

CONVERSION COMPANION

WEEK 1, THE CHAIR | DAY 1

TIRELESSLY

Deeper than your longing for God is God's desire for you. "God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from His face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. ... God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response."¹ "Although man can forget God or reject him, He never ceases to call every man to seek Him, so as to find life and happiness."² Sound familiar? Ever forget God? Ever hide far from His face? Ever run after idols? Ever accuse God of having abandon you? If so, there is good news: "the living and true God tirelessly" pursues you for "God's initiative of love always comes first."

We all have our patterns. We all forget God. We all hide from His face. We all run after our idols. And, because the inevitable emptiness birthed from such passive aggression throbs in ache, each of us accuses God of having abandoned us. Sound familiar? While the aforementioned litany may describe the truth of our patterns, the truth about God is that He "tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer." Regardless of our childish games and fear-laden hiding, God tirelessly pursues us. God longs for you infinitely more than you long for Him. In fact, God does not simply take the initiative, God tirelessly reaches out to you. He never tires of reaching out to you. God's tireless pursuit of you precedes your often faint-hearted attempts to respond.

Regardless of how often you have forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected God's inner invasion of intimacy, God is tirelessly calling you to communion. God is taking the initiative; God is calling; God is calling you. God is tirelessly calling you "to that encounter known as prayer."³

FOR YOUR PRAYER

Pray with Isaiah 49: 1-6; 14-16. Practice the art of Lectio Divina.

As you read, answer this specific question: What do you really want from God?

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2567

2 Ibid., no. 30

3 Ibid., no. 2567

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WEEK 1, THE CHAIR | DAY 2

INITIATIVE

We all want God. We are all searching for God. You are searching for God. You would not be reading this if you did not desire God or desire more in your relationship with God. Here is the good news: God wants you more. The first essential thing to know about God is that God always takes the initiative; God always takes the first step towards us.

He is taking the initiative because of who He is. In fact, God has always been taking the initiative. "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you." Our job is to simply put ourselves in a position to let God find us. Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J. is a wisdom-filled spiritual director. Perhaps his spiritual sight is heightened by his physical blindness. He tells the story of one day getting lost while walking. Unable to see, he panicked and began to pray. The Lord responded to his plea, "Sit in the middle of the street." Puzzled, Fr. Larry questioned, and soon, God replied, "Put yourself in a position to be found." Soon after, a car driven by one of Fr. Larry's friends drove up. Fr. Larry found himself safe and sound and realized he had just learned one of the most important things about God: when you are lost and cannot see your way out, stop trying to guide yourself ... simply put yourself in a position to be found. God is taking the initiative, for that is who God is.

He is reaching out to you. In a chapel, when things may be quiet, He is reaching out to you. In your struggles, He is reaching out to you. In your longings for more, where you may yearn to once again hear His voice, He is reaching out to you.

Throughout the next few weeks, for the rest of this pilgrimage, let God take the initiative and simply put yourself in a position to be found.

FOR YOUR PRAYER

Pray with Psalm 63. Practice the art of Lectio Divina.

As you read, return to this week's question: What do you really want from God during these next few weeks?

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WEEK 1, THE CHAIR | DAY 3

LOVE

“God’s love for us is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are.”¹ The very meaning of our existence flows from the very meaning of God’s existence. Thus, as God is love, God’s love is the lens through which you understand yourself, respond to God’s call and pray your way through this semester.

Pope Benedict XVI continues, “In considering this, we immediately find ourselves hampered by a problem of language. Today, the term ‘love’ has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings.”² One challenge confronting many of us stems from the distorted experience in our history of “love.” Some of us may feel we need to please God. In the silent whispers of spiritual desolation we hear “I’ll love you if you succeed.” “I’ll love you if you meet my expectations.” “I’ll love you if ...”. Thus, many of us spend so much time trying to impress God that we miss the life-changing truth that God loves because of who He is rather than because of what we do or try to be.

Regardless of your subjective experience of God, the objective truth of God and His love remains timelessly unchanged. God’s love is pure. It is faithful. It is everlasting. You exist because God is love. God’s love is not dependent upon you succeeding or living up to your expectations. In other words, love is who God is, not what He does. And, God does not love you because you deserve it, He loves because of who He is in His essence. God’s love for you in the darkest valleys of your past was no less present than during the most impressive chapters of your success.

FOR YOUR PRAYER

Pray with 1 John 4:7-21. Practice the art of Lectio Divina.

As you read, return to this week’s question: What do you really want from God during these next few weeks?

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 2

² *Ibid.*, no. 2

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WEEK 1, THE CHAIR | DAY 4

MERCY

Yesterday we read about love, and we continue today. “We have seen that God’s eros for man is also totally agape. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives. ... God’s passionate love for his people—for humanity—is at the same time a forgiving love.”¹ God’s mercy is the medicine that embraces the confusion of Saint Paul, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”²

Nowhere is the mercy of God more eloquently displayed than in Luke 15 and the parable of the prodigal son. “The father had certainly not forgotten his son, indeed he had kept unchanged his affection and esteem for him. So he had always waited for him, and now he embraces him, and he gives orders for a great feast to celebrate the return of him who ‘was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.’”³ The father is aware of his son’s inability to fully receive his love, thus it was the father who waited for his son to return. Likewise God “tirelessly calls” you “to that mysterious encounter known as prayer.”⁴ He calls you and shows you with mercy.

I once heard someone say: “They only call it mercy when you don’t deserve it.” None of us deserve God’s mercy, but He offers His mercy because of who He is. Regardless of how often you have forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected God’s inner initiative of intimacy, God is tirelessly calling you to communion. God is taking the initiative; God is calling; God is calling you. God is tirelessly calling you to receive His mercy.

FOR YOUR PRAYER

Pray with Psalm 25. Practice the art of Lectio Divina.

As you read, return to this week’s question: What do you really want from God during these next few weeks?

1 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 10

2 Romans 7:15

3 Saint John Paul II, *Reconciliation et Paenitentia*, no. 5

4 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2567

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WEEK 1, THE CHAIR | DAY 5

DESERVE

Peter van Breeman reminds us that we all need love; unfortunately, we all need much more than we deserve. Furthermore, we all need mercy, and, we all need more than we deserve. The profundity of God's mercy far exceeds our longing for mercy, for we do not deserve God's love, God's mercy; however, He bestows it anyway. "If we think God is a person who can divide his love, then we are thinking not of God but of ourselves. God is perfectly one, the perfect unity. We have love, but God is love. His love is not an activity. It is his whole self."¹

As mentioned this week, we cannot impress God into loving us. Nothing we have ever done, nothing you have ever done, impresses God. God is not impressed with your job or finances. God is not impressed with anything you do. God loves you because of who He is, not because of what you do. Therefore, nothing that you do makes you deserve God's love. It is a gift. Therefore, nothing that you do can remove God's desire to bestow it upon you. You need love, and you need more than you deserve.

Let's summarize the week. God is one who takes the initiative. God does not sometimes take the initiative, He always takes the initiative. In fact, God tirelessly takes the initiative: "God calls man first. ... the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. ... God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response."² God's initiative is love and His love is filled with mercy. And, we all need more mercy than we deserve.

FOR YOUR PRAYER

Today, using your spiritual senses, pray with Luke 15:20 and imaginative prayer.

Visualize yourself in the scene. You are the son. You return home. God is looking at you.

Ask God for more mercy than you deserve.

¹ Peter van Breeman, SJ, *The God Who Won't Let Go*

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2567