

ST AUGUSTINE'S
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY

Changing Times: Week 1



Sometimes we choose to make changes that have the potential to shift the direction of our life. Perhaps we change the focus of our work, begin or end a relationship, or give ourselves more fully to a cause we have always cared about but done little with.

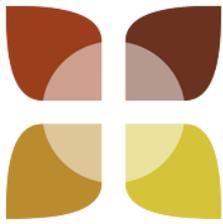
At other times it is as if change has chosen us; something we are all experiencing through the current experience of lockdown. Yet, even when events happen that are beyond our control we have a choice as to how to respond.

Sometimes we sense that a change is needed without being able to identify what it is or how it begins. Perhaps we feel restless, or that our capacity to 'just keep going' has largely gone. Perhaps we feel some glimmer of excitement or energy about a different path from the one we have walked up to now.

To be in relationship with God is to open ourselves to continual movement. The Spirit is 'the Lord, the giver of life' and this life stirs purposefully within us, drawing us deeper into relationship with God, freeing us to know and express who we are and leading us to share the best of ourselves in a way that is life-giving for others.

Over these weeks we will explore this movement of the Spirit within those outward changes that have had such an impact on our lives and the stirrings within our own deep spirit.

The exercises and reflections that follow give some starting points for listening to God about the changes taking place within your life.



A pattern for prayer

- I am in the presence of a God who loves me, believes in me and wants my good.
- I settle into this presence, slowing myself down. I come as I am.
- I name my desire: it might be something like 'I want to be open and attentive to what God is doing in my life' [but use your own words].
- I read through the Bible passage once / or contemplate the exercise given me
- I read / look again, letting the words and images expressed sink in more deeply.
- I become attentive to any particular phrases or images that in some way touch me. I notice my 'feeling' responses as well as thoughts that come to me.
- I move into a time of quiet attentiveness before God. I am not trying to have great thoughts or new insights at this stage – more 'abiding' in what I have thus far felt, thought or sensed, and in God who is with me.
- I end with a conversation with God flowing from my time of prayer. I share my thoughts and feelings openly and honestly. I listen to how God seems to respond.

After the prayer time has finished, spend a few minutes noting down what you sensed, heard or felt within the prayer time. Note especially those moments within prayer that touched you in some way – whether this felt 'positive' or 'negative' at the time.

Changing rooms

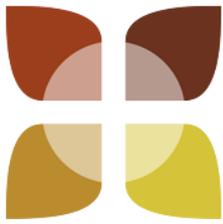
Sometimes making outward, physical changes unlocks the elusive inner change we sense we need but cannot get hold of.

If there is a space in your home or garden that you feel dissatisfied with spend some time rearranging it. It might be a room, or a garden space, a cupboard or even a drawer.

Or you might find this imaginative exercise helpful...

Picture your life as it was before lockdown as a room? What was the room like? In your imagination, walk into it, look around and notice what you feel as you do so. Is the room cluttered or under-furnished, light or dark? How is the room arranged? What dominates the room – a large work desk perhaps, a table where people sit around, a cupboard stuffed with reminders of your past.

Now imagine the room clear – as if you were in a process of redecorating and you had taken everything out of the room.



ST AUGUSTINE'S
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY

Now imagine you are going to order the room again. Are you going to put everything back where it was? Perhaps there are some items you want to leave behind. Or you might want to put things in different places or introduce new things to your room. Be as radical as you like.
You might find it helpful to draw your old and new room.
Talk with God about what emerges.

Digging up the concrete path

The garden path was straight and narrow – a practical, durable, concrete strip. To its right a narrow rectangular bed of imprisoned plants, to its left a rectangular lawn. I disliked the path. I resented the way it constrained all else in the garden. For years I accepted its inevitability and worked around it as best I could. But when I started to draw imaginary gardens, the straight path became serpentine; the beds flowed with it, ebbing and flowing in their shape; curves replacing straight lines.

So the concrete path had to go. I had little confidence. I lacked proper tools or knowhow. With hammer and chisel I somehow cracked the slabs and wobbled the remnants away. I was all too conscious of eyes from neighbours' gardens watching me get rid of a perfectly serviceable garden path. I marked out my river, bit with my spade into the squareness of the lawn and dug out my path. I edged it, put down sand and gravel, and stood up to admire the result.

It is some years now since I defied my perfectly formed but oppressive concrete path.

Listen to what God is loosening from a concrete hold.

Pay attention to what is emerging from God's Spirit in your spirit.

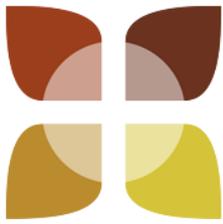
Do not be afraid of that strange originality God draws you to become and share.

Dare to dig up the oppression that experience imposed on the course of your life.

Defy the disapproving voices and glances that advise you that it's better to be unhappy than to be a fool.

There is a new garden, just waiting to become.





ST AUGUSTINE'S
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY

Undergrowth:

Hold for a moment the word 'undergrowth'.

What is growing below your normal line of sight?

What depths of your own spirit and God's spirit in your spirit are beginning to surface – inviting your attention.

Maybe it's a restlessness you are accustomed to push away.

Or is it a deep down desire – some expression of yourself that longs to be free and see the light?

Nicodemus meets Jesus at night [John 3. 1-9]

'How can anyone be born after growing old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?'...

'The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is of everyone who is born of the Spirit.'



Other Bible passages for reflection and prayer:

Ezekiel 47. 1-12

Luke 3. 1-23

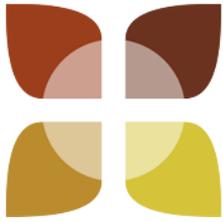
Ecclesiastes 3. 1-8

Genesis 1. 1-2

A time for change: The death of George Floyd in Minnesota has moved many to speak out and to take action.

- What issue or need in your neighbourhood or in wider society touches you most?
- What do you want to change?
- While many things may be out of your reach, what one action can you take?

Following the way of wise ignorance



ST AUGUSTINE'S
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY

Ignatius was following the Spirit,
he was not running ahead of it.
And yet he was being led gently,
where he did not know.
He was not intending at that time to found the order.
Little by little, though,
the road was opening up before him
and he was moving along it,
wisely ignorant,
with his heart placed very simply with Christ

[Jerome Nadal on the journey of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits]

www.christopherchapmanspirituality.co.uk