



# THE LITTLE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

*Six Spiritual Exercises  
for Starting New Years and New Things*

CHRIS ALTROCK, D.MIN.







## Introduction

In the Gospel accounts, the nativity and early childhood scenes of Jesus give way to a new beginning: the launch of Jesus' public ministry. At age thirty, Jesus transitions from the relative obscurity and solitude of life as a Nazareth carpenter to a life of full-time ministry.

The scenes and activities that mark the transition from one season of Jesus' life to this new season of Jesus' life tell us a great deal about what it means to begin well--whether we're considering the beginning of our own attempts to follow Jesus, the beginning of a new year, the start of a new career or calling, or the first steps in a new relationship or geographic location.

Luke 3-6 encapsulates these new-beginning-principles. We might call it Luke's "Little Book of Beginnings." Over the next few hours, we'll immerse ourselves in these texts, seeking to hear God's invitations to us as we step into new days, seasons and spaces with Jesus.

Here, in summary, are the six movements of Jesus as he prepares his new beginning, and the six principles we should ponder as we face all things new:

1. Jesus departs Nazareth, realizing that "*It is time.*" When it came to his new, Jesus would neither push nor procrastinate. He would begin in God's time.
2. Jesus visits the Jordan river where he is baptized, recognizing "*I am beloved.*" These words from heaven at his baptism confirmed that nothing in Jesus' new would ever increase or decrease his inherent worth.
3. Jesus waits in the wilderness, tempted by the Devil, confessing, "*not my will.*" Jesus' three-fold quotation from Scripture revealed that this new would ultimately be about God's wishes, not his own wishes.
4. Jesus spends the night in prayer, modeling his truth, "*I need capacity.*" Supernatural power from heaven was needed for his work on earth.
5. Jesus selects the Twelve, acknowledging "*I need community.*" Ministry and life would be done with others.
6. Jesus draws near to the crowds, admitting "*I need proximity.*" He would be close to those who most needed him.

Move slowly, mindfully and prayerfully through any of these six transition points over the next few hours. Open yourself to the ways God may invite you to particular actions or reactions through them, especially as you consider anything in your life starting or transitioning.

SCHEDULE (*if onsite, move to the room noted in the exercises' titles*)

Gather - 1:30 PM

*Round 1* - 1:45 PM

Gather - 2:25 PM

*Round 2* - 2:40 PM

Gather - 3:20 PM

*Round 3* - 3:35 PM

Gather and Closing - 4:15 PM



## I Am Beloved (*prayer coloring (library)*)

### Pray

Lord Jesus, as I face a new year, a new opportunity, a new challenge or a new chance, replace within me that self that serves *so that I might be loved* with that self that serves *because I am already beloved*.

### Ponder

*21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." 23 Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:21-23a ESV)*

Clear your mind and bring this scene into focus:

- *See* the people being baptized, Jesus emerging from the water, and the Spirit descending like a dove.
- *Hear* the splash of water from the baptisms, the intake of breaths as people come up out of the water, and the sound of the voice from heaven.
- *Feel* the coolness of the water and perhaps the movement of air from the dove's wings.
- *Smell* the freshness of the river.

Now, pay attention to which, of any of these catches your attention. What sight, sound, sensation or smell are you drawn to? And, why? What might God be saying to you through this? Pause for a moment and reflect on this.

Consider this: the Father's words to Jesus prior to his ministry launch, "You are my beloved son," enabled Jesus to serve in a new season of his life from a secure identity rather than to form a secure identity. *Who* Jesus was fueled *what* he would go and do. His being preceded his doing.

Too often, for us, our doing precedes our being. We're not confident in who we are until there's something for us to go and do. We serve in order to *form* a secure identity rather than *from* a secure identity. Lacking a sense of worth and value, we step into new seasons hoping they will enable us to feel beloved. We hope to make a contribution to the world through our actions, failing to recognize we've already made a contribution by our very existence. Let belovedness be where you start new new things, not what you seek from new things.

No new task achieved, new title awarded, new thing afforded or new trimness of body attained in this New Year can increase your inherent self-worth by a single degree. Right now, in this moment, long before you bring about anything new, you are already beloved you.



## I Am Beloved (*cont.*)

### Practice

Spend time coloring this image from Luke 3. As you do, allow your mind to consider questions like these:

- When do I feel most beloved?
- When do I feel most unloved?
- In what ways is my sense of self-worth tied to what I do/ do not do?
- How might my life change if I lived with a constant sense of being beloved?
- How might my sense of being loved be tied in unhealthy ways to the new thing(s) in front of me?

Specifically consider this: *What invitation do I sense from God about being beloved?*





## It Is Time (*examen (teen class 1)*)

### Pray

Lord Jesus, before I head into a new year, a new opportunity, a new challenge, a new chance, help me to leave my Nazareth, knowing “It is time.”

### Ponder

*4 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan ... 14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up ... 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away. 31 And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. (Lk. 4:1, 14-16, 29-30 ESV)*

Clear your mind and bring this scene into focus:

- *See* Jesus, having left Nazareth, and having left the Jordan river (and its surrounding wilderness), moving into Galilee, back to Nazareth briefly, and then into the city of Capernaum.
- *Move* with Jesus as he leaves his childhood home and enters these new spaces and experiences. What do you see? What do you hear? What smells or sensations do you experience?

Now, pay attention to which, of any of these catches your attention. What sight, sound, sensation or smell are you drawn to? And, why? What might God be saying to you through this? Pause for a moment and reflect on this.

Consider this: before launching a new season, Jesus left old Nazareth. Until it was time for his new, he resolved to remain in Nazareth. But once it was time for the new, he determined to depart Nazareth.

Before you launch into a new season, a new year, a new challenge, or a new chance, consider the Nazareth Question: “Is it time?” If it is, pack your bags. If it isn’t, stay in place.

### Practice

Take some time to prayerfully complete these three questions, listening for God’s guidance. This is a type of *examen*. Normally, an examen reflects on something in the past. This examen is a chance to reflect on the future.



## It Is Time *(cont.)*

In this season of my life, *it is time* for me to *start* doing/ being

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In this season of my life, *it is time* for me to *stop* doing/ being

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In this season of my life, *it is time* for me to *keep* doing/ being

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You may find it helpful to consider this list of things from Ecclesiastes 3 (NIRV). Is it now time to  
plant,  
pull up what is planted,  
tear down,  
build up,  
weep,  
laugh,  
embrace someone,  
not embrace someone,  
search,  
stop searching,  
keep,  
throw away,  
tear,  
mend,  
be silent, or  
speak?



## Not My Will (*prayer labyrinth*(CR2))

### Pray

Jesus, help me face every new chapter as a new chance to surrender to what you want most rather than to secure what I want most; to give to others rather than to gain for myself; to further your dreams rather than my desires.

### Ponder

Before Jesus transitions to his full time ministry, he spends time in the desert being tempted by the devil:

*4 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" 5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." 9 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' 11 and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." 12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Lk. 4:1-13 ESV)*

Clear your mind and bring this scene into focus.

- *See* the desert wilderness, a hungry and gaunt Jesus, the conniving devil, the stone meant to be turned to bread, the high place and the pinnacle of the temple.
- *Hear* the sounds of desert wind and animals, the voice of the devil and the voice of Jesus.
- *Feel* the heat of the desert sun, the weight of the stone meant to be turned into bread and the breeze at the pinnacle of the temple.
- *Smell* the crisp air of the wilderness and the mixture of smells in the city of Jerusalem.

Pay attention to which, if any of these catches your attention. What sight, sound, sensation or smell are you drawn to? And, why? What might God be saying to you through this? Pause for a moment and reflect on this.

Now, consider: Jesus' surrender in the garden at the end of his ministry--"not my will"--begins with his surrender in the desert at the launch of his ministry--"it is written." Three times he tells a Devil who wants Jesus to do his own thing that he will in fact do no such thing. This new ministry will be about heaven's will, not his wishes.



## Not My Will (*cont.*)

As you face a new year, a new challenge or a new choice, release the outcomes, surrender your wants, and cling alone to your understanding of all God wills.

### Practice

In the Christian tradition, the first labyrinths were found in Gothic cathedrals and were symbolic paths of the sacred pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The labyrinth is a single, spiraling path that leads to a central area. You walk the same path back out, returning to the beginning. There are no tricks or dead ends, unlike mazes. The labyrinth is thought of as a mirror or metaphor for the spiritual journey. For centuries, Christians have walked labyrinths as a way to engage the body as well as the heart and spirit in contemplation and meditation.

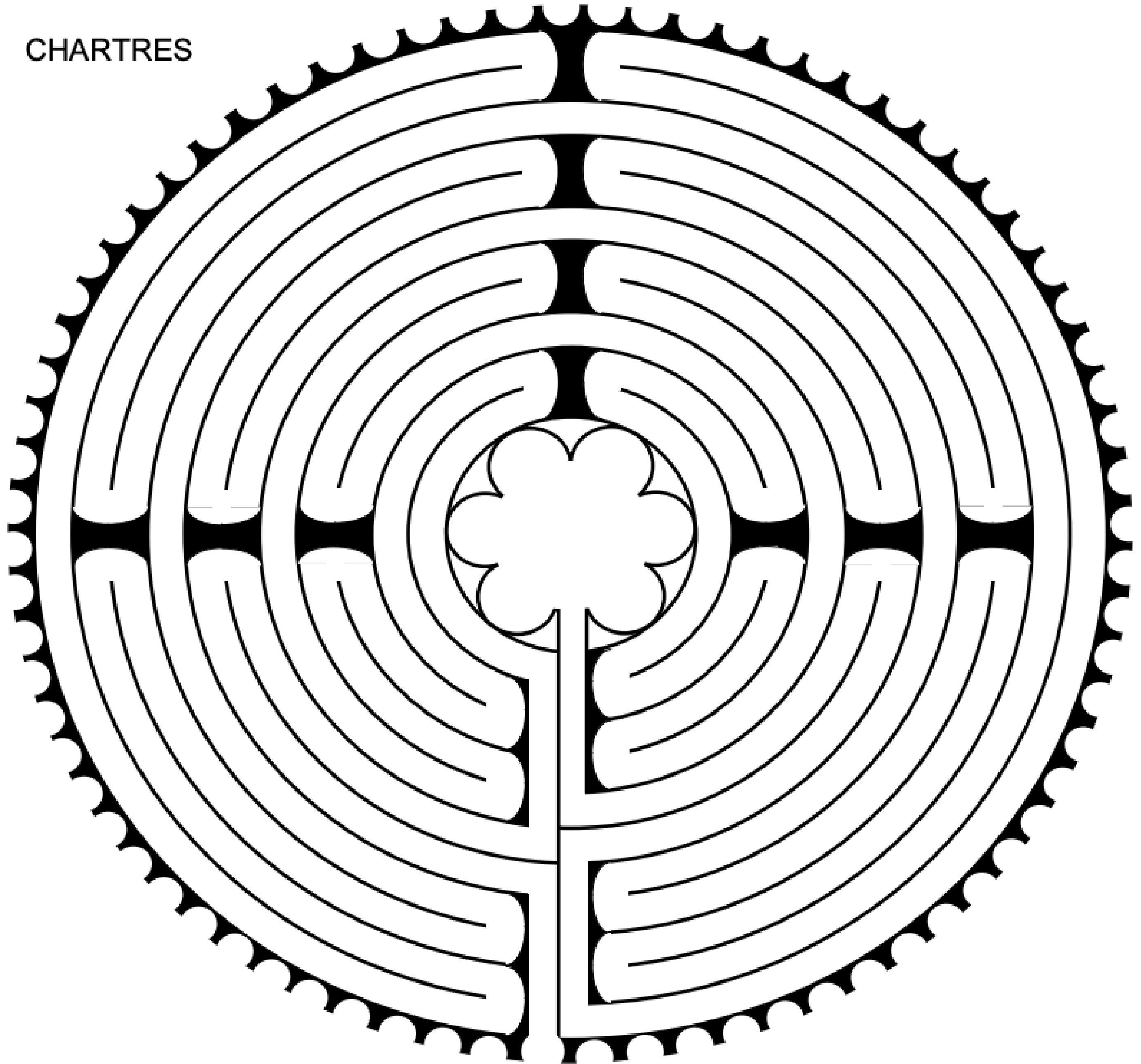
Labyrinths can be found all over the world. You can also experience them at a desk or a table using a diagram like the one below.

- For this exercise, find a labyrinth you can walk or use the finger-labyrinth below (tracing the path with one finger, or the point of a pen/ pencil, very slowly).
- As you move through the labyrinth, from the start until the middle, at each turn, say (aloud or silently), “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.*” Let this phrase be a way you submit yourself to whatever God may have planned for you in the short and long-term future.
- When you reach the middle, and move back toward the start, no longer repeat this phrase. Instead, allow your mind to simply remain open to anything God may have to say to you about what lies ahead for you. As you walk back, meditate on this question: *what shall I surrender during this new season?*



Not My Will *(cont.)*

CHARTRES





## I Need Capacity (*petitionary prayer (prayer room)*)

### Pray

Lord Jesus, your three years of transformative ministry for God began with an entire night in prayer to God. Remind me constantly that fulfilling my own desire for years of fruitfulness for you will depend on hours of prayerfulness with you.

### Ponder

*12 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. 13 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. 17 And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, 18 who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. (Lk. 6:12-19 ESV)*

In one scene, Luke captures three actions of Jesus which helped lay a foundation for the new season of public ministry. First, Jesus withdrew to a mountain and spent the night in prayer to God.

Take a moment and bring just that part of this scene into your mind:

- *See* the path Jesus used to climb the mountain, the place Jesus stopped to pray, and the posture of Jesus as he prayed.
- *Hear* the night sounds of the mountain, the words Jesus used as he prayed and the morning sounds of the mountain.
- *Smell* the scents of the mountain in the evening and early morning.
- *Feel* the coolness of the night air.

Now, pay attention to which, if any of these catches your attention. What sight, sound, sensation or smell are you drawn to? And, why? What might God be saying to you through this? Pause for a moment and reflect on this.

Consider this: Jesus begins this new ministry with prayer. Petition precedes action. Pausing precedes going. Meditation precedes motion. The apparent inactivity of prayer takes precedence over the apparent urgency of all else that could be done. Jesus refuses to be on the go until he spends an entire night on his knees.



## I Need Capacity (*cont.*)

The conviction that led Jesus to spend the night in prayer at the dawn of his new ministry was rooted in a confession: “I need capacity.” To do a significant work on earth, Jesus needed supernatural power from heaven. As mighty as the Messiah might have been, he would not step into a new season without asking for the assistance that could only come from a source outside himself. He wouldn’t take it to the streets until he took it to God.

The same remains true for you and for me. The capacity required by our calling is greater than the capacity we currently contain. We do not possess sufficient resources within ourselves to successfully thrive in new seasons, new challenges and new opportunities. We, like he, must call upon the name of the Lord.

Like Jesus, step into this new season with prayer. Pray because you recognize that solo, there’s really not much you can do for God. Pray because you recognize that surrendered, there’s really not much God can't do through you.

### Practice

In his book *Prayer* Richard Foster calls for the simple practice of petitionary prayer--petitioning God through prayer for what we need in each season of life. Specifically, he invites us to pray using three words from the Lord's Prayer.

Spend time writing words or drawing pictures of the specific things you need in each category as you enter into a new season of your life. As you write or draw, lift the letters and images to God in prayer:

1 - Father, as I enter this new season, *give* me ...

2 - Father, as I enter this new season, *forgive* me ...

3 - Father, as I enter this new season, *deliver* me ...



## I Need Community (*fellowship (teen class 2)*)

### Pray

Thank you Jesus for being a constant companion. Grant me courage to embrace the way your companionship comes through the flesh and blood of others. Enlighten me to see how doing life with them today is doing life with you today.

### Ponder

*12 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. 13 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. 17 And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, 18 who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. (Lk. 6:12-19 ESV)*

In one scene, Luke captures three actions of Jesus which helped lay a foundation for the new season of public ministry. First, Jesus withdrew to a mountain and spent the night in prayer to God. Second, Jesus intentionally selected companions for his life and ministry.

Take a moment to bring part of this scene into your mind.

- *See* the face of as he looks toward the twelve whom he will choose to be with him, the faces of each of the twelve as they are called by Jesus. What looks are on their faces? Surprise? Relief? Love? Fear?
- *Hear* the voice of Jesus as he names each one by name and the reactions of each one as they are named.

Imagine what it would feel like to be among those named by Jesus.

Now, pay attention to which, if any of these catches your attention. What sight, sound, sensation or smell are you drawn to? And, why? What might God be saying to you through this? Pause for a moment and reflect on this.

Now, consider this: Jesus was an outsider. But he was not a loner. He launched his ministry just as he'd lived eternally--in relationship with others. The interdependence he experienced existing in Trinity he also expressed in choosing the Twelve. Jesus refused to do life, in heaven or on earth, alone. As we launch a New Year, a new season or a new opportunity, may we do the same.



## I Need Community (*cont.*)

### Practice

The spiritual discipline of fellowship involves actions we take and choices we make to identify people with whom we can do life and service together, engaging in these shared experiences, and sustaining these relationships over time.

Take time to prayerfully consider three questions:

1 - *Who* is God inviting me to intentionally connect with as companions/ friends in life and service to God and others? That is, who are/ could be my “Twelve”?

2 - *What* is God inviting me to do in life and service with these companions/ friends?

3 - *How* will I intentionally sustain these relationships over the course of this year?



## I Need Proximity (*ministry (teen class 1)*)

### Pray

Grant me courage, Lord Jesus, to adopt a posture of proximity to those most in need of what I can provide. Help me to leave safe havens to come alongside hurting people.

### Ponder

*2 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. 13 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: 14 Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. 17 And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, 18 who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. (Lk. 6:12-19 ESV)*

In one scene, Luke captures three actions of Jesus which helped lay a foundation for the new season of public ministry. First, Jesus withdrew to a mountain and spent the night in prayer to God. Second, Jesus intentionally selected companions for his life and ministry. Third, Jesus and his companions left the haven of the mountain and drew near to the multitude below so they could serve them.

Take a moment to bring part of this scene into your mind:

- *See* the "great multitude," including those who need healing of disease, those who need curing of unclean spirits. See people reaching out to touch Jesus. See the power come from Jesus.
- *Hear* the sounds of this large group of people. Hear the joy and jubilation as they are healed and cured.
- *Smell* the variety of aromas that must have accompanied a large gathering like this.

Now, pay attention to which, if any of these catches your attention. What sight, sound, sensation or smell are you drawn to? And, why? What might God be saying to you through this? Pause for a moment and reflect on this.

Consider this: The great temptation at the start of Jesus' public ministry was to stay on the mountain in the company of friends. It's the same temptation we face. The pull to remain in safe places with people we know. The draw of distancing ourselves from people and places who are unpredictable. The allure of abiding with allies at a retreat, at the coffee table, at the desk, on the couch, in the car or wherever we find sustenance, solace and security.



## I Need Proximity *(cont.)*

Instead, Jesus moved away from the mountain and toward those most in need--bringing along his beloved friends with him. Jesus drew near to those who would most benefit from the power of God within him. We too must step off the mountain and towards whom we can serve. We must position ourselves in proximity to the people who most need the power of God which we bring.

### Practice

Consider for a few minutes three things. First, consider what you're able to provide others through the power of God. What skills, resources or assistance are you able to bring into the lives of others? Second, consider who is most in need of what you're able to provide. Finally, meditate on what it would take to get closer to those who have needs so that you can provide.

What I Can Provide	How I Can Get Close	People/Groups in Need
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.