



ST AUGUSTINE'S  
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY

## Changing Times: Week 2

### The Journey

One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,

Mary Oliver in *Wild Geese: Selected Poems*,  
2004, Bloodaxe Books



In our search to understand what is stirring in our spirit and what this might mean for the choices we make and the shape of what is to come, we understandably seek clarity.

But what clarity are we looking for? The detailed itinerary of our path and where it will lead us to? Or that deep down gut knowledge that gives us the boldness to begin – a direction of travel more than an arrival point?

Knowing what you have to do is different in kind from the familiar 'tug

at the ankles' or the cry of voices demanding that you respond as they expect. It is different too from that compulsive activity that amounts to a fleeing from uncertainty, seeking refuge in any answer so long as it delivers us from unknowing. Most of us know what it is to be driven by anxiety, or an addictive need, or pushed around by voices from our past that linger in our present.

When Mary Oliver writes of knowing what it is you have to do, it is freedom, not compulsion that is at work; the surfacing of your deep spirit and God's spirit in your spirit; the welling up of love not fear; the surfacing of who you are at depth, and in truth, and in creativity, and with generosity.

Beginning to know who you are [and who you are not] has a strong link with understanding what it is you have to do. You are not summed up by your unfreedoms, your compulsions, needs and anxieties, as real as these might be. You are – at depth and in freedom - what you love to do that also creates life, brings wholeness, and builds relationship - all that is original in you that is a reflection of God's being and activity.



## Walking the Examen

The examen is a tool for reflecting on the day with God. Its focus is on movement – recognizing the different stirrings within our spirit that have taken place in the last 24 hours. As such it naturally goes with walking. The physical rhythm of our footsteps helps us settle down into a listening space. In the examen we are not walking alone; Christ goes alongside us, just as he did with the two disciples along the road to Emmaus [Luke 24]. He opens the scriptures of our experience to us.

*I remember with gratitude the gifts of the day: As I begin my walk, I invite Jesus to accompany me, and to help me recall with gratitude the gifts of the day, however small and easily passed by. As I remember and give thanks, I am opening myself to the goodness of God, the wonders of creation and what brings my own spirit joy.*



*I review my experience of the day:* As my walk continues, I replay the journey of my day, letting God prompt my memory. I ask God's help in recognising significant moments, and times when my feelings or thoughts were particularly stirred.

*I ask for understanding:* My steps help me move into a deeper place of listening. Perhaps I raise my hands, palms upwards, ready to receive. I draw back into my awareness any sense I have of an invitation of the Spirit in what took place today. Perhaps I was blind to it then, but I see it now. I ask for insight into my own responses. How far was I cooperating with the Spirit? What else was driving my reactions?

*I let go to God my need of healing and wholeness:* As I walk I let my hands fall down by my side. I own my need of God in those areas where I struggled today. I ask for forgiveness and healing. I release my fears or burdens into God's care. I trust myself to God's continuing love for me in the day to come. I let my walking take me into a place of rest in God.

### **A journal for a journey:**

Many of us will have kept a journal at some point. When we are looking to discern our path, it helps to build in a discipline of noticing what we have experienced, and then recording it. The very act of writing [or drawing] helps us process what has happened. Note down whatever you read, heard, saw or experienced that made an impression on you. You can also use your journal to dialogue with God.

## What am I to do?

We are often better at giving helpful guidance and encouragement to others than we are to ourselves. We may be our own worst critic or slave-driver. In the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius Loyola suggests it might help to put ourselves in the place of a person we have never seen or known. Imagine we have listened carefully to all this person has to say and noted their feelings and desires. What then would we encourage this person to do?

## Finding my direction

If we cannot name a precise destination often what we can do is identify a direction of travel

- What are you moving from?
- What are you moving towards?
  
- What do you want less of?
- What do you want more of?
  
- Most roads have names. How would you name your road?
  
- Is there a visual image that expresses in some way what it is you seek and feel drawn to?
  
- What biblical character do you identify with at this time? Why is this?

## Making a first step

Rather than be over-anxious about accurately identifying *the* first step towards a change you seek, or *the* first step along a road you feel drawn to travel, dare to take *a* first step anyway! Even if the movement is not perfect it will have created some momentum.



## Some biblical readings for reflection and prayer:

Mark 8. 34-37

Genesis 12. 1-4

Matthew 3. 1-17

Matthew 4. 1-11

Matthew 4. 12-22

1 Kings 19. 1-13

[www.christopherchapmanspirituality.co.uk](http://www.christopherchapmanspirituality.co.uk)