale without references through which more research could have been pursued. Lonsdale states that in the Lenten season, civil law “forbade all prosecution of men in criminal actions which might bring them to corporal punishment and torture;” lawsuits were postponed; “bodily punishment such as flogging and branding” were forbidden; and that “imperial indulgences [were] shown especially during this great week by the Emperors to all prisoners—criminals as well as debtors.” Lonsdale, 73–74, 120–121.

¹⁴⁷ For a readable summary of Orthodox Lenten practice by week and focus, see Schmemmann, 17–29. Also of interest is Hopko, 9.

¹⁴⁸ For more on this contrast, consider Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), loc. 8085 and 8520; Maria and Kallistos, 15, 17; Schmemmann, 137; and Abdelsayed, 31–32.