

# 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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# SHAME AND RECONCILIATION: WHERE ARE YOU *REALLY* FROM?

By TJ Ono

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IN FACT, SOME PARTS OF THE BODY THAT SEEM WEAKEST AND LEAST IMPORTANT ARE ACTUALLY THE MOST NECESSARY. AND THE PARTS WE REGARD AS LESS HONORABLE ARE THOSE WE CLOTHE WITH THE GREATEST CARE. SO WE CAREFULLY PROTECT THOSE PARTS THAT SHOULD NOT BE SEEN, WHILE THE MORE HONORABLE PARTS DO NOT REQUIRE THIS SPECIAL CARE. SO GOD HAS PUT THE BODY TOGETHER SUCH THAT EXTRA HONOR AND CARE ARE GIVEN TO THOSE PARTS THAT HAVE LESS DIGNITY. THIS MAKES FOR HARMONY AMONG THE MEMBERS, SO THAT ALL THE MEMBERS CARE FOR EACH OTHER. IF ONE PART SUFFERS, ALL THE PARTS SUFFER WITH IT, AND IF ONE PART IS HONORED, ALL THE PARTS ARE GLAD.

- 1 COR. 12:22-26, NLT

White light poured through the stage lights blinding my eyes as I strummed the last chord of the worship set. Then in the sea of white light, in a congregation filled with white people, I saw an older white woman beeline it to me. With speed and earnestness, she stopped me. No introduction. No exchange of names. Just a burning question poured from her mouth, “Where are you from?” I knew what she was asking. But I didn’t want to have this conversation, so I replied, “Downtown.” And after a chuckle that masked her frustration, she questioned, “But where are you *really* from?”



I grew up in whiteness. In my elementary school of six hundred students, you could count the number of kids of color on two hands. And like every kid - and adult - I just wanted to fit in, to belong. I wanted to stop having the conversation, "Are you Asian or Chinese?" I wanted to stop feeling like an outsider. Slowly I grew resentful of my body that marked me as "different" from the other six hundred kids. I grew ashamed of the question, "Where am I *really* from?"

Simply put, shame is the painful feeling of not being enough. Yet shame is not simple; it's tricky. It hides, sneaks, and dwells in our psyches. And instinctively we hide from it, because shame makes us want to hide from ourselves. Our greatest fears and anger are often tethered to what makes us ashamed. And that feeling may arise from something we've done or something that has been done to us, something about us or our loved ones that we did or did not determine, a story that we have chosen to live or a story imposed upon us. But if we are all honest, all our hearts are triggered by things that make us feel the pain of not being enough. And if we are all honest, we have all tried to resolve our shame in ways that we are not proud of - probably by heaping shame, anger, and fear upon ourselves and others.

Yet Christ shows us a better way, a way teeming with resurrection life, rather than the shame of death. But if we follow after Christ, Lent must precede Easter. We must bear the courage to walk with Jesus through pain, suffering, and death to resurrection life. Rather than hiding from our shame, we must face our shame and put it to death. The question we are left with is: *How?*





In Genesis 3, we glimpse how God relates to our shame. Ashamed of their sin, Adam and Eve hide. But God comes searching for his beloved, and “the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of animal skins and clothed them” (Gen 3:21, my translation). This poetic imagery is pregnant with meaning. We see God dignify Adam and Eve in their shame and treat them with honor. We hear of a sacrificial system in which one pours out its life to cover the sin and shame of another.<sup>1</sup> And we see God calling God’s beloved out of shameful-hiding, back into God-nearness – even though it’s just for a moment. Two chapters prior, God creates humanity in God’s image (Gen 1:27). Thus,

glory is humanity’s essence. But glory and honor are different; honor demands acknowledging one’s glory. In other words, to honor a person requires relating to the person in a way that is congruent with their glorious essence. So much has gone wrong by chapter three, but God reveals to us: *Where humanity heaps shame, God heaps honor.*

Ashamed of the question – Where am I really from? – I stared my shame in the face. God revealed to me that my shame emerged from a deeper question: Who am I really from? Shame for my body turned to resentment towards those who gave me my body. But slowly, Jesus began to teach me a new way. He taught me to heap honor where I once heaped shame. As I learned the stories of the women and men who came before me, I saw their resiliency, tenacity, and fierce hearts in the face of oppression and hardship. I beheld God’s redemptive work in the story of the men and women who gave me my DNA. Today, with profound delight and gratitude, I am honored to continue the story of those I come from. It’s a glorious gift from God.

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**WHERE  
HUMANITY  
HEAPS  
SHAME,  
GOD  
HEAPS  
HONOR.**

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<sup>1</sup> God uses animal skins to cover Adam and Eve. The animal skins show us that animals were sacrificed to cover Adam and Eve. This alludes to the Levitical system which is introduced in Exodus and Leviticus that paves the way for us to receive Jesus Christ as the lamb of God.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

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TJ Ono is a Japanese and Chinese American who was born in California, raised in Texas, and educated in Massachusetts. He has the heart of a pastor-teacher. From leading student ministries to teaching seminary-level Konia Greek, he has spent his career cultivating Christian communities of curiosity and wonder. He loves inviting people to ask hard questions, especially about race in America and the Christian faith. He is ordained in the Anglican Church of North America and lives in the Washington, D.C. area.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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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**Recall a time in the past six months when you felt the painful feeling of not being enough. What triggered those feelings?**

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**What story were you telling yourself about yourself when you felt ashamed?**

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**God heaps honor where we heap shame. How has and is God honoring your story? How do we treat ourselves and our stories in a way that is congruent with how God honors us and our stories? How do we treat others and their stories in a way that is congruent with how God honors them and their stories?**

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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 27 - NLT

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my light and my salvation—  
so why should I be afraid?  
The Lord is my fortress, protecting me  
from danger,  
so why should I tremble?

<sup>2</sup> When evil people come to devour me,  
when my enemies and foes attack me,  
they will stumble and fall.

<sup>3</sup> Though a mighty army surrounds me,  
my heart will not be afraid.  
Even if I am attacked,  
I will remain confident.

<sup>4</sup> The one thing I ask of the Lord—  
the thing I seek most—  
is to live in the house of the Lord all the  
days of my life,  
delighting in the Lord's perfections  
and meditating in his Temple.

<sup>5</sup> For he will conceal me there when  
troubles come;  
he will hide me in his sanctuary.  
He will place me out of reach on a high  
rock.

<sup>6</sup> Then I will hold my head high  
above my enemies who surround me.  
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with  
shouts of joy,  
singing and praising the Lord with  
music.

<sup>7</sup> Hear me as I pray, O Lord.  
Be merciful and answer me!

<sup>8</sup> My heart has heard you say, "Come  
and talk with me."  
And my heart responds, "Lord, I am  
coming."

<sup>9</sup> Do not turn your back on me.  
Do not reject your servant in anger.  
You have always been my helper.  
Don't leave me now; don't abandon  
me,  
O God of my salvation!

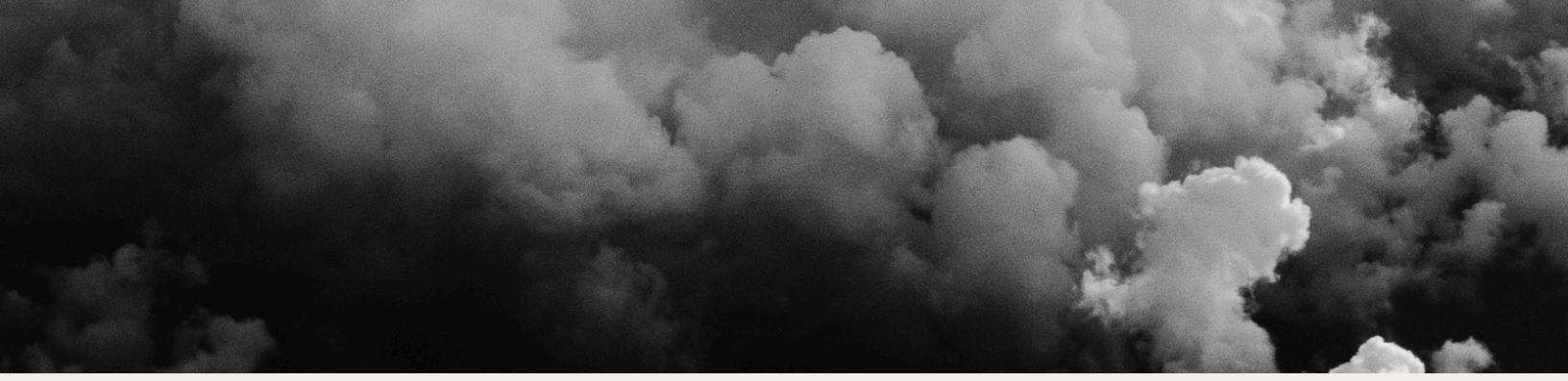
<sup>10</sup> Even if my father and mother  
abandon me,  
the Lord will hold me close.

<sup>11</sup> Teach me how to live, O Lord.  
Lead me along the right path,  
for my enemies are waiting for me.

<sup>12</sup> Do not let me fall into their hands.  
For they accuse me of things I've  
never done;  
with every breath they threaten me  
with violence.

<sup>13</sup> Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's  
goodness  
while I am here in the land of the  
living.

<sup>14</sup> Wait patiently for the Lord.  
Be brave and courageous.  
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.



## REFLECTIONS

[illegible]



## WEEK 3 | GAZE UPON THE BEAUTY

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This week's reflection, rooted in Psalm 27, helps us center on the beauty of the Lord. Amidst the darkness all around us, God's light shines bright as we rest in God's goodness, beauty, and love. May we be given eyes to see our neighbor, ourselves, and even our "enemies" in light of God's everlasting love.

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



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