

what we can do

reflections & journal prompts

Week 1

Scripture:

Luke 16:1-13

Theme:

Kingdom Investing with
Worldly Currency

Reflection:

I've been thinking lately about my occasional distrust of my personal financial instincts and decisions. In the past I have paid too much for a car. I have not saved enough for the medical bills that rolled in unexpectedly. I have given less to the church and other nonprofits than I intended.

Yes, listing these might appear I am being hard on myself. I didn't always have the resources I needed as a result of circumstances outside my control. Other times I was told I would have access to a resource and then I did not. Again, outside my control. But, sometimes I was being impatient, driven by a need to make a purchase on my desired timeline.

Either way because I was not being shrewd with my resources, I was creating a deficit in my goals. And, often I wasn't inviting God to shape me in this area of my life.

Journal Prompt:

Do an imagination brainstorm in a world of "what if". In this scenario, you have the resources (money, time, talent) to live a sustainable life. (maybe you already do!) How would you shrewdly share your resources with your church, your community, etc? What project could you imagine funding even if it was a small gift? Now imagine how that would make you feel. Would you feel happy? Free? Newly stressed? Write it all out and contemplate how God is part of it.

Prayer:

Generous, creative
Creator, please illuminate
the desires inside me to be
a generous and thoughtful
steward of your good gifts.
Open my imagination to
the possibilities. Amen.

Meet the Author: Amanda White



Amanda grew up in another denomination (i.e. evangelical in nature) and now deeply loves the Lutheran church with its message of grace, space for questions, and deep theological history. Before graduating from Luther Seminary with a MA in Bible, Amanda taught middle school English, and helped lead a thriving ELCA campus ministry with her spouse. You can find Amanda listening to music or podcasts, hanging out with her two college-aged daughters and spouse, and knowing an extraordinary amount about Bob's Burgers.

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Week 2

Scripture:

Luke 16:19-31

Theme:

Opening our Eyes

Reflection:

A good parable can really challenge us. It also can be compartmentalized so we don't have to face the very real possibility it is speaking directly to us. In the story, Lazarus wastes away outside the rich man's gates. Every day the man likely walked right by him. We are told the rich man does nothing to improve Lazarus' life. Perhaps he thought, "not my problem." Perhaps he had spent so much time avoiding unpleasant people, scenes, etc. that he no longer visually processed the dying human just outside his property.

A good use of our resources might look like investing in our community. That investment might be actual funds, but more importantly, it may include using our influence or power to benefit the Lazarus' around us. Or, some of us may be Lazarus. Maybe not literally, but when have you experienced a time of true need, of desperation? Maybe it was emotional, financial, or spiritual. How did that change you? Your family?

Journal Prompt:

Reflect on a time you chose not to see something or someone who clearly needed help. Get the feelings and memories down on paper - it's just for your eyes. Perhaps you were the one not being seen. Were you able to ask for help? Where are there opportunities right now for you to come alongside someone in need or to accept help from someone else? What would it take for you to respond?

Prayer:

Loving God, please give me sight. Make it clear and make it unafraid. Please forgive me when I look away. Help me love like you do. Amen.

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Week 3

Scripture:

Luke 17:5-10

Theme:

Enough for Our Work

Reflection:

I get tired of the obsession with the next big thing. The world is moving so fast. Just when you get a phone you can live with, the next one appears on the scene and you're missing out on a better camera or some other feature that you're convinced you need. This quest for having the best often leaves us feeling tired with a sense of deprivation. Putting the screens down and creating some space from the never-ending news cycle can offer some much needed space and peace. God made us for more than all of the 'keeping up'. Just a couple minutes for prayer, chatting with God and pausing to listen always brings me back to who God has created me to be: God's beloved. I am reminded that I have enough and am enough. Every small talent within me is enough to love people, to share what God has given me, and to live a fulfilling life of joy.

Journal Prompt:

Write about a time when you didn't feel you had enough to offer. Alternatively, write about a time you refused to receive something from someone who might have really helped you.

Prayer:

Oh, Lord, please help me. I need an openness to your love. I crave your love. Please remove the stubbornness that creates walls. Open my eyes to see I have something, if not a lot of somethings to offer the world. Amen.

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Week 4

Scripture:

Luke 17:11-19

Theme:

Gratitude > Obedience

Reflection:

This week we encounter Jesus healing 10 lepers. Of the 10, one returns to share gratitude with Jesus. Just one. And, like many of Jesus' stories we think, "Well, I wouldn't do that." I would do the right thing. I would see the gift Jesus bestowed. I wouldn't miss it. And, if we are being honest, we would more likely be one of the 9 who did follow Jesus instructions to go see the priests, but would stop there. I keep wondering what would it look like for me to exercise gratitude every day in every situation?

Journal Prompt:

Reflect on a time you recognized gratitude within yourself for something or someone. Why did that gratitude well up inside you at that particular time? What might have been different? How did you respond to the gratitude? Write a thank you note to God for something you've experienced or felt or received.

Prayer:

God of abundance please help me to experience the joy of gratitude. Please also help those I love to also know gratitude. Help me to embrace a spirit of joy. Amen.

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Week 5

Scripture:

Luke 18:1-8

Theme:

Persisting

Reflection:

Repetition matters. It also annoys. I'll never forget the hours of scales I was asked to do for piano. I was a good student and did the drills. It did annoy me, but I did it. And, the work eventually led to me gracefully and confidently playing the scales, which led to better piano playing. Likewise, when we pray that God will bring about change for those who suffer, for those living with war, for those who are hungry, for those who are lonely, we can be confident that God is hearing and acting. Prayer matters because the repetitive action of talking to God matters.

Journal Prompt:

Who inspires you to keep going? When you've given up on a goal or given up on someone who has let you down, who or what inspires you to keep trying? What or who is an opportunity to exercise persistence in your life? What might you gain from that persistence? Is there anything you would have to let go?

Prayer:

God of love please bless me as I persist. Even when I look around and wonder 'what's the point?' help me to dig deep and find the energy and will to keep moving forward. Walk with me and be my guide. Amen.

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Week 6

Scripture:

Luke 18:9-14

Theme:

Change

Reflection:

This week's parable plays out on social media and in gossip circles all the time. "Well, at least I don't...." or "Did you hear what she did?" It is easy to prop ourselves up by putting others down. Instead of just owning our own garbage we use a stand-in so we can lessen our guilt. Except, that it doesn't work, does it? Even kids struggle with owning their own part in something that goes wrong. Once when my daughter was spouting off all braggy about something she had done right while a classmate failed, I responded, "Well, at least you're humble about it." And, she promptly replied, "Well, I don't know what that means, but I'll take it as a compliment." Funny and still makes me smile all these years later. But, it will always remind me that we find ways to spin the truth. Instead God gives us the opportunity to humble ourselves and see that we are part of a bigger picture.

Journal Prompt:

What might God be calling you to change in your life? What could God make possible through God's power and creativity that our own intelligence or resources cannot?

Prayer:

God, it would be great if you could gently humble me. While I often feel like I am not enough, there are many times my ego gets in the way. Help me recognize my need for you. Amen.

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Week 7

Scripture:

Luke 19:1-10

Theme:

Curiosity to Commitment

Reflection:

We are created for relationships. But, the draw to isolate can be an easy solution to stress and uncertainty. As much as we may want to watch from the edges, be an island unto ourselves, we still find ourselves seeking connection. This week's text finds Zaccheaus up in the tree watching from a distance. For whatever reasons that led him to perch there (depends on your interpretation) Jesus comes close to him and engages him in conversation and friendship.

Very recently I went through a serious medical situation, and I found it difficult to allow my name to be added to my church's prayer list. It was a simple thing I could do to share my life with others, but I tend to be private. Upon reflection I ended up saying go ahead. During that time I learned that the church was praying alongside me and was invested in caring about my life. It brought me into their deep conversations with God. I'm grateful because it opened me up to the beautiful relationships that God has given me. It helped me feel a deep sense of connection and trust.

Journal Prompt:

Reflect on a time in your life when you were knowingly or unknowingly isolating yourself from others? How long did it take for you to be lonely? Is this something you do for your own wellbeing? If so, write about how it affects you. Did you pray during this time?

Or....

Reflect on a time when someone you care about isolated from people. How did that affect your relationship? How did you reach out? Were you able to get back to the 'way things were'?

Prayer:

Mothering God, please help me to trust that connection and care from and with others is good. Please bring healing to those who have been hurt by others. Help me to love others well. Amen.

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Week 8

Scripture:

Luke 18:18-27

Theme:

Giving it All Up

Reflection:

Sometimes I think it would be such a release, a relief to just sell my house along with everything inside. Perhaps I'd take the box of precious notes and drawings my girls have created over the years. But, other than that, just walk away. Imagine how free that might feel. This imaginative proposition is not the same as the story of the rich ruler asking how he could inherit eternal life, is it? It's similar but not quite. In my walking away it pre-supposes that I'd have the funds to replenish my discarded items as needed. In the story of the ruler, Jesus is suggesting a complete giving up. While this story feels a bit despairing, he also offers hope. In verse 27 Jesus says, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." That is good news indeed!

Journal Prompt:

If you could give \$20,000 to any person or good cause, how would you spend it? Would you split it up over several groups? Would you give it to one person? Make a list of people and/or organizations that you would be happy to share the money with. What if you are the one who really could use \$20,000? How would you receive that gift well? How would you use it? Would you give some of it away? No judgments...just a reflection. :-)

Prayer:

Giving, generous Lord, I need your grace. I cling to my things. I lose sight of your generosity given to me. I lose sight of how I can use resources to help others. Help me expand my imagination and love for others. Amen.

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Week 9

Scripture:

Luke 19:29-35a

Theme:

Saying "Yes"

Reflection:

I used to teach middle school. The students often demanded to know why they had to do homework. Why was I asking them to write an essay? I wanted to give them reasons that would genuinely make sense and matter. (I know, big ask!) But, it was my goal. I understand the desire to want to know why. For the curious type, it brings peace and purpose. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is moving and an opportunity presents itself to reach out to someone or to stop what we're doing and take a different route if you will. When we get curious about what God is up to in the world, we just might discover a whole new exciting path.

Journal Prompt:

What would you love to say 'yes' to right now? Would it align with your current goals? How might that 'yes' help you love and serve your neighbor?

Or....

Write about the art of saying 'no' vs 'yes'. In recent years we have heard a lot about saying 'no' and how that's beneficial to our wellbeing. What would a healthy 'yes' look like for you?

Prayer:

Oh, most lovely Creator,
guide me to saying 'yes'
when it is good, when it
serves your purposes.
Please send the Holy Spirit
to guide me. I pray for
understanding and clarity.
Amen.

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