



CHRISTINE VALTERS PAINTNER

THE LOVE OF
THOUSANDS

HOW ANGELS, SAINTS, AND ANCESTORS
WALK WITH US TOWARD HOLINESS

"Reading a book by Christine Valters Paintner is like going on a retreat in your own home."

Carl McColman, Author of *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism*

Reflection Guide



Art by Elise Ritter

Introduction

- What is the threshold space you are in now? What is this threshold calling for you to release? As you anticipate the new, invite angels and spiritual beings to accompany you in the uncomfortableness of this liminal space.
- How might you open yourself to the discomfort of not knowing what will come next, accept your inability to imagine what your future might look like, and simply rest in the threshold between the old and the new?
- Take a moment and listen to the messages you're hearing from your mind, heart, and gut. Are you valuing one over the others? In what ways do you allow yourself to listen to your daydreams and night dreams and allow yourself to pay attention to synchronicities?
- Are you actively cultivating the capacity to let things be organic and emerge slowly? Notice what happens internally when you listen for leaves erupting from a branch and blossoms emerging from their stems — remind yourself you don't have to figure anything out.
- Are there beliefs you might be called to suspend to allow for messages to come through?



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Chapter 1: Calling on the Archangels

- When might you experience the impulse to call on Michael, the angelic warrior, to stand beside you as a fierce, protective presence?
- Have you ever heard a call or invitation that felt like it was from a higher source? What message did the angel carry to you? How did you respond?
- As you begin, or continue, your spiritual pilgrimage, how might you open yourself to receive the healing qualities offered by the angel Raphael?
- Can you recall an experience when you were offered a profound and unexpected sense of wisdom?
- Imagine Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel shimmering beneath the surface of things, offering you a felt sense of deep connection to energies beyond the everyday. In what ways will you commit to nurturing your relationship with the Archangels?



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Chapter 2: Encountering Your Guardian Angel

- Do you trust that your guardian angels are ever-present beings made of spirit who love you unconditionally and help you to walk through life with courage toward greater love and wholeness? If not, how might you begin to nurture this belief?
- Pause for a moment and identify a place in your life where you feel a disturbance to your inner peace; then identify a place where you feel like your heart is out of alignment with the Divine desire for your life; and, finally, identify where your prayer has felt dry or where connecting to the sacred has felt challenging. What do you feel when you call on the angels for help in these areas of your life?
- What does “hearing the symphony of angels” mean to you? When and/or where do you feel connected to celestial harmony and allow for the original song to flow through you?
- In what ways can you invite communication from the angels through intuitive ways of knowing? Explore listening to your body, paying attention to symbols that repeat, attending to dream wisdom, practicing radical nighttime surrender, and listening for the wisdom of animals. Do any come more naturally to you? In what ways do you feel yourself resisting these ways of intuitive knowing?



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Chapter 3: Wrestling with Angels

- What experiences have led you into the depths of a dark night? What initiated your dark night experience?
- How did your experience of the long, dark night of the soul manifest in your body?
- Have you ever demanded a blessing from God as you attempted to make meaning out of something hard and difficult in your life? Was the outcome what you expected?
- Is there anything you can do now to help develop the qualities of imagination and open-heartedness? How can you continue to strengthen these qualities in the face of trial and hardship? Consider times when you have found love at the heart of your wrestling and struggling.
- Examine your patterns in the face of difficult moments: do you seek distraction, numb out, flee either internally or externally, reside in the past or future instead of the present? Invite angels to help you endure as you connect with your breath to come fully present into the moment.



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Chapter 4: We are All Called to Be Saints and Mystics

- What practices do you devote yourself to with the intent of opening your heart to encountering the Divine?
- Do you lean towards knowing God through the cataphatic way or the apophatic way? How can you begin to honor the paradox and cultivate a hyperphatic understanding of God?
- Consider those in your life who have shown you what it means to love generously in a world that is often hard to love. Who inspires you through their poetry or music, commitment to social justice and the poor, or other pathways?
- What images and identities are you grasping onto? Are you attached to being viewed a certain way?
- In what ways might your life plans change if you were to consider following in the footsteps of saints? How can you practice listening for holy direction?



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Chapter 5: Embodied Love

- When you ponder the image of angels and saints praying for your well-being and transformation, what stirs inside you? Sit with this image and explore how you can incorporate a deeper knowing of this sacred communion into your day.
- Does a belief that death is not the final word help you connect to those you have known, loved, and lost? Consider the ways you might still be sensing their steadfast support through the veil between heaven and earth.
- What is your prayer in solidarity with the pains and struggles of the earth? What does this prayer bring forth in you?
- Who are your holy departed friends to whom you call out in prayer for help, protection, and divine intercession?
- In what ways do you feel invited to deepen your connection with the communion of saints who have gone before you? What are the practices of remembrance that call to you?



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Chapter 6: Saints and Pilgrimage

- Which saint do you most feel a connection with? What is the story of your sense of communion with this saint?
- Where and when does your chosen saint show up in your daily life?
- In what ways do you see how God's creative power animates and enlivens that chosen saint?
- How does that same divine, creative impulse animate and enliven your own life and being?
- What patterns in your life are you ready to release into the embrace of the holy landscape of pilgrimage?



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Chapter 7: Blessings of Our Ancestors

- Are you open to being in relationship with your ancestors? What traditions or rituals do you engage with to nurture such relationships? What new practices call to you as you read this chapter?
- How would the belief that your actions can positively affect the dead alter your approach and relationship with those who have crossed over before you?
- What messages are your ancestors whispering to you through nature, dreams, and synchronicities? Practice allowing yourself to trust and honor these signs as moments of connection.
- Recall times you've engaged with art — have you ever encountered unexpected wisdom? How can you intentionally make space for the intuitive language of the arts to speak the wisdom of the ancestors to you?
- Consider your spiritual lineage, creative lineage, and other potential lineages with which you can connect and from whom you can draw wisdom. What are the various lineages can you imagine as you welcome the blessings of all your myriad ancestors?



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Chapter 8: Intergenerational Wounds and Our Responsibilities

- How might you open yourself to an inner sense of your ancestral past being present in you today? Do you already have a sense of the wounds and unfulfilled longings of those who came before you? What does it mean to you to be a part of the healing of your ancestors'?
- How does it resonate with you when you consider that death is not the end of all possible means of communication with your departed loved ones and ancestors? Do you dip into traditional ways of prayer and ritual to connect with them? Do you create your own ways of communication?
- Which wise and well ancestors, angels, and saints do you call upon to sit with you as you engage in your sacred practice of healing work? Invite them to sit with you in your inner, sacred circle, helping you to keep the energy of ancestral wounds from affecting your own.
- What are the shadow parts you've inherited from ancestral wounds? Do you have a sense of the wounds' lineage? Or is it a mystery? Regardless of known or unknown origins, how do you feel called to engage with these wounds?
- What are the ways you can begin to walk calmly and courageously back into your ancestral memory and into your family systems with open eyes and loving compassion? How can you integrate humility and compassion into this process?



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Chapter 9: Grieving Our Losses

- Consider your landscape of loss. What griefs do you know in an intimate way? You're invited to practice gently placing your pain in God's tender care.
- Where have the cultural practices of denying death and worshiping eternal youth shown up in your life? How do you resist these messages? How can the practice of lament become one of your tools of resistance?
- When have you gathered with others in communal lamentations, acknowledging with your tears that there is suffering worth weeping over?
- When have you allowed the practice of lament to move you beyond your own perspectives?
- What practices of lamentation help you to invite God's reconciling and healing power into your life?



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Chapter 10: Ancestral Pilgrimage

- With the understanding that pilgrimages are journeys with the intention of being changed, what pilgrimages have you taken? In what ways did the experience change you?
- If you have ever stood in the land of your ancestors, did you sense an elemental awareness of what shaped your ancestors' imagination? Did you feel a deeper connection to your ancestors' experiences, sorrows, and joys?
- How do you prepare for your pilgrimage: with excitement and anticipation, or fear and trembling? Can you hold space for the whole of your experience and trust that it is in facing the dark depths that you no longer have to live in fear of them?
- In what ways do you experience a disconnection from the land of your ancestors as a sense of exile?
- When have you felt most connected to your ancestors? Consider the ways you retrieve your soul origins: has it been through land, stories, language, food, or other meaningful ways of connecting?



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Chapter 11: Cosmology, Myth, and Song

- What does the invitation to connect to your ancestors by exploring the cosmologies and cultures of the lands they came from stir inside you? Be present with whatever arises.
- Is there a symbol or story you've discovered that especially resonates with you, even if you can't articulate why? Contemplate how this informs your understanding of your ancestors and how it informs your understanding of yourself.
- As you peruse and explore the cosmologies, folktales, and music of your ancestors, what are the literal and mythic truths these stories embody?
- What are the griefs and losses that accompany you on this search for deeper connection to the world of your ancestors? What resources can support a sense of homecoming?
- As you continue exploring, what excites you? Listen to your curiosity as synchronicities open up entire new worlds of questions.



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Chapter 12: Becoming a Wise and Well Ancestor

- What do you find most challenging in your attempt to live with integrity? From where and from whom can you seek support?
- Can you imagine that your ancestors would want you, their descendant, to live a good, fruitful, and meaningful life? What does that uniquely look like for you? Practice making space to listen for your ancestors' words of guidance and wisdom.
- Imagine looking back at the generations behind you — what fulfilled and unfulfilled desires do you see? How might you set about weaving some of these loose threads of desires into the tapestry of your own life?
- Who can you choose to dedicate your actions to? What are the ways you can practice and ritualize this dedication?
- How do you honor the sacred duty we all share to bring love, equality, peace, and security to future humans, animals, plants, and all living beings?



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Chapter 13: Ancestral Earth and Deep Time

- How does it feel to consider the Earth and stars as your ancestors? What shifts when you regard all beings and creatures as your kin?
- In what ways have you allowed Earth's elements to affect how you experience and understand the world?
- What do you imagine "intimate communion" with Earth would look like? How can you begin to cultivate that communion now?
- Consider the ways your physical substance and your breath are connected to the cosmos and millions of generations of life: what do these reflections inspire within you?
- How might you enter into or deepen a relationship of mutuality with all of creation?



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Conclusion: The Love of Thousands

- Reflect on the ways you encountered angels, saints, and ancestors on this journey. What surprised you? Is there anything you understand differently than before? What were the many layers of love that began revealing themselves to you?
- When have you experienced threshold moments in your life, both those unbidden and those welcomed? What was released on those thresholds?
- When have you heard the angels, saints, and ancestors cheering you on to live the resurrected life here and now?
- How will you choose to celebrate life as it emerges?
- What sparks your aliveness and passion? How does your love call you to cocreate a more beautiful world with God?



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