



THE
OTHER SIDE OF CHAOS
— ❖ —
STUDY GUIDE

BREAKING THROUGH
WHEN LIFE IS BREAKING DOWN





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Week 1— Chapter 1 & 2

The Welcome and Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light a candle as a symbol of Christ's presence in our midst:
O Christ, we light this candle in the hope and promise
That you will be among us along the way of transforming discipleship
Grant us wisdom and courage to open ourselves to your grace. Amen.

Sharing Insights and Discussion Chapter 1—Dislodged

Margaret Silf begins by describing how we might experience discomfort during transition and change. What does it mean to trust God when things in our life that we had counted on are in flux?

1. When you have felt dislodged, not by your choosing, but because something happened to you? What was that like? Do you experience the ache of transition more in the body, the mind, or the heart (see pp 3-5).
2. On page 3, the author believes that when we are “dislodged” and forced to leave our comfort zones, that we can receive an invitation to “begin to set ourselves free.” This journey towards freedom and spiritual transformation will be the theme of the book. As we begin, what is your response to this notion that even chaotic change can lead us to something good?
3. On pages 8-9, Silf describes the difference between certainty and trust. I may not have certainty about the answers or what is next, but I can have trust that God will open up a future through the uncertainty. What experience have you had in trusting God when you didn't have the answers or certainty about what will happen next? What was that like?



Story of Exodus Begins with a Breakdown, chapter 1-2

We are going to work through the story of the Exodus as one of the great journeys through chaos, from breakdown to breakthrough. The author's notes are found in chapter 18, pages 159-175. We will take up a brief section of the story each week. In preparation, you can read the assigned chapters or passage. In our gathering each week, we will focus on a few verses from the reading. In Exodus, chapter 1-2, the story begins with a time of exploitation, cruelty, and violence. Even Moses is provoked to an act of revenge and desperation and must now flee. There seems to be no way out of the chaos and breakdown. Read the selection of verses from Exodus 1-2.

4. How is life breaking down for the Hebrews? For Moses? What is happening? What seems hopeless?
5. How would you describe your own chaos or experience of unsettled change? What are your own feelings? In what ways do you identify with the "no exit" or no way out for Israel and Moses from Pharaoh?

Chapter 2 — Crisis: Danger or Opportunity?

Silf describes how moments of crisis and danger can also be moments of opportunity for a better life and world. Sometimes it is in the danger of the crisis that we are motivated to act in better ways.

6. Silf begins with the observation about how much the world has changed, the change in youth culture, climate change, you name it. As you look around at the world, what change seems disorienting to you? In any of those situations, where do you see the danger?
7. Silf on page 14 wonders whether the crisis points may actually serve as opportunities for positive change. Do any of these seem possible to you?
8. Have you experienced a Humpty Dumpty event where things fall apart (see 16-17)?
 - a) How do you feel when things fall apart?
 - b) Does it result in nothing more than a rather messy omelet? Or is a chick trying to hatch? In other words, is it a mess beyond repair, or is the mess the start of something new? What has been your experience?



Listen to Scripture —

Matthew 26:30-34, Good Friday as a Breakdown Event

³⁰When Jesus and the disciples had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

³²But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

³³Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." ³⁴Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." ³⁵Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

9. Have you ever considered the crucifixion of Jesus as a break-down moment (page 15)? A Humpty Dumpty moment for the disciples (16)? What do you make of her description of the crucifixion as a crisis that leads to a breakthrough, a new beginning in the resurrection? How do you think the disciples would have felt about such a transformation possibility that Thursday night in the garden of Gethsemane? Hopeful, Doubting, Confused, Something else?
10. If God can bring a new beginning out of something as terrible as the crucifixion, what might that have to say about what God could bring about in your life? What do you think God is seeking to birth or bring about in your life? Can you see the outlines of something new now? Or are you still waiting and wondering?

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, your Son was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself. Grant that we who have been born out of his wounded side may at all times find mercy in him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

For Next Week

Read chapters 3-5, pp. 19-41. Read Exodus, chapters 3-4



Exodus, chapter 1-2 selections

⁶Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. ⁷But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

⁸Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." ¹¹Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor....

¹¹One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. ¹²He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" ¹⁴He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." ¹⁵When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh.





Week 2 — Chapters 3-5

The Welcome and Lighting of the Christ Candle

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Sharing Insights and Discussion

Chapter 3 – Mind the Gap

Silf describes the gap as what is between the no longer and the not yet, that space where we are neither in one place nor another. Gaps are those places in-between where chaos arises.

1. Silf lists some gaps on page 20. Take a moment to reflect on whether you find yourself in any of these gaps. How would you describe the gap of a pandemic? Without trying to fix anything or make a judgement about yourself, simply notice where you are and how you are feeling. How would you describe any gap that you are in right now? What makes gaps so hard?
2. Silf describes what it means to avoid or mishandle a gap. We avoid the gap by clinging to the past and what is no more. We mishandle the gap by jumping too quickly to the new (23). Are you more tempted to hold on to the old or jump too quickly to the new?
3. Silf describes a third approach as “minding the gap,” that is being present and paying attention to what is happening without fixing it. How might you “mind” the gap – give it your attention for the sake of giving birth to something new in your life? What does that mean for you? Do you have an example of when this happened for you? How is faith as trusting in God a part of “minding the gap?”



Chapter Four – Bridges over Troubled Waters

Silf describes three kinds of bridges over troubled waters, three ways navigating the gap, of responding to crisis, uncertainty, and chaos.

- Bridge 1 is money or quick fixes that force a way across, but often don't really address the deeper matters.
 - Bridge 2 is the experience of obstacles that really prevent us from crossing.
 - Bridge 3 is the collection of resources and skills we may already have that at first seem inadequate or flimsy, but like a sturdy rope, can actually get us across.
1. Do you recognize any of these bridges in your life— quick fix, obstacles, rope? What is a story or example of one of them for you? Do you tend to experience one of these bridges more than others?
 2. Silf describes the bridge of rope as that collection of personal gifts, resources, abilities that we may at first overlook or discount, but actually may be what we need to cross troubled waters (32-33). How have you experienced this or seen it at work in others—using your gifts in new ways to meet a challenge?
 3. How do you feel about the bridges you have crossed or the one you are on right now?

Chapter 5 – When the Traveler Is Ready, the Bridge Appears

Silf makes a distinction between faith as an intellectual belief in God and faith as an act of trust that God will provide. The story of scripture is so often how God provides a bridge between the past and the not-yet in surprising, gracious, life-giving ways.

1. In what ways do you think of faith as belief in certain truths and faith as an act of trust? How are they the same or different for you? On page 39-40, Silf compares the all-embracing reality of God for us like a fish swimming in the ocean or pond looking for water. "Faith is allowing ourselves to rest in the ocean of God's love and trusting that it will never fail to sustain us, whatever traumatic changes we may face: (41). How did this illustration speak to you?
2. Have you ever taken risks by stepping into an abyss or an uncertain future, simply in trust or perhaps because circumstances forced it? What happened, and how do you feel about it now?



Story of Exodus—God Invites Moses into the Journey, chapters 3-4

Exodus chapter 3-4 tells the story of God calling Moses. It is a story where God is showing Moses a way across the gap. It is also a story of how Moses resists, how Moses sees only obstacles, difficulty, and his own inadequacy. The question is whether and how Moses will trust God when so much is still unsure and untested.

1. At the end of chapter 2, God notices the suffering of the Hebrews. In chapter 3, Moses who had been a prince of Egypt is now a shepherd in the mountains. How has Moses turned away or ignored what is happening in Egypt? How is Moses avoiding the troubled waters?
2. What are the obstacles as Moses sees them that keep him from helping the Israelites? How does Moses think it is an impossible task? Is Moses looking to himself or God?
3. How does God provide for Moses? What assurances does God offer? Does God's help happen right away or does it mean that Moses must still wait and trust in God going forward?
4. In chapters 4 and 5, the author is navigating a way across troubled waters that is based on faith, while not being fool hardy. How do you make that judgment and dare to trust that when you are ready to make that first move of commitment to what lies ahead, the way will be open up for you, inviting you to unravel your rope bridge and risk the crossing?
5. Do you have any sense God is calling you to move beyond whatever impasse you are facing? How does that feel? How does God's invitation to go forward reveal itself to you? How does God provide help for you in abilities, companions, and God's own promised presence?

Closing prayer

Gracious God, you have revealed yourself to us as the great I AM. You have breathed your life in us, and your loving purpose embraces all of life. When I see only trouble, and I feel unable to face the challenge, release my heart to trust in you and to find my courage for living in you. Amen.

For Next Week Read chapters 6 & 7, pp. 43-60, Read Exodus 5 & 6

Exodus, chapters 3-4 selections.

¹Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There



the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

⁷Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

¹³But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

¹⁴God said to Moses, " I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ' I AM has sent me to you.'" 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

¹Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" ²The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." ³And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it.

¹⁰But Moses said to the LORD, "O my LORD, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." ¹¹Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

¹³But he said, "O my LORD, please send someone else." ¹⁴Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron the Levite?"





Week 3 — Chapters 6-7

The Welcome and Lighting of the Christ Candle

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Chapter 6—God Bless this Mess

Messes can sometimes be the condition for something new to emerge. Breakdown is a necessary precursor to breakthrough. Silf identifies two breakdown/breakthrough events in scripture—the moment of creation, and the upper room experience of the disciples.

Listen to Scripture—Two Occasions of Chaos leading to New Life

Genesis 1:1-4, Creation

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good...

John 20:19-22, Resurrection

¹⁹When it was evening on the day of resurrection, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

1. What is the mess or chaos described or implied in Genesis account of creation? What does "formless void" suggest? What picture or image comes to your mind?
2. Notice that the day of resurrection, Sunday, is also identified as the first day of the week, that is the first day of creation. (Remember God begins on Sunday and rests



on Saturday). What is the personal mess or chaos that the disciples are experiencing that first Easter evening? What's going on emotionally for the disciples before they recognize Jesus?

3. In these two stories, God brings order and direction to the world and to the disciples' lives, where before they were at a messy stuck point, as in a formless void or hiding for fear.

Take a moment to reflect on how your own inner chaos feels to you right now. On page 43, the author shares a conversation where moments of greatest discomfort may be places where God is beginning something new. Can you identify at all with the image of the Spirit of God hovering over the chaos of your life, anticipating new order? Or can you identify with the image of Jesus breathing life and a new order on you like in the upper room?

4. What is your response to the author's claim (47): "Chaos is not bad news, a mess that we have to bring back into the right kind of order, the order that existed before we messed it up. On the contrary, chaos is a sacred reality, the very thing that is needed for a new creation to begin. Chaos is a gift, overflowing with potential." Have you ever looked at chaos or disorder as a gift, with the potential for something new and life giving? When or How?
5. Which of the images of God hovering over your life on page 46 speak to you?
 - + A wind of change and transformation can blow across the dark void
 - + A new energy can emerge, or even erupt
 - + New possibilities can "foam forth," one by one, instant by instant.
 - + This is the singular gift of existence, forever renewing itself.

Story of Exodus 5 & 6—When things get worse before they get better. (See reading sheet)

6. Moses does what God asks, but it does not go well at the beginning. Things get worse for the Hebrews, forced to make bricks without straw. Moses and the Hebrews complain: "God isn't doing anything!" Have you ever wondered something like this? Have you had the experience where things get worse before they get better? Have you wondered where is God in the mess?



Chapter 7 – Can Bad News be Good News?

7. Silf begins with a story of a farmer, who sees a silver lining in the clouds. Good luck from bad luck. (53-54). Pause and try to remember whether anything like this has ever happened for you. Can you remember bad times or unwelcome changes that seemed so unfavorable at the time, but now in hindsight, actually brought great gifts into your life?
8. Silf wonders (55): “Suppose God is continually striving to draw the more life-giving outcome from whatever we present? Suppose God, who is Life and Love itself, longs for nothing more than our coming to the fullness of who we can be, and will start over with us whatever happens, from exactly where we are, and lead us forward into the next stage of growth?” One application of this is reflected in Romans 8:28—God can take whatever is happening in our life and work it for good; we are not abandoned. ²⁸“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” On page 56, Silf asks: Look again at the messiness of your own transitions right now. Can you imagine that God is there alongside you saying “This is where we are, and this is how things are. Now together, let us look for the most life-giving way forward.” What is this saying to you? How does it change your perspective?

Closing prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you that you hover over the uncertainties of our lives with your creative Spirit. Take the raw material of our lives and worth them together for good according to your loving purpose. Give us courage to trust you as we travel through the uncertainties of life.

For Next Week:

Read chapters 8-9, pp 61-80, Read Exodus 12.



Exodus 5:17-6:1

Pharaoh said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' ¹⁸Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks." ¹⁹The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks." ²⁰As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. ²¹They said to them, "The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

²²Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? ²³Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people." ¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land."





Week 4 — Chapters 8-9

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Chapter 8, The Day the Rains Came

Silf tells the story of Noah as a case story of transition and change, leading to growth. Noah's rescue in the ark is but part of the story that results in Noah and his family emerging on a Mountain top and beginning a new life. There is the possibility that "Noah came through with a new, and perhaps cleansed, purged, and heightened sense of what it means to be human. We can hope they moved on with greater insight than before (69)."

1. How do you think Noah was changed or grew in wisdom and character from this journey? Does the story of Noah speak to you in a new way?
2. Silf concludes: "Transition gives us a chance to make a new start, to cherish the best of the past, yet risk the better of a future still known. To grasp at transformation rather than relying merely on rescue."(70) Are you drawn more to rescue or transformation? How do you feel about taking a risk for an unknown, yet potentially better future?
3. Who do you know that seems to model risk and dare for the sake of a better future rather than a safe rescue and return to what is familiar?

Exodus Story, chapter 12, Reluctance for Change

Silf notes (163) that Egypt can hardly be called a comfort zone, and yet the children of Israel are strangely reluctant to leave it. They are instructed to celebrate Passover quickly, and to leave in haste, carrying almost nothing with them. They are driven out. They are dislocated. They are expelled. They don't have time for a meal but must be content with unleavened bread.

- 
1. What is that place of comfort or familiarity (like Egypt) that you want to hold onto, which actually may be a place that is holding you back?
 2. How are you entering your own journey of transition? Does it feel like you are being pushed along like the Israelites that Passover night?
 3. Pilgrims always travel light, if they don't, they won't make the distance. What, for you, is the hardest thing to leave behind? What will you miss most? Do you feel as if you are trying to take too much?
 4. What would it mean to take few things like the Israelites? What does it mean to travel light through the transitions of life?

Chapter 9, The Rock and The Sand

What do we build our life on? What provides security? Often what we thought secure or reliable is not. Silf draws on her own experience of God to describe the bedrock of God's gracious presence in times of change.

Listen to Scripture, Matthew 7: 24-27

²⁴"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell — and great was its fall!"

1. Close your eyes and imagine these two houses, one on sand, another on the rock. What do you see of the house built on sand? Of the house built on rock? What would be the benefits of building on sand? What views or setting do you imagine when building on the sand? What would be the obstacle or hindrance of building on rock?
2. Silf draws the comparison that what is actually the more sure foundation is not always obvious. "Frankly, most of us think financial security is a foundation you can trust...we never expect the unexpected of financial collapse...but the possibility is there. We have built our houses on the shifting sands...then the storms come." What surprises do you see in the world today where things that people counted on turned out to be shifting sands? Now with a pandemic, a recession, and a storm, how have these experiences tempered or influenced your view on what is a solid foundation for living?



3. Silf recalls an event when she “knew that life is held in a mysterious presence that we cannot name or describe and that this presence is utterly loving and all welcoming...It hadn’t been about “believing” anything, but rather it is about a kind of knowing...You can stand on it. It is a rock. Perhaps it is *the* authentic meeting place with God.” (77) Have you had an experience where your sense of God was deeply present and like a rock to stand on? Do you ever return to that experience, that memory?
4. Are there any Bible stories or passages that invite you into this sense of God’s deep presence? Psalm 23, John 3:16, Romans 8:36-39, something else?

Closing prayer

Gracious God, we confess how easy it is to build our lives on shifting sands, on things that seem good, even necessary, but will not provide true protection in the storms of life. Turn our attention to what endures, to your promises and your presence, and give us faith to trust you as the true rock, our true security. We thank you for your love and mercy that is ours each day. Amen.

For Next Week

Read chapter 10-12, pp 81-108, Exodus 13:17-22

Exodus 12: selected verses, Traveling Light

¹The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD.

²³For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.



³⁰Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. ³¹Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, "Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD, as you said. ³²Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone.

³⁷The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. ³⁸A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. ³⁹They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

Listen—Scripture, Lamentations 3:19-26

¹⁹The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!

²⁰My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

²¹But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;

²³they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

²⁴"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

²⁵The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

5. How does your sense of these verses change when you understand that Jeremiah is sitting on a hill, the Mt. of Olives, and looking at the ruins of Jerusalem, burned and smoldering, after the Babylonians laid siege? Everything people had counted on is now shifting sand. What is Jeremiah's "rock?"



Listen to Scripture, Genesis 6-9

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. ¹³And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark and cover it inside and out with pitch.

¹¹In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. ¹²The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark.

¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹²God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.





Week 5 — Chapters 10-12

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Sharing Insights and Discussion

Chapter 10, A Fly on the Face of the Mona Lisa

Silf describes the importance of perspective, taking the long view, and having an awareness of how God has written into creation the ability for things to renew, as in a new moon, and the emergence of spring.

1. Silf writes, "An important aspect of living through change and transition is the ability to take the longer view...When we are stuck in one place, we can see only that tiny bit of the picture...we can't see the longer view—a view that may well be a lot longer than our own lifetime"(82) What experience have you had of being stuck and then gaining a bigger perspective, seeing the long view?
2. Silf draws on the phases of the moon—new moon, full moon, last quarter, and no moon to provide a sense of perspective. What phase are you in now, and how do you feel about it? How easy or hard is it to step back and see a bigger picture of growth, change, and new possibility?
3. Silf says "We know that this no-moon phase is also the prelude to a new beginning, whether in this life or beyond or both."(87) As you reflect on your life, have you experienced a "no moon phase" that led to a new moon, a new beginning?



Chapter 11, Strange Attraction

Silf describes how the chaos of events can actually be the springboard for creativity and new life. She points to “lightning bolt” experiences of insight or experience that open up new possibilities. It is as if the chaos and turmoil contained the seeds of future promise.

1. “Disaster often calls forth new depths of resourcefulness and altruism that we never knew we had...it is said that we are often at our best when life deals us its worst.” Do you agree with this or not? How have you seen it at work after the recent storm?
2. Have you had a bolt of lightning experience that jolted you toward new creativity and living? Or does creative change happen through “a small change in our situations that brings about a new growth—a change of scene, a journey, a visit with a friend, or a book or movie that excited new passion in us?” (92). Which is more true for you?
3. Silf write: Just as order periodically breaks down into chaos, within the chaos there is a new order trying to reveal itself. Just what form this new order will take cannot be predicted....As a Christian, I choose to think of Jesus of Nazareth, and especially the energy released in the Holy Spirit, as a kind of “strange attractor,” bringing about radical and unpredictable change in the chaos of the journey.

On page 93-94, Silf recalls the resurrection experience of the disciples by the sea. Once they haul in the fish, they have breakfast with Jesus. It is as if Jesus is saying, “Now come ashore and let’s have breakfast. Let’s start a new day with new possibilities.” Is this a new way of looking at the meaning of the risen Christ? How have you experienced God in Jesus as bringing about change in your life, opening up new possibilities?

Read Luke 1:26-38. The story of the annunciation provides an example of three actions in the face of change (96-99): letting go, permitting interruptions, and listening to the movement of the spirit—tending the holy. Briefly, how do you see these three elements at work in the story of Mary?

- a) What must she let go of?
 - b) How is she open to the interruption? What is interrupted in her life?
 - c) How does she tend the holy?
1. Is there anything you are reluctant to “let die” or “let go” in your life, even though you sense that its time is over?
 2. Have you ever been “interrupted by God?” A nudge, an intuition, a sense that you believe was God’s guidance? What happened?

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3. What do you do to nurture the practice of inner stillness and the habit of listening for the movements of the Spirit in your life? What practices are you drawn to? Silence, solitude, reading scripture, meditation, prayer?

Story of Exodus 13:17-22

1. The journey of the exodus begins with the intentional act of going into the wilderness, into a strange place, rather than along the well-traveled roads closer to the coast. When you go on a trip, do you prefer to go by well-traveled roads or by unfamiliar routes?
2. The pilgrims in the story are guided by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night as they make their way into the wilderness. What are the beacons of light that guide you through life? What specific promises of God or matters of faith provide guidance for your life?

Chapter 12, When Bad Seeds Yield Good Fruit

Silf tells the story of Helen Newlove who turned her husband's killing into an energy for renewing her town and offering hope and new possibilities for disadvantaged young people.

Silf describes what happened for Helen by referring to Viktor Frankl. "In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, [he] asserts that there is one freedom that can never be taken from us—the freedom to choose our attitude in any given situation." How do you think this statement is true or not? Have you ever been surprised when someone chose a positive or hopeful attitude in a dire moment?

Closing prayer

Gracious God, you surprise the world with your Spirit that calls forth acts of creativity, new life, and fruitful love. In those times, when we are at our limit, come and give new life, releasing our passions and energies for what is good and life affirming. Amen.

For Next Week

Read chapters 13-14, pp 109-126, Read Exodus 14



Listen to scripture, Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Story of Exodus 13:17-22

¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, "If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt." ¹⁸So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle. ¹⁹And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, "God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here." ²⁰They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. ²²Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.





Week 6 — Chapters 13-14

The Welcome and Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light a candle as a symbol of Christ's presence in our midst:
O Christ, we light this candle in the hope and promise
That you will be among us along the way of transforming discipleship
Grant us wisdom and courage to open ourselves to your grace. Amen.

Sharing Insights and Discussion

Chapter 13—Places of Passage, Places of Fear

1. Silf identifies several kinds of life passages that can be the source of fear and uncertainty. (110-114) Tunnels, Mountain Passes, Causeways, Flight, Rough Seas, Cliff Tops, Jungle Trail, Desert Crossing. Do any of these places of passage speak to where you find yourself? If you can, identify one and focus on the image of that passageway as a way of identifying the fears that meet you. Share the image and what it is telling you.
2. Silf writes "Dare we trust that, in spite of all the pain and anxiety and fear that our own places of passage may evoke in us, they are actually the thin places where transformation is very close at hand? That is, if we can trust the process and work with God to bring about the new." (116) What experience of a "thin place" or a passageway as a breakthrough to something new have you had? What happened? Were you surprised?

Listen—Mark 5:25-34

²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my



clothes?" ³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."

3. How would you describe this woman's passage? Using one of the passages identified above on pp. 110-114, which one is descriptive of her situation? What is the deeper risk in touching Jesus, whether social, physical and or spiritual? That moment of reaching out to Jesus becomes a thin place, a breakthrough moment. When breakthrough happens, how is her life changed socially, physically, and spiritually? If you were to reach out and touch Jesus' cloak, what change or breakthrough would you hope for? What keeps you from change?

Story of Exodus, Red Sea Passageway of Peril, Exodus 14:19-30

In any transition, there comes a decisive moment when we cross a line, and we know that we are stepping right into the unknown."

4. "There was that first step into the sea, with the divided waters. It was a step in flight from Pharaoh's army, a known fear; it was also a step into the unknown, into the watery depths that was no divided water and dry ground. It was an act of trust to step into the unknown. Would the waters hold? Would the seabed remain firm? Would there be enough time to cross?"
What experience have you had of stepping into the unknown, of crossing a line where there is no returning? What was that experience like? How did God provide in that moment?
Like the Hebrews, when have you preferred returning to the danger you know (bondage in Egypt) to the danger you don't know (crossing the sea to what is still an undetermined future).
5. Silf notes (169) "When the Egyptians try to pursue them, the waves that parted for the pilgrims return to engulf their enemies. We are a bit too quick to suggest that God is always "on our side" in any conflict, including our military confrontations. We perhaps cherish the hope that God will simply eliminate our enemies and all will be well. But Jesus challenges us to love our enemies. Yet the power of this story is not diminished, for there are subtler "enemies" trying to ensnare us. When we journey through the wilderness, we are pursued by forces of uninhibited consumerism, selfish acquisitiveness, careless lifestyles, apathy in the face of injustice, collusion



with agents of violence, the list goes on.” Which “enemies” do you feel are pursuing you? How do you see God opening a way forward for you? or showing you how to transcend or go beyond them?

Chapter 14—Yesterday is Already Ours

Silf explores how experiences and relationships stay with us through memory. As we move forward, not everything is lost, but there is a treasury of experience that continues to enrich the present. Letting go of the past can also mean carrying forward the lessons, insights, experiences, and friendships.

6. What treasure from your own past experiences or relationships do you feel has been internalized and forever absorbed into your heart? Think of one such treasure: how does it continue to enrich you in the present.
7. It has been said that our memories are like a garden from which we can never be expelled. Which memories in your soul’s garden are life-giving, making you feel more fully alive in the present moment and more hopeful for the future?
8. Is there anything that you cling to from the past that you feel may be holding you prisoner to a false nostalgia and blocking your way ahead?

Closing prayer

Gracious God, you lead us through passages in a journey of life that moves forward, ever forward. Encourage us forward, when we are tempted to look back and return to what is familiar, but may also hold us down, or prevent us from experiencing life in you.

For Next Week

Read chapters 15 & 16, pp. 127-145 and Exodus 15-17



Story of Exodus, Red Sea Passageway of Peril, Exodus 14

⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." ¹³But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." ¹⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.

²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

²⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

³⁰Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians.





Week 7 — Chapters 15-16

The Welcome and Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light a candle as a symbol of Christ's presence in our midst:
O Christ, we light this candle in the hope and promise
That you will be among us along the way of transforming discipleship
Grant us wisdom and courage to open ourselves to your grace. Amen.

Listen to Scripture, Matthew 16:24-26

⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

Chapter 15—Will You Save your life, or Spend it?

Silf explores the outlines of the Christian life arising from Jesus' call to spend our life for the sake of the Gospel. What does it look like to give away your life, to spend our life for a greater purpose?

1. Silf describes the cultural messages we receive to save or preserve our lives, especially for the years of retirement. The primary focus of saving is "me." You may look good, but something of the zest for living is missing. What is your reaction to her description?
2. What is there in your own life that is genuinely worth spending yourself for? How does this look in practice? One way of getting at this is to ask: When my life is over, what do I want to be remembered for? Often, the answer is how you spent your life or gave away your life to others. What would you want that to be for you?
3. What is your response to the story of the woman who said, "I hope that when I die I shall have spent, completely, every gift I have been given by God, and I hope to leave nothing behind except maybe a little footprint"(130)? Your life is a gift and gifts are for spending.. What thoughts or reactions do you have to the author's question: Do you want, most of all, to save it or to spend it?



4. Silf points out that Jesus does not save himself from the cross. “Jesus will not be spared the worst that can happen. But in passing *through* it, he will transcend it....Are we willing to acknowledge that our faith is not about being saved from harm, but about transcending it by walking through it in God’s company?....Are we looking for a faith that protects us and keeps us safe? Are we trying to save our lives, when in fact we are invited to follow a man who spends himself for others and who invites us to become life spenders. We are invited to become people on a quest not for rescue, but for transformation.”(131-132)
Who has been an example of a “life spender” to you? How so?
5. Silf is saying that we journey to the other side of chaos not by being rescued or saved from the chaos, but in the journey through to transformation. How do you see transformation different from rescue? Note that we speak of a ministry of spiritual transformation, rather than spiritual rescue. How does that difference speak to you now?

Story of Exodus—Transformation in the Wilderness, Exodus 15-17

God does not leave Moses and the people to perish in the wilderness, and God will not abandon us in our wilderness either, if we really trust in this process of transition and transformation. As they journey, the people of Israel find unexpected sources of life even in the wilderness.

- + Bitter waters are made drinkable (Ex 15)
 - + Twelve springs and 70 palm trees in the desert (Ex 15)
 - + Food in the form of manna and quails (Ex 16)
 - + Fresh water springing from the hardest rock (Ex 17)
6. What sustains you in your own desert journey? What surprising ways has God provided you when you were at your limit?
 7. In the wilderness journey of Exodus, the response of the people of God was a brief thankyou and a longer grumbling. Often the people wanted to go back to slavery more than continue the journey. Have you ever felt regret that you left the relative comfort of what is familiar to follow a dream into the unknown future? What sustains you when you feel like grumbling and complaining?

Chapter Sixteen – Restoration? Renovation? Re-creation!

Silf describes three kinds of faith journeys or changes: 1) a restoration of the past, 2) a renovation or renewal of the present, 3) a re-creation that brings about something new. There are deep feelings and images associated with each. Silf also makes the point that they are not the same, but each of these goals are different. A choice needs to be made.



8. Do you think it is possible to get stuck in trying to reconstruct how things were in the past and lose sight of the challenge to let them become the new thing that God is longing to bring to birth? Do you have any stories or examples?
9. Silf writes “Re-creation is something of an entirely different order. It involves risk. The eggshell must crack and the new life must emerge...The dynamic of the Christian gospel is a dynamic of re-creation—of giving birth to something that is entirely new, yet truly reflects the shape and pattern of what has gone before.” What is being re-created in your life? As you look back over the story of your own life, or the life of your family, community, or nation, where do you see the desire for re-creation manifesting itself?
10. What impressed you about the story of the Church in Dresden? (140-144).

Closing prayer

Gracious God, You call us to invest our life in the treasure of the Gospel, so that we may spend our life in love and service. Amid the treasures of the world that now seem so fleeting, give us a vision for a life worth living, a love worth giving away, a purpose worth spending our creativity and energy. You rescue us from sin and death, so that we may be created anew in the power of the resurrection. Amen.

For Next Week

Read chapters 17-20, pp 147-184, Exodus chapters 32 and 40.





Week 8 — Chapters 17-20

The Welcome and Lighting of the Christ Candle

We light a candle as a symbol of Christ's presence in our midst:
O Christ, we light this candle in the hope and promise
That you will be among us along the way of transforming discipleship
Grant us wisdom and courage to open ourselves to your grace. Amen.

Chapter 17 – Adapt, Survive, Transcend

Adaptation is a key survival skill when there is changed conditions. The story of creation is of a constant adaptation to change leading to survival. We live now in a time of complex transitions on many levels, so that simple black and white answers are no longer possible.

1. Silf speaks of a spiritual evolution as becoming fully human, the people God is dreaming us to be (150). What is your reflection on her list of signs of spiritual evolution on page 150? Do you think these signs they are mostly true, or is the opposite reality more prevalent for you?
2. Silf distills some practical wisdom when facing transitions on pages 152-157. If you had to choose one or two of them, which would you choose as most important or useful? Why or How so?

Chapter 18—It's a Bit Muddy...Story of the Exodus 32

We have been following the story of the Exodus these weeks as a window into our own experience of God in the midst of chaos and change. On this last day, we reckon with the temptation to seek help apart from God, and then we hear how God will go with us and be present in the journey of life.

Story of the Exodus 32, Settling for Less, Story of the Golden Calf (See selected verses)

1. Silf observes (173) "There is a constant temptation to settle for less. God appears conspicuous by God's apparent absence in the desert, and so the people make themselves a lesser God that they can see, and we have the memorable image of the golden calf, an image that they substitute for the spirit of the living God. What is the shape of temptation for you that means you settle for less? What shape does the golden calf take for you?"

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2. What are the golden calves in our culture and world today?

Story of the Exodus 40, God Traveling with Us in the Desert (See selected verses)

Silf notes on page 174 “In the wilderness, the place of divine encounter is a tent—representing that place where human beings encounter the power of God and know by them as the tent of meeting. God is understood by Moses and his people to be a power on the move. Although they do not know it yet, the children of Israel are already making the journey to the promised land and the breakthrough in the fulfillment of God’s promises of grace and mercy in Jesus. So for us, the cloud of God’s presence hovers over the tent and never leaves it. God accompanies us right in the very heart of our process of transition and never leaves us.”

3. How do you experience or sense God’s presence hovering over you in your journey? As you journey, do you feel like you are still lost in the wilderness? Or do you have a sense of how God is transforming you? Giving you new life?

Chapter 20, As you Move On

The gifts of God for the journey of life. Learning to travel light with the Gospel and the life giving energy of God.

Listen to Scripture: Mark 6:8-11—Instructions for traveling light

⁷Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet.

1. Silf offers this observation: (182) “Both the disciples and the Israelites start their journey with few items. Our journeys have much in common with theirs. We don’t know where the future is taking us or what we will encounter along the way. We know we are leaving a lot behind, and yet that which matters most in God’s presence is always with us....there will be no money, because the currency we need for this journey is the currency of the heart and is counted in courage, not cash.” What does it mean for you to travel light in life’s journey? What is hard to give up?
2. What is essential for you to take? What does the currency of the heart mean to you? How is trust in God connected to how God provides courage for you? How have you experienced this in the storm?



3. Silf notes we still need a staff (183). "The journey through change to transformation is a journey for the mature soul. And the mature soul knows that there is no way of making this journey on his or her own. The staff is there to remind us that we need something—Someone—to lean on." In your life, how have you grown to lean on God more? How does leaning on God happen for you?
4. Silf draws some final notes of encouragement. (183-184)
 - As you journey, you will meet situations that take you closer to the God who dreams within you and to the heart of what it means to be human.
 - You will meet situations of doubt and mocking of those dreams—shake them off like the dust from your sandals.
 - Walk in your own sandals, not another's. Your journey is yours alone. No one can do it for you.
 - Walk in in courage and hope, leaning on the only staff you know you can trust, and one day when you least expect it, you will wake to find yourself on the other side of chaos.

So much has happened in the year 2020. How has your sense of God's leading through chaos changed through this study? What have you learned? What is still a puzzle or uncertain? What are you thankful for? What breakthrough do you hope for in your life?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, you are with us in the journeys of our life. We are not alone. You lead us through the chaos and turmoil of life, and we experience your presence and your call to faithfulness. Lead us away from the temptation to settle for less, and strengthen our trust in you. Lead us through to the other side of chaos, today, tomorrow, forever. Amen.

Exodus 32 – selected verses: Settling for Less, Story of the Golden Calf

¹When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ²Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"



Exodus 40 – selected verses, God Traveling with Us in the Desert

¹The LORD spoke to Moses: ²On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. ³You shall put in it the ark of the covenant and you shall screen the ark with the curtain.... ⁶Moses did everything just as the LORD had commanded him.

³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; ³⁷but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. ³⁸For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.







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