



**JANUARY 28 – FEBRUARY 11, 2024**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

## Week 1: God in Art

1. What stood out to you from the message on Sunday? What resonated with you? Was there anything you disagreed with or found uncomfortable?
2. Read Genesis 1:24-27. What do you think it means to be created in God's image?
3. There are several poetic descriptions of creation in the Bible, including in the Wisdom literature. Read Job 24:7-14. What does this poem say about God's power, and about God's artistry? What do you think the writer is trying to communicate through this?
4. Chas, the speaker on Sunday, suggested that art is not just a product (with God in total control of each element), and art is not just a process (with God no longer involved in creation). Rather, God uses us (God's creation) to work toward a new reality right now. What do you think of this suggestion? How might it impact your view of God and your view of life?
5. Watch [this video](https://tinyurl.com/ytzrnzbnk) (tinyurl.com/ytzrnzbnk). How do you feel about the following statements:
  - "When you unite things, their power keeps growing."
  - "Mistakes are to be expected... as an artist, I have to figure out how to harness those differences into something organic."
  - "As an artist, you don't have to have a meaning for everything... meaning can come out of play."
6. Look at the paintings below. Where do you find God in each of them?



7. Toni Morrison said, "This is precisely the time when artists go to work... That is how civilizations heal." How can you use your creativity this week to (i) draw closer to God, and (ii) bring joy to someone else? If you are discussing these questions in a group, share your ideas, and agree to report back next time you meet.

### **Prayer Practice: Prayer doodling**

Take some time this week to be alone with God with a piece of paper and some pens or colored pencils.

- Ask God to use the time to speak to you, and open your mind and heart to God.
- Think of a name for God that is meaningful to you, and write it in the center of the paper.
- Doodle around the name.
- As you do so, other words may come to mind that describe how you feel towards God, or things that are weighing on your heart at this time.
- As words pop into your mind, write them down and doodle around them.
- As you finish encircling a word, let it go into God's hands.
- Breathe, doodle, add color. Enjoy this simple act of creation with your loving Creator.

## Week 2: God in Writing

1. What stood out to you from the message on Sunday? What resonated with you? Was there anything you disagreed with or found uncomfortable?
2. Lent begins next week on Ash Wednesday. One of the scriptures we often read at Lent comes from book of Joel: "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." (Joel 2:12) God asks us to try many ways to open our hearts to the Divine. Melanie, our speaker on Sunday, says that journaling helps her return to God with all her heart. What practices or methods have helped you return to God in the past? What other creative approaches might you try?
3. Author Frederick Buechner writes that "the most basic lesson that all art teaches us is to stop, look, and listen to life on this planet, including our own lives, as a vastly richer, deeper, more mysterious business than most of the time it ever occurs to us to suspect as we bumble along from day to day on automatic pilot." Melanie said that both gardening and reading and writing poetry help her slow down and reflect on her life. What practices get you off "automatic pilot" and help you stop, look, and listen to your life?
4. Buechner also wrote, "In a world that for the most part steers clear of the whole idea of holiness, art is one of the few places left where we can speak to each other of holy things." How do you feel about that statement? Melanie says that to write authentically, she often finds herself writing about God and her spiritual journey, despite the fact that many of her readers have been turned off by Christianity. Are you able to share about your spirituality and "holy things" with people who don't think in those terms? Do you want to? Why or why not?
5. When was the last time you experienced a steep learning curve that gave you the feeling of having "beginner's mind," not having answers and just being a student? How did that feel for you? Did you recognize God's presence and action as you let go of the familiar and opened up to new things? Or can you look back and see it now? Artists often talk about being "in the flow." Have you experienced that in any way and did you recognize God's involvement at the time or later?
6. Read Psalm 139: 23-24 out loud three times, slowly, as a prayer. Spend a few minutes sitting with the words in silence and see if God shows you any thoughts or ways that might be out of alignment with God's will for you. If you are in a group, share your observations if you are comfortable doing so.

### Prayer Practice: The Examen

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491 - 1556) invited his followers to find God in all things. He urged people to pay careful attention to ordinary events and to be open to the Spirit in every moment. To that end, he developed the powerful Prayer of Examen. You may want to make this a daily Lenten journaling practice beginning this week.

Try to do this exercise at about the same time and in the same place each evening this week, if possible. Light a candle if that helps you relax, and have a journal and pen ready.

1. Each day, sit quietly in God's presence for a few minutes. Breathe in God's presence and give thanks for God's great love for you.
2. Pray for the grace to understand how God is acting in your life.
3. Slowly review your day — recall specific moments that stand out and write down your feelings about them.
4. Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those moments. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away?
5. Thank God for giving you the courage and grace to see your day clearly, and then look toward tomorrow. Think of how you might align your day more effectively with God's plans. Finish by saying the Lord's Prayer.

## Week 3: God in Music

1. Was there anything in the message on Sunday that stood out to you? What was most helpful for you? In what ways did it stretch your thinking?
2. What role has music played in your life? How have you experienced God through music? What spiritual lessons have you learned through the creation or appreciation of music?
3. There are over 400 references to singing in the Bible. Since the beginning, the church has been a singing community. Every Sunday, the Cedar Ridge community sings songs together to God. Why do you think music plays such a significant role in the life of the church? Why do you think God places such a high value on music and singing?
4. Read Philippians 4:8. Notice that this verse does not exclude Christians from thinking about “secular” things. In fact, this verse draws from ancient Greek philosophy to establish a basis for Christians to enjoy “the best values that the world has to offer.” How does this verse serve as a template for analyzing and appreciating art forms that are not particularly Christian?
5. The book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, and it is filled with songs. These songs contain the full range of human emotions: Grief and joy, loneliness and fellowship, doubt and confidence, despair and hope, fear and courage. This shows that music is an effective medium for expressing human emotions.
  - How has music helped you express your emotions?
  - What value is there in expressing emotions through music?
  - How does knowing that God invites you to express all your emotions make you feel?
6. Read Matthew 26:17-30. Notice in verse 30 that Jesus sings with his disciples before facing the darkest moment in his life. Why do you think Jesus chose to sing at that moment? How has music helped you through dark moments in your own life?

### Practice for the week: Music and emotion

Choose a song that expresses an emotion you identify with in this season. Listen to it several times and let yourself feel whatever emotions surface without judgment or shame. Each time you listen to the song, allow the music to help you become more aware of the contours of your emotions. Then spend time in prayer, expressing your emotions to God and experiencing God’s love and acceptance.