

**LIVING CONFIDENTLY IN
UNCERTAIN TIMES**

A SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR EASTER
2020

STUDY LESSONS

PREPARED BY
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STUDY LESSONS

**PRESENTED BY
FRIENDS OF UNITY - PLYMOUTH**

WEEKLY THEMES

Theme One: **PEACE**

Theme Two: **BE**

Theme Three: **STILL**

Theme Four: **KNOW**

Theme Five: **I AM**

Theme Six: **GOD**

PROLOGUE

Thank you for joining us in this Lenten experience. Our goal in these lessons is to see beyond the crucifixion. We will explore in a fresh way the transforming teachings of the Christ. We are expanding our vision to the real Easter message, the real Easter experience living through us. Reverend Chris Chenoweth reminds us that we are **EASTER** people. “We must go beyond our daily crucifixion, go beyond our tombs and those areas in our life that seemed to be dead. We must follow Jesus and rise again ourselves – like he said we could. We are transmuted by Spirit. We are to become examples as light bearers for others stuck in their own darkness.” We are **Easter** people; we are people of the **resurrection**.

Thank you for sharing your light, peace and presence.

You are a blessing.

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Theme One: PEACE

In this quiet time of prayer, I open my heart and mind to the presence and power of God.

Welcome to our time together. Lent is a perfect time to come apart. There is a need for us to come at life reflectively. Even an hour a week of coming together can help us restore our awareness of God at work in all things. There have been many periods of uncertainty in the history of man. Imagine the “uncertainty” of Noah and his friends floating in a small boat for 40 days and nights. What do you think Jesus’ thoughts were as he went into the desert to prepare for his work? The desert represents a place without clear boundaries. Some of us may be feeling that we are now in a desert place. We have great role models for responding to these times.

Forty is considered "long enough" for a change to take place. It is considered "long enough" to establish a new pattern, long enough to change a habit. Forty is also considered a foundation, a preparation for something to follow. Charles Fillmore speaks of Lent as a time to retreat from the things of the world. It is a time to cleanse the mind and recollect the things of the spirit. If we are feeling scattered, pulled in many directions, this is a perfect time to gather up the ideas and practices that have nourished our spirit in the past. It is a time to become reacquainted with the holy presence within us.

There is an interesting balance here in the concept of forty days and nights. Day represents understanding, and night represents ignorance or not knowing. Most of us are not very comfortable with "not knowing". Spiritual psychologists tell us the wilderness times in our lives are the times when the usual understanding and parameters no longer work. It is a time when we must rely totally on Spirit. Are we willing to be that vulnerable? It is a great risk to say "I don't know", "lead me", "show me the way". Are we willing to enter this sanctuary of Spirit for forty days and forty nights and just see what God has planned for us?

Lent is a wonderful time to walk a closer walk with Jesus Christ. Charles Fillmore tells us Jesus Christ is always holding services within. "I am with you all days". Donald Curtis reminds us there is within us a rising tide, a ray of light, the Christ light always expressing through us. Do you have a sense that when you are compassionate or wise, courageous or joyful, that you really are God at work in the world? You are God's hands and feet. In Finding the Christ, Donald Curtis shares this promise: "There comes a time when every person's path crosses the path of the Christ. His life is changed from that point. So strong, so pure, so relentless is the influence of the Christ within that if you take just one step with Him, He will transmute your whole life and uplift your whole being." It sounds worth the risk. Step into the wilderness. Be vulnerable and open to this strong, pure presence.

You may enjoy thinking about the acronym for Lent: Lets Eliminate Negative Thinking. What shall we do?

Let's fast from complaining and feast on appreciation.

Let's fast from unrelenting pressure and feast on unceasing prayer.

Let's fast from bitterness and feast on forgiveness.

Let's fast from discouragement and feast on hope.

This is a powerful time to become open to the holy presence of the Christ expressing through all people. As we walk this path together, we will be aware of our deep bond, our kinship. We will be supported and carried forward by the holy presence that supports and nourishes the entire planet. It is a wonderful time to be alive. Enjoy this extraordinary opportunity to prepare for transformation. We are sons and daughters of God. It is not yet clear what we shall be.

We will work with the thoughts in Psalm 46:10. Be still, and know that I am God. We often place the word "Peace" before this phrase. It seems to fit perfectly there. This may be because of Jesus. Jesus was with his disciples out in the Sea of Galilee when a huge storm developed. Have you ever been in a great storm in a small boat? Even though many of the disciples were experienced fishermen, they were really afraid. In Mark 4:39 we find Jesus standing up in the boat "rebuking the wind and saying to the sea, peace be still! And the wind ceased and there was a great calm."

Jesus went on to ask his disciples why they were so fearful. Fears create blockages in our knowing how to respond to adversity. We can

acknowledge our fears and remain open to the inner guidance and support that is always there for us.

We begin with peace. Peace, what echoes in your heart when you hear this word? Do you hear the ancient *Shalom*? Jesus would have used the Aramaic word *Shlama*. This is a greeting used in the Middle East for thousands of years. It means health and safety. It acknowledges a mutual agreement that saves a difficult situation. It recognizes a happy gathering.

The Dalai Lama reminds us that peace must be developed within an individual. Love, compassion and altruism are the fundamental basis for peace.ⁱ We have the example of many contemporary peacemakers who not only remain peaceful but bring peace to their daily lives. Picture Mother Theresa moving through the streets of Calcutta ministering to the most neglected outcasts. Imagine Thich Nhat Hanh establishing days of mindfulness in the midst of Vietnam during the war. Thich Nhat Hanh has written many wonderful books filled with nourishing thoughts and practices. In his book Peace Is Every Step he shares a poem.

Peace is every step.
The shining red sun is my heart.
Each flower smiles with me.
How green, how fresh all that grows.
How cool the wind blows.
Peace is every step
It turns the endless path to joy.ⁱⁱ

There is a lot of suffering in the world right now. We must nourish our beings with peace through thoughtful contemplation. In a quiet place, we become conscious of our breath. We breathe in peace (shalom) and breathe out peace (shalom). We greet all the aspects of our life with this greeting of peace. May health and safety prevail. We turn to those aspects of suffering in our own life. We greet them with this blessing of shalom. We look upon the suffering of others and bring them this greeting of compassion and tenderness, health and safety.

As we move out of our time of contemplation, we see more clearly how we can help to relieve the suffering of others. We see what we can do to move with peace in every step.

Viktor Frankl speaks of the “demand quality of life.” We are called to respond to the needs of those around us in a meaningful way. We are meant to bring compassion, respect and hope to our own suffering and the suffering of others.

We walk together through this Lenten experience. We expand our understanding and embrace all things in this awareness. Dr. Ilchi Lee shared this prayer of peace at the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations (August 28, 2000).

I offer this prayer of peace
To the cosmic oneness that is our birthright
And our privilege
And our strength,
That should we let it shine and show us the way
Will guide us to the road of peace,
Not the Christian peace,
Not the Jewish peace,
Not the Islamic peace,
Nor the Buddhist peace,
And not even the indigenous peace of many nations,
But the human peace
That has a place in the hearts of all people
To allow us to truly fulfill our divine potential,
To become the children of one humanity.
I offer this prayer of peace
To declare a revolution
Of the human spirit.
I wish to announce that it is now time
For all of us to spiritually awaken
And become enlightened,
For the time for the enlightened few is over.
The age of elitist enlightenment has passed.
For how long do you seek to wait for prophets
To come down from mountaintops
And tell us what to do.
We all must become enlightened,
To recognize our divinity,
To raise up our consciousness,
And proclaim our independence

From blind reliance on long ago sages
And find the answers from our own well
Of spiritual wisdom.
We must ourselves become the enlightened ones,
We must ourselves realize our Oneness.

We close our time together with a quiet meditation in which we water the seeds of peace within us.

Throughout this season of Lent consider embracing this practice. Take the statement we are using and speak it into the depth of your being. **Peace, be still and know that I am God.** Then, restate it dropping the last word as you move through it. For example, the second time would be **Peace, be still and know that I am...** and so on. Consider this as a daily practice and observe the changes that take place within you.

Thoughts to contemplate or discuss:

1. How will I use this time to grow in understanding?
2. What one regular action would make my life more peaceful?
3. How can this action be extended to my community?

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Theme Two: BE

I am one with the energy, love and radiance throughout the universe.

What can we bring to this moment? We are living in an extraordinary age. On the one hand we are in the midst of great scientific discoveries. There is a vast worldwide movement for increased understanding and peace. More and more people are awakening to global citizenship. On the other hand there is much anxiety about world issues. We have concerns about our safety and the safety of family members. Perhaps we have personal concerns regarding friends and family.

We are challenged to listen for the underlying message. We must listen for the rhythm of life at the center of all the events around us. Fortunately we have guides along our path. They appear just when we need them. They nudge us into greater understanding. James Dillet Freeman reminds us to “listen to life, and you shall hear the voices of life crying Be! What shall you be? Be what you were made to be! You were made to be alive. You were made to be joy. You were made to be a son (daughter) of God. God made you in His image. The impress of His spirit is on your every living cell.”ⁱⁱⁱ

One of the ways we can listen to the voice of life is by stopping often during the day even for a few seconds. Take a moment to consciously breathe in and out. Now ask yourself: what do I hear; what do I see; what do I feel. Take a moment to do this now.

This is mindfulness. When we stop often during the day, even for a minute, we begin to live from the inner voice of life. We begin to notice the beauty around us. We appreciate the squirrel with his tail wrapped over his head enjoying a black walnut. We notice the unexpected kindness of a young man in the grocery store. Jon Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as “heartfulness.” As we work with this practice we experience our heart opening.

The outer conditions in our life may still be very demanding. The waves may be high on the sea around us, but we keep taking moments of

“heartfulness.” We keep checking in with what we are seeing, hearing and feeling. We keep breathing.

Jesus only gave one “sermon” that we know of. It has come to be called the Sermon on the Mount. Eric Butterworth calls the Beatitudes (Be attitudes) the “amazing attitudes of Being.”^{iv} We are expanding our understanding of this great sermon with the help of Aramaic bible scholars.

Jesus spoke Aramaic. It is an ancient language with very fluid meanings. One word may have many translations. Sometimes these ideas seem to conflict with each other. The words of Jesus are meant to resonate on many different levels. They intrigue our intellect, comfort our heart, and expand our spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:3)

Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity; their “I can!” is included in God’s.^v

We speak of God as “closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.” The Holy Breath is the atmosphere we breathe all the time. We are united with all living beings in each breath. As we take moments to consciously breathe in and out, we are united with the energy of God. Some call this energy the Holy Spirit. When we are in tune with this breath and life we don’t put ourselves forward inappropriately.^{vi} We merge into the realm of light, vibration, wholeness and love.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

Blessed are those in emotional turmoil; they shall be united inside by love.^{vii}

In the second Beatitude we can consider the word mourn as one who grieves or as one who longs for something to occur.^{viii} Is there something you long for? Is there some deep question you carry in your heart? Jesus has promised us we will come into unity through love. We will be comforted. A new understanding will come upon us. We will find fulfillment and strength.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

Healthy are those who have softened what is rigid within; they shall receive physical vigor and strength from the universe.^{ix}

In the third Beatitude “meek” might be translated as gentle or humble. Some of us may carry some rigid attitudes and beliefs. We may feel that people “should” do things a certain way. We may be hardest on ourselves. In developing our “heartfulness” practice, we begin to release and soften some of these attitudes. We return to the real source of power which is God acting through all of nature. There are many ways to do this. Lie down quietly on the floor and acknowledge the support and care of our beautiful earth. Take a walk on the earth. In these ways we come to know we are nourished and loved. We are united to all living things.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for physical justice; they shall be surrounded by what is needed to sustain their bodies.^x

Righteousness in Aramaic includes inner and outer justice.^{xi} Sometimes we have conflicting thoughts within our own mind. We long for understanding. We hunger and thirst for it. That energy of longing creates an energy path that draws what we need to us. We will have the guidance to establish harmony around us.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

Blessed are those who, from their inner wombs, birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them.^{xii}

The fifth Beatitude is very tender. The word mercy comes from the root word which means womb. This mercy has its origins at the center of our being, and it radiates from that center. It can also mean “compassion” or a “long drawn breath extending grace.” We feel mercy developing within us, radiating through us. Birthing can be hard work; it requires intention and commitment.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere.^{xiii}

This Beatitude calls to mind the bright souls among us who radiate an energy of love from a deep spiritual center. They see goodness everywhere in everything. They smile in the midst of suffering, not because they are in denial. They are truly one with God, and see God, the activity and energy of the cosmos, in all things.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

Blessed are those who plant peace each season; they shall be named the children of God.^{xiv}

Planting peace implies a regular, committed activity. We know Jesus loved the metaphors of planting and harvest. Peace represents health and safety and those things that unite us. On a lovely plaque purchased in Assisi, Italy we find the greeting *Pace et Bene*, Peace and Well Being. This commitment to peace opens us to be channels for the energy of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)

Blessings to those who are dislocated for the cause of justice; their new home is the province of the universe.^{xv}

Jesus was recognizing that the world does not always embrace prophets. Those who stand up for justice are often mistreated. Consider Martin Luther King, Jr. Jesus is telling us to expand our view. Consider the world your home. We are part of something greater than our local environment.

Blessed are ye, when men revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (Matthew 5: 11)

Renewal when you are reproached and driven away by the clamor of evil on all sides, for my sake...^{xvi}

This Beatitude makes a transition to the last lines.

Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5: 11)

Then, do everything extreme, including letting your ego disappear, for this is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the universe.^{xvii}

We can make use of adversity. This is an opportunity to return to our breathing. Return to inner quiet and mindfulness. In these sacred moments we expand in our connection with all of life.

Let's spend a few moments being present, breathing, listening and feeling. We are one with the energy, love and radiance throughout the universe.

Peace, Be Still and Know that I Am God.

Thoughts for discussion or contemplation:

1. How are you experiencing mindfulness or heartfulness in your life?
Are there ways to deepen this practice?

2. Choose one of the beatitudes to work with for the next week. How do you think it might affect your life? Write down your insights throughout the week, and share them at the next session.

3. Is there a way to bring the essence of this lesson to specific people or situations in your life? How would you do that?

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Theme Three: STILL

Eternally one with the light and life of God, I am filled with the joy of Spirit.

How are you doing with your inner stillness, your inner quietness? What would your life look like if you always responded from this quiet inner core?

In Keep a True Lent, Charles Fillmore speaks of the altar "as a fixed, definite center in the consciousness of man. It is a place where we meet the Lord face to face and are willing to give up our sins...It is a place of full consecration". Many of us have had a favorite sanctuary, a place we feel safe and inspired, enfolded in God's love. It might be a consecrated chapel, a place in our home or in nature. It is important to have a place we can return to in our mind's eye. In that place we can walk and talk with God. We can be who we are, with our hopes and fears, our dreams and disappointments. We can let go of the many faces we wear, the many roles we play, and just be still. "Be still and know that I am God."

Roy Davis has us ask ourselves this question: "When you contemplate your true self - the being you really are - what is your realization? Do you see yourself as a restricted person, subject to restless thinking, mood changes and changing circumstances, or do you know yourself to be a Soul, a spiritual being?" This is a perfect season in our life to renew our mind, body and life by contemplating our true self and aligning our thoughts with the overcoming pattern of Jesus Christ.

Jesus really understood his relationship to God. He knew God as unconditional love. Think of how this is expressed in the story of the Prodigal Son. The father had been totally rejected by the younger son. The son went off to a far country. The father kept waiting, hoping his son would return. When the son did return, the father gave him all the symbols of sonship, plus he threw a party. Even the older brother who begrudged his father's largesse was tenderly told, "Son, you are always with me. Everything I have is yours." Picture that all-embracing, unconditional love of the Father enfolding you and everyone you know and pray for. Keep extending that "knowing" and enfolding to include all people, everywhere.

Jesus knew God as ever-present, abundant life. He was quick to notice the birds of the air, the lilies in the field waiting to be harvested. He knew God as wisdom. "The Father knows what you have need of." Jesus knew God as abundant Father, ready to supply every need.

In Finding the Christ, Donald Curtis tells us "we seek to remind ourselves of who we are - that we are beautiful lights in the universe, that we are natives of eternity, that we are children of God."

We have so many distractions, so many responsibilities. We take on many projects. Wayne Muller in Sabbath – Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest and Delight^{xviii} reminds us that the mantra of modern life is "I am so busy" and "I am so tired." We say it almost with pride. It seems to make us feel that we are really contributing. We must be busy for our life to be valuable and worthwhile.

When we look around at nature we see that most creatures and plants require a time of dormancy in order to flourish. There are seasons in our life that require vigorous outward commitment followed by days of rest and restoration.

What have you noticed as you walk into the woods? There is a deep beauty. The air is charged with life. Sunlight comes through the trees in shafts of light. We notice the sound of the wind high in the treetops. The earth is soft underfoot, cushioned with generations of leaves. Nature provides us with healing places. We must give ourselves permission to step into these places with our heart open. These moments of receptivity will then begin to penetrate the other moments of our life. We will bring the forest, the quiet streams, and the desert sky to the busyness of our life.

The daily news brings reports of many situations that are troubling. We find our anxiety rising. We are concerned about the safety of our children and grandchildren. We look for guides. Who are your hero spirits? These are often family members who have responded to adversity with tenderness, compassion and humor. Viktor Frankl, philosopher and psychiatrist, was sent to Auschwitz with his parents and his young, pregnant wife. His parents and wife perished in the gas ovens. He was put to work digging trenches. He recalls thinking deeply about his wife. He was filled with love

for her. At that moment someone lit a lamp in a distant house. This brought him great comfort.

At that moment he had a choice. He could have been filled with despair and anger. He chose to be filled with love. Suffering was all around him. Viktor Frankl found a way to rest in the tenderness of the moment. One of Frankl's fundamental teachings is that all of life is meaningful. We find this understanding echoed in Nehemiah's message to the Levites (8:11) when he calmed all the people, saying "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve."

A favorite Unity teacher reminds us that every day is God's Day. In Unity we often speak of practicing the presence of God. This is the decision to step into the still place within us. Charles Fillmore (co-founder of Unity) speaks of taking words (centering affirmations) and stepping into the place where we experience the presence of God. "But in order to keep the gate ajar it is a daily necessity to withdraw into this deep stillness of the soul."^{xix}

This is wonderful imagery. We picture a garden (we are already more peaceful). We step through the gate and walk into a place of beauty and peace. In this place of stillness, we find strength, compassion, insight and rest. It is a place to turn over our fears, our deepest questions and let them be. It is a place to turn over our work and give it to spirit, give it to life, give it to the unfolding energies in the universe.

How can we bring this stillness into the activities of our life? Let this stillness become like a stream that flows through each moment of our life. We are meeting with a client, caring for an aging parent, or meeting with a critical person. We take a moment to acknowledge this stillness in us and them. Thich Nhat Hahn has often said that it is not such a miracle to walk upon water; it is a miracle to walk upon the earth in stillness and peace.

Although living the phrase, "Peace, be still," is a challenge, it is also a gift. What if this is all we had to do to move confidently through our day? What if we really believed this is a special day? Imagine that every day is your birth-day. We are reborn today. Unexpected gifts will appear. We will receive greetings from unexpected quarters. A church sign will bring a chuckle. A friend will share a hug. A sliver of moon will hang in the sky over your backyard.

Imagine this is your special day. God has sent you a greeting card.

On this special day...
Laugh from the belly
Run like a child
Dance for no reason
Smile a big smile
Nap because you can
Give yourself a hug
Feel peace in your heart
Know that you are loved

Be still and know that I Am God.

Thoughts for contemplation or discussion:

1. What ways have you found that are helpful to cultivate inner stillness?
2. Who are some favorite authors that you turn to for guidance?
3. What is your commitment in the next week to live from this center of stillness?

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Theme Four: KNOW

My radiant awareness of God is always fresh and clear.

In my family, a favorite greeting was “What do you know for sure?” This deep question is the next theme that flows from “Peace, be still.” “Peace, be still and know.” At the core of our being what rings true? Perhaps you have uncovered some revelations during these weeks of contemplation.

Solomon went to sleep and Jehovah came to him in a dream. He offered Solomon anything he desired. Solomon asked for an understanding heart. Charles Fillmore speaks of a “knowing capacity transcending intellectual knowledge. Nearly everyone has touched this hidden wisdom and has been more or less astonished by its revelations. The knowing that man receives direct from the direct fusion of the Mind of God with his mind is real spiritual knowing.”^{xx}

Knowing implies a deep level of confidence. It is deeper than believing. It is very different from intellectual knowing that we get from books. This is not to minimize the value of books. Because of books we can read the thoughts and share in the experiences of the great “knowers.” We can walk with Jesus in the gospels. We can pray with the great mystic St. Francis. We can stand next to Brother Lawrence in his kitchen while he practices the presence of God. Spiritual guides provide us with handbooks, practices and inspiration. These are all wonderful. For many of us they have been essential to our growth. They all can only lead us to the doorway of awakening. At some moment we need to step over the threshold and be still and know at that deeper level of confidence.

All that we are seeking to know is already available. All that we need, we already have. We are already one with all the good we require to respond to the assignments set before us. What are the conditions in your world asking of you today? We have needs of family members. We have work related demands. We have broader community and national needs.

What do we “know” is available to help us each moment of each day? Do we feel we have to do it all ourselves? Do we trust that we live in a vast, supportive presence? Take a moment to rest in these thoughts of Tagore.

This is the ultimate end of man, to find the one which is in him; which is his truth, which is his soul; the key with which he opens the gate of spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom. Man’s desires are many and madly he runs after the varied objects of the world, for therein he thinks to have his life and fulfillment. But that which is one in him is ever seeking for unity...unity in knowledge...unity in love...unity in purposes of will. The vision of the supreme one in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on reasoning or demonstration at all.

How does this message echo in your heart? Knowing can come in so many forms. Perhaps we are guided to the perfect gift that will touch someone’s heart. Perhaps we arrive at the perfect time when we are needed by someone. This kind of knowing opens our life to synchronicity. We expect to be guided, supported and loved.

We often speak of light in Unity. We say, "may the light of God surround you". We speak of giving life the "light touch". We are really inviting Spirit to bless us and others. We are opening ourselves up to be channels of God expressing as Spirit. We may use these words so often and in such a casual way that we lose connection with their significance. Jesus told us to let our "light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven". Light is energy. It is a force for good. When we look at people and situations with the eyes of Spirit, the good and the possible will be illuminated. We will begin to see the activity of God everywhere.

We can quite simply meditate upon light. We can close our eyes and see our body filled with light. We can do this in great detail, moving through every part of our body, seeing every cell glowing, shining, and transformed in this holy light. We can see all those for whom we pray enfolded and filled with that same light. We can shine this light into every situation and condition. We bring this light to our daily life in the form of kindness, compassion, insight and affirmation. We are really channels of God's Spirit. We can let it flow as easily as breathing. Think about the people who have crossed your path and shared a kindness, a courtesy. That was a gift of the Spirit in your

life. Light dissolves darkness. When we feel discouraged we need a touch of the Spirit. We need a little light on the subject.

Spirit is light. Spirit is energy. Spirit is the movement of energy in our lives. At Unity retreats we sing a joy song that celebrates "there's a Spirit in my feet keeping me alive, keeping me alive etc." This song celebrates the movement of Spirit throughout our whole being. When we sing it, we feel a need to stand up and move with the joy of life. We feel the energy. In The Way of the Christ by Donald Curtis, he discusses seven main aspects of Spirit: "life, love, light, power, peace, beauty and joy". As we open our minds and hearts through meditation, our imagination is stimulated. We have an expanded range of ideas open up and flow into our life through many unexpected channels.

We affirm the qualities of Spirit as our qualities of being. We affirm: I am filled with the revitalizing presence of God. I am filled with love, light and power. I greet each new experience centered in peace. I give and receive joy to all persons. I rejoice in the beauty of God's world.

As we dwell in the consciousness of Spirit our intelligence is expanded. We become more and more open to the "inspiration" of God. Our lives take on wonderful new forms. What are the attitudes and beliefs that restrict the flow of Spirit? We know when we are very tired or filled with resentment or jealousy, we find the flow of Spirit constricted. As we expand our consciousness, the flow is opened up again. Think of this as light energy moving easily and fast as the speed of light.

There is a powerful link between Spirit and imagination. Spiritual ideas draw to them all that is necessary to bring them into expression. Bring Spiritual values into your life as the foundation principles in every area. Live with integrity, forgiveness and compassion. Be gentle with yourself and others. Invite Spirit, light energy, to move through every project and activity. Cooperate with this great flow of unfolding energy. Acknowledge the good that has flowed through your life each day by jotting down some of the ways you have experienced God's Spirit. We are growing more and more aware of this powerful force for good at work in the world. In a recent Daily Word we find this wonderful affirmation. "With God's help, the good I imagine becomes a reality." We also find this thought from Paul to the Corinthians: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the

Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." 1 Corinthians 2:12.

Of course, sometimes the meanings of the experiences in our life are obscure. At these times, a sense of humor (a profound spiritual resource) can help. Milly Collins, beloved Unity Minister, reminds us to invoke the Law of Levity, the law of taking things lightly. She encourages us to pause for some "light" refreshment. She suggests we hop off the worry-go-round. Don't make your joy dependent on the appearance or disappearance of anything. There is so much beauty, humor and delight all around us. It is so easy to miss the moments. It helps to remind ourselves to savor the delightful moments in the day.

In Care of the Soul, Thomas Moore speaks of "pausing." "Living artfully, therefore, might require something as simple as pausing. Some people are incapable of being arrested by things because they are always on the move. A common symptom of modern life is that there is no time for thought or even for letting impressions of a day sink in. Yet it is only when the world enters the heart that it can be made into soul."^{xxi}

We have agreed to take this time to plant seeds of peace in our lives and around us. We have agreed to pause often to check out the moment at hand. What does this moment look like? What do we hear? How do we feel? We are pausing to be still, to take time to know. We are open to whatever that knowing provides.

In autumn, 1991 Roy Eugene Davis affirmed these thoughts in a newsletter called the Serenity of Holy Remembrance. "You are God's personalized expression in space-time. Your body is formed of the elements of Nature, of God's cosmic forces and material ingredients. Your mind is a portion of God's mind. Your aspiration is God's urge to awaken. Your knowledge is God's perfect knowing. Your intuition is God's infallible perception. God is already expressing as you. Holy remembrance enables you to realize this."

Let's take some time to dwell in the statement "Peace, be still and know that I am God." Let each word drop into your heart center. Speak the words together 3 or 4 times. This is the truth. We are supported and loved in all our endeavors. We know what to do. We have the strength and energy to do it.

Thoughts for contemplation and discussion:

1. Have you had any revelations during this period of study that have surprised you?
2. Have you had some experiences of synchronicity, of being in the right place at the right time? What were those experiences like?
3. How has the spiritual resource of humor expressed in your life?

LIVING CONFIDENTLY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Theme Five: I AM

I walk simply, speak softly and act gently. I am aware of the creative presence of God within me at all times and in all that I do.

Peace, be still and know that I am God. What comes to mind when you think of the words I Am? Do you think of Jesus asking his disciples: who do people say I am? Remember some replied that there was talk that he was Elijah or John. He asked again “Who do you say I am?” Peter replied: you are the Christ, Son of the Living God. (Matthew 16:16).

What does this mean to us? Charles Fillmore tells us the “I Am is the metaphysical name of the spiritual self, as distinguished from the human self. The I Am is the real or Christ Mind of each individual.”^{xxii}

This understanding is one of the great gifts of Unity to our spiritual growth and awareness. Jesus opened the way for a deep oneness with the holy presence that fills the universe. Because of Jesus we can give qualities to this presence that helps us live our life. Jesus was known for his wisdom, compassion and acceptance. Jesus was courageous. He was forgiving. He enjoyed nature and children.

“Through Jesus’ presence we can find a personal relationship with *abwoon*, the breathing life of all. Through attunement to Jesus’ breathing, atmosphere and way of prayer, we will be lead to what he experiences.”^{xxiii} We take Jesus’ words and use them within to gain insight and direction. We look within for affirmation and guidance instead of looking at what is happening around us.

“Direct contact with Sacred Sense leads to an experience of simple presence, a sacred awareness of the here and now. We no longer identify with what we perceive, feel or own, but rather with that which offers the notion of ‘I to all.’”^{xxiv}

The “I am” leads us to the right experiences at the right time and place.

(KJV: “I am the good shepherd” John 10:11.)

Simple Presence is the food of understanding, giving life to all.

(KJV: “I am the bread of life” John 6:35.)

The “I am” gives knowledge of all levels of sensation and existence.

(KJV: “I am the light of the world” John 8:12.)

Simple presence is the door between all worlds.

(KJV: “I am the door” John 10:9.)^{xxv}

These statements provide an opening. Truly, the I Am is a doorway into a profound relationship with the allness of God.

Often in Unity we use the word “Christ” interchangeably with I Am. We have wonderful poems and music such as “I Behold the Christ in You.” We should try to remember to connect the words “I Am” with what is profoundly true about us. I am whole and well. I am centered and poised in the Christ mind.

These are mystical thoughts. We can benefit from discussing the nature of the Christ mind or the I Am. What do you think the Christ mind is like? (Take a few moments to consider this question.) Think about how your perspective on daily life experiences might change if you really embraced this truth: Have this mind in you that is in Christ Jesus. Are there ways this could help you live confidently in uncertain times?

We have agreed to use this time during Lent to make direct contact with God. This takes a lot of dedication. There are so many voices around us that are angry, hopeless and negative. Many people are discouraged. Many people are suffering and afraid. Jesus was not overwhelmed by the crowds that came to him for healing and guidance. He met people where they were. He stepped into their world. He invited them to think differently. He saw possibilities in them. Their lives opened up.

Jesus represents the perfect pattern of one who understood and demonstrated the Truth. What if we could interview Jesus for a national magazine and ask

him to list the five things he did every day to remain spiritually, mentally and physically aware?

Question: Jesus, what are five things you do every day to maintain your centeredness and vitality?

When I first awaken in the morning, I give thanks that the Father and I are one. I know I live and breathe and have my existence in this great and holy presence, which I have come to call, Father. Gratitude opens up my day to grace.

The next thing I do every day, is I get up early, usually long before dawn and I go out to a lonely place, a quiet place and spend time praying. You may have read in Mark's writings about the day when they brought everyone who was sick to me. The whole town came crowding around the door and many who were sick went away well. The next morning, I got up very early, long before dawn to go out into a lonely place to pray. It has been my custom to go to the desert or a garden or a quiet courtyard. Sometimes my friends find me there and they pray with me. This time is important to me; I really want to be like my Father, so I spend time with him in this way.

The third practice I do every day is speaking words aligned with life. I teach in stories so people will remember. These are not my words or my stories. They spring from within, and many people who hear them recognize their power. Just recently I had a centurion come to me concerned about a servant. He wanted me to heal him. The centurion understood the power of the word aligned with truth. I spoke the word, and the servant was healed. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it.

The fourth important part of each day for me is my work. I spend a lot of time with fishermen and people who harvest crops, and I have been a carpenter. But my most important work is to help people see the good and the possible. I like to encourage them to look beyond what they can see. Instead of blindness, I see vision. Instead of brokenness, I see strength and vitality. Instead of infidelity or sin, I see wholeness and love. I don't know if you have heard about all the people we fed with a few fish and a little bread. It is all a matter of seeing. My work is one of tenderness and compassion.

As a fifth practice, I really return to my first practice. I am full of gratitude and joy. I don't know if you have taken a look around you lately, but there is beauty all around you. Look at the people in your life; listen to the sweet bird songs in the morning; catch a glimpse of the sky right before dawn. Appreciate that tender presence within you. The blessings and the promises are extravagant and true. I am with you all days. Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. I really wish people would relax and take delight in the beauty and wonder of life. I have overcome the really hard things. Celebrate the glory that is all around you.

Picture Zacheus up in the tree. He was a fat, little man who had climbed up to get a better view of Jesus. Jesus called to him and said come down; I'm eating at your house today. Zacheus was a tax collector. He was disliked by everyone in the society. But Jesus recognized his wholeness. People like Zacheus challenge our understanding of the Christ nature in everyone. Would we reach out to someone who looked different from us? Are we really practicing practical Christianity?

Peace Pilgrim lived confidently. She walked across all fifty states, Canada and Mexico. She walked for twenty-eight years. She was a joyous person. She expressed a oneness with everything on the earth. She said "we have all the light we need; we just need practice."^{xxxvi} Life is providing us with opportunities to practice. We can trust the presence within us. We can respond with courage and optimism. Peace, be still and know that I am God.

Let's touch deeply into the thoughts of the poem, *I Am There*, by James Dillet Freeman.

Do you need Me?

I am there.

You cannot see Me, yet I am the light you see by.

You cannot hear Me, yet I speak through your voice.

You cannot feel Me, yet I am the power at work in your hands.

I am at work, though you do not understand My ways.

I am at work, though you do not recognize My works.

I am not strange visions. I am not mysteries.

Only in absolute stillness, beyond self, can you know Me as I am, and then but as a feeling and a faith.

Yet I am there. Yet I hear. Yet I answer.

When you need Me, I am there

Even if you deny Me, I am there.
Even when you feel most alone, I am there.
Even in your fears, I am there.
Even in your pain, I am there.
I am there when you pray and when you do not pray.
I am in you, and you are in Me.
Only in your mind can you feel separate from Me, for only in your mind are the mists of “yours” and “mine.”
Yet only with your mind can you know Me and experience Me.
Empty your heart of empty fears.
When you get yourself out of the way, I am there.
You can of yourself do nothing, but I can do all.
And I am in all.
Though you may not see the good, good is there, for I am there.
I am there because I have to be, because I am.
Only in Me does the world have meaning; only out of Me does the world take form; only because of Me does the world go forward.
I am the law on which the movement of the stars and the growth of living cells are founded.
I am the love that is the law’s fulfilling.
I am assurance.
I am peace.
I am oneness.
I am the law that you can live by.
I am the love that you can cling to.
I am your assurance.
I am your peace.
I am one with you.
I am.
Though you fail to find Me, I do not fail you.
Though your faith in Me is unsure, My faith in you never wavers, because I know you, because I love you.
Beloved, I am there.

Thoughts for contemplation and discussion:

1. The concept of “I Am” can be difficult to grasp. What do you struggle with the most about this concept?

2. For Unity students who have been exposed to the metaphysical interpretation of “I Am” for some time, the concept may feel like an old friend. How has an understanding of “I Am” helped you live your life?

3. Unity has, for years, taught the power of “I am” affirmations. What are your reflections on your own use of “I am” affirmations after thinking about this lesson?

LIVING CONFIDENTLY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Theme Six: GOD

I am one with the power that pervades the universe, and its harmonizing influence is at work everywhere, creating a tendency toward peace and love and orderly fulfillment.

What do you love? What do you give your heart to? Do you love music and nature? Do you love your family and friends? Do you love creating beautiful art work or things for your home? Do you love to learn and use your mind? Do you love to laugh?

James Dillet Freeman says to us, “tell me what you love and I’ll tell you what your God is like.”^{xxvii} For some of us, God has represented a confusing presence. God appears as a super being. He is old, male and has a long white beard. God is changeable. One day he is loving and tender and the next day full of wrath. This God is also far away, in the Kingdom of Heaven. We often hear that the Kingdom of Heaven is “up there, somewhere.”

Jesus used the word *Alaha* for God. This is such a rich, expansive word. “It means Sacred Unity, Oneness, the All, the Ultimate Power / Potential, the One with no opposite.”^{xxviii} Jesus embraced everyone and all things in this understanding of God. There is no separation in humankind or nature. There is a sacred oneness.

This sacred oneness is echoed in the great religions. A guide in Istanbul, Turkey was asked the fundamental teaching of Islam. She replied, God is all, all is God. In the *Shema Israel* we hear, “O Lord God, Thou Art One.” The Buddhists teach us of the energy of mindfulness. As we touch this moment deeply we touch all moments. We live in sacred Oneness.

As we study Jesus’ life in the Gospels, we gain new insight into the nature of God through understanding the words he spoke in Aramaic. Recall the story of the centurion. He came to Jesus asking him to heal his servant. He told Jesus he understood authority. He had soldiers and servants that he directed. He told Jesus you don’t need to come to my house. Just say the word and

my servant will be healed. (In Unity we often speak of the power of the spoken word.) Jesus said he had not seen such faith in Israel.

The translation from the Aramaic for the word faith is “living confidence.” This is confidence that is rooted in Sacred Unity, in Oneness. Picture something strong and living that is deeply rooted. Perhaps you have a favorite tree; it stands tall and peaceful throughout all seasons. Picture yourself now deeply rooted in living confidence in Sacred Unity.

The centurion demonstrated this deep living confidence that healed the servant. What do we need to heal in our life? When we are aware that we dwell in sacred unity all things are possible.

Jesus said: “Have faith in God.” (Mark 11:22). Dwell in living confidence in Sacred Unity. We must be willing to step into the mystery. Sometimes the challenges before us are very great. People we love may be suffering. Conditions in the world may be troubling. Enter the mystery. We do not always have a clear vision of the next step. Have faith in the presence of God. Spend time cultivating a deep heart connection with this Holy Presence.

Jesus was the great “wayshower.” He showed us how to connect with the holy presence he called "Father." Jesus taught us how to draw vitality from the vast resources of Spirit. This is a perfect season to dwell more closely in the words of Jesus and let them instruct us. We know our bodies are transformed by the renewing of our mind. We also know how frustrated we feel when our energies are depleted. We seek the bread of life, the word of Truth that will restore our vitality in mind and body. Strength is the energy of God. Strength is physical, mental and spiritual. All strength originates in Spirit.

In the book The Hidden Gospel by Neil Douglas-Klotz, we are introduced to a powerful new understanding of the words of Jesus. Frequently with the English language we view words as a vehicle to share ideas. But Jesus spoke in Aramaic. These words had meaning and power. They were energized and echoed through the body and out into the universe. We will explore six of Neil Douglas-Klotz' eight keys to understanding the message of Jesus. These keys will help us unlock Jesus' teachings and bring us into an intimate relationship with the transformation of his teachings.

The First Key: My breath is part of the Holy Spirit.

In John 4:24 Jesus tells us God is Spirit. The Aramaic translation of spirit also means "breath", "air" or "wind". The word God means "Sacred Unity", "Oneness" or the "Only Being". As we breathe, we breathe in Spirit, and we are immersed in Sacred Unity. We are in God all the time. God is as close as our breath. Klotz invites us to use the Aramaic words "Alaha Ruhua". These would have been the exact words Jesus used. As we sing, chant or say them, we are connected to his consciousness. Klotz says "we experience ourselves as a vessel for the sacred breath; as part of the Sacred Oneness that holds us all." Take a breath and release it. Know that we share this sacred breath with all living beings on the earth. This sacred oneness holds us all. You might enjoy chanting these words or saying them internally as you breathe.

The Second Key: "God" means no one and nothing are excluded.

Every being is held within this Sacred Unity. Jesus used the word "Alaha", which is very similar to the word for God used throughout the Middle East. Nothing is excluded in this understanding. Even the many facets of our own personality are bound together in this Sacred Unity. Isn't that a comfort when we feel we have flown off in many directions that we are tenderly gathered up and enfolded in this great presence? Sometimes we call this Sacred Unity the "Heart of God." Perhaps you have experienced your own Middle East conflicts within; these factions within us are drawn together in Alaha. Again, we chant or breathe this word and enter into Sacred Unity with Jesus, with ourselves, with all sentient beings.

The Third Key: God gives birth every moment. Everything is born in blessing.

Douglas-Klotz and Rocco Erico speak of Jesus' intimate relationship with the Divine. Jesus begins the Lord's Prayer with "Our Father, which art in heaven." Erico speaks of Jesus going directly to God; he didn't ask Moses or Abraham to intercede. His word Father indicates a "closeness", a "companionship". Douglas-Klotz translates this first line as "O Parent of the universe, from your deep interior comes the next wave of shining life." This is our origin. This is our true home. We all have come out of God and will return to God. We were born out of original blessing not original sin. There is only good in this Sacred Unity. As we pray and meditate, we agree to

participate in this vast creation story, bringing forth new expressions of God's blessings. By remembering our origins, our home in the heart of God, we are born anew each day. The Father and I are one.

The Fourth Key: "Goodness" means "Ripeness".

When we read about the good tree bringing forth good fruit, we usually think of a moral judgment. The word "good" is the English translation for the Aramaic word "ripe." "Ripeness" is really about timing and being in harmony with the seasons of our life. There is a time to plant, a time to be quiet, a time to harvest. Jesus was in tune with the seasons around him and the seasons of his life. Remember when he told his mother it was not time to demonstrate his powers. In Unity we speak of being in divine order. This is a sacred rhythm. As we pray, we affirm our unity with this sacred rhythm, divine order, ripeness.

The Fifth Key: "Love means giving birth to a new self."

The word Jesus used for "love" is rooted in the word that means "womb." All creation and birth comes out of a rich, fertile place. This highest form of love gives birth to a new sense of self for ourselves and others. This kind of love brings forth a new vision and expression.

Jesus used a different word for love when he spoke of loving your enemies. This is a "little" love. When we have enemies we feel restricted; the flow of energy is constricted. We need to first be reestablished in the "breath" of God, in Sacred Unity. Then we take a little bit of kindling; we build a little fire of understanding; and we try to find some area we can connect with. We try to find some common ground, and we begin to build a small connection. As we do this we are filled with the all-renewing, energizing, perfect love of God.

The Sixth Key: "Eternal life" means embodied, renewable energy, here and now.

We are very familiar with the wonderful quote from Jesus; "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10. The Aramaic word for life (hayye) refers to embodied life energy. This is not an abstract concept. This is real; this is personal. As we move deeper into this "I Am", we move into this renewable source of all life. We

know that within this Sacred Unity nothing is excluded. There is a wonderful affirmation we use; "There is one life, that life is perfect, that life is whole, that life is God. That life is my life now." As we immerse our awareness in this "hayye" we come into harmony with the universe, with the cosmos. We know ourselves to be part of the sacred cycle of life.

These are six of the eight keys articulated by Neil Douglas-Klotz in The Hidden Gospel. As we prepare for Easter it is a perfect season to immerse our understanding in this fresh view of the words of Jesus.

Let's share in a practice from Neil Douglas-Klotz: The Presence of Unity.^{xxix}

Settle yourself for a few moments, and breathe easily and gently. Place one hand very lightly over the heart and experience the sensation of your breathing there, in the middle of what Jesus would have called the *leba* – the center of courage and feeling. As you breathe in, feel the sound "A-la-ha," and as you breathe out, feel the same sound. Let the rhythm of the sound and the rhythm of your own breath come into a harmony of feeling. After some minutes, release the sound of the word and simply practice the presence of Unity: all inner voices and concerns are acknowledged and included; all outer voices and concerns are acknowledged and included – without judgment.

Peace, be still and know that I Am God. We have treasured these thoughts in our hearts for six weeks. We have created a space within for peace. We have faithfully planted seeds of peace in our hearts and in the world around us. We have put peace in every step, opening our lives to joy.

We have stopped often to be in the moment. We stop and breathe. We listen and we look. We ask ourselves, what am I feeling? Our heart is opening to those around us. We have worked with the Beatitudes and gained new strength from their living message.

We have cultivated a new sense of stillness in the center of the activity of our lives. Every day is a sacred day. We bring this stream of stillness to our daily responsibilities. We bring a sense of joy and delight to those around us.

We are “knowing” more. We are dwelling more confidently in the Sacred Presence in Unity and Oneness. This knowing results in trusting. This trusting moves us to be where we need to be, when we need to be there. We are finding more cosmic humor in the events of our life. We are bringing mirth to earth.

Jesus said, “I am the way, I am the door, I am the good shepherd.” We now know that these statements are an opening into a profound relationship with God. We are taking the steps to expand our understanding of this relationship. We are living confidently.

Think about these words of Roy Eugene Davis.

Because God is the Life of All

When the worlds were framed, when time began, we were there.

When God came into manifestation, He came as you and as me, and as everyone else.

He did not come as us without purpose; He came to fulfill a marvelous plan.

When we are in harmony with our brothers and sisters, we best express Him.

When we rest in the deep silence of the soul, we consciously know the truth.

When our earthly sojourn is over, when God has fulfilled His purposes as us, we will fully awaken.

We will experience nameless, formless existence, and God’s drama as us will be complete.

Peace, Be Still and Know that I Am God.

All is well. We walk the closer walk with all of life. We walk confidently. Thank you Sacred Unity, Holy Presence, Oneness.

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- The New Testament
 - Peace Is Every Step
 - Blessed Are The Peacemakers
 - Care Of The Soul
 - Sabbath
 - Discover The Power Within You
 - Revealing Word
 - Keep a True Lent
 - Mysteries of John
 - Teach Us To Pray
 - Be!
 - Prayer: The Master Key
 - The Hidden Gospel
 - Prayers of the Cosmos
 - Various works
 - The Way of the Christ
- | |
|------------------------------|
| Thich Nhat Hanh |
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| Charles Fillmore |
| Charles and Cora Fillmore |
| James Dillet Freeman |
| James Dillet Freeman |
| Neil Douglas-Klotz |
| Neil Douglas-Klotz |
| Roy Eugene Davis |
| Donald Curtis |

If you have found these lessons to be helpful in your spiritual unfoldment, please express your appreciation to: Friends of Unity – Plymouth. You will find more information about our community at www.friendsofunity.org.

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