



# JOURNEY INWARD *to* JOURNEY OUTWARD

## **The Journey Outward, Week 3: MAKE THE CONNECTION**

### **Summary**

*This week we intentionally connect our inner journey with our outer journey, asking, “how do we show up for others?” The articles challenge us not to step into savior mode but instead call us to deep humility and integrity as we notice the impacts of mis-guided ways of engaging with those around us.*

### **Introduction**

So far in the journey outward, we have been all about connection: connection to creation, connection to neighbor. But this week, we invite you to make a different connection: the connection between your own inward journey and your particular outward journey.

We will examine ourselves and our spiritual practices, convinced that how we show up for others is intimately related to the personal work that God does with us. The inward journey shapes the outward journey, and vice versa.

Our guiding scripture is Isaiah 58. In it, the people have gone through the motions of prayer and fasting, but they haven't had the change of heart that results in a true outward journey of justice and mercy. Isaiah challenges them to connect differently – to let themselves actually be changed by the people and situations around them – and then to see how their relationship with God changes too.

Many of the readings focus on the relationship between spiritual practices and action. We will look at our own practices like prayer, confession, reflection, and ask how they affect our outward journey.

We will name ways that religion, including Christianity, have failed their core purpose of love and talk about the “white savior complex,” where actions may be well-meaning but are mis-guided. All this is to help us have integrity between our inward and outward journeys.

## Gathering

- Go over names again.
- Report on how did your faith practice go last week? Did anyone make a new relationship? Did anyone catch themselves starting to be judgmental and move to curiosity instead?

## Discussion based on the readings:

### 1) Isaiah 58

- a. Summarize the basic themes of Isaiah 58.
- b. Share your reactions to the idea that the “fast that God chooses” is to “loose the bonds of oppression.” How are fasting and oppression related?
- c. It’s important to note that Isaiah doesn’t think that prayer and fasting are bad. Quite the opposite. He does think, however, that they are never only about your personal relationship with God and always have some communal impact. Discuss your own prayer and fasting practices.
- d. The end of Isaiah 58 paints a beautiful vision. He says “now you will be repairers of the breach.” In the group, name honestly some of the ‘breaches’ and societal ills that you would like to help repair.

### 2) Vertical and horizontal, prayer and action.

- a. Richard Rohr describes that we need to connect with God (vertical) and also with neighbor (horizontal). Bishop Michael Curry says we need to get on our knees (pray) and also on our feet (act). What are your spiritual practices (think daily, weekly, and annually)? In your life, how are prayer and action connected? What about in the church?
- b. As a “mystic-activist,” Howard Thurman thought that “Activism can be anything that helps to heal people and the world.” Given that definition, what is your “activism?”



### 3) Honest critique.

- a. Rachel Held Evans says that “Salvation isn’t just about managing our own personal sins; it’s also about restoring health and wholeness to all of creation.” Discuss what you have learned about salvation. Is it mostly personal or is it also holistic?
- b. Brian McLaren critiques the church, saying, it, “could develop a spiritual vaccine – a set of habits and practices that would inoculate people against hate and fear and help them be carriers of love...but it hasn’t.” What do you think of his critique of the church? Where do you see hope?
- c. In *Crisis Contemplation*, Barbara Holmes draws the connection between crises and values, saying that lack of compassion is the true crisis. At a time of crisis, people “plunge into a space of stillness and unknowing, a shared interiority of potential and rebirthing.” Discuss when you have been in times of crisis. How did you change? What compassion did you need?
- d. Together, briefly describe the six harmful consequences of the white savior complex outlined in the article. Which of them resonate most powerfully with your experience?

#### For a faith practice this week:

- A. Notice when you are judging yourself and be intentional to get curious instead (this is a parallel to the practice last week, when you noticed when you judged *someone else*.)
- B. Pick an issue or topic in the world that you think is in need of healing. Pray intensely for that topic every day. Pray also for God’s guidance to make a real, positive difference.

#### Closing

- Make sure everyone knows where and when you will meet next week.
- Close with this prayer, repeated 4 times.

May I be at peace.

May my heart always be open.

May I awaken to the Divine Light within and all around me.

May I be healed. May I be a source of healing.

*The next time through the prayer, pray it for someone dear to you.*

*The third time through, pray it for something of great concern to you in the world.*

*And lastly, pray it over yourself once more.*



## Week 3 – Make the Connection – Scripture

### Isaiah 58

Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!  
Announce to my people their rebellion,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.

<sup>2</sup>Yet day after day they seek me  
and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that practiced righteous-  
ness

and did not forsake the ordinance of their  
God;

they ask of me righteous judgements,  
they delight to draw near to God.

<sup>3</sup>'Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not no-  
tice?'

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-  
day,

and oppress all your workers.

<sup>4</sup>Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today  
will not make your voice heard on high.

<sup>5</sup>Is such the fast that I choose,  
a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,  
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?

<sup>6</sup>Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them,

and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

<sup>8</sup>Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
your vindicator<sup>[a]</sup> shall go before you,

the glory of the LORD shall be your rearguard.

<sup>9</sup>Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I  
am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

<sup>10</sup>if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.

<sup>11</sup>The LORD will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.

<sup>12</sup>Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many  
generations;

you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.

<sup>13</sup>If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy  
day;

if you call the sabbath a delight

and the holy day of the LORD honourable;

if you honour it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests, or pursuing your  
own affairs;<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>14</sup>then you shall take delight in the LORD,  
and I will make you ride upon the heights of  
the earth;

I will feed you with the heritage of your ances-  
tor Jacob,

for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

## Week 3 – Make the Connection – Readings

### *A Nation for All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America from the Politics of Division*, by Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley

The Catholic vision of the common good is as clear as it is challenging. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which the Vatican released in 2004, notes that the specific “demands” of the common good are deeply connected to the fundamental dignity and rights of the human person:

These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State’s powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom. [1]

A robust commitment to the common good dates to the very beginnings of our faith and is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew scriptures call readers to look beyond their own self interest to create a just and healthy community; and the Gospels teach us to love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, *and* to love our neighbors as ourselves.

[Richard Rohr adds: *The so-called vertical line toward God must be embodied by a horizontal line toward everything else.*]

The common good also requires a concern for the entire world community. . . . In 1963, Pope John XXIII introduced the phrase “universal common good” [2] in the Catholic social tradition in recognition of the duty to promote the good of our neighbors around the globe as well as at home.

By Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley, *A Nation for All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America from the Politics of Division* (Jossey-Bass: 2008), 4–5. [

1] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2004), 94.

[2] Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth)*, encyclical, April 11, 1963.



*Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times*, by Michael Curry with Sara Grace

In the United States and in the world, we have different cultures, different politics, different experiences that have shaped our beliefs. But if we can establish that we're working toward some common good, whether we like each other or not, then we can be brothers and sisters. . . . Let's all stop worrying about whether we like each other and choose to believe instead that we're capable of doing good together. . . .

If love is your purpose . . . it was and still is the time to double down on prayer. Because prayer, real prayer, is both contemplative and active. . . . Part of that is working for a good, just, humane, and loving society. That means getting on our knees [to pray] . . . and it *also* means standing on our feet and marching in the streets. It means praying through participation in the life of our government and society. . . . Through fashioning a civic order that reflects goodness, justice, and compassion, and the very heart and dream of God for all of God's children and God's creation.

Michael Curry with Sara Grace, *Love Is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times* (Avery: 2020), 205, 206

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*Wholehearted Faith*, by Rachel Held Evans with Jeff Chu

Embracing God's love for creation isn't some trite form of positive self-talk; it's not a wave of the hand that says, "Everything's good," or, "We're all fine." It's the complicated, challenging, and unwavering conviction that every single person is created in the image of God and loved by God, even your enemies, and even you. Operating from that conviction is no walk in the Edenic park, let me tell you. In my experience, centering my worldview and ethics around the inherent worth and belovedness of all of creation makes me even more attuned to the seriousness of doing harm to God's beloved. It makes me even more aware of my own capacity for destruction and desecration. Centering our conversations about sin around God's love rather than our depravity raises the stakes, for it means that salvation isn't just about managing our own personal sins; it's also about restoring health and wholeness to all of creation.

*Wholehearted Faith*, by Rachel Held Evans and Jeff Chu, HarperCollins. Pg 85.

## *Do I Stay Christian?*, by Brian McLaren

A few years ago, in *The Great Spiritual Migration*, I proposed that the purpose of the Christian faith is clear and simple: it is not an evacuation plan to heaven but a transformation plan for earth, a transformation plan built on the strategy of helping people become loving human beings who build loving societies, following the loving example of Jesus. I noted that in all my years in Christian circles, I was unaware of any well-thought-out Christian curriculum to help people mature in love. After two thousand years, I suggested, it's about time for the Christian religion to get serious about its prime directive.

Shortly after the book came out, a woman came up to me and told me she had just gotten a cross-disciplinary PhD in psychology and education at a secular university. Her research question centered on how we help educate children to be empathetic. "That's at least a part of what we need, isn't it?" she asked. "If we can train people from childhood to be empathetic, that's one step toward becoming loving people." Then she added,

"You know, according to my literature review, I'm the first person in history to write a dissertation on this subject. That's the problem, isn't it? Why are we're only now beginning to see how important this work is?" I came across a powerful video recently of musicians around the world joint New Orleans' street musician Grandpa Elliott singing the old spiritual "Down by the Riverside." The lyric "Ain't gonna study war not more" unexpectedly brought tears to my eyes. The truth is, we're still styling war al the time. But we're doing precious little study in empathy, humility, conviviality, love. The religion that should be leading the way could drop everything it's doing. It could develop a spiritual vaccine—a set of habit and practices that would inoculate people against hate and fear and help them be carriers of love.

It could. But it hasn't on any large and consistent scale for most of its first two thousand years. I'm not surprised that many people are giving up on a failed religion and looking elsewhere.

If speaking of Christianity as a failed religion seem harsh to you, I invite you to step back for a moment of review. Think of Christianity's history of anti-Semitism. Think of Christianity's treatment of its own nonconformists. Think of the Catholic church's Doctrine of Discovery and what it unleashed on the world, and the unique Protestant appropriation of that brutal doctrine in the American genocide of Native peoples, and the traumatic legacy of white Christian supremacy in slavery, segregation, and their bitter aftermath. Think of the impact of conventional Christian theology on Christian women and gay people and the poor. Think of the privilege Christianity has conferred on straight white Christian men—especially those with wealth. Think of the impact of Christian theology on the natural world, in the service of money.

If you persist in minimizing these failures of the past and brushing them aside as trivial matters, then please realize: to the growing millions of people, *you now represent the contemporary failure of Christianity to transform lives.* To put it more bluntly, *you are a living example of the failure of Christianity, and you are another reason for them not to stay Christian.*

Brian McLaren, *Do I Stay Christian: A Guide for the Doubters, the Disappointed, and the Disillusioned*, St. Martin's Essentials: 2021. pp 64-65.



*Crisis Contemplation: Healing the Wounded Village*, by Barbara Holmes (excerpts)

(Pg 20) As a crisis reaches the point where we experience spiritual and psychic dissolution, contemplation takes the form of a freefall through our carefully woven safety nets of “normalcy.” We let go of our narratives, our plans, the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are and where we come from. We toss our resumes or CVs to the winds and finally realize that, with regard to our corporate social climbing, there is no “there” there. when a crisis impacts a community, we collectively plunge into a space of stillness and unknowing, a shared interiority of potential and rebirthing.

*(Pg 29) When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. Isaiah 43:2*

Isaiah is not speaking for himself. He is voicing a promise of the Creator, a promise that can be relied upon throughout the ages. If this is true, how do we understand the flooding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and the devastation of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria: I don't have any easy answers, but I want to suggest a contemplative interpretation of Isaiah 43:2 through the lens of the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself: (Mark 12:31).

I am convinced that devastating hurricanes do not represent a failure of the prophet's promise on behalf of a living God, but a neighbor-to-neighbor failure. It was the failure of governments and political parties to understand the circumstances of poor and underserved people of color/culture living on the margins in vulnerable geographic locations exacerbated the effects of the hurricanes.

(pg 31) Whether we like it or not, our personal destiny is interwoven with the wellbeing of the community. After each crisis, questions loom. Will we rise to the occasion and allow the planet to recover from our toxic greed or will we continue to destroy our planet, our only home?

(pg 35) But the true crisis in America is diminished compassion for others. We have allowed the top 10 percent to determine the rhythm of our lives. As a consequence, we choose a type of exclusionary patriotism over freedom, enslavement to market forces rather than exploration of our calling and gifts. We harm one another and our environment because we cannot honor the s(S)pirit that enlivens everyone and everything and respects our differences. I believe that we still have a unique opportunity to change everything, including our destructive patterns of behavior.





(pg 39) Holmes quotes Bayo Akomolafe, “A Slower Urgency: We will Dance with Mountains.”

*Slowing down is...about lingering in the paces we  
are not used to. Seeking out new questions. Becoming  
accountable to more than what rests on the surface.  
Seeking roots. Slowing down is taking care of ghosts,  
hugging monsters, sharing silence, embracing the  
weird...The idea of slowing down is not about  
getting answers, it is about questioning our  
questions. It is about staying in the places that are haunted*

Barbara Holmes, *Crisis Contemplation: Healing the Wounded Village*, CAC Publishing, January 2021.

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## ***6 Harmful Consequences of the White Savior Complex***, by Ryan Kuja

I served the poor and destitute, hungry and sick, in 15 cities and on five continents. I worked side by side with Mother Teresa’s nuns in the slums of Calcutta, sat with the homeless on the streets of Cape Town, fed starving children in the rebel-infested forests of South Sudan.

You see, though I had the best of intentions to help the least of these in far flung, exotic locations around the globe, I was driven by the idea that those I was trying to serve were in need of rescue from people who looked like me — people who were white, Western, and Christian.

Though I was never a missionary in the standard sense of the word, never proselytized or attempted to save souls, the engine driving me was the white savior complex. I thought the dark bodies living in the developing world needed us white, Western, Christians. The other Westerners I worked with believed we had it all pretty much figured out. We had the right theology. We had the right answers. We had the expertise. We were the so called “whole” condescending to help the “broken.”



I imagine that you're familiar with the white savior complex in many of its manifestations, whether as the overdone trope in Hollywood films like *The Help* and *The Blind Side*, or maybe you've seen it in a missionary friend, or perhaps you are a recovering white savior like me.

Here are some of the harmful consequences of the white savior complex:

- 1) It leads to approaches and methodologies rooted in patronizing charity rather than biblical justice.
- 2) It prevents mission, aid, and development work from being dialogical and participatory; the so-called experts swoop in with their answers and expertise and fail to include the voices of local leaders, organizations, and stakeholders.
- 3) It leads to paternalism: doing things *to* or *for* others rather than seeking to empower and build local capacity. It makes us into heroes rather than empowering others to become the heroes of their own stories.
- 4) It robs agency from the economically poor and contributes to a shame-based identity and sense of helplessness.
- 5) It leads to doing things in other contexts that we'd never even imagine doing in the U.S. or Europe. Imagine if twelve of us got on a plane and flew to Stockholm or Dublin and when we arrived, we found all the cutest little children — other people's children — and we began picking them up and taking selfies and posting them on Facebook. Sounds strange, right?
- 6) It perpetuates poverty porn, the ubiquitous images of the poor seen in many fundraising campaigns, which objectify human beings for the sake of eliciting an emotional response in order to garner a donation. It labels them as powerless victims who can't help themselves, implicitly naming God's image bearers as inept, incapable objects who are passively awaiting rescue.

We must stop trying to medicate the symptoms of the white savior and look at the deeper disease. It's one thing to realize it's not ethical to use poverty porn or post selfies with children who we have no relationship with. It's another thing entirely to reflect on the colonial roots of white, Western, Christian supremacy. That means doing some hard, inner work if we're white people. It means working to change the narratives that sustain injustice.



The white savior complex will crumble one person at a time, one mission agency at a time, one NGO at a time only if we commit ourselves to the task of knowing the story of colonialism and we begin interrogating it, telling the truth and leading others into this same sort of honesty. If we do this work, my promise is this: White saviors will become recovering white saviors.

And that is exactly what we need to be.

Published in *Sojourners Magazine*, July 24, 2019

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***Mystic-Activists***, by Lerita Coleman Brown (writing about Howard Thurman)

*[Howard Thurman was a Baptist minister, theologian, professor and chaplain who was active in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is often called the spiritual architect of the civil rights movement.]*

Thurman's life and writings on mysticism confirmed that we don't have to take monastic vows or accept a call to the ministry in order to bask in the loving presence of God. They also clarify how our encounters with God contribute to an inner resilience. Living as an ordinary mystic invites us to take our awareness of God with us into the emergency or operating room, the classroom, meetings, and courageous conversations. Spirit becomes a flowing stream of constant guidance that we can tap into by pausing and listening. In his writings Thurman distinguishes between mysticism and social change, but he believed both were essential. In a tribute written by the esteemed Quaker mystic, scholar Douglas Steere, commends Thurman to readers for his "concern for inward journeys that meet something at the center, which turns them outward again." Steere adds that Thurman must have carried in his heart this aphorism from Meister Eckhart: "You can only spend in good works what you have earned in contemplation." We need regular quiet time with God in order to have the strength, courage, and vitality required for social action: for moving against injustices, speaking truth to power, and assisting in humanitarian efforts.

Thurman believed Jesus was a mystic. "Mystical consciousness was part of Jesus' life," he writes. "It deepened his sense of self and his intimacy with God. Jesus' whole identity depended upon his mystical experiences. These experiences made him sure of God's presence, love, and commission for a ministry of love." Like Jesus, Howard Thurman lived his identity as a mystic-activist. He pressed for an active mysticism, for when we meet God, God has a role for each of us in the restoration of the beloved creation.

When people hear the word "activism," many think of marches and protests in the street. Yet not all participants in major human rights struggles like the civil rights movement marched.



People cooked meals, babysat children, wrote and filed legal briefs, trained marchers, and became community organizers. Others who were unable to march prayed, made phone calls, and hosted movement gatherings. Activism can be anything that helps to heal people and the world. The call one hears in a unitive moment might involve work on gender or environmental justice concerns or humanitarian crises. It might mean working in a soup kitchen or connecting with military veterans or tutoring children. Or it might mean playwriting, choreography, painting, or sculpting.

Mystical experiences can give people a sense of vitality and lead them to their holy assignments. Part of Howard Thurman's response to God was to provide the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings for the work that calls people to action. Thurman "participated at the level that shapes the philosophy that creates the march," says Otis T. Moss II. "Without that, people don't know what to do before they march, while they march, or after they march."

Social action, writes Thurman, "is an expression of resistance against whatever tends to, or separates one from, the experience of God, who is the very ground of his being. . . . The mystic's concern with the imperative of social action is not merely to improve the conditions of society. It is not merely to feed the hungry, not merely to relieve human suffering and human misery. If this were all, in and of itself, it would be important surely. But this is not all. The basic consideration has to do with the removal of all that prevents God from coming to himself in the life of the individual. Whatever there is that blocks this calls for action."

Coleman Brown, Lerita. What Makes You Come Alive (pp. 134-136). Broadleaf Books. copyright 2023

