



Give Me a Word

By Christine Valters Paintner, PhD, REACE

Reflection Questions



INTRODUCTION

Think back to what has shimmered for you — what was your felt response? Was it something that challenged you, something to wrestle with? Was it something that invoked wonder or awe? What is revealed when you attune more deeply to sensations that arise, both remembered and present?

PRELUDE (SAVOR)

Quiet your mind for a while — what dreams and subtle whispers rise to the surface of your awareness? What dreams have been diminished or lost in a haze of indifference or a continuous “pushing aside”? What do these dreams tell you when given the space?

PART ONE: LISTENING FOR A WORD

What are the ways you strive and reach? When do you more naturally linger and allow for things to unfold slowly? What can both of these teach you about what you need to inhabit a spirit of softening on this journey ahead?

DAY 1: CROSS THE THRESHOLD

What personal or global thresholds feel especially present and strong for you? What are the liminal spaces in which you might be called to be midwife, providing presence and aid to the future’s birthing?

DAY 2: LISTEN WITH THE HEART

What parts of yourself do you resist bringing before God? Are there other blocks you encounter when entering your heart-space? What are ways you can engage with and listen to these blockages?

DAY 5: LET THE WORD CHOOSE YOU

Like the use of “taking”, “shooting”, and “capturing” in reference to photos, what are other aggressive expressions used in our language and culture? Notice what happens within yourself and around you when you begin to shift your language to reflect a posture of grace and receptivity.

DAY 4: LISTEN TO YOUR LIFE

Recall times you have experienced dull vision and times when your vision was illuminated with a sacred presence shimmering around you. What demands, anxieties, or struggles of daily living distract you from being fully present and seeing the sacred both around and within you?

DAY 5: REFLECT ON WHAT HAS BEEN LIFE-GIVING AND LIFE-DRAINING

Have you practiced the Examen prayer before, or are there other end-of-day reflections you've engaged in? What has been your experience in those practices — what was challenging about them and what was enriching about them (a little Examen of your Examen practices, if you will)?



DAY 6: GIVE ME ONE WILD WORD

When you think of “greater freedom”, what images and sensations arise? How are those images similar or dissimilar to your current season in life? Where in your life do you feel a pull or a call to expand into greater freedom?

Day 7: Tend to the Night Wisdom of Dreams

Such as the suggestions in the book (online oracles and decks of cards), what are other supplemental ways you can explore your dream world and the liminal space between sleeping and waking? When tending to night wisdom, remember this practice is valuable regardless of what you're able to specifically recall from your dreams.

DAY 8: CONSULT A SOUL FRIEND

When have you walked your spiritual path alone? What dangers did you face? When have you been gifted with the presence of someone who offered courage and counsel? What dangers did that soul friend help you navigate?

DAY 9: READ A SET OF WISDOM PRINCIPLES

Do you tend to gravitate towards something new or towards something familiar? Consider these patterns and what they reveal to you — what shifts within you when you break out of your usual habits? How does your experience change when you engage in your familiar pattern with purposeful intention?

DAY 10: IMAGINE YOUR DEATHBED

What invitations of freedom and responsibility does Sister Death offer you? What are other ways you see the intersectionality of freedom and responsibility?

INTERLUDE: SURPLUS

As you read Christine's reflection on how the word “surplus” was given to her, how do you feel invited to engage with your own life story in preparation for a word to be given to you?

PART TWO: RECEIVING THE WORD

Reflect back on your journey thus far — what is being revealed to you through your resonances and dissonances? Where are you invited to expand, and where are you invited to ask for grace? What attachments have you released or are beginning to release?

DAY 11: ALLOW THE WORD TO RIPEN

What seasonal symbols resonate with you and your deep longings to live in sync with your soul's natural cycle? How can you invite these symbols to be companions along your journey?

DAY 12: TRUST WHAT YOU LOVE

In a culture that idolizes the grind and the hustle, what are the obstacles you run into when letting what you love seek you? What hurdles do you experience when trying to prioritize that which makes you come alive and satisfies your heart? What radical acts of rebellious grace could you offer yourself to allow for the space you need to be nourished?



DAY 13: CONSULT THE DESERT ELDERS

Like the sayings and stories left behind by the desert elders, our lives don't always follow linear or logical paths. What are the paradoxes of life that have been themes in your journey? What do you feel when you let yourself rest in those paradoxes?

DAY 14: CREATE A PANTOUM

After the creative practice: how was the experience of trusting the process and not forcing the poem, but rather letting it emerge as it desired? Was it frustrating? Releasing? Both? How might you incorporate this type of stabilizing structure in tandem with creative unfolding into your spiritual journey?

DAY 15: TAKE A PILGRIMAGE OF MEMORY

What are the ways the practice of receiving is evolving for you over the course of this journey? What new awarenesses or obstacles have you encountered? What helps you rest into grace?

DAY 16: ATTUNE TO YOUR BODY'S WISDOM

What is your current relationship with your body and the concept of embodiment? What are the ways you have felt the pressure to separate and disconnect from your body or to control it? What are the ways you've felt betrayed by your body? Gently and lovingly consider the ways you may have betrayed your body.

DAY 17: LISTEN TO THE ELEMENTS

Which elements described in this chapter resonate more with you? Which challenge your patterns and typical ways of viewing the world? Did this shift after the meditation practice versus before? When your resonant and dissonant elements are in conversation with each other, what do they say to one another, and what do they reveal to you?

DAY 18: EMBARK ON A PHOTOGRAPHY PILGRIMAGE

What is your relationship with intuition as a concept? How about with your intuition specifically? What are ways you can befriend your intuition?

DAY 19: CALL ON THE ANGELS, SAINTS, AND ANCESTORS

How do you define your community? What stirs inside upon the invitation to welcome "the love of thousands" into your community? How do you feel called to honor and deepen this relationship with the angels, saints, and your ancestors?

DAY 20: BRING YOUR WORD TO A THRESHOLD PLACE

What is your typical response to not knowing what comes next? What are ways you can cultivate the capacity to sit in the mystery of your own unknown? How does the invitation to recognize heaven on earth intersect with your unique call to embrace mystery?



INTERLUDE: HERMIT

What are the challenges offered by your word that you feel resistant to? What priorities is your word revealing to you?

PART THREE: CARRY THE WORD WITH YOU

What are the rhythms of spiritual practice that have begun to emerge over the course of this journey? What's life-giving? What's life-draining? What are ways you can continue to cultivate the life-giving rhythms with intentionality?

DAY 21: CREATE A BREATH PRAYER

What has been your relationship with breath over the course of your life? What is your current relationship with breath? What are the ways this invitation to create a breath prayer challenges or enlivens you?

DAY 22: CHOOSE A SPIRITUAL TEACHER

What are your longings and areas of resistance in regard to committing to focus deeply on a singular spiritual teacher? Listen for where those longings and areas of resistance guide you and consider their wisdom as you discern your spiritual teacher.

DAY 23: ILLUMINATE THE WORD VISUALLY

What are the voices of restriction that inhibit your creation? What might your inner child say in response to those voices? When does your creativity flow naturally? What does your inner child say at those times?

DAY 24: WRITE AN ACROSTIC POEM

Like Christine taking a walk to release stuck creativity in the midst of writing, are there other contemplative practices you're naturally mixing and blending? Consider how your creativity can extend into the ways you engage with these contemplative practices, allowing any given moment's needs and inspirations to speak wisdom and to invoke liberation — inviting an intersectionality of practices to serve your own, unique, spiritual journey.

DAY 25: CREATE A PLAYLIST OF WORD-THEMED SONGS

What are the ways God sings to you? What are the ways God sings through you? What music has softened your heart, and what music has drawn forth tears of compunction? What does all of this reveal to you about what your soul requires to make space for the Holy?

DAY 26: COMMIT TO A WORD-ROOTED PRACTICE

Recall a time when your spiritual practice felt integrated (or partially integrated) with how you showed up in your daily life, no matter how faint or brief that experience might have been — what did that spiritual practice offer you that feels currently missing in your life? What is calling to you now for tending and embodiment?

DAY 27: WRITE A SEVEN-WORD PRAYER

Where and when have you experienced holy disruption on this “Give Me a Word” pilgrimage? What in this journey has expanded past the confines of how you’ve previously lived your life?

DAY 28: CREATE A SIMPLE WORD-CENTERED RULE OF LIFE

Recall times in your life when you felt suffocated by over-rigorous legalism and/or times when you felt lost and unmoored due to a lack of structure. What did these experiences teach you about your own personal needs for flourishing?

DAY 29: PRACTICE LECTIO DIVINA WITH REVELATION 2:17

When entering meditative practices, which of your senses feels most alive and awake for you? What are ways you can welcome in the experience of that sense to your everyday life? Which senses are calling to you for more intentional awareness?

DAY 30: GO FORWARD INTO A NEW SEASON

This journey has been a practice of making space to hear the prayer of God already at work within — what has been released (either intentionally or unintentionally) to allow for this space in your heart? In this space that’s been created, you are invited to let your word reveal its mysteries to you. What are the ways of being that soften you into a stance of receptivity?

POSTLUDE: DISTILLATION

Recall your own “dark nights of the soul” or “journeys to the underworld” — what have those seasons uniquely revealed to you?

BLESSING FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

What deep desire does your word echo back to you? How does that echo call you back to Love and invite you to embody your word?

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This set of reflection questions was put together by the amazing team at Abbey of the Arts. Visit AbbeyoftheArts.com for more resources.

