

## Before and After

### A One Week Devotional by Dayna Schoonmaker

This one week Bible Study explores several “Befores” and “Afters” of the Christian faith. Given the current circumstances, you may feel the swift move from Lent to Easter more jarring than usual. Because of this, you will be invited over the course of this devotional to reflect on difficult Lent-like aspects of the Christian journey as you are ushered toward a renewal of heart, soul, and mind through Easter hope. If you are already in an Easter frame of mind, however, you may choose to use the alternate list of daily readings found at the end of this packet.

## Devotionals

**Day 1:: Sinning into Praising** - God wants us to seek righteousness in order to experience the joy of our salvation. We must not expect this righteousness to come to us like some sort of magic trick. Instead, we are invited to approach God asking for forgiveness, repenting of our sins, seeking restoration and newness of life. This is the gift of Easter, the ability to approach God freely. This active movement towards God creates room for healing, cleansing, and flourishing relationships.

Is there something weighing on your mind today? Repenting means ceasing and turning away from things that are displeasing to God. What can you do to repent and put an end to thoughts or activities that aren't edifying? If you feel so moved, try creating a ritual to mark your renewal.

### Scripture Reading:

*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Psalm 51:5-12*

### Questions

1. It is easy to become trapped in patterns of sin that rob us of real joy. Can you identify one thing that is robbing you of joy today?
2. In order to be truly cleansed, we need to expose those parts of ourselves in need of cleansing. Can you name aloud something you'd like to see God redeem?
3. Once you've identified places in need of redemption, God can restore the joy of your salvation. What does it look like to accept this gift of forgiveness and joy?

**Day 2:: Mourning into Gladness** - As Christians, we are Easter people, which means we always have the hope of the resurrection available to us. But that doesn't mean that we aren't people who experience grief, mourning, and loss as well. What matters isn't that we negate all sadness in pursuit of a hollow happiness, but that we know how to entrust our suffering to God in order for our mourning to be turned, in time, to gladness.

Have you cried lately? Perhaps you've been crying a lot lately. Or perhaps it takes a bit for you to let the tears flow. It is okay to give yourself permission to release your tears. Our salty tears cleanse mind, body, and spirit. They are an important part of who we are as humans. If you struggle to access your emotions, listen to a song, read a book or article, or watch a movie that draws your feelings to the surface. Once you've had a good cry, entrust those tears to God, allowing room for gladness to follow as God draws you near.

### **Scripture Reading:**

*Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.' For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds, They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. Jeremiah 31:10-13*

### **Questions**

1. In order to feel comfort and joy instead of sorrow, we must first feel the sorrow. It can be helpful to list out our sorrows naming them one by one. Can you do that now?
2. Once we take time to feel our sorrows, we can also feel the lifting of our burden as we begin to see the hope that lies before us. This passage talks about the scattered being gathered back together. Can you list the hopes that lie before you?
3. Turning mourning into gladness, restoring broken communities, resurrecting food sources, these things aren't snap-of-the-finger transformations, they are processes that unfold over time. Are you willing to walk with God through the process of restoration? What do you expect that might look like?

**Day 3:: Weeping into Dancing** - When we experience times of disorienting grief or hardship, it is important to recall days when we were able to stand unshaken. Recalling God's faithfulness in the past helps us hold out hope for the day when we will stand unshaken again. God empowers us to turn our dismayed cries into rejoicing no matter how counter-intuitive that act may seem. In God's presence, we have the power to choose a posture of joyful praise despite our circumstances.

Yesterday was a day for weeping, but on the heels of weeping comes dancing. And dancing is healing to the soul. Turn on your favorite tunes and get your body moving today. Laugh, smile, spin around if you are able, or just tap your toes along to the music. Ask others to join in the dance party, or create a virtual dance party with loved ones across the miles. Enjoy the sensation in your limbs as you embody your worship.

### **Scripture Reading:**

*When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." Lord, when you favored me, you made my royal mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. To you, Lord, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: "What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help." You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever. Psalm 30:6-12*

### **Questions**

1. The Psalmist asks, "What is gained if I am silent?" This important question is one for us to consider as well. Where have you fallen silent?
2. Our silence is meant to be turned into songs of praise. Take some time today to write a line or two of praise to God. If you are so inclined, try writing a whole song of praise!
3. Take a few moments to reflect on what it felt like to dance today. How did it impact your body to move? How can you offer God more movement in your life?

**Day 4:: Deceitful Speech into Peaceful Prayers** - We have great power in choosing what we listen to, and perhaps more importantly in choosing what we say to one another. It can become easy to speak harsh words to others when we ourselves feel pressed or distressed, but how we choose to use our words and what we decide to say to others shapes the very core of who we are. Therefore, the choice to be a peace-seeking, peace-speaking people is crucial.

Is there someone in your life who needs words of peace spoken over them today? Take time to write a letter, send an email, make a phone call, or if they live with you, speak with them eye to eye. Words of peace bring life. Perhaps you need to speak kind words to yourself as well?

**Scripture Reading:**

*“Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. 1 Peter 3:10-12*

**Questions**

1. Have you ever been subject to harsh words? How did those words impact you?
2. Think of a time when you were offered words of peace. How did those words impact you? Compare with your answer to question 1.
3. When have you impacted a situation with the use of well placed words of peace? What impact did those words have on the situation?

**Day 5:: Bondage into Freedom** - Sometimes we just feel bound, unable to accomplish anything meaningful on our own. In these moments the Spirit comes to us, affording us the blessing of freedom despite our inability to do anything on our own. By simply accepting the presence of God with us, we are freed; freed to contemplate God's glory, freed to be transformed into the likeness of his Son, freed to be inhabited by the very Spirit of God who empowers us to do far more than we can even begin to imagine.

Find a warm or sunny spot in your house where you feel secure. Wrap yourself in a blanket or sit with a warm drink in hand. As you allow the warmth to permeate your body, imagine the permeating presence of God with you. You do not have to do anything in this moment. You do not have to be anything to anyone right now. You are simply invited to soak in the comforting warmth of God which enfolds you in unconditional, everlasting love.

**Scripture Reading:**

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*  
*2 Corinthians 3: 17-18*

Questions

1. Why do you think it can be difficult to accept the freedom offered by God?
2. We experience freedom in contemplating the Lord's glory, which means we turn from contemplating ourselves in order to be transformed into the likeness of God. How can you actively turn toward God today?
3. What does it feel like for you in those moments when you are fully enveloped in the love of God? How can you seek to make that your primary posture?

## **Alternate Eastertide Readings:**

*Day 1 - Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Acts 2:22-24*

*Day 2 - Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. Sing for joy, you heavens, for the Lord has done this; shout aloud, you earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel. Isaiah 44:21-23*

*Day 3 - Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him. The Lord is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever. Psalm 28:6-9*

*Day 4 - Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:8-11*

*Day 5 - He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children." Revelation 21:5-7*