

# THE WINDING ROAD

## AN ARRABON DEVOTIONAL

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*"What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light." John 1:3-5*

We live in a moment marked by disorientation, division, injustice, and pain. Amidst the darkness, there are glimmers of light and hope. As Christ-followers, we live in the liminal space between love & loss, injustice & wholeness, and grief & joy. We trust in the goodness of God, and long for all things to be made new (Revelation 21:5). But if we're honest, the road can feel long, lonely, and arduous. The truth is- we're not alone, we are empowered by the Spirit of God to become more like Christ alongside a global community.

Throughout church history, the season of Lent has been an opportunity to be formed by Jesus' journey to the cross. It is a liturgical season marked by repentance, sacrifice, and generosity.

The road to reconciliation and healing necessitates the people of God to be formed by our cross-bearing, enemy-loving, and liberating Christ. This Lent, in partnership with The Porter's Gate, we invite you to join Christ-followers across the country as we pursue spiritual formation for the glory of God and the sake of our neighbor.



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# FULLY KNOWN AND FULLY LOVED

## A REFLECTION ON OVERCOMING FEAR

By Phebe Meyer

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As a recovering perfectionist, I'm terrified of saying the wrong thing. This fear shows up especially while engaging in the work of racial healing. I am fearful of being wrong and how others might perceive or receive my words, and allowing those fears to dictate my thoughts and actions prevents me from experiencing the fullness of community.

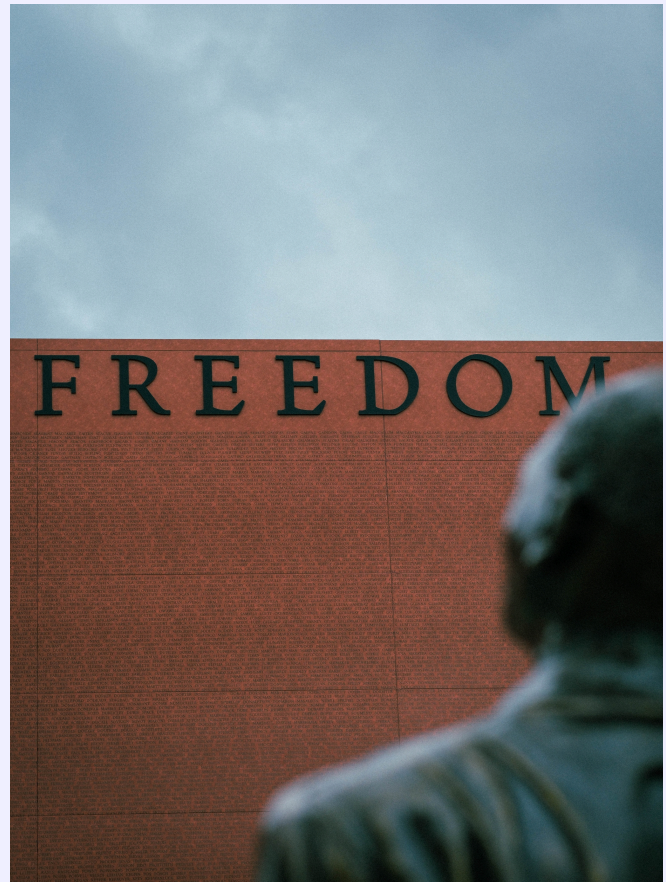
I noticed fear - and the resulting healing - play out this year during an Arrabon experiential learning trip in Montgomery, Alabama. We visited the Legacy Museum, the National Museum for Peace and Justice, and several Civil Rights era landmarks alongside facilitated engagement with Arrabon's Foundations of a Reconciling Community framework. I showed up excited to learn and grow with the small group of people also on the trip. But in a room with people who did not know me, my words were stuck in my throat, held captive to the fears of not having the right words and being misinterpreted.

I watched fellow participants offer their experiences and perspectives with humility, acknowledging that they "did not know the right thing to say." This challenged and motivated me. As someone who is often a leader in the room, I needed a safe space where I could simply show up as myself. Through the vulnerability of others, I was ushered into a place of mutual respect and security.



On the last night, I found both the courage and security to share words that I had penned, reflecting on the grief and anger I felt while encountering the racial history of Montgomery.

American theologian, Howard Thurman, writes about fear in his 1949 book, *Jesus and The Disinherited*. He writes of an “ever-present fear” that is the lived reality of the oppressed and disinherited. This fear, “has its roots deep in the heart of the relations between the weak and the strong, between the controllers of environment and those who are controlled by it.”<sup>1</sup>



As a middle-class, white American I do not know “ever-present fear.” In the United States, systemic racial oppression has reinforced messages of fear that exhaust and control. I don’t know the fear of being racially profiled, fear for my physical safety or the safety of my family members at the hands of law enforcement, or fear that I might not get the job or the promotion because of the color of my skin.

**In the season of Lent, we are directed toward self-examination, asking where we need to reconcile with God and others.** This season in the Church calendar can also be an opportunity to approach others’ fears with curiosity, acknowledging where there is hurt and grieving alongside them. Naming our fears and seeking to understand others’ fears diffuses tension, grows our compassion, and ultimately, leads to healing.

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<sup>1</sup> Thurman, Howard, 1900-1981, *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston, MA, Beacon Press, 1996, pp. 26-27



At the beginning of the year, I retreated with a few close friends and spent 48 hours in silence and solitude before the Lord. I dreaded that the silence would bring to the surface feelings of regret and disappointment, an overwhelming sense of my unworthiness, and a list of ways that I could better myself. But what I encountered was something completely different. In the silence, I felt the Lord's love wash over me. As I sat watching the sun outside the window sink beneath the trees, a small candle lit before me, I knew I was completely known by the God who created me in the unique expression of his own love. I realized that the root of my fear was a misplaced identity. When I built my identity on what others thought about me and saw my worth defined by the quality of my contributions, my fear became amplified and drove the narratives in my head.

Scripture teaches us another way. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear," (1 John 4:18). A perfect love is a love that is complete, freely given, and without conditions. This is the love that God has for each one of us as his children. Face-to-face with perfect love, fear of rejection, judgment, or what others might do to us is eliminated.

In the final pages of Thurman's chapter on fear, he concludes that the awareness that a person is a child of God is the one thing that can overcome fear and replace it with a profound faith and deep peace. Thurman writes: "Nothing less than a great daring in the face of overwhelming odds can achieve the inner security in which fear cannot possibly survive... Of course God cares for the grass of the field, which lives a day and is no more, or the sparrow that falls unnoticed by the wayside. He also holds the stars in their appointed places, leaves his mark in every living thing. *And he cares for me!*" <sup>2</sup>

In the eyes of the God who made us, we are fully known and fully loved. We can neither earn this love nor be separated from it. When we experience a perfect love, we are empowered to move toward people in that same love. Living in our true identity as a child of God, we have nothing to fear. Perfect love drives out the fear of what we do not understand, the fear of an uncertain future, the fear

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 45, emphasis mine

of being seen as less than human, the fear of not getting it right, and the fear of being labeled or misinterpreted.

May we grow in awareness of the Lord's love for us. May we live with courage even amid our fear. And may we become people of perfect love. Amen.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

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Phebe Meyer is the Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor for The Center for Christianity and Public Life, a nonpartisan nonprofit with the mission to contend for the credibility of Christian resources in public life, for the public good. A multi-disciplinary creative with a background in Anthropology, she is passionate about understanding how the Christian faith and spiritual formation shape public engagement, bringing that lens to her work at the intersection of faith, culture, and politics. In her previous role at The Clapham Group, Phebe worked with major foundations, corporations, and organizations to build cross-sector partnerships and bipartisan initiatives on economic mobility and racial equity. She is also a founding partner of We Own Now, an organization led by Grammy-winning artist Derek Minor that advances Black ownership and works to end the racial wealth gap through storytelling, education, and policy advocacy.

Each week you will be invited to listen to Scripture, spoken word, music and read through a reflection that will challenge you to examine your own heart, mind and spirit.

It is our prayer that this weekly Lenten journey, curated out of the questions, grief, frustration, hope and pain of a generation, would compel us to remember that we belong to each other. May we be encouraged to imagine anew what it might look like to accompany each other as we walk our own winding roads this Lenten season.

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THEREFORE I TELL YOU, DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHAT YOU WILL EAT OR WHAT YOU WILL DRINK, NOR ABOUT YOUR BODY, WHAT YOU WILL PUT ON. IS NOT LIFE MORE THAN FOOD, AND THE BODY MORE THAN CLOTHING? LOOK AT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR: THEY NEITHER SOW NOR REAP NOR GATHER INTO BARNS, AND YET YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER FEEDS THEM. ARE YOU NOT OF MORE VALUE THAN THEY? AND WHICH OF YOU BY BEING ANXIOUS CAN ADD A SINGLE HOUR TO HIS SPAN OF LIFE? AND WHY ARE YOU ANXIOUS ABOUT CLOTHING? CONSIDER THE LILIES OF THE FIELD, HOW THEY GROW: THEY NEITHER TOIL NOR SPIN, YET I TELL YOU, EVEN SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY WAS NOT ARRAYED LIKE ONE OF THESE. BUT IF GOD SO CLOTHES THE GRASS OF THE FIELD, WHICH TODAY IS ALIVE AND TOMORROW IS THROWN INTO THE OVEN, WILL HE NOT MUCH MORE CLOTHE YOU, O YOU OF LITTLE FAITH? THEREFORE DO NOT BE ANXIOUS, SAYING, 'WHAT SHALL WE EAT?' OR 'WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?' OR 'WHAT SHALL WE WEAR?' FOR THE GENTILES SEEK AFTER ALL THESE THINGS, AND YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER KNOWS THAT YOU NEED THEM ALL. BUT SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE ADDED TO YOU.

THEREFORE DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT TOMORROW, FOR TOMORROW WILL BE ANXIOUS FOR ITSELF. SUFFICIENT FOR THE DAY IS ITS OWN TROUBLE.

- MATTHEW 6:25-34





**Read Matthew 6:25-34. What fears and worries are you holding onto today?**

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**What is a step of courage toward racial healing that you can take, knowing that you are held secure by a God who deeply knows you and loves you?**

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# LECTIO DIVINA

ADAPTED FROM SACRED RHYTHMS BY RUTH HALEY BARTON

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## PREPARATION (SILENCIO)

Take a moment to come fully into the present moment. With your eyes closed, let your body relax and allow yourself to become consciously aware of God's presence with you. Express your willingness (or your willingness to be made willing) to hear from God in these moments by using a brief prayer, such as "Come Lord Jesus," "Here I am," or "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Then read the chosen passage four consecutive times, each time asking a slightly different question that invites you into the dynamic of that move. Each reading is then followed by a brief period of silence:

## READ (LECTIO)

Listen for the word or the phrase that is addressed to you. Turn to the passage and begin to read slowly, pausing between phrases and sentences. You may read silently or you might find it helpful to read the passage aloud allowing the words to echo and resonate, sink in, and settle into the heart. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. Allow for a moment of silence, repeating that word or phrase softly to yourself, pondering it and savoring it as though pondering the words of loved one. This is the word that is meant for you. Be content to listen simply and openly without judging or analyzing.

## REFLECT (MEDITATIO)

How is my life touched by this word? Once you have heard the "word" that is meant for you, read the passage again and listen for the way in which this passage connects with your life. Ask, "What is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word?" Allow several moments of silence following this reading and explore thoughts, perceptions, and sensory impressions. If the passage is a story, perhaps ask yourself, "Where am I in this scene? What do I hear as I imagine myself in the story or hear these words addressed specifically to me? How do the dynamics of this story connect with my own life experience?"

## **RESPOND (ORATIO)**

What is my response to God based on what I have read and encountered? Read the passage one more time listening for your own deepest and truest response. In the moments of silence that follow this reading, allow your prayer to flow spontaneously from your heart as fully and as truly as you can. At this point you are entering into a personal dialogue with God “sharing with God the feelings the text has aroused in us, feelings such as love, joy, sorrow, anger, repentance, desire, need, conviction, consecration. We pour out our hearts in complete honesty, especially as the text has probed aspects of our being and doing in the midst of various issues and relationships” (Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, p. 114). Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or respond in some way to the word you have heard. You might find it helpful to write your prayers or to journal at this point.

## **REST (CONTEMPLATIO)**

Rest in the Word of God. In the final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God’s presence like the weaned child who leans against its mother (Psalms 131). This is a posture of total yieldedness and abandon to the Great Shepherd of our souls.

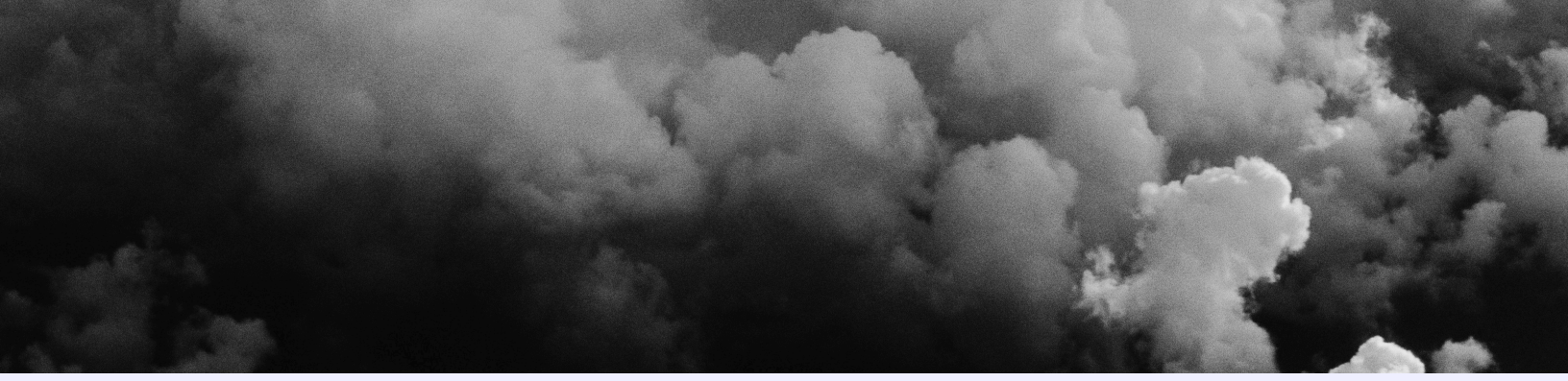
## **RESOLVE (INCARNATIO)**

Incarnate (live out) the Word of God. As you emerge from this place of personal encounter with God to life in the company of others, resolve to carry this word with us and to live it out in the context of daily life and activity. As you continue to listen to the word throughout the day, you will be led deeper and deeper into its meaning until it begins to live in you and you “enflesh” this Word in the world in which you live. As a way of supporting your intent to live out the word you have been given, you may want to choose an image, picture, or symbol that you can carry to remind you of it.



## PSALM 139 - NIV

- <sup>1</sup> You have searched me, Lord,  
and you know me.
- <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- <sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying  
down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.
- <sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue  
you, Lord, know it completely.
- <sup>5</sup> You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.
- <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.
- <sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?
- <sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are  
there.
- <sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- <sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.
- <sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"
- <sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.
- <sup>13</sup> For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- <sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.
- <sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of  
the earth.
- <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in  
your book  
before one of them came to be.
- <sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!
- <sup>18</sup> Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand  
— when I awake, I am still with you.
- <sup>19</sup> If only you, God, would slay the wicked!  
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- <sup>20</sup> They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.
- <sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,  
and abhor those who are in rebellion  
against you?
- <sup>22</sup> I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.
- <sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- <sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting



## REFLECTIONS

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



# THE PORTER'S GATE

## WORSHIP PROJECT

### WEEK 2 | DARKNESS

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[bit.ly/ArrTheWindingRoad](https://bit.ly/ArrTheWindingRoad)

Rooted in Psalm 139, this week's reflection explores God's everlasting presence with us. Sometimes we feel close with God and sometimes we feel far away. This reflection invites us into honest prayer of frustration and confusion amidst hope. In a world of darkness and disorientation, we have an opportunity to bring our full honest selves before our loving Creator.

This reflection was produced in partnership with The Porter's Gate. Listen on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.