

Coracles Monthly Reflections

Introduction for Year One

Welcome to *Coracles Monthly Reflections*.^{*} The name *Coracles* is taken from the small boats made of hide and strong branches used by some of the early Celtic Christian saints of old when going on missions of mercy and evangelism from their homeland across the sea to other countries. These reflections are, in a sense, small boats which tie our community together in the seasonal rhythms of life and in our individual and collective missions of mercy and evangelism. They are designed to introduce you to the main themes of the Church calendar over a two-year period, as well as the stories in the Bible that we consider essential to our life as Christians in an ever-changing 21st century world. The two-year cycle can be repeated as often as you like. The seasonal rhythms of the year are connected to us both in the Church calendar and in creation – in the seasons that mark the passages of time throughout the year. These reflections create a framework outlining the larger canvas of a person's and a community's life where the Holy Spirit paints an on-going and unique expression of the Lord's work.

The 8th Day Community is dedicated to *living compassion in the city*. This phrase has two meanings. The first is that we look at a life of compassion as central to our calling and vocation, so we “live” this out in the present as people of faith with active concern for the poor, the marginalized, and the brokenness of humankind. The second meaning is that “living compassion” means we are part of the grand story of redemption and renewal as Jesus creates a new humanity in us as we incarnate, or flesh-out, His love. In short, this compassion is a personal journey of faith and self-awareness into God's compassionate heart, while at the same time our personal journey becomes a community adventure in giving ourselves away to the least, the lost, and the lonely.

We believe that God has a unique calling for 8th Day primarily in the cities of the world. The majority of the world's population will soon be living within the city landscape. Being involved with this vast people movement into the urban world is a big part of 8th Day's calling and passion. The opportunities for service and acts of compassion are endless, and we believe by being prayerful and strategic our prophetic voice of love will be heard by many. Jesus is calling us into a life of risk and of adventure in a community that blesses the local church and strives to strengthen the unity of all believers.

For the 8th Day Community, the yearly calendar is marked by the usual four seasons of Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. Included in those seasons are the main Church calendar events that have shaped the history of the Church throughout the two-thousand years of its existence as well as a main theme that helps describe the “seasons” of community. Fall represents *Forming* for us. This is the season of preparation for Advent and invites us into community after the summer holidays as we once again form community. Winter represents *Nurturing* in community, a time of preparation for Lent, and also a time of nurture and care for the community around us. Spring represents *Renewing* and vitality as new life is birthed. Here we celebrate Easter and the resurrection of Jesus. Summer represents *Sending* as the warmth of the season gifts us with Pentecost, the beginning of the Church and of mission both local and abroad.

In addition, the 8th Day Community's purpose is to help model genuine encounters with Jesus and one another, receiving the Holy Spirit's empowerment for mission and for wisdom, and embracing the Father's heart of compassion and care for ourselves and our neighbors. We model and "live this compassion" by our eight core values:

Incarnational Community: We are a prophetic and collaborative community witness of Christ's love, living among and caring for the marginalized and oppressed, cultivating creative expressions of mature Christian spirituality by caring for creation and becoming a people of prayer, hope, anticipation, and wonder (I John 4:7-12).

Spiritual Direction: We listen intently to one another in guided relationships of prayer, discernment, and vulnerability, aware of the Holy Spirit's movements of grace in our lives as individuals and within the community we serve (Matthew 11:25-30).

Self-Awareness: We cultivate the essential and growing quality of self-awareness and confessional living, increasing our understanding of our vulnerabilities and weaknesses as well as our strengths and giftings (Luke 15:11-12).

Pastoral Care: We extend care, compassion, and healing to one another and to broken humanity, affirming life in all its complexities and nuances as the Lord extends His care, compassion, and healing to us (II Corinthians 1:3-4).

Simplicity in Giving: We believe that lives of grace and freedom are marked by generosity. This generosity is an outcome not only of God's abundant grace, but also of living within our means (financially) and giving of our time, resources and talents with hearts of joy and thankfulness (I Timothy 6:17-19).

Life (spiritual) Practices: We strive to be a community that practices the spiritual disciplines of the faith (see the eight life practices or spiritual disciplines of the 8th Day Community) as a means of being attentive and guided by God's Spirit and continually formed in Jesus' image both individually and corporately (Mark 1:35).

Rhythms of Living: We are a community of faith that celebrates the Church Calendar as we live within the seasonal rhythms of the year. These seasonal rhythms and Church Calendar celebrations help us to engage in God's creative cycles and shape our discipleship, our daily tasks and vocations, and our creativity in all forms of artistic expression (II Timothy 4:2).

Transformational Leadership: We train and mentor leaders in Scriptural truth, global awareness, stewardship of power and position, who become leaders of transformation growing in *Integrity*, *Intensity*, and *Intention*, covenanting to nurture, protect, and build up the family of faith (John 15:1-4).

The first year of reflections include some thoughts on Jesus' *Parable of the Prodigal Son* in Luke chapter fifteen, receiving and living within the embracing and compassionate love of God, and the first four of the *Beatitudes* in the *Sermon on the Mount* found in Matthew chapter five, describing the characteristics of the Kingdom of God. The second year includes reflections on Jesus' *Parable of the Good Samaritan* in Luke chapter ten, serving our neighbors and communities from the center and strength of God's compassion, and the remaining *Beatitudes* in the *Sermon on the Mount*. Every reflection has an Old Testament reading, readings from the Parable and Beatitudes themselves, a reading from the Paul's New Testament letters, with questions to consider at the end of each reflection as well as a quote to ponder from a well known figure of the early or contemporary Church.

The 8th Day Community is defined not only by *living compassion within the city*, but also by the calling to reflect the image of the God (the Imago Dei) in the rich and extraordinary history and traditions of the Church – both ancient and contemporary. Drawing on the main traits of **Celtic Christianity**, these reflections will ask you to reflect on some of the aspects of the Celtic tradition. We are drawn to the Celtic Church's ability to "weave" the historical traits of the Celtic mission in the life of a follower of Jesus into a broader perspective of community and wholeness. We purpose to encourage people to experience the love of God amidst the ordinariness of life and freedom from unrealistic institutional or self-made expectations.

We will also become familiar with the *life practices or spiritual disciplines* that the 8th Day Community fosters as part of our expression of the Christian faith. Each season is devoted to one of *eight life practices* that include many of the classic and historical practices or spiritual disciplines of the Church. The first year has four categories, one for each season (or quarter) of the year and each month's reflection has one of the four categories as part of the material. The first year's categories are: (1) *Prayer*, (2) *Integrity*, (3) *Intensity*, and (4) *Intention*. The second year's categories are: (5) *Stewardship*, (6) *Learning*, (7) *Creativity*, and (8) *Celebration*. Every person who uses these reflections will express and emphasize these different practices/disciplines uniquely. The same is true of any group or organization that engages in this monthly rhythm. The goal is to become familiar with these practices and emphasize how God uses the disciplines, liturgy, and the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism to draw you, your group, and your community to Him.

These monthly reflections immerse us in the words and stories of Jesus, giving us time in often busy lives to reflect on the Holy Spirit's work and our relationship with the Lord. It is important to journal our thoughts and prayers stemming from these reflections daily, weekly, or monthly (depending how often a personal journal is utilized) as a chronicle of the transformative work of God. Sharing these reflections and journal entries with trusted friends who listen and pray with us is an added benefit. *Coracles* can also be a complimentary study and meditation along with daily devotionals being used personally or corporately.

Each person will have a different pace with the material, either focusing on all aspects of the reflection or focusing on particular questions/verses/stories that capture their attention over the month. The goal is to bring these differing points of view together to discern the diverse and creative moves of the Spirit in individual lives and the life of the community. Each group may choose to concentrate on any aspect of the monthly

reflections depending on what that group desires to share together. It is important for groups as they facilitate discussions and prayer around the shared experience of reflection to be flexible and to listen closely to the stories and journeys of each person. It is also essential for each member of the group to be prayerful and attentive regarding what material engages their imaginations, what creative gifts are flourishing under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, and what the experience and awareness of Jesus' healing accomplishes in transforming brokenness into joy, strength, thanksgiving, and compassion.

In sum, we are a community of contemplation and witness – discovering Christ in the depths of His word and in the depths of our hearts, compelled by His love to serve one another in our world, shaping the stories that we steward and invite others into. That is the aim of these reflections and of the 8th Day Community – to be a purposeful community defined by prophetic acts of compassion and an expression of the love of Jesus to a desperate world... a world full of wonder and mystery, filled with the life, love, and freedom of our Triune God of Grace.

Peace, as you enter into God's extravagant love and adventurous grace!

Dr. Dale Pollard and the 8th Day Community