

BREMER BRISBANE PRESBYTERY

SELF GUIDED REFLECTION DAY

“Discovering life through trauma,  
disruption and chaos”



**By Rev Gerda Olafsen**

## SELF-GUIDED REFLECTION DAY

Dear friends

A warm welcome to the Self-Guided Reflection Day on the theme “Discovering life through trauma, disruption and chaos”. I pray that you will be very blessed as you open yourself to the Spirit of God and God’s movement in your heart. I have drawn on Scripture and other writings for these reflections. The material is organised in three Sessions which can be used in one day in whatever time slots suits you or used over three days or longer, again whatever suits your life. It is not meant to become burdensome but to be empowering and nourishing. The material can be adapted in any way that speaks to you.

Please choose any creative medium that you can use – Paper, crayons, paints, colour pencils, a notebook or a journal for keeping track of your thoughts and responses. Music that aids quietness and meditation and candles if you are into candles can also be used.

Lastly, I suggest that you turn off your electronic device(s) and most of all enjoy your sacred time and space.

I have also written a reflective exercise that can be done as you walk, perhaps in your favourite walking space.

It is below:

As you walk and feel your body moving into a rhythm, breathe deeply and be grateful for the aliveness of the created world around you. What can you observe, see, hear or smell?

Ask yourself what is your body, the way it moves, what it sees, what it hears what it feels telling you about your strengths.

spiritual  
emotional  
physical  
intellectual

What is your body telling you about how you should care for yourself,

spiritually  
emotionally  
physically  
intellectually

As you feel yourself connected to the earth through sight, hearing, smell, and touch what is being revealed about God and yourself. Find something that symbolises these epiphanies and take it home as a reminder of this moment in the days ahead.

**Rev Gerda Olafsen**

## Session One The journey begins

Welcome to this place, space and time of reflection. Please settle yourself into a comfortable space and posture, begin to breathe deeply and slowly and then exhale slowly. Do this as many times as you like until you feel calm and settled.

You can add some words to inhaling and exhaling, which can help to provide a focus. Some people find the following words helpful. On inhaling “Jesus Christ, Son of God” and exhaling “have mercy on me”. You might prefer single words such as LOVE and PEACE.

If you find unbidden and unwanted thoughts coming into your mind, simply observe them and let them pass through. Don’t dwell on them. Be kind to yourself. Slowing down is not easy especially if our normal pace of life is fast.

You may wish to speak to God about yourself, your life, your dreams and hopes. Take your time and don’t rush. The following prayer can be used. Read it slowly allowing the words to penetrate your being:

God of the morning  
Help me to be still:  
To breathe  
To be aware  
To appreciate  
The giftedness of today  
The sounds  
The colours  
The tastes.  
Help me to explore the mystery  
Opening before me  
All around me  
And deep within me.

Ruth Burgess Friends and Enemies. A book of short Prayers.

Now ask yourself, “what do I bring to this time in my heart and mind”. Write some thoughts and awareness in your journal or draw something that symbolises this.

And

“What needs and desires do my heart and mind carry”. Use your journal for this.

And

“Who or what situations am I most concerned about” Use your journal or draw or pain.

The following are scripture readings that will speak to what you have thought and written. They are Psalm 126, Psalm 121 and Matthew 17:1-9. Slowly read all or any of these, asking yourself how does this reading illuminate your questions, concerns, puzzlements and tensions with new insights or guidance to comfort, support, challenge or sustain you.

Close this time with prayer. The following is a prayer from Michael Leunig’s book “When I talk to you”.

Dear God

We give thanks for places of simplicity and peace.

Let us find such a place within ourselves.

We give thanks for places of refuge and beauty.

Let us find such a place within ourselves.

We give thanks for places of nature’s truth and freedom, of joy, inspiration and renewal,

Places where all creatures may find acceptance and belonging.

Let us search for these places, in the world, in ourselves and in others.

Let us restore them.

Let us strengthen and protect them and let us create them.

May we mend this outer world according to the truth of our inner life

And may our souls be shaped and nourished by nature’s wisdom. Amen

## Session Two - Understanding crisis and our responses

### Prayer

Thank you God for today, for its blessings and its promises.  
For its relationships and its challenges  
Its mystery and its mundaneness,  
Please may I learn in my head and my heart,  
Thank which I need to know, which will lead to life.

**Please keep a few moments silence.**

**Thinking Spot** Think about the word Crisis. What images come to mind especially as you have experienced a crisis. How did this event, called a crisis, effect you, how did it effect your faith and your coping ability.

**Here is a definition** – a crisis is a life event often traumatic and mostly unexpected that disrupts a sense of what is normal and right. A **crisis** is a turning point when our usual methods of problem solving are not effective or not available. A **crisis** can provoke a profound sense of chaos and loss, where we may feel that nothing will ever be the same again. The certainties on which we have built our lives may feel that they have turned to dust.

I would like to share two stories of people who have experienced traumatic, terrible life events.

The first is Viktor Frankl, Jewish Viennese Neurologist and Psychiatrist imprisoned in 1941 by the Nazis in concentration camps, 5 different camps in all. His wife, father, mother and brother all died in concentration camps. One sister escaped to Australia.

Frankl, a keen observer of human behaviour began to ask the question “How is it that some prisoners survived the horror of the experience of concentration camps remaining spiritually and emotionally intact while others relinquished all hope, sometimes turning their faces to the wall and dying”.

He came to the conclusion that Prisoners who were less likely to survive found their suffering meaningless and eventually succumbed to hopelessness – they were not convinced they had any reason to try to survive, so they gave up mentally and physically.

We are all subject to external forces that can change our lives, whether they are positive or negative forces. Bring to mind such external forces that have impacted you, positively or negatively. **Write** something about them and how you responded and reacted.

Frankl survived the concentration camps which inspired him to believe that making meaning is the driving force in human life. In response to this he developed Logotherapy as a consequence of his concentration camp experience, which proved to be very helpful and life giving for many people

This is one of Frankl’s most well known quote. “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves. Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms = to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances”.

**Stop a moment - how do you respond to this?** Is Frankl onto something really important that is life giving. Or can we dismiss him as an unrealistic idealist. Is there a profound Gospel truth in Frankl’s understanding of making meaning as the driving force in human life and how does this effect our capacity to negotiate a crisis.

The next story is told by Margaret Sif in her book “The Other side of Chaos” concerning a lady called Helen and her family. “This isn’t a nice story, but it has a surprising outcome” pg 101 Helen, her husband Garry and three young daughters lived in Northwestern England. The streets around their house had been plagued for sometime by gangs of youths who indulged in heavy drinking and roamed the town committing mindless acts of vandalism.

On this particular night after the youths had vandalised Helen's car, Garry went outside and confronted the gang in the streets and remonstrated with them, staying calm and reasonable. The boys set upon him, punched him to the ground, kicking his head in and left him dying in the street.

Shortly after being admitted to hospital in a coma Garry died in Helen's arms. The death of this fine upstanding husband and father left his grieving widow and children in deep shock and near despair.

The town's people were also shattered. Asking questions such as "Are young people's lives so empty that they have nothing better to do than roam the street. How has this binge-drinking culture been able to take over so many of our teenagers and our towns?"

Helen is a powerful example of Frankl's statement that the freedom to choose our attitude in any given situation can never be taken from us.

This does not mean that we can't surrender it to something or someone else. Barely a year after Garry's murder she launched a ground breaking project called "Newlove Warrington" (Newlove being her surname) with the intention of inspiring the people of Warrington to lead purposeful lives and become proud of their city – The project has established amongst other things a community radio station offering information and positive messages, education packages for vulnerable, disadvantaged young people, becoming involved with the alcohol industry to work on binge drinking issues.

**These stories** are such powerful stories of transformation, out of terrible, tragic events. Do you have stories of transformation in your life or the life of your community. Give deep thanks for them. When you are able to, you may like to share these stories with others.

**Thinking back** to Frankl's belief that making meaning is the driving force in human life can you write some lines about how the Gospel helps you to make meaning for your life. Who was an agent in helping you to form these meanings and have they changed over the years., and how have they been tested and in what situations?

### **Prayer**

O God,  
Light of the minds that know you,  
Life of the souls that love you,  
Strength of the thoughts that seek you,  
Help us so to know you,  
That we may truly love you,  
Whose service is perfect freedom;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord  
Who lives and reigns with you  
In the unity of the Holy Spirit.  
One God, now and forever  
AMEN.



### **Session Three - Making choices, affirmations and actions.**

Sit quietly and return to session one and two. Read again what you wrote or drew, or collected on your walk. Does anything stand out for you as an illumination. What questions are lingering.? Any painful feelings?

**Write about these.**

**Pray** gathering it all up and asking God to gently take what you offer for transformation, that it will become a source of life.

Much has been said and written about COVID 19, its impact on people, social, economic and political systems. Some of the changes ushered by dealing with COVID has impacted us, our families and communities, including of course our church communities. Many statements have been made about the permanent changes that could be our new experience as a consequence of the Pandemic. e.g. the continuation of “online” worship and Australia becoming a cashless society.

Bernard Salt – social commentator for the Australian weekend magazine on Saturday May 30-31<sup>st</sup> wrote the following in an article called “National Trust”. He traces firstly a loss of trust in the Australian public for the major institutions of our national life. Then the rise of cynicism which has become fashionable, the fraying of the bonds that held our community tight and close and safe. He saw Australians acting true to form at the beginning of the COVID Lockdown by hoarding food and toilet paper etc. then discerned a turning point in April when the mind and mood of the nation pivoted. All of a sudden we saw not what we had lost in our straitened and constrained circumstances, but what was to be gained. He finishes by saying “that a healthy dollop of trust is needed to bind it all together.” “Being collectively trustworthy and trusted is the stuff upon which a community and a nation can be built”.

I found these words challenging and hopeful. It seems to me that Salt at this point is giving voice to Frankl’s statement that individually and collectively we still have the power to change our attitudes and make different choices. However, it cannot be denied that human beings find change difficult. We tend to like things to stay the way they are and have always been. Change is often stressful and upsetting. We tend to prefer stability and predictability and order even when we are aware that “a change is as good as a holiday!”. We possess a strong tendency to hang on to what we know, and we are reluctant to risk letting go of the familiar to make way for what we don’t know yet.

Spiritual writers over the centuries have emphasised the crucial place that “letting go” has in spiritual development. Margaret Silf a contemporary Spirituality writer writes in her book “The other side of Chaos”, “sometimes it takes a bolt of lightning to release creativity and kick-start the emergence of a new way of thinking, or doing or being. She understands the Resurrection of Jesus as such a release of energy that the disciples were kick-started into a new way of living, doing and being. Some old beliefs, attitudes and behaviours had to die so that the new can be embraced.

1. First, we have to be willing to let things die, when the time is right.
2. Second, we have to be willing to tolerate, and even welcome interruptions to the smooth running of our lives.
3. Third, we need to learn to listen to the subtle movements in our hearts that help us to hear the movements of the Holy Spirit.

**Sit quietly** with these thoughts and listen to any stirring in your mind and heart of new life, perhaps through memories, stories, symbols or relationships.

**Read** John Chapter 21. John’s account of Jesus’ Resurrection appearances to some of the Disciples. Imaginatively enter into the story perhaps placing yourself amongst the disciples. To guide you in your reflection here are some questions you can ask yourself.

What are the disciples being asked to “let go” of?      What are you being asked to let go of?  
What new things are they being asked to embrace?      What new things are you being asked to Embrace?  
What does Jesus affirm in the disciples?      What does Jesus affirm in you?  
What actions do the disciples need to take?      What actions do you need to take?

**Finish** by thanking God for his presence, His grace and His love for you and the whole created order.

### **A blessing**

The Lord, our God be with you when you sit and when you stand,  
The Lord, our God to whom night is as clear as day  
Guide your feet as you go.  
The Lord, our God be with you when you sit and when you stand,  
Encompass you and lead you by the hand.  
The Lord, our God,  
Who knows your path and places where you rest,  
Be with you in your waiting be your good news for sharing,  
And lead you in the way that is everlasting.      Ruth Burgess Friends and Enemies

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