

# BROWNSON

MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

*A missional community called to love and live in Christ*

## Healing from Within

**Christ | Mystics | Music | Meaning**

**2026 Lenten Series**

**PARTICIPANT GUIDE**

# Healing What's Within: Christ, Mystics, Music, and Meaning

## Series Introduction

What if Lent—Christ's journey to the cross and the empty tomb—is, at its heart, a journey of healing? This is the simple premise of this series.

Not healing in the abstract, but healing that touches real lives: our stories and wounds, our relationships and bodies, our fears and longings. In *Healing What's Within*, Chuck DeGroat reminds us that spiritual healing does not happen at a distance. It begins when we become compassionate witnesses to our own interior world and allow God to meet us there.

This Lenten season, *Healing What's Within: Christ, Mystics, Music, and Meaning* invites our congregation to slow down, breathe, listen, and walk with Christ into the deeper places of the soul—where healing begins.

In a world shaped by hurry, anxiety, noise, and fragmentation, Lent becomes a countercultural invitation: to return to God's restoring presence and to rediscover wholeness from the inside out.

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## Four Sources that Shape the Series

### 1. Coming Home — Healing as Return

Healing is not self-improvement; it is a return—to God, to ourselves, to the life God longs for us to live. Lent calls us home again, back to the God who knows us fully and loves us deeply.

As Frederick Buechner writes, "At the innermost heart, at the farthest reach, of our remembering, there is peace... Home is there." And poet Mary Oliver echoes, "Though Eden is lost, its loveliness remains in the heart."

### 2. The Mystics — Learning to Listen for God

Each week we will be guided by a Christian mystic—women and men who sought God not only through doctrine, but through prayer, longing, silence, and attentiveness. Their lives remind us that healing unfolds when we allow God to speak gently within us.

### 3. Music — The Language of the Heart

Music has always been part of the church's healing ministry. Each service will pair Scripture with hymns and sacred music that give voice to longing, grief, trust, and hope. Music comforts, awakens, and opens us to God's grace in ways words alone cannot.

### 4. Meaning — Christ's Healing Way - The Wounded Healer

At the center of our journey stands Jesus Christ—the One who does not heal from a distance, but by drawing near. Christ meets us in our wounds, bears our suffering, and leads us toward resurrection wholeness. Healing comes not by escape, but by presence.

## Why This Series?

Because many are carrying deep burdens—emotional, spiritual, relational, and physical.

Because beneath our productivity, our souls are tired.

Because we long for more than coping—we long for healing.

This series offers a sacred invitation to:

- Return to God with honesty
- Rediscover stillness and trust
- Encounter grace in places of shame or sorrow
- Welcome Christ's healing presence into our bodies and stories
- Make space for renewal and resurrection

### About Rev. Chuck DeGroat and *Healing What's Within*

While we are not requiring the book for reading, the title of the series and some of its content comes from the Rev. Chuck DeGroat is a pastor, professor, and author known for his thoughtful teaching on soul care, spiritual formation, and pastoral leadership. With decades of experience guiding individuals and congregations through seasons of struggle and transformation, DeGroat combines theological depth with practical insight into the human heart. His work encourages readers to attend to their inner lives with honesty, compassion, and openness to God's healing presence.

In his book *Healing What's Within: Coming Home to Yourself—and to God—When You're Wounded, Weary, and Wandering*, DeGroat explores how true spiritual healing begins not at a distance, but from within. He emphasizes the importance of becoming compassionate witnesses to our own interior world—our wounds, longings, and stories—so that God can meet us where we truly are. The book invites readers to rediscover wholeness, cultivate resilience, and experience God's restorative love in the midst of life's brokenness.

Through practical guidance, spiritual reflection, and deep theological insight, *Healing What's Within* is both a resource for personal growth and a roadmap for anyone seeking to experience God's healing touch in tangible, life-giving ways.

## **\*\*Please Read: Important Reminders about Healing\*\***

As we begin this Lenten journey, a season marked by honesty, repentance, and hope, we want to name a few important truths about healing.

- Healing does not come from us; it comes from God. And God's healing is often slow, patient, and not bound to our timelines. Lent is not about fixing ourselves, but about making ourselves more available—creating space where Christ can meet us in what is broken, tender, or unfinished within us.
- We also name the mystery of healing. We do not fully understand how it works, why some wounds heal quickly while others remain, or why healing sometimes comes in forms we did not expect. I never want to place limits on what God can do, and yet we confess with the Apostle Paul that “now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12).
- So we enter this season with humility and faith, trusting that as we open ourselves to healing, Christ will meet us there—not always on our timing, not always in the way we would choose, but always with grace that is sufficient for the journey.

### What is Lent?

The season of Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and self-examination in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord at Easter. It is a period of 40 days. In the early church, Lent was a time of preparation for the celebration of baptism at the Easter Vigil. In many communities of faith it remains a time to equip and nurture candidates for baptism and confirmation and to reflect deeply on the theme of baptismal discipleship. As his followers, we travel Christ's path of servanthood through the Lord's Supper and the suffering on the cross toward the glory of Easter, all of which underscores the inseparable link between the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### PC(USA) Mission Agency

What we hear during Lent is the power and possibility of the paschal mystery, and that the way of the cross, the way to Easter, is through death. To appropriate the new life that is beyond the power of death means we must die with Christ who was raised for us. To live for Christ, we must die with him. New life requires a daily surrendering of the old life, letting go of the present order, so that we may embrace the new humanity.

An excerpt from the Companion to the Book of Common Worship (Geneva Press, 2003 110-111)

### Booklet Structure

This booklet provides a weekly lesson to be discussed in your small group as well as guidance for individual faith formation. Unless otherwise noted, scriptural passages included in the content of the study are the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE). Your group's first meeting will discuss *Session 1*.

### Expectations for This Booklet

We hope that this participant booklet would serve as a devotional resource that encourages connection and deeper conversations in your small groups. We recognize that this is not an exhaustive examination of Lent or Healing. The strength of this booklet is the space it creates for the conversation you will have in your small group.

### Weekly Lesson Structure

Discuss one lesson each week. Each week will follow a similar pattern:

- 1) Gathering Question
- 2) Opening Prayer
- 3) Scripture
- 4) Reflection
- 5) Mystic
- 6) Discussion Questions
- 7) Closing Prayer

## Group Covenant

*Your group is invited to review this covenant before beginning Week One. Please feel free to add, edit, and make it your own.*

Small groups are wonderful opportunities to grow in faith, guided by the Holy Spirit, alongside others in our community. An essential component of the small group experience is to operate with a sense of trust and accountability to one another. Please prayerfully consider the covenant below as a way to affirm one another in this group setting.

I will make attending this group a high priority, missing only when ill or out of town.

I will strive to be on time to all of our group meetings.

I will come willing to fully participate, preparing for each meeting and being open to God's presence and to others in the group. No one will be asked to share what they do not want to share. The group will respect each person's position.

I accept that group members have the right to their own opinions. I will respect and receive what others offer, even if I have a different perspective. I will try to create space for others to share.

I will respect the confidence of each group member. What is shared in this group stays in this group, unless otherwise directed.

I will listen to and care for the members of my group.

I will pray for our group time and for each member of my group.

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Assumptions and Definitions of Terms:

### Assumptions about Healing:

- Healing does not come from us; it comes from God. And God's healing is often slow, patient, and not bound to our timelines.
- Lent is not about fixing ourselves, but about making ourselves more available—creating space where Christ can meet us in what is broken, tender, or unfinished within us.
- We also name the **mystery of healing**. We do not fully understand how it works, why some wounds heal quickly while others remain, or why healing sometimes comes in forms we did not expect.
- We acknowledge that healing is complex and can touch emotional, physical, and spiritual areas of our lives. While our focus will be on emotional and spiritual healing, we do not want to place limits on what God can do. At the same time, we humbly confess with the Apostle Paul that “now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12), trusting that God's work often surpasses our understanding.
- So we enter this season with humility and faith, trusting that as we open ourselves to healing, Christ will meet us there—not always on our timing, not always in the way we would choose, but always with grace that is sufficient for the journey.

**Working Definitions:** We write working because they are open to your discussion and debate.

### Healing:

- Healing is necessary because sin separates us from God, from our neighbors, and from our truest selves.
- Healing is the gracious work of God in Christ, who through the Spirit reconnects us to God, to one another, and to the truest self God created us to be.

### Mystic:

- A **mystic** is someone who has had a close, personal experience of God, and whose life and writings have become guides to help others on their own journey of faith.



# SESSION 1—Where Are You?

## 1) Gathering Question

Tell about a time when you knew you were lost. What helped you realize it? And what did it feel like when you began to find your way home?

## 2) Opening Prayer

Faithful God,

You meet us not only in answers, but in questions;  
not only in light, but in shadow.

As we begin this Lenten journey, help us tell the truth about where we are  
and trust that you are already here with us.

Amen.

## 3) Scripture

Psalm 42:1–11 (NRSVUE)

As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and behold the face of God?

My tears have been my food day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
“Where is your God?”

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:

how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;  
therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,  
from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully because of the enemy's oppression?"

As with a deadly wound in my bones,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
"Where is your God?"

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

### Genesis 3: 1-13

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took off its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.'

#### 4) Reflection

One of the most important movements in the opening weeks of Lent is learning to name where we are. Again and again in Scripture, God asks a simple, searching question: “Where are you?” It is not a question of accusation, but of relationship. God asks it in the garden, not because God has lost track of the human story, but because we have lost our sense of where we stand. Lent begins here—with honesty about distance, disorientation, and longing. Before healing can take root, we must be willing to say where we feel far from God, where we feel dry, numb, restless, or unsure.

Psalm 42 gives us language for that moment. “As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.” The psalmist dares to ask both questions at once: Where am I? and Where are you, God? There is thirst here, and memory, and grief—but also faith. “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?” This is not the voice of someone who has given up on God; it is the voice of someone who trusts God enough to tell the truth. Longing becomes prayer. Absence becomes an address. The ache itself becomes a form of communion.

The opening chapters of Genesis remind us that this tension has always been part of the human story. God forms humanity from dust and breath, placing us in a garden of intimacy, meaning, and belonging. Yet even in abundance, vulnerability is present—the capacity to desire, to reach, to feel the ache of need. From the very beginning, our lives are shaped by both gifts and longing. Healing does not begin with perfection or certainty, but with awareness—standing honestly before God and naming where we are.

John of the Cross believed that seasons of darkness can be holy ground. In what he called the dark night of the soul, familiar comforts fall away—not to punish us, but to heal us more deeply. When clarity fades and God feels distant, space is opened for a truer, quieter union with God. Lent invites us not to rush past this darkness, but to stay with it, trusting that God meets us there. Or as John of the Cross wrote, “In the dark night of the soul, bright flows the river of God.”

This is the faith we carry into Lent: that if we dare to ask Where am I? and Where are you, God?—not defensively, but honestly—Christ will meet us there. Not always on our timetable. Not always in the ways we expect. But always with the slow, faithful work of healing.

#### 5) Mystic: About St. John of the Cross

St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) was a Spanish Carmelite friar, priest, poet, and reformer whose life was marked by profound faith and intense suffering. A close collaborator of St. Teresa of Ávila, he worked to renew the Carmelite order by calling it back to simplicity, prayer, and devotion. His commitment to reform came at great personal cost. In 1577, he was imprisoned for nine months by members of his own order, confined to a tiny, dark cell, subjected to harsh treatment, and cut off from nearly all human comfort. It was in this place of isolation and physical deprivation that John began composing some of his most enduring poetry, including lines that would later shape his reflections on what he called *the dark night of the soul*. *From his own lived experience, he learned that darkness does not signal God’s absence, but can become the very place where God’s transforming work unfolds.*

Out of that suffering, St. John of the Cross articulated a theology of healing that resonates deeply with the Lenten journey. He believed that God sometimes leads the soul through seasons of dryness, confusion, and loss—not to harm us, but to free us from attachments that limit our love and trust. As he wrote, “To come to the knowledge you have not, you must go by a way in which you know not.” For John, healing was not about regaining comfort or certainty, but about being drawn into a deeper union with God beyond feeling or control. In Lent, his witness reminds us that when prayer feels empty or God feels far away, we are not necessarily lost. We may be standing on holy ground, where God is quietly at work, reshaping our desires and teaching us to trust that even in the dark, “bright flows the river of God.”

## 6) Discussion Questions

- **Beginning with the Question**—When you hear God’s question, “*Where are you?*” What thoughts, feelings, or images come to mind for you right now?
- **Noticing What Stays With You** As you reflect on Genesis 2 or Psalm 42, was there a word, phrase, or image that stayed with you or caught your attention? What about it felt significant?
- **Paying Attention to Longing** Where do you notice longing, thirst, or weariness in your life these days? What has your body, heart, or spirit been asking for?
- **Experiences of Distance** Are there places where you feel a sense of distance—perhaps from God, from others, or from yourself? What has that experience been like for you?
- **God in the Middle of It** Instead of imagining God only on the other side of struggle or longing, what might it look like for God to be present within it? Where might you already sense that presence, even faintly?
- **Living with the Question** As we move through this season of Lent, what question, invitation, or practice do you feel drawn to carry with you? How might you stay open to where God meets you along the way?

## 7) Closing Prayer

God of deep waters,  
Hold us in our questions and our longing.  
Teach us to trust that even in the dark,  
your healing work continues.  
Amen.

# NOTES:

# SESSION 2—In the Silence, God Speaks

## 1) Gathering Question

Where do you most crave stillness in your life, and how does your soul respond when it is quieted?

## 2) Opening Prayer

God of quiet whispers,  
You meet us in the silence, where our hearts can slow and our souls can rest.  
Teach us to listen deeply to your presence, and help us trust that you are faithful even when the world is loud.  
Amen.

## 3) Scripture (NRSVUE)

### Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters, or with things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is quieted within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

### Psalm 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God; I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

## 4) Reflection

Teresa of Ávila teaches that true healing begins in stillness. Psalm 131 mirrors this idea by guiding us toward a quiet, humble posture before God. The psalmist acknowledges limits and accepts life’s smallness without striving for grandeur or control. Healing often emerges when we cease striving and simply attend to God’s presence in our hearts. In this Lenten season, we are invited to practice interior silence and to notice what emerges when we do not force answers or outcomes.

Healing also requires trust. Like a child resting in the arms of a loving parent, the psalmist models a posture of surrender. When we stop resisting our inner realities—our fears, our weariness, our longing—we create space for God to meet us. Teresa emphasizes that this kind of attentive waiting is not passive; it is a dynamic engagement with God’s life within us. In the silence, we begin to sense God’s steady rhythm and sustaining grace.

Finally, this Psalm and Teresa’s teaching invite a practical question: Where do we notice restlessness in our lives, and how might God be calling us to cultivate inner stillness? The invitation is simple but profound: let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. Healing starts when we slow down enough to trust God’s constancy, even when circumstances are uncertain or challenging.

## 5) Mystic

**Teresa of Ávila** (1515–1582) was a Spanish mystic, reformer, and teacher of prayer who understood the spiritual life as a journey toward **healing through rest in God**. She believed that much of our restlessness, fear, and spiritual exhaustion comes from living disconnected from the deep place where God already dwells within us.

In *The Interior Castle*, Teresa describes the soul as God’s dwelling place and teaches that growth in faith happens as we move inward—gently and honestly—bringing our wounds, distractions, and longings into God’s presence. Prayer, for Teresa, is not about striving or perfection, but about **allowing God to heal what is fragmented within us** through loving attention and trust.

**To rest in God is to stop performing, stop proving, and let ourselves be seen and loved as we are.** For Teresa, this resting presence becomes a source of healing—quietly restoring the soul, strengthening love, and making us whole. Healing, she taught, comes not from effort alone, but from **being with God long enough to be changed**.

## 6) Discussion Questions

- What parts of Psalm 131 resonate most with your current life?
- When have you experienced God’s presence in silence or stillness?
- What practices could help you cultivate interior peace this week?

## 7) Closing Prayer

God of quiet grace,  
Help us rest in you and notice your life within us.  
Calm our hearts and strengthen our trust. Amen.

**NOTES:**

# SESSION 3—Touched by Grace

## Burnout, disenchanted...

### 1) Gathering Question

When has God's grace surprised you in the midst of everyday life?

### 2) Opening Prayer

God of attentive love,  
Stir our hearts to notice your presence and your invitations.  
Help us recognize the ways your grace touches our lives even when we least expect it.  
Amen.

### 3) Scripture (NRSVUE)

Mark 5: 24-34

So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

### 4) Reflection

The woman in Mark 5 does what seems small yet courageous: she reaches for Jesus' cloak. Her healing is not about grand gestures, but about faith, attention, and trust. Ignatius teaches that God communicates with the soul through imagination, discernment, and attentive noticing—qualities evident in her humble act. Healing, therefore, is often found not in dramatic interventions, but in small acts of faith that align our hearts with God's presence.

Grace works through attention. The woman's act of reaching requires awareness of both her need and Jesus' power to heal. Healing often asks us to notice the places where we are wounded, to bring our struggles before God, and to allow God's presence to meet us there. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises call us to reflect on these ordinary moments, where God's grace can transform not only circumstances but the very contours of our souls.

Finally, her story invites us to consider our own spiritual attentiveness. Where might we practice noticing God's movement in our daily lives? Where might we "touch" Christ through acts of faith, prayer, or service? Where might Christ be reaching out to us? Healing begins in this sacred attentiveness, allowing grace to move us toward freedom, love, and deeper wholeness.

## 5) Mystic

### Ignatius of Loyola — Noticing God in all things

**Ignatius of Loyola** (1491–1556) was a Spanish priest, spiritual guide, and founder of the Jesuit order who taught that God is not found only in churches or moments of prayer, but is **active and present in all things**. After a life-altering injury and long season of inner conversion, Ignatius learned to pay close attention to the movements of his heart—his desires, fears, consolations, and struggles.

From this attentiveness came the **Spiritual Exercises**, a set of practices that help people notice where God is drawing them toward life, freedom, and love, and where they are being pulled away from God. For Ignatius, faith is about awareness—learning to discern God’s presence in daily work, relationships, decisions, and even difficulties.

To “find God in all things” is to live with open eyes and a listening heart, trusting that God is always at work, inviting us into deeper love and faithful action in the world.

## 6) Discussion Questions

- Where have you seen God’s presence today? This week? This month?
- In what ways is God’s presence healing?
- How can attention and imagination open us to God’s grace this week?
- What small act of faith might you take in response to God’s presence?

## 7) Closing Prayer

God of grace,  
Open our eyes to see your presence and our hearts to receive your healing.  
Teach us to trust in your care, even in small, ordinary moments.  
Amen.

**NOTES:**

# SESSION 4—Where God Meets Us in the Mud

## 1) Gathering Question

Can you describe a moment when stepping back, or waiting, allowed you to perceive something larger than yourself?

## 2) Opening Prayer

God of Light and Life,

You see us, even when we cannot see clearly. You meet us in the ordinary, the messy, the places we feel stuck or unsure. Just as Jesus met the man born blind with mud and care, meet us here now in our own lives.

Open our eyes to see Your presence around us. Open our hearts to trust Your work, even when we do not understand it. Help us notice the small, everyday ways You are at work and invite us to step toward You in faith. May we leave this time with hearts and minds awakened to Your goodness. Amen.

## 3) Scripture (NRSVUE)

John 9:1–7(NIV)

*Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind*

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

## 4) Reflection

Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when Your Presence, like lightning, illuminates the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed. And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder: How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it!

From the Mishkan T’filah, “A Prayer for Shabbat”

As Jesus walks along, he sees a man blind from birth. Before anything is said or done, notice this: the man is not invisible. The disciples, however, rush past him into explanation and blame—Who sinned? They assume suffering must be traced to fault, that blindness requires a cause they can name and control. Jesus interrupts that logic gently but firmly. This is not about assigning guilt. This is about revealing God. In doing so, Jesus reframes both suffering and healing.

He does not deny the man's blindness, nor does he romanticize it. Instead, he situates it within a larger story where God's work is not constrained by human assumptions. Healing, here, is not punishment reversed but possibility unveiled. Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world," and then enacts that light not through distance or command, but through intimacy—touching earth, saliva, mud, and human flesh.

The method matters. Jesus heals with clay—echoing Genesis, where God forms humanity from the dust of the ground. This is creation happening again, slowly, bodily, and vulnerably. The man is then sent—go, wash—invited into participation rather than passive receipt. Sight comes not instantly, but through obedience and movement. This story reminds us that we often walk "sightless among miracles," surrounded by God's presence yet unable to perceive it. Healing, then, is not only about restored vision but awakened awareness. As the ancient prayer declares, "Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing... Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed." In Christ, the light of the world, even ordinary ground becomes holy, and we—clay touched by God—are given eyes to see what has been there all along.

## 5) Mystic

**Julian of Norwich** (c. 1342–after 1416) was a 14th-century English mystic whose theology centers on the radical goodness and love of God. Writing in a time marked by plague, suffering, and social upheaval, Julian received a series of visions—*Revelations of Divine Love*—that reshaped how she understood sin, suffering, and healing.

One of Julian's most distinctive insights is her refusal to link suffering with punishment. She insists that God does not assign blame or act in wrath, famously saying, "*I saw no wrath in God.*" Instead, Julian teaches that God works patiently and compassionately within human brokenness, drawing life, healing, and love from places the world assumes are marked by failure or fault.

For Julian, healing is not simply the removal of pain or limitation; it is the restoration of a relationship. God's light does not shame or condemn—it illuminates with tenderness. Healing happens as we come to trust that we are held in love, even when we do not yet see clearly. In this way, Julian's theology helps us understand Jesus' declaration, "*I am the light of the world,*" not as judgment, but as grace made visible.

Julian teaches that God's ultimate purpose is not punishment but **wholeness**, not blame but **belonging**. In Christ, she believes, all that is broken is being gently gathered and healed—so that, in her enduring words, "*All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.*"

## 6) Discussion Questions

- Seeing and Being Seen: The story begins with Jesus *seeing the man born blind*. *Where in your own life do you long to be truly seen—by God or by others?*
- Letting Go of Blame: The disciples want to explain suffering by assigning fault. Where do you notice that impulse in yourself or in our culture, and how does Jesus' response invite a different way of understanding suffering?
- Healing as Process: The man is healed through touch, mud, and obedience—*go and wash*. *What does this story suggest about healing as a process rather than a moment? Where might God be inviting you to take a step, even before clarity comes?*
- Light in Ordinary Places: Jesus uses the most ordinary materials—dirt and saliva—to bring about healing. Where might God be at work in the ordinary or overlooked parts of your life right now?
- Participation and Trust: The man must move toward the pool before he can see. What helps—or hinders—you from trusting God enough to act when you don't yet know the outcome?
- Learning to See Anew: The prayer says, "We walk sightless among miracles." What might it mean for you, in this season of Lent, to ask God for deeper sight rather than quick answers?

## 7) Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Light of the World,  
You see us even when we stumble in darkness.  
Open our eyes to the ways You are at work around us,  
and help us trust that Your healing comes in Your time, not ours.

Touch our hearts as You touched the blind man's eyes,  
remind us that we are clay in Your hands,  
called to participate in the work You are already doing.  
Give us the courage to move toward Your waters of renewal,  
to obey even when the way is unclear,  
and to recognize Your presence in the ordinary and the miraculous alike.

May we, like the man healed, return to our homes seeing,  
our souls alight with awe at Your goodness,  
and our lives bearing witness to Your works.  
Amen.

**NOTES:**

# Session 5: Healing in Community

## 1) Gathering Question

What communities are you a part of? How have they shaped your identity?

## 2) Opening Prayer

Holy God - open our hearts and minds this day as we read your Word, together as your people. May we listen well to one another; may we listen well to your Spirit, together, as your children. Amen.

## 3) Scripture

Luke 5:17-26

One day while Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were sitting nearby, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" When Jesus perceived their questions, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your stretcher and go to your home." Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen incredible things today."

## 4) Mystic: Howard Thurman

### *A Brief Biography*

Howard Thurman (1899-1981) was a preacher, writer, educator, Civil Rights leader, and Christian mystic. He was born in Daytona Beach, FL, and was raised primarily by his grandmother who was formerly enslaved.

He was exposed to the mystic tradition through studying under a Quaker mystic named Rufus Jones. This influence and its emphasis on contemplation and experiential faith is woven throughout Thurman's work. Thurman was an ordained Baptist preacher, and went on to teach at Morehouse College, Spelman College, Howard University, and Boston University. He also founded an interfaith church in San Francisco called "The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples."

Thurman traveled to India where he met Mahatma Gandhi, who shared with him principles of non-violent resistance alongside the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to whom Thurman served as a spiritual advisor. Thurman wrote over twenty books, and died in 1981 in San Francisco, CA.

### *Thurman on Community*

Throughout the writing and preaching of Howard Thurman, we see that community is integral to his understanding of and experience of faith. Though we are individuals with our own thoughts, personalities, and emotions, Howard believes that we are created for connection. Our souls long for the wholeness and healing possible when we live in community, and experience harmony as the body of Christ.

Throughout the year of 1961, Howard preached several sermons in a series entitled “Community and the Will of God” at Marsh Chapel at Boston University. This series explores the nature of humanity, and our calling towards belonging and interconnectedness. In a sermon from this series entitled “Community and the Self,” Thurman writes of the human soul being tethered to that of all others, saying, “Nothing is foreign. Parts relate to the whole. One all-extending, all-preserving soul connects each being, greatest with the least, made beast in aid of man and man of beast, all served, all serving. Nothing stands alone. The chain holds on, and where it ends, unknown.”

Thurman goes on to preach of the necessity of community for the work of social change and upholding human dignity, stating that people must asking the following question before taking action:

“If I do this deed, will it rupture my relationship? Will it break the thing that guarantees my persona, that gives me my sense of community? And if I decide that I will run the risk of cutting myself off so that I will no longer be a person but an individual, then immediately, I must see this deed in terms of a new sense of community that I may develop. And it is for this reason that all persons who are concerned about social change understand very clearly that it is never enough merely to try to change the insides of people's hearts. This is important. It is crucial. It is necessary. But it is not enough, because the thing that guarantees the sense of private and personal stability for the individual is a sense of being supported, sustained, maintained in community.”

Howard then shares his memories of conversations with his grandmother, a former slave, who was formative in shaping his theological understanding of community and belonging:

“And this perhaps is what is meant by being a child of God. It is this discovery of the depth that is available to each of us that makes the difference in the center of focus and integration and community, wholeness, tranquility of the self. I shall always remember this very personal reference. But when I was a boy and having to spend most of my time with my grandmother, who was a young woman at the time of the Civil War-- she was a slave in Tallahassee, Florida. And sometimes when life seemed very so fragmented for me that I didn't know where to take hold and I could not find any authentic way to belong, and she used to talk to me about what it really meant to be a child of God.

And I shall always remember one of the things she said to me one Sunday morning. She told me about how she made that discovery as a little girl on this plantation. The minister, who was one of the slaves, was permitted now and then to have a religious service for all the slaves on that plantation and the neighboring plantation. And he always had the same sermon to preach, the essence of which was this.

Look at you. Look at you. You, you are not slaves. You, you are God's children. And after the long silence that passed after she'd tell me this, then she would add, nothing else really matters.

Now that may seem like a very naive defense mechanism that has no significance beyond the temporary reinforcement of the ego at a moment of attack. But no, it gave to her and to those like her and to their offspring a sense of roots that was watered by the underground river of existence. And this is the discovery that the prodigal son made and the lesson. When he came to himself, when he cut down through all the levels until he hit this hard core, it was at once to him going back to his father.

When he came to himself, he came to his father. When you come to yourself, you come to your father. And the tranquility that pervades all the levels of your life announces in everything you do community, wholeness, integration. This, after all, our father, is the deep desire of our hearts. May we never give up the quest until at last we come to ourselves in thee.”

## 5) Reflection

In Luke's gospel, we witness a unique story of healing. We read of a paralyzed man with some truly bold friends, who go to extraordinary lengths to put him face to face with Jesus. We can imagine that he was seeking healing, but we do not hear directly about his desires or his actions - only that of his friends, who took that quest upon themselves. What we know of this man is that he not only would have faced physical limitations, but social ones as well. A paralyzed man would have been an outcast from society due to his physical condition. He would have been unwelcome in many communal spaces. In Luke we see the assumptions of antiquity regarding disease and disability - the assumption that these were the result of sin. Although the author of Luke is still operating under these assumptions, we do see Jesus challenge the idea of casting aside any child of God. It is ultimately the faith of this man's friends, his community, that brings him into the presence of Jesus, and into inclusion through healing.

In the work of Howard Thurman, we too see the healing made possible through the power of community. He argues that true transformation, and for our purposes, *healing*, is only possible when people have the support and grounding of community. His grandmother's church community of enslaved persons, led by powerful words of their preacher, endowed them with the belief that they were more than what slave masters named them. Together, they found healing from the inhumanity that shadowed their lives. Together, they could believe in their humanity, their own goodness, their identities as children of God. Together, hope and healing was made possible in impossible circumstances.

## 6) Discussion Questions

- How do you see the role of community at work in the healing of the paralyzed man in Luke?
- What do you make of Thurman's statement that our souls are bound to one another - "one all-extending, all-preserving soul connects each being"?
- How do you respond to Thurman's assertion that true social change can only occur through community?
- Have you found healing through your communities, and if so, how?
- How might our communities offer healing to our world?

## 7) Closing Prayer

Holy God, we come to you together as the body of Christ. We trust that we are not meant to go through life alone. We are created for connection; we belong to one another. Help us to show up for one another. Guide us, together, as your people, that we may seek the well-being of all. May we work toward a world where all might flourish, and all might know the healing power of your love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

## References

- Jay, Jeff. 2014. *Feasting on the Gospels. Vol. 1. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.*
- Thurman, Howard. 1961. "Community and the Self," Sermon. The Howard Thurman Digital Archive. <https://thurman.pitts.emory.edu/items/show/1064>.

# NOTES:

# Session 6 — The Wounded Healer

## 1) Gathering Question

Where in your life do you feel wounded, and how might Christ's presence meet you there?

## 2) Opening Prayer

Jesus, our wounded healer,  
Meet us in our brokenness.  
Teach us to receive your compassion and to share it with others.  
Amen.

## 3) Scripture (NRSVUE)

Isaiah 53:1-6

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted for him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

#### 4) Reflection: Are We Being Carried?

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, the scene in Matthew 21:1–11 invites us to notice both humility and solidarity. He sends his disciples to bring a donkey and colt, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah: *“Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey.”* The crowds spread cloaks and branches, shouting, *“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”* Here, the king of creation enters not on a horse of war, but on a lowly colt, drawing near to the people he loves, stepping into the midst of their fear, hope, and uncertainty. In this act, Jesus demonstrates that God’s power is revealed not through dominance but through solidarity with those who suffer and wait for healing.

Isaiah 53 deepens this insight, portraying a suffering servant who bears our pain and alienation: Christ heals not from a distance but by entering into the very brokenness of the world. Henri Nouwen reminds us that our wounds are not disqualifications but invitations—they make space for God’s healing and allow us to participate in extending compassion. Mitch Albom writes, *“What we carry defines who we are.”* If Christ carries us and our world, then our burdens are intertwined in a shared story of grace. Healing, therefore, is both personal and communal. When we allow Christ into our vulnerability, we are transformed; our wounds become a bridge to empathy, connection, and hope. On this Palm Sunday, as we remember Christ’s humble entry into Jerusalem, we are invited to receive healing within and to carry that healing outward into the lives of others.

#### 5) Mystic

**Henri Nouwen** (1932–1996) was a priest, theologian, and spiritual writer who believed that our wounds are not obstacles to ministry or compassion, but **the very place where healing and connection begin**. In *The Wounded Healer*, (Nouwen’s book) he challenged the idea that helpers, leaders, or pastors must have it all together before they can serve others.

For Nouwen, a wounded healer is someone who does not hide their pain, but has faced it honestly and allowed God to meet them there. When we acknowledge our own brokenness, we become more compassionate, less judgmental, and more able to walk alongside others in their suffering.

Healing, Nouwen taught, does not come from pretending to be strong, but from offering our real, vulnerable selves to God and to one another. As we allow God to heal us—often slowly and imperfectly—we become instruments of healing for others, not by fixing them, but by **being present with love, humility, and hope**.

## 6) Discussion Questions

- Isaiah 53 describes a servant who is “despised and rejected...acquainted with infirmity.” How does it feel to imagine Christ entering into the places of your own brokenness or vulnerability?
- In Matthew 21, Jesus enters Jerusalem humbly on a donkey rather than a warhorse. What does this tell us about the way God’s power and healing are revealed in the world? How does it challenge our own assumptions about strength and leadership?
- The author Mitch Albom says, “What we carry defines who we are.” How do you experience Christ carrying your burdens? How does this affect the way you see your own struggles and those of others?
- Henri Nouwen suggests that wounds are invitations, not disqualifications. How might your personal or collective suffering become a pathway for God’s healing—for yourself or for your community?
- The crowds in Matthew 21 shout, “Hosanna!” as Jesus enters. How do you recognize Christ at work in your life or in the world around you? What keeps you from seeing or celebrating that presence more fully?
- If healing begins as a personal encounter with Christ but flows outward into relationships, how might you participate in carrying or sharing God’s healing with others this week?

## 7) Closing Prayer

Christ our healer,  
Hold our wounds tenderly.  
Teach us to live in your compassion and share it freely.  
Amen.

## NOTES:

## **Good Friday: An Invitation to a Healing and Wholeness Service on Good Friday for Us and Our World**

Good Friday is a paradox: a day marked by suffering, grief, and the weight of sin, yet it is called “good.” Why? Because on this day, we are invited to enter the reality of our brokenness, to face the wounds of the world, and to lay bare our own vulnerabilities before the One who bore them all. Isaiah 53 reminds us that the suffering servant was “wounded for our transgressions...by his bruises we are healed.” Healing begins not in avoidance, but in the honest recognition of pain and the willingness to let Christ meet us there. On this day, we gather not in triumph, but in solidarity with our wounds, trusting that God’s presence transforms what feels hopeless into a space of tender restoration.

And yet, Good Friday is never the final word. The promise of Easter waits just beyond the tomb. Resurrection invites us to see that healing is possible—not in isolation, but in belonging, in the presence of Christ, and in solidarity with one another.

**NOTES:**

## Lenten Practice—Commit to being in worship during Lent

During this season of Lent, we hope you will help us bring people into the pews at Brownson Church. Invite those you miss seeing to sit with you and let them know that they are missed in worship! If you have been watching from home, or are out of the habit of coming to worship in person, we invite you back! It's a great time to recommit yourself to the practice of worshipping God!

### *Schedule for Holy Week*

#### **Palm Sunday—March 29, 2026**

9 AM—Worship

10 AM—Higher Grounds & Small Groups

11:10 AM—Worship

#### **Maundy Thursday—April 2, 2026**

7 PM—Tenebrae Service in Shadows and Confirmand Foot Washing

#### **Good Friday—April 3, 2026**

12 PM—Service of Healing and Wholeness

#### **Easter Sunday—April 5, 2026**

9 AM—Worship

10 AM—Higher Grounds & Small Groups

11:10 AM—Worship

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