

# Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



## Week Thirty Five Encouragements & Wisdom

*E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.*

In our initial Seattle project at two thirds through the Forty Weeks, some of our participants offered reflections on the spiritual benefits received through Forty Weeks *Sacred Story* prayer. The reflections cover many different and important themes:

Awareness and Attention to Reality

Finding Balance in Life

Concern for Others

Spiritual Growth

Difficulties Encountered

Gratitude and Healings

Intimacy and Friendship with God

**God's Love and Mercy**

Peace and Hope

**The Structure and Routine of Prayer**

Appreciation of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist

Growth in Self-Understanding

This week's reflections cover **God's Love and Mercy** and **The Structure and Routine of Prayer**. As you listen to these reflections, be amazed at how powerfully God is working in all of our lives. The Good News is much more powerful than the bad. Remember, God is healing the world one life at a time while he writes our *Sacred Story*.

## GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY

1. I have struggled through this process but it reminds me to always remember that God meets me exactly where I am and that every moment is an opportunity to start fresh with my Heavenly Father and that we are walking this journey together.

*RESPONSE: This is the first lesson every saint in Church history learned.*

2. I never felt worthy of God's love or attention. Now I know and feel God's immense love for me and His design for my life.

*RESPONSE: Always remember God's goodness and give thanks!*

3. (I have a) connection with the immediate Presence and awareness of The Spirit in the moment. (I have) awareness of the ups and downs of the day and exploring the why, the connection, and the Presence of God in all we encounter, and all whom we encounter. (I see) the Love of God for me and each other person in and through all we go through.

4. My understanding of God's unbounded love for me has given me a new hope for my life, my journey. I never really understood how much God loves me until now.

5. (I have a) greater understanding of my relationship with God. A deeper gratitude for each moment. (I have) a realization of God's presence within me. A real feeling of being loved by God.

6. I have come to a tremendously deeper understanding of how judgmental I am of myself, and how quickly I discourage my own spiritual progress. I now ask myself, "whose voice are you listening to?" I hear God's loving voice more clearly in my soul. I have learned to trust the wisdom that I've been given in this first 50 years of my life, while joyfully continuing my learning process walking with God.

*RESPONSE: When we discover our sinfulness (judgmental etc.), we are uncovering the very things that, by God's work, can bring us peace and holiness. Remember, we are working with the Divine Physician!*

7. I did not understand the mission of Christ. I have carried with me the guilt that comes from thinking that if I had acted differently there would have been no violation of love, no violation of innocence. I did not understand the concept of original sin. The most powerful spiritual revelation of my life is understanding the myriad ways we are "undone" from the start and accepting that THIS was the mission of Christ, to enable true forgiveness, which is the restoration of life.

*RESPONSE: Think of this simple formula: God's signature is perfect relationship and total*

*intimacy. The enemy of human nature's signature is destroyed relationships and isolation. God's mission in Christ is to restore relationship to the world.*

8. Early on in this 'process', I asked you if you were aware of Anthony de Mello, S J., and you responded yes, that you had all of his books. I asked the questions because I recognized similarities in *Sacred Story* and de Mello's teachings, and I have wished that I had been able to attend one of his seminars. I now recognize that so much of his teaching was based upon those of St. Ignatius Loyola. I am so very grateful that you are making *Sacred Story* available for us and helping us become 'AWARE' !!, as we grow(?) in it! I do now believe that holiness IS available to me in spite of my brokenness and sinfulness. I know that God has forgiven me, and now, I may be able to forgive myself for all of the sins of my past. Eternity! Nothing else matters! Thank you, Almighty God, St. Ignatius and Fr. Watson, S.J.

**RESPONSE:** *Sanctity is offered to every man and woman alive. Pride is the main thing preventing most of us from achieving it. Cultivate humility.*

9. I'm glad God understands that many of my choices have come out of my woundedness, and that God is even more anxious to heal the wounds than I am. I have a new sense of God being intimately present and involved in every moment of my life, and I'm aware that what is happening now will be with me in eternity. I also know God's love for me, and his delight in me, in a new way. I am becoming more mindful all through the day, to quickly notice and "catch" any interruptions of peace.

**RESPONSE:** *The Lord walked His path of suffering and death so you could live. You are loved beyond all comprehension.*

10. It has made me see that God is more generous and more merciful than I thought possible. I have found that there are no limits to God's incredible generosity to me. That was the greatest gift I found in doing *Sacred Story* prayer. Even though I had not been on it for a few weeks, due to the fact that I've been out of town, *Sacred Story* prayer has been behind my thinking, acting and praying. I am a different person today than I was when I started this whole project. Now that I'm back, I'm even more committed to it.

**RESPONSE:** *No one out does God's Mercy and Generosity. He came to seek out what was lost. He is the Divine Physician and the Good Shepherd.*

11. (I am grateful for) the opportunity to establish a daily dialogue with Jesus knowing that I am valued and forgiven.

**RESPONSE:** *You have discovered the Christian vocation: walking daily with Christ by your side. The mercy and love you experience will no doubt help you discern how to share the same love and mercy with others.*

12. *Sacred Story* has made me aware of how things in my past affect what I do today and how the things I do can have a profound impact on others and the world we live in. I also feel it has definitely deepened my personal relationship with God and opened my eyes to his loving, forgiving nature.

**RESPONSE:** *The goal of being able to see the connections between past and present is to free you both to hear Christ speaking to you today, and following him with a generous heart. The insights achieved in seeing the connections help you serve the Kingdom of Christ.*

## **PRAYER ROUTINE/STRUCTURE**

1. *Sacred Story* prayer has benefited me in becoming engaged with my spirituality. I don't just sit and complain or blame or wonder where God is in my life. *Sacred Story* has made my relationship with God come into focus and has thereby moved me to be an active participant in the relationship. I am aware of my choices, my challenges, my sinfulness and have become more active in a daily prayer life that creates more peace no matter what is going on around me.

2. I have enjoyed learning a new discipline for prayer that has helped me solidify my practice.

3. Establishing a daily habit of prayer: I'm realizing that the way I schedule my life is interfering with my ability to commit to the exercises every day, and therefore also interfering with what is important in life.

4. Being mindful and aware of God's presence, goodness and love is the single biggest benefit. What I particularly appreciate about the *Sacred Story* practice is the step by step "how to" guides, especially the Week 26 Encouragements and Wisdom. On my own, I would just flounder around.

5. It has reminded me that I need to make God a priority in my life. I will have the time to pray IF I make it. I choose what I have time for in my life!

6. I have taken my *Sacred Story* very seriously, and it is making a big difference in my life. I am settling down and following my Lord intentionally and mindfully in a way I had not intentionally abandoned, but had missed through stress and distraction. Last week (26) I was reminded that, "This is a spiritual exercise after all." And not, it is implied, merely a psychological one. Some of the exercises are psychological--"Live in the present moment." (And I always add a paraphrase of something you wrote early on: You can't do life better by doing it faster.) But the psychological is part of my whole self, my whole Human Nature. And my life should look for Eternal value, that ultimate end in our thoughts of Creation, Presence, Memory, Mercy, and Eternity. God wants my life to count, to matter, and to continue. It matters to Him.

7. It has given me a way to deepen my relationship with God. By having spiritual exercises to practice each day, it has given me a structure to begin to take my spirituality in a specific direction and with a purpose. It is also very personal and brings peace to my busy day.

8. I appreciate the structure, but I am still struggling to figure out what I should be praying about when I sit down for my prayer sessions. I have been plugging in my own issues that come up in my life and seeing how the five chapters apply to them. I benefit from feeling a connection to God at key points during my day: on arising, prayer session time, and on retiring. I feel more whole and complete.

***RESPONSE:** Just keep praying and things will become clear. Fidelity to the practice is paramount. It sounds like you are doing just fine!*

9. It has helped me to recognize some of the ways sin entraps me. I have gained some additional tools for keeping God present in my life. The disciplines are helping me let go of an unhelpful image of God.

***RESPONSE:** Some of those unhelpful images of God are the direct influence of counter-inspiration's desolation. They work on us to diminish our hope and trust in God.*

10. Doing this consistently has broadened and deepened my relationship with God in a way that hit and miss does not.

11. To start with it has given me a means of making more time for God in my life. Though I may sometimes slip and forget or perhaps delay my time because something came up, I have found that the *Sacred Story* prayer and exercises have shifted my sense of how much it takes to make time for God in my life. I have found bits of insights that touch my heart and give me hope of finding and following the path God has in mind for me. I still have times of uncertainty, doubts, questions and what feels like incomplete understanding but I have found the framing of *Sacred Story* to be a tool to help me in facing and addressing them. I want to try to develop closeness to Christ in my life and these prayers seem like a place to continue to move in that direction.

***RESPONSE:** You will always have "times of uncertainty, doubts and questions." Don't fret. Your faith in God is deepening and will until the day you pass to Eternity.*

12. *Sacred Story* has given me a closer relationship with Jesus because of the discipline in it. It allows me to focus on talking to him not on wondering how to approach prayer.

13. The practice of prayer, though imperfect, is the beginning of a life-long journey that will only end when I am united with Christ.

***RESPONSE:** Knowing the life-long dimension of the journey gives us permission to take each day as it comes. It counters the oftentimes unspoken expectation that God expects us to achieve*

*heavenly perfection in this finite world.*

14. I have a new structure, commitment, and organization to my spirituality. I am not practicing it perfectly, some weeks not very well at all, but I have a clearer sense of what this kind of commitment looks like. The monthly confession practice has especially led me to reflect more carefully on my habits and prayer life.

**RESPONSE:** *I do not practice it perfectly either. But I keep trying each day. And yes, the monthly confession brings awareness and makes me also focus on my life in a way that is helpful and consoling.*

15. It has encouraged me to pray several times a day, whereas I was an evening person only.

**RESPONSE:** *Pretty soon, like Ignatius, you will be aware of God all the time.*

16. *Sacred Story* has emphasized the importance of prayer on a regular basis. It takes practice, like learning how to play a musical instrument. It is work! And sometimes I am not up to it, just as I am sometimes not up to practicing music. Then I go to the quick prayer just as I go to the five minute practice. And I think just that much is enough for the day.

17. *Sacred Story* has helped organize me to set aside time daily for my Lord. Also that "listening" time is now as important to me as praying.

18. *Sacred Story* provides structure to my prayer life.

**RESPONSE:** *What a powerful simple statement. Grace brings order out of disorder. It is the work of God. One day, the world will be ordered aright—the “new heavens and the new earth” will be our inheritance.*

