



Sensible Shoes  
Sharon Garlough Brown  
A Reflective Prayer Guide

The book *Sensible Shoes* is the first of a series of books looking at the journey of four women invited to attend a school of prayer. The book deals with life as it is lived and the questions of faith which arise from this. *Sensible Shoes* is the kind of book that can be read by and given to others asking these deeper questions of life.

This is a reflective guide designed over the Covid lockdown to be used individually and in groups to help dig a bit deeper into the text. It helps us look up to God, into ourselves and out into the world and encourages us to move from contemplation to action. The guide can be used to facilitate discussions on platforms like Zoom to enable a small group of friends to discuss and accompany each other on the journey together.

There are questions to prompt reflection on each of the chapters.

- The questions in black type are questions more suited for group discussion.
- The questions in grey type are questions more suited for reflecting on and talking through individually with God, and perhaps a close friend or a spiritual director.

### **On line groups:**

The on-line group sessions often work well with this material if everyone is given the opportunity to answer the first couple of questions.

- One person offers to share their answers to questions 1 and 2 first.
- This person then 'passes the baton' on to another member of the group.
- This next person then 'passes the baton' to someone else, having either shared or decided not to share their answers.
- No pressure is put on anyone to answer any question at any point but everyone is given the opportunity.

Zoom and other on line platforms:

- Have confidentiality issues that relate to the platform
- Can be prone to people sharing more deeply than they might do face to face
- Can make silences seem long. (This is often best handled by letting silences happen and holding them for a while and checking that no-one else has something to say before moving on to the next question).

It is therefore important that the person leading the sessions has the pastoral and technological skills to do this. There is on line training available to enable people to translate the skills of leading small groups to the on line environment.

### **Creative prayer**

At the end of the reflections for each chapter are some ideas for individual creative prayer.

All quotes are taken from the book itself which can be purchased on line through [Ten of Those](#) or in digital format on [Kindle](#).

As you begin this journey, you might like to get a notebook and pen to note down some of your thoughts and words and gifts from God that you want to remember.

Rhona Knight  
June 2020

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.

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**New International Version (NIV)**

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## Chapter 1

### Invitation to a journey

1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*  
*What do I want to give thanks for?*

2. *How do I feel when I get an invitation to something?*

#### 3. Meg

We meet Meg.

*What are my first reactions to Meg and her story?*

We are told 'Meg Crane was alone. Truly alone. Now what? Slumping forward, Meg cradled her head in her hands and wept.'

*Have I known anyone who felt like Meg – completely alone?*

*Have I ever felt that way myself?*

#### 4. Hannah

We meet Hannah.

*What are my first reactions to her story?*

We are told about Hannah's Brown Bear, and of her broken heart when one of his gentle eyes fell off.

*What toys do I remember from childhood?*

*Do I remember any particular toys that broke or were lost? How did that impact on me?*

#### 5. Mara

We meet Mara.

*What are my first reactions to her story?*

We are told about Mara being 'left over' and having to take a 'walk of shame'.

*Where was I when it came to picking teams at school?*

*How did that impact on me then and how do I think it impacts on me now?*

#### 6. Charissa

We meet Charissa.

*What are my first reactions to her story?*

We are told 'Mother didn't allow her to bring books to church or to the dinner table, so Charissa hid them in her head.'

*How do I react to that?*

*Were there any 'rules' I was brought up with that I valued?*

*Were there any 'rules' I thought were harmful?*

7. How did I feel when it was suggested I read this book?

*How would I feel if I had been given an invitation to the Sacred Journey days like Mara, Charissa, Hannah and Meg?*



## Creative prayer

You might like to look at the image below and listen to Kate Rusby sing [Until Morning](#).  
*What is God's invitation to me today?*



## Chapter 2

### The Pilgrimage Begins

1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?  
What do I want to give thanks for?*

2. *How do I respond to the words of Psalm 84 at the start of the chapter?*

#### 3. Meg

Rachel tells Meg as she approaches the New Hope Retreat Centre 'A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.'

*When have I had to take just one step at a time?*

*Where would I normally sit if I went to something like New Hope for the first time?*

*Why would I choose to sit there?*

#### 4. Mara

Mara notices Charissa and feels envious.

*What kind of things provoke me to envy?*

*How do I feel when I acknowledge this?*

*Why do I think I react this way?*

In praying with the story of the calling of the disciples using her imagination, Mara feels chosen. Jesus says 'Mara, come with me, I choose you, walk with me.'

*How do I feel about this way of praying?*

*Might I also pray this way with this passage of scripture from the gospel of Mark?*

#### 5. Hannah

Hannah introduces herself to Charissa saying 'I'm a pastor who's been forced against my will to take a long sabbatical in an absolutely gorgeous place. And I don't have a clue what to do.'

*When did I last have a period of time with nothing in the diary?*

*What did I do with the time?*

*How would I feel if I was forced to take a long sabbatical? What would I do with the time?*

#### 6. Charissa

Charissa asks Katherine for a reading list and a syllabus. Katherine responds 'I know this will be frustrating to some of you, but I won't be assigning readings or using a syllabus. For the most part, I won't even tell you ahead of time what to expect...'

*How much do I resonate with Charissa?*

*What would be my words of advice to her?*

7. *How would I feel if invited to walk the labyrinth?*

## Creative prayer

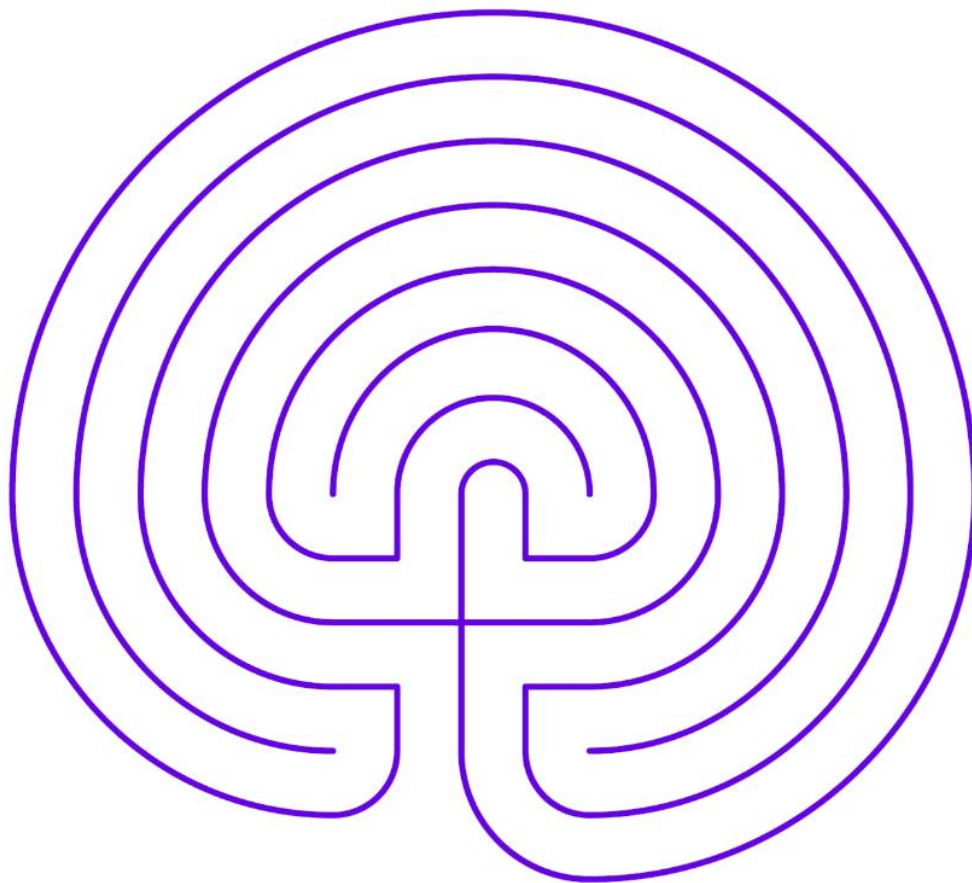
You might like to pray the prayer below or listen to the song [I the Lord of Sea and Sky](#)

*O God, we thank you for our birth,  
for your care for us until now,  
for your choice of us,  
your call to us,  
your hope in us,  
for your promise to us of love, grace and strength,  
the fullness of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, your incarnate Son, our Saviour and our Lord.  
Amen.*

*(Adapted from George Appleton, Gratitude for our Calling)*

You might like to walk the finger labyrinth below with your finger.

<http://www.wellfedspirit.org/welcome/spiritual->



[practices/labyrinths/ewExternalFiles/Finger%20Labryinth%20Guide02.pdf](#)



## Chapter 3

### Exploring the heart of God

1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*  
*What do I want to give thanks for?*

2. *How do I respond to the words of Jesus saying 'who do you say that I am?'. What would I say?*

#### 3. Mara

We read of Mara's difficult past, having to leave everything. She uses all the money that is thrown at her to get away from the threat of violence.

*Do I know anyone who has had to leave everything behind?*

*When in my life have you had to leave a situation, a job or a person or people?*

*What helped me cope?*

#### 4. Charissa

Charissa is provoked by Katherine's observation that she wanted to be in control of her life.

*How much do I like to be in control?*

*What kind of things do I like to be in control of?*

*What areas do I need to let go of and let God get into the driving seat?*

#### 5. Hannah

Steve says to Hannah 'I'm thinking it also might be helpful for you to connect with a spiritual director while you're up there. This sabbatical is radical surgery, and you can't operate on yourself. You're going to need some help.'

*Do I ask for help easily or do I prefer to struggle on alone? Why do I think this is?*

*Where am I really able to be vulnerable and open and myself?*

#### 6. Meg

Standing at the entry of the labyrinth, she tried to summon the courage to take the first step.

What if she got it wrong? What if she got lost and confused? What if she didn't hear anything from God?

*How would I answer Meg's questions if she had asked me?*

*What other questions might she be wanting to ask?*

## Creative prayer

You might like to read Psalm 23 slowly.

What words or phrases do you notice? What strikes you?

You might like to listen to the Stuart Townend version of [Psalm 23](#).

What different names or words to describe Jesus do you have?

Note them down and as you do give thanks. You might like to continue in prayer by turning these names into a word cloud. To do this:

- Go to the web site [here](#).
- Write in the names for Jesus that you have chosen.
- Let the website create the word cloud for you.
- Take a screen shot and print this out.



## Chapter 4

### Learning to Linger

#### 1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*

*What do I want to give thanks for?*

*How has God been revealing himself to me or speaking to me?*

*How have I responded?*

#### 2. *How do I respond to the words of Jesus saying, “What are you looking for?” John 1:38*

#### 3. **Charissa**

“Picture lectio divina as a way of feasting on God’s Word,” Katherine was saying. “First we take a bite; then we chew, savoring the taste of it; and finally we swallow and digest it, and it becomes part of us. I’m going to read the same passage several times. Slowly. As I read the first time, listen for a word or a phrase that chooses you—something that catches your attention and invites you to linger with it. Don’t analyze it. Just listen to it. Then, as you listen to the text again, ponder that word. Chew and savor it, letting the word descend from your mind to your heart. Why did it catch your attention? What is God personally saying to you? How does that word connect with your life? Don’t be afraid of thoughts and feelings that arise around that word... After you’ve chewed on the word or phrase for a while,” Katherine said, “begin a conversation with God. How is God inviting you to pray? Be honest. Allow the word you have been pondering to touch you at a deep level as you dialogue with God. Listen for the Spirit’s gentle voice of reassurance as you talk with God about what you have heard. And then finally, simply rest in the Lord’s presence. Let go of the need for words, and just enjoy being held in God’s infinite love.”

Charissa stiffens in her chair and is concerned about the subjectivity of it all.

*How do I respond to this way of approaching reading scripture?*

*Is it something I have done before – and how did I meet God in it?*

*Is it something I might like to try?*

#### 4. **Hannah**

Hannah says “My senior pastor suggested finding a spiritual director, but I’ve never had a director before, and I don’t know much about it.”

*Who in my life has helped me notice the moments of God in my life?*

*How did they do this?*

*How do I respond to the idea of Hannah being recommended getting a formal spiritual director?*

Hannah says “One of these days, Meg, I’d love to have you come out to the lake. It’s a beautiful, peaceful place. Great for reading or walking or praying.”

*What places do I have that are great for reading, walking or praying?*

*What makes them so special?*

#### 5. **Meg**

Mara smiles and says “We all have our gifts, don’t we?” “And I’d say you have a gift of compassion, Meg.”

*What gifts do I have?*

*What gifts do I recognise in others I know?*

Meg shares about the death of her husband.

*What significant losses have I had in my life? As I look back at these where do I notice the presence of God?*

### **Creative prayer**

You might like to read John 1:35-39, chewing on the words. Read this passage slowly.

*What words or phrases strike you?*

*Read these words again slowly.*

*Stay with one of the words or phrases that catches you and hold it in the stillness before God.*

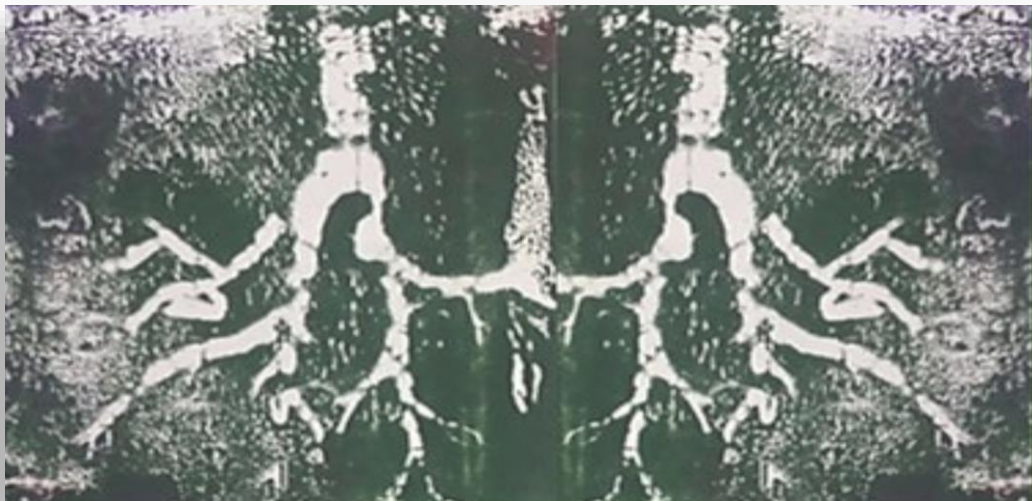
*What thoughts, feelings and images have emerged in this time of prayer?*

*How has the Spirit been at work in your heart as you have prayed?*

*You might like to note these down in a journal.*

You might like to listen to the Sons of Korah sing [Psalm 1](#).

You might like to pray with the image below. As you do, how do you respond to the other translation of the words of Jesus in John 1:38, 'what do you want'?



## Chapter 5

### Come and see

#### 1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*

*What do I want to give thanks for?*

*How has God been revealing himself to me or speaking to me?*

*How have I responded?*

#### 2. *How did and do I react to the verse from Zechariah at the beginning of the chapter?*

The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. He said to me, "What do you see?" Zechariah 4:1-2

#### 3. **Mara**

'Mara listened to the message with mixed emotion. She had expected to disappear from the group without being noticed or missed. It had never occurred to her that Katherine would take the time to call and ask about her. Now she was second-guessing her decision to quit. Was she that easily persuaded by a small demonstration of kindness and concern?'

*When has someone taken the time to notice I am missing?*

*How did they do that and how did I feel?*

*When have I wanted to call and ask about someone who I have noticed was missing?*

*What did I actually do and how did I feel?*

As Mara is listening, she hears the pastor say: "You better ask yourself: how's God tryin' to get your attention? Maybe it's somethin' from the Word that's gripped you and won't let you go. Pay attention. Maybe it's a friend who's encouragin' you to take a leap of faith and trust God. Pay attention. Maybe it's somethin' that's really buggin' you, and God wants you to pay attention so he can talk to you about why you're so upset. Wake up and listen! If you get a sense that the Lord Almighty is talkin' to you, I'm tellin' you, drop everything you're doin' and pay attention! Amen?"

*When did I last get a sense of God talking to me in a way I could not miss?*

*How do I look to notice God in the everyday at the moment?*

*How might I like to do this more?*

#### 4. **Katherine**

Katherine tells Mara: "Start looking at Jesus... Start reading the stories of Jesus interacting with people just like you. Imagine yourself right in the middle of the story, experiencing grace, receiving forgiveness, seeing love. Let everything you see about Jesus begin to reshape your image of God and your image of yourself."

*How do I react to this way of praying?*

*Is it a way of praying I use and if so how did God use it to show his love?*

*Is it a way of praying I might like to try?*

#### 5. **Hannah**

Hannah notices the serenity prayer on the wall "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference."

*How does the serenity prayer speak to me as I read it?*

*Where would I like the grace of God in my life to help me accept, be brave and be wise?*

Hannah is asked “So ... as you think about this season of your life, Hannah, is there an image or a passage of Scripture that comes to mind? Anything that connects with your story?”

*What season is my life in at the moment?*

*Is there an image or passage that comes to my mind that connects with my story?*

## **5. Meg**

‘Meg had spent the past three days contemplating two questions: Who am I? What do I want? Hannah had given her advice about how to seek answers. “Try to discover who you are apart from the roles you play or the relationships you have”.’

*What are the key roles and relationships in my life?*

*Who am I apart from these roles and relationships?*

Meg hears the words “There is great love in God’s heart for you, Meg. Love you have yet to experience. More than anything else in the world, God wants you to know that you are the one he treasures and loves. That’s the heart of this journey.”

*How do I respond to these words?*

*If I take time to look at God looking at me saying he loves me, how do I feel?*

*How might he be wanting me to experience his love more deeply?*

## **6. Charissa**

‘Charissa fumed. She hated being scolded. After the test she marched up to her teacher’s desk to explain what had happened. But Mrs. Jackson wouldn’t listen. “Let it go, Charissa. It’s not a big deal.” Charissa disagreed. And she wasn’t going to let it go.’

*How do I react to criticism?*

*What can make feedback easier for me to hear and take on board?*

*What do I think about what Dr Allen says to Charissa?*

*How might I have done it differently?*

## **7. Nate**

‘Nate passed the red lighthouse at the end of the channel and came about, changing course. As the wind filled the sails, he entrusted Charissa to God’s faithful care. Please don’t let her walk away from you, Lord. Please.’

*How easy do I find it to entrust those I care for into God’s care?*

*What situations and people would I like to entrust more into God’s care now?*



## Creative prayer

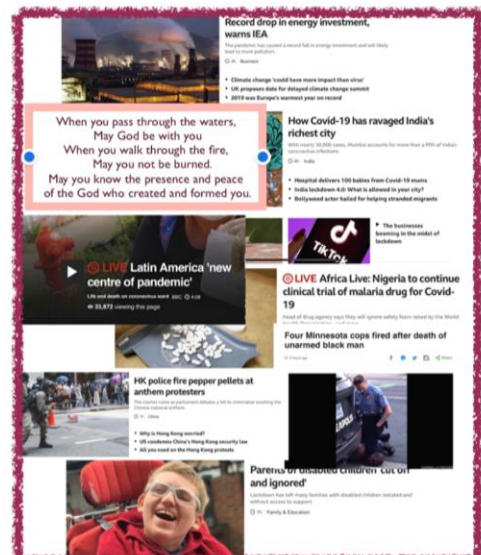
You might like to read Psalm 84 slowly.

What words or phrases do you notice? What strikes you?

You might like to listen to this version of [Psalm 84](#).

You might like to make a prayer collage. This could be done for world events, as below. The same process could also be used to make a prayer collage for those friends and family you love and care for.

- You will need a newspaper or an online news channel
- Cut out from a newspaper or a printed screenshot items of news that God draws to your attention
- Place them in a collage
- On a separate piece of paper write a prayer based on the words of Isaiah 43: 1-3
- Pray these words over the situations on your collage
- Place this collage in a prominent place and pray over these situations over the week
- You might like to incorporate this approach into your weekly pattern of praying for the world



## Chapter 6

### Hiding and Seeking

#### 1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*

*What do I want to give thanks for?*

*How has God been revealing himself to me or speaking to me?*

*How have I responded?*

#### 2. *How did and do I react to the verse from Ezekiel at the beginning of the chapter?*

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak. Ezekiel 34:15-16

#### 3. **Meg**

'Perfect love casts out fear. Was this her journey? From fear to love? She remembered the image of the shepherd finding her and comforting her. She remembered thinking that if Jesus really walked with her, she wouldn't be afraid. Suddenly, everything seemed to fit together: her emerging understanding of God's perfect love, her memories of Jim's deep love, her longing and love for Becca... She couldn't. She couldn't fly to England. Could she? Remembering the simple prayer Katherine had taught her, Meg slowed her rapid and anxious breathing, inhaling, I can't. Exhaling, You can, Lord. Inhale. I can't. Exhale. You can, Lord. If only ... What if ... ?

*Where have I had to rely on God's strength in the past?*

*Where do I have to rely on him now?*

*How is he asking me to trust him?*

#### 4. **Katherine**

Katherine tells Meg "Getting rid of the fears is never the goal," she said. "If we fix our eyes on that, then we won't be looking at Jesus. Drawing close to the Lord is what we're seeking. God is always our first desire. So we focus on the perfect love and faithfulness of God instead of the depth of our fear. We meditate on how big God is. How trustworthy God is. How loving and gracious God is. And slowly ... slowly we discover our trust growing, and our fears shrinking—all by God's gift and power. Always by God's gift and power—not by our own efforts."

*How do I respond to these words?*

*How might I focus more on how trustworthy God is?*

*Do I have a favourite Psalm that speaks to me in this?*

#### 5. **Charissa**

Emily says to Charissa 'Jesus has never failed me, no matter how rough it's gotten.'

*How much do I echo Emily's thoughts?*

*Where I look back where do we see God has been with us?*

*How do I respond to putting my name in to this passage of Isaiah 43?*

But now, this is what the Lord says—  
he who created you, Jacob,  
he who formed you, Israel:  
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.  
For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

#### 6. Mara

'That's when she heard it: a gentle, tender echo of words spoken with deep feeling and great love. No matter where you hide, I will always find you. You belong to me and I love you very very much.'

*What do I think and feel when I hear those words being spoken by God over me?*

*Should I expect God to give me experiences like Mara's?*

*What can I say to myself and others who may not have had that deep type of 'mystical' experience that Mara had of God's love and wonder why?*

#### 7. Nate

Nate says: "Real confession is deeper than seeing our own failure... We need to see how our sin impacts our communion and intimacy with God and with other people. Sin should break our hearts—not because we discover we're imperfect—but because we see that our sin has destructive consequences. And the sins of the spirit are particularly treacherous because they can be so easily concealed."

*How do I react to this description of sin and confession?*

*What areas of sin do I want to confess before God?*

*Am I open to receiving his abundant forgiveness?*

#### 8. Hannah

We are told Hannah 'never told her parents about the phone call from Brad. And the next day, to punish herself for getting distracted, she told Brad she was sorry, but she couldn't go to the movie after all. He didn't ask her out again.'

*How do I imagine Hannah might feel as she looks back at the time her brother fell from the tree?*

*How might it be impacting on her now?*

*How might I need to be open with God about my past failings and receive his forgiveness?*

#### 9. The Examen

How do I respond to this way of prayer?

## Creative prayer

You might like to pray with the Examen over the next week. You might like to make an Examen Bracelet to help you focus.

You might like to listen to Esther Mui sing the verses from [Isaiah 43:1-3](#).



### A bracelet EXAMEN.

The EXAMEN is a way to help us reflect prayerfully on the events of the day. It comes from the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. It helps us notice where God has been present and to discern his direction for us and our lives. Some of us have minds that find it easier to stay focussed in prayer by using other senses. These EXAMEN beads seek to do this by using the senses of sight and touch.

The EXAMEN below is designed to be used with bracelet EXAMEN beads in the evening before going to sleep. The key below serves as a guide on how to use them. These beads have been designed to be worn on your wrist and kept by your bed at night.

Orange bead	Become aware of God's presence with you and of His love for you. Spend some time giving thanks to God for who He is, for all He has done and in gratitude for the day.
Crystal bead	Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you through a review of your day as you reflect on your thoughts and emotions and where have you have noticed God or wandered away.
Sixteen different coloured beads	Use the first bead to reflect on the previous night. Use the other fifteen to review the rest of the day hour by hour to the present time.
One cross bead ✝	Ask God for His forgiveness of any mistakes or failures that the Holy Spirit reveals.
One pink bead	Consider the next twenty-four hours. Ask God for His grace and guidance as you look towards the coming day.

## Chapter 7

### Walking attentively

1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*  
*What do I want to give thanks for?*

2. *How have I found praying with the examen?*  
*Is it something I might continue with?*

### 3. Charissa

Charissa was encouraged by Dr Allen to pay attention to the things that provoked her. She finds it difficult to pray the hands up hands down prayer. 'Then it occurred to her. It wasn't the physical action itself. Rather, it was what the action represented. Charissa was uncomfortable letting go.'

*What do I find difficult to let go of to God?*

*What do I find more easy to let go of to God?*

### 2. Meg

Then she heard a man's voice: 'I've got you, Meggie. Keep comin.' Hard as she tried, she couldn't see a face. She only felt the grip of a hand and heard the sound of a voice.'

*What is my first memory?*

*Do I have any memories like Meg that I would like God to explain or reveal more to me about?*

### 3. Hannah

Hannah says 'I'm empty Lord. Completely empty. And you know what? I'm not even interested in being filled. How's that for honest?'

*When did I last feel empty?*

*When did I last feel full?*

*Have I ever felt so empty that I have not been interested in being filled?*

*Have I ever felt full to overflowing?*

Hannah has a real rant at God.

*When did I last rant at God like Hannah and like the person/people writing so many of the psalms?*

*How do I feel when I am so honest with God?*

### 4. Mara

Mara says 'I talked too much... I'm so sorry. I completely dominated the conversation. I don't have an off switch, do I?'

*Which disciple does Mara remind me of? Why?*

*Which disciple do I identify with? Why?*

### **Creative prayer**

You might like to read the poem below



A cup must be empty before it can be filled. If it is already full, it can't be filled again except by emptying it out. In order to fill anything, there must be a hollowed-out space. This is especially true of God's word. In order to receive it, we must be hollowed out. We must be emptied of the false self and its endless demands. When Christ came, there was no room in the inn. It was full. The inn is a symbol of the heart. God's word, Christ, can take root only in a hollow.

—from *A Voice Over The Water: An Invitation To Pray* by William Breault, SJ

Listen here to [New Wine](#) sing: Make me a vessel, make me an offering. Make me whatever you want me to be.



## Chapter 8

### Intimacy and encounter

1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*  
*What do I want to give thanks for?*

2. *How did and do I react to the poem by George Herbert?*  
*Have I ever been aware of God's love in a similar way?*

#### 3. Charissa

Charissa has an intimate encounter with God. She says to Dr Allen that poetry became prayer for her.

*Do I remember a time when poetry became prayer for me? How did it affect me?*  
*When else have words touched me in a deep way that has made me want to weep, or filled me with joy?*

Charissa begins to wonder if oneness with Christ can be a deeper intimacy than she was discovering with her husband John. She prays 'Let me love you, Jesus, even as you first loved me.'

*What do I think/feel about this kind of intimacy with God?*  
*How would I describe God's love for me?*  
*How would I describe my love for God?*

#### 2. Hannah

Hannah has been talking to Katherine who has pointed out that she has been bleeding inside for a long time.

*When have I felt like I was bleeding on the inside? Keeping all the pain in?*  
*When have I been able to share my pain and what difference did that make?*

Hanna says 'I have so far to go. So much to confront. I am not going to be naive about how hard the road will be. But there's hope. There's hope in the ashes.'

*When have I experienced hope coming out of ashes?*

Hannah sees Nate and her response is 'Oh no. No no no.'

*Do we recall ever having felt that on seeing someone? What was our underlying feeling?*

#### 3. Nate

Nate say to Hannah 'hard pruning will do that. Our task is yielding and resting, saying yes even when God cuts off the parts we can't live without.'

*Have I ever felt pruned by God? How did I respond to it?*  
*What growth have I seen in myself after times of pruning?*

### Creative prayer

You might like to listen to this version of Ed Sheeran's [Perfect as Worship](#).

You might like to look at the image of The Kiss by Klimt (Fair Use). How does this image resonate with my experience of the love of God?



## Chapter 9

### Found at the crossroads

1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?  
What do I want to give thanks for?*

2. *How did and do I react to the version of Psalm 121 at the beginning of the chapter?*

#### 3. Katherine

Katherine says 'God always intends good for us. Always. There is nothing but love in God's heart for you. I promise. And because God loves you more than you can possibly comprehend, he will gently reveal areas of discomfort, pain and agitation – not to cause you harm, but so that you can identify where it hurts and turn to him for comfort and healing.'

*Do I remember a time where God revealed an area of pain to me that he then began to heal?*

Katherine continues 'we begin our journey into freedom when we go back to the places where we were spiritually, emotionally and mentally wounded. But this time we go with God's presence, help and strength. No matter how frightening and messy it feels, God asks us to trust him. The Lord does some of his most beautiful work in the midst of the messiness and brokenness of our lives.'

*Do I agree with Katherine?*

*How have I seen God at work in my life or the lives of others in this way?*

*Where would I like to feel the touch of God in my life?*

#### 4. Nate

Nate says 'when Laura walked away from our marriage into an affair, her sin was condemned. Publicly. But for years my sin has been congratulated and affirmed, I was such a good and faithful servant of the church, so passionate in serving God and others.'

*What other 'respectable' sins are there?*

*Are there any of these that I am more prone to?*

Nate says 'my way forward is always about going deeper into God's love for me. That's where I am going. Deeper into God's heart, deeper into union and communion with Him. I am walking the road to claiming my identity as a beloved son of God. Nothing more, nothing less.'

*How does it feel being a beloved child of God?*

*How deeply do I really take this truth on board?*

#### 5. Hannah

Hannah notices that Nate has managed to 'overtake her in spiritual insight and maturity. She had one been the one mentoring him. Now their roles were reversed.'

*Where have I noticed this kind of 'reversal' in my own life?*

*How has God blessed me and others through this?*



### **Creative prayer**

Where have I come from and where am I going?  
You might like to use the finger labyrinth below.  
Ask Jesus to join you on your journey.

*Where have I come from?*

Start from the outside and look back over your life as you journey with God as your finger moves to the centre. Stay in the centre for a while.

*Where am I going?*

Begin to journey out with your finger. As you do, talk with Jesus about where you are going and where he is leading.

You might like to listen to this piece of music [Jesus you are changing me](#), sung by Marilyn Baker.



<http://www.wellfedspirit.org/welcome/spiritual-practices/labyrinths/ewExternalFiles/Finger%20Labryinth%20Guide02.pdf>

## Chapter 10

### Deeper into the wilderness

#### 1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*

*What do I want to give thanks for?*

*How has God been revealing himself to me or speaking to me?*

*How have I responded?*

#### 2. *How did and do I react to the verse from Isaiah at the beginning of the chapter?*

I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.

These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them. Isaiah 42:16

#### 3. **Meg**

Meg says softly "I'd really like to support you, Hannah. If there's anything I can do to help ... I know my faith isn't as strong as yours, but if there's anything I can offer you ... I just wish ..."

*How am I tempted to compare myself to others and why do I do this?*

*How do I react to The Plum poem (p27)?*

Meg explores the attic with Rachel and discovers things about her Dad's death. 'Maybe the attic revelation merely confirmed what Meg had always suspected: there was something deeper and darker to the sadness of her family. The specter of sorrow had never been named, and so it had become the air they'd breathed, poisoning them with its secrecy and silence. Now Meg had words. No reasons. No answers. But words for voicing the burden. Maybe that was gift enough.'

*How might I respond to Meg if I were to meet her and she was to tell me what she had found?*

*How would I feel?*

*How might such a discovery be a gift?*

*What does Loretta give Meg?*

#### 4. **Mara**

Mara is talking with Jeremy about the possibility of spending thanksgiving helping at Crossroads, a place she and Jeremy knew well but which Brian and Kevin had been sheltered from. Jeremy says "Tell you what, Mom. You've been talking so much lately about how God is answering prayer in your life. Why not ask God for a Thanksgiving gift? I'll pray for that for you, okay?" Mara's eyes filled with tears as she looked at her son. "You're the one who keeps telling me nothing's impossible with God," he said. "Right?"

*Have you ever been encouraged to pray for what seems impossible?*

*Where have you seen God do the impossible?*

#### 5. **Hannah**

Hannah says "I saw an image as Nathan prayed for me in his office... I was running in and out of the throne room of God, collecting flowers from Jesus to give to other people. Then suddenly, Jesus caught me by the hand and told me that the flowers were actually for me."

*In what ways am I like Hannah?*

*How might Jesus be asking me to sit and receive flowers from him?*

'Hannah had told herself that if she really understood how deeply God loved her, then she would have the courage to go back into the past without fear. This was her opportunity. Help, Lord. She pulled out the box and carried it to the sofa by the picture window. It was time.'

*Hannah kept a diary / journal – have I ever done this?*

*How did this impact on me?*

*Have I ever spent time looking back at what I had written?*

*How did this impact on me?*

*How do I feel about taking God into the more difficult parts of my past to let him heal some of the memories that still trouble me?*

## **6. Charissa**

So when she sat staring at a faint blue plus sign, she was sure it had to be a false positive. In fact, she was so certain that she retook the test three times over three days with three different brands. But dots, lines, and plusses all confirmed the truth. She was pregnant.

*What has been my experience of being or not being in a parental / caring role?*

*How do I respond when I have a responsibility to care for someone else that compromises my own freedom?*

*If, like Charissa, I have been pregnant, how did I feel when I made the discovery?*

## **7. Katherine**

"Jesus is the perfect Redeemer of our sorrow and suffering, if we entrust ourselves to him. The miracle is that Christ has the power to make something precious and beautiful out of it." "A pearl," Meg murmured. "A pearl," Katherine echoed, nodding slowly. "I'm watching God form you into a beautiful pearl, Margaret," she said with deep feeling.

*How do I see myself as a pearl in formation?*

*What part has suffering played in this?*

*How do I see God shaping others into pearls?*



## **Creative prayer**

You might like to listen to this piece of music [Nothing to Fear](#) sung by Audrey Assad.

### **The Plum – author unknown**

*You can learn that you cannot be loved by all people*

*You can be the finest PLUM in the world,*

*RIPE – JUICY – SUCCULENT*

*And offer yourself to all.*

*However you must remember there will always be people who do not like plums.*

*You can learn to understand that if you are the world's finest plum,*

*And someone you like does not like plums*

*You have a choice of becoming a banana.*

*However, you need to be warned that if you choose to become a banana,*

*You will be a second-rate banana,*

*However, you can always be the best plum.*

*You need to understand that if you choose to be a second-rate banana,*

*There will always be people who do not like bananas,*

*Furthermore, you can spend your life trying to become the best banana (which is impossible if you are a plum),*

*Or: You can seek again to be the*

*BEST PLUM!!*



## Chapter 11

### Lightening the load

#### 1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*

*What do I want to give thanks for?*

*How has God been revealing himself to me or speaking to me?*

*How have I responded?*

#### 2. *How did and do I react to the verses from Isaiah at the beginning of the chapter?*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. . . . For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken. Isaiah 9:2, 4

#### 3. **Katherine**

Katherine is saying “It’s always a gift when the Spirit shines the light of truth into the dark corners of our lives, ... It’s mercy when God reveals areas of blindness to us. God never shows us these things to condemn us, but to free us. The Lord gently coaxes us out of hiding so that he can heal and restore us.” She continues “Friends, there’s such freedom in being able to say, ‘Yes, that’s my sin. And yes, I have a Savior.’ No need to hide. No need to be defensive. No need to be ashamed. No need to carry the burden of trying to be perfect. We have freedom to confess what’s true about ourselves and receive God’s grace.”

*How do I respond to the idea of self-examination?*

*Did I pray with the Genesis story and how did I find it?*

*What did God show me about myself?*

*If I decided not to pray with the passage, what stopped me? Is this something I might like to do?*

#### 4. **Charissa**

Charissa seems less convinced and would have avoided going to New Hope if she had known the subject matter. ‘Charissa didn’t want to have ears to hear, and she was tired of seeing her sin. She already knew her sin—some of it, anyway—and she didn’t want light shining into any other dark corners of her toxic waste container.’

*When have I been like Charissa?*

Charissa later talks of impression management but is beginning to see how tiring it is.

*When have I put on a mask or sought consciously or unconsciously to manage impressions at work? At home? In friendships?*

*When am I able to be more fully myself?*

#### 5. **Mara**

“You know,” she went on, “I put so much energy into hiding over the years, and now suddenly, everything’s breaking loose, and I’m not afraid like I was before.” She smiled at Charissa. “I’m not terrified of rejection anymore. How amazing is that?”

*How good am I at hiding from God? From myself? From others?*

*What helps me reveal myself to others?  
What helps me not be terrified of rejection?*

Mara reads from her notebook “ ‘The exposure of sin is the beginning of its destruction.’ That’s good, isn’t it?”

*Do I agree with Mara?*

#### **6. Meg**

Meg writes in her letter to Jim ‘You always told me I needed to be kind to myself. You tried to help me understand that loving myself wasn’t a selfish thing, but a way of opening up to God’s love for me.’

*What does being kind to myself look like?  
How does loving myself open me up to God’s love for me?  
How might writing the letters Meg writes to Jim and her father have helped her?*

Meg buys herself 21 long stemmed roses.

*Have I ever bought myself flowers? If so when was the last time I did this?*

#### **7. Hannah**

Hannah begins to ponder the questions: Who was she? What did she want? Where was she going? Where was she?

*What would my response be to those questions?*

#### **8. Nate**

Nate says to Hannah ‘You made me love God more, and that was important to me.’

*What friends have made me love God more?  
How have they done this?*

#### **Creative prayer**

You might Listen to Shane and Shane sing [Psalm 139](#) or to David Suchet reading it [here](#).

You might like to look at this YouTube clip on [Bible Art Journaling](#) and may consider praying with scripture in this way.

## Chapter 12

### Walking together in the love of God

1. *How has the week been and how has what I have read resonated with life?*

*What do I want to give thanks for?*

*How has God been revealing himself to me or speaking to me?*

*How have I responded?*

2. *How did and do I react to the verse from John at the beginning of the chapter?*

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. John 15:9*

3. *How do I respond these questions from chapter 12?*

*What regular practices help me to receive, remain in, and respond to the love of God?*

*What brings me life and helps me stay close to God?*

*What practices help me deepen relationships and love others?*

*What habits and patterns of sin impede my growth and formation in Christ?*

*What regular practices can address these patterns and help me to cooperate with the grace of God?*

#### 4. Meg

Meg says “I was thinking about how much solitude and quiet I have in this season of my life... And I’m glad that my alone time is becoming more life-giving to me, because it was absolutely terrifying after Becca left.”

*How do I find time alone and in solitude?*

*What might make it more life giving?*

#### 5. Hannah

Hannah says “So I’m going to read a lot about Sabbath-keeping and see if I can become a better steward of my time.”

*How do I feel about my use of time?*

*How might I become a better steward of it?*

*How might I better keep Sabbath time?*

#### 6. Charissa

Charissa says: “I didn’t even know all that was inside of me. Next steps of the journey, I guess. I’m paying attention to why my buttons are getting pushed right now...”

*What buttons has reading about the journey of Charissa and her friends pushed in me?*

*What areas might I need to work through more with God?*

*How might God be asking me to do this?*

## **7. Nate**

Nate says to Hannah, “what if part of this sabbatical is all about learning to play? What if God wants to teach you how to stop taking such good care of everybody else and start looking at what brings you life and joy? ... learning how to ‘relax into God... You’ve spent a lifetime being the burden-bearer. What will you do if you’re not carrying the heavy loads anymore?”

*How much am I like Hannah?*

*Where might God be asking me to ‘be well’ and develop greater wellbeing?*

*What brings me closer to God, and helps me experience life and joy?*

## **8. Katherine**

Katherine says: “Rules of life are like trellises... helping branches grow in the right direction and providing support and structure. They can be as simple or as detailed as you wish. I’ve known some people who benefit from having specific spiritual patterns and rhythms for each day; others prefer more of a free flow. What’s important is that you discern what brings you life. Which disciplines help you keep company with Jesus? Which practices create space where God can dwell deeply within you?”

*What kind of formal or informal rule of life do I have at the moment?*

*How does it bring me life?*

*Is there anything I would like to change about it?*

Katherine says “Remember: even though we sometimes experience significant breakthroughs and tangible evidence of the Spirit’s work in our lives, spiritual growth is often imperceptible. I encourage you to be patient.”

*Where have I seen the Spirit at work as I have read this book and reflected on it?*

*How patient am I when I don’t see progress?*

## **9. Mara**

Mara says “I’m so happy for you, Hannah... I’ll be praying for you guys, for whatever God has planned for you.”

*What does it mean to me for others to be praying for me?*

*What does it mean to me to be praying for others?*

*What do I see as the next steps of my journey with Jesus individually and with others?*

### **Creative prayer**

You might like to follow the link to a [book of Labyrinths](#). Choose one and use it to look back over the journey of *Sensible Shoes* and what God has shown you. Come to the centre and pause. Then begin to 'walk' out again asking God to show you what is next as you respond to his call and leading as he walks with you.

You might like to listen to Paul Field sing [God of the Moon and Stars](#).

As you come to the end of the book you might like to read this poem:

*Trust in the Slow Work of God  
Above all, trust in the slow work of God  
We are quite naturally impatient in everything  
to reach the end without delay  
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being on the way to something  
unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through  
some stages of instability  
and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you.  
your ideas mature gradually – let them grow,  
let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on,  
as though you could be today what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances  
acting on your own good will)  
will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit  
gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing  
that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense and incomplete.  
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955)*

You might also like to read the words from Proverbs 3

***Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight***

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