

This week I have the blessing of writing this letter from Forest Home family camp. I am sitting below white clouds, granite spires, and sun-seeking pines. A mountain breeze gently transports birdsong.

We have come here each of the ten years(excepting last year's pandemic pause) since Ashleigh, our first baby was born.

This has been a place of rest, restoration, reset, recalibration, reconnection and restoration. I can trace critical turning points in my family's journey to prayers offered in this place.

Like any other movement toward a deepening relationship with the Lord, it is contested. Holy ground is most often battleground as well. The enemy loves to kick up a good argument at the start of a trip. Packing the car is one of the devil's oldest and most sure fire tactics.

To be clear, there is nothing special about this *place* and yet there is something divinely special about *anyplace* set apart for the glory and enjoyment of the Lord of Lords. It could be a mountain retreat, but it could just as easily be the chair you are sitting in now.

As we have begun exploring over the past several weeks, there are critical elements to this spiritual formation process: purgation (a cry for help), illumination (show me how, Lord), and union (in times of peace and in times of persecution, make me more like you Lord. For you are good.)

These steps repeat and fold over on themselves. God is faithful in redeeming our lives individually and corporately.

As I sit in *this* place with *those* thoughts, I am caught by one particular nuance--and that is the way we approach God and the things of his kingdom. Do we come to him looking for a bargain or do we come looking for a blessing? Do we come with an offer for God (I'll do this, if you do that) or do we come with an offering (not my will but yours be done).

The first of those postures seeks to complete a transaction. The second of those practices enters into transformation. One is a procurement; the other is a process.

Let's be honest,the world makes consumers (bargain hunters), but the kingdom invites contributors (blessing receivers and givers). We are far more conditioned to grind a deal than wait for direction.

I'll be honest, for far too long and in far too many ways, I have asked the Lord to bless my plans rather than surrender my life to His. I am praying to leave that type of thinking on the mountain this week, on the altar, to be consumed by his refining fire.

But I know already that these good intentions will come to nothing if I attempt to accomplish them in my own strength. Only in His name, by His Spirit, for His glory, and alongside His people will He accomplish these things in me. In other words, I need Him and I need you, just as we all need Him and one another.

And there's more: the world needs Him and while He can reveal himself in any miraculous way he might choose, He most often reveals himself through ordinary people like you and me, salt and light to a world that desperately desires and needs them.

Small Group Direction

Salt and Light

13“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

- Let's consider some of the uses of salt: in the ancient near east, it was used a purifying agent, a seasoning, a fertilizer, a preserving agent.
- Which of these roles grabs your attention as it relates to the gospel and its calling to God's people?
- Are there specific practices or postures that the church should repent and turn away from?
- Are there particular problems or places that the church should engage with more intention?

14“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

- Let's hear descriptions of light as found in scripture.
- This might be a great way to revisit last week's spiritual discipline: lectio divina.
- Read each of the scripture passages below, pause, listen, what do you sense/hear/notice the Lord bringing to your attention?
 - Isaiah 49:6
 - Isaiah 60:1-3
 - Psalm 67:1-2
- What stands out to you?
- What's one circumstance or relationship that you might sense God's nudging to bring light to?
- Would you like accountability to meet this challenge?

Listen to a portion of this section of Matthew as translated by Eugene Petersen: *You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth...You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world...Keep open house; be generous with your lives.*

- Really getting after this and sticking too it will require an undivided allegiance to Jesus, a reliance on the Holy Spirit, and the critical cooperation of God's people.
- What does that challenge that commitment look like in your sanctified imagination?
- What does it stir in your spirits?

For this week's spiritual discipline, we'll pick up another Latin term: *Examen*.

Here's Adele Calhoun's definition to get us started. "Examen is practice for discerning the voice and activity of God within the flow of the day.

In most cases, an Examen is completed at the end of the day, often in the form of a journal, as a means of reflecting on our day with the Lord. We take time to consider specific questions that attune us the ways we are most likely to draw near and stay close to God's presence. Here are few questions to get you started. You/your small group may want to generate a few more.

- For what moment was I most grateful today?
- For what moment was I least grateful?
- What moment was most life giving today?
- What moment was most life-depleting?
- In what ways did I experience living out of the fruit of the spirit?
- In what ways did I experience a lack of the fruits of the spirit?
- Where/when did I experience the deepest connection with God?
- Where/when did I experience a seeming disconnection with God?