

All of Us in Wonderland

Going down
the rabbit hole
into God's
reign of love



A Personal Spiritual Practice Guide for a six-week Pentecost Season
by Sacredise.com

All of Us in Wonderland

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for a six-week Pentecost Season

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Sacredise
Johannesburg



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Introduction

After all we've been through in the last two and half years, most of us are ready for a change. We all know now that what was normal in our global society wasn't working for anyone but a tiny, privileged few. We need to find another way of being. But for most of us, 'immersed in the way things are,' it's very difficult to imagine what a different life and a different world could look like. It might seem like the dream of a better, more compassionate and connected world is nothing more than a wonderland of fantasy.

But what if that wonderland is real? What if we really could dive down a metaphorical rabbit hole and discover a whole new wonderland world for all of us? Well, I believe that this is, essentially, what Jesus' message of God's reign of Love was all about. And I believe that the experience of the Spirit that happened on the Day of Pentecost two thousand years ago was the rabbit hole that we need to enter God's new world.

Pentecost Sunday is a pivot point in the Church Calendar. It's mostly celebrated as a stand-alone event in the year, but it marks a significant shift. This is the day we move from the first half of the year, where the focus is on Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, to the second half of the year, where we focus on how to live as Jesus did. The gift of Spirit at Pentecost is the gift of sight to see the Wonderland of God's reign. It's the gift of longing to see that world become a reality among us. It's the gift of courage and strength to begin to live the way of Christ here and now. And for me there is great value in celebrating Pentecost as a season rather than just an event.

And that is why I am so excited to share this new Personal Spiritual Practice Guide for a six-week Pentecost Season: **ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND—Going down the rabbit hole into God's reign of love**. Based on the Lectionary readings for Year C from Pentecost Sunday to Proper 10, **ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND** offers everything you need to make Pentecost a season of opening to the Spirit and diving more deeply into the Wonderland of God's reign of Love.

A Repeating Practice

To get the most out of this guide, you will need to set aside at least ten to fifteen minutes every day. I recommend that you have a journal, or a dedicated document on your phone, tablet, or computer to record your thoughts, questions, and insights. You can also make notes of any specific practical things you want to do to open more to the Spirit in your life.

If your church is using this journey in your Sunday worship, the content in each week is the same as that which is used to guide the sermon in church. The practices you find in this guide are based on this content and you are invited to return to it throughout the week. The practices themselves are tailored to help you to engage more deeply with the message of the week, and are repeated throughout the week. Some of the practices remain the same or similar throughout the entire Pentecost journey for the same reason.

Repetition often moves us past an initial, shallow engagement and removes any resistances we may have to more difficult or challenging insights. As we repeat a practice, so our defences begin to relax and the Spirit is able to speak to us in ways that are not possible without the repeated practice. I encourage you not to skip over the repeating parts, but to engage in them with intention throughout the journey.

It is my hope and prayer that ***ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND*** will not only be meaningful for you, but that it will be transforming. When the Pentecost experience of opening to the Spirit's presence becomes a constant part of our lives, we discover the wonder and joy of living in God's reign in the midst of our ordinary human lives. And our world desperately needs people who live their lives according to the values, priorities, and purposes of God's reign of love.

May God guide and bless you as you join ***ALL OF US IN WONDERLAND*** in this Pentecost Season!

John

Down the Rabbit Hole

Pentecost Sunday

Repeat this practice every day this week. The preparing, responding, and integrating elements remain the same every day. This repetition enables you to dwell in the practice more deeply through the week and it often opens you to new insights and experiences of God.

The listening part of your practice changes so that each day can focus on a different aspect of the reflection on Scripture. Feel free to use the questions provided to guide you or to follow your own process as you meditate with the reading and the thoughts presented here.

Preparing

Spend a moment in silence as you centre yourself. You may want to close your eyes, slow and deepen your breathing, open your hands, and allow yourself to become aware of the Divine Presence.

After a while, you may want to do the following focus exercise:

Begin by asking:

What is keeping me from hope right now?

Allow a short time to consider your answer. Then ask:

Can I let go of whatever it is for a few moments as I do my practice?

Allow a short time to practice letting go and prepare yourself for your practice. Then you may offer this or some other prayer:

I am here, God, in this place and time,
to set aside my routines,
and the values and agendas
of my society,
and open my mind, heart, and life to God.

I come in response to your call
and in expectation of a new encounter
with your Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit,
Make your Presence known to me now,
lead me into a deeper knowledge and love of God,
and use my practice to transform me a little more
into Christlikeness.

Amen

After this prayer you may want to play some music that speaks to your spirit, or just sit in silence for a few moments as you open yourself to the Spirit's presence.



When you're ready you may want to offer this prayer in preparation for the reflection ahead:

God, on this day I remember the Pentecost moment.
The world has become something very different
 from your dream of love and care for all.
We have lost sight of the abundance we could enjoy
 if we worked together for the greater good,
 instead of holding on to as much as we can grab.
But Jesus, you knew that there was a better way,
 that God's reign of love was possible after all.
You also knew we couldn't do this alone;
 but you had a plan,
 a gift to us of the Spirit.

Spirit, I open my heart to you today,
 just as the disciples did on that Pentecost morning.
I praise you for the vision of God's reign of love;
And I praise you for the fire you stir up in me
 to make this vision a reality
 in my world.
Thank you for being my guide on this journey
 my voice of comfort
 and my passion for a better world.
Amen.

Listening

SCRIPTURE READING

Acts 2:1-21

REFLECTING

When we were in Cape Town, Debbie and I got to see an exhibition that celebrated Leonardo Da Vinci. We shot through the various rooms and displays, and it still took us over an hour. But if we had taken our time we could have spent hours there and not seen the same thing twice. It was overwhelming to see everything that this man had accomplished. His dream-like inventions, that must have seemed so fantastical in his time, are now commonplace. He envisioned the helicopter, the parachute and the military tank. He came up with ideas for scuba diving, and portable bridges. Before Copernicus he had already concluded that the earth moved around the sun, and before Galileo he had the idea of using a large magnifying lens to study the surface of the moon. Da Vinci was obsessed with "knowing how to see"—probably because he knew that those who can see differently change the world.

In 1999 the movie *The Matrix* caught the imagination of a generation. It gave voice to the feeling, that many of us experience, that the world we live in isn't really real. It's like a matrix—a way of seeing and believing and doing—that holds us prisoner, that we can't break out of. The values and priorities that drive us, the attitudes we have toward ourselves and others, the actions that fill our days, all are shaped and controlled by the systems that govern the world in which we live.

And usually we don't even realise it. We go through life imagining that this is just the way it is, that nothing can change, and all we can do is make the most of it. Have you ever felt this way?

The Matrix movies drew on imagery from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. They spoke of going down a rabbit hole, as Alice did, in order to see reality as never before and find a life that is real and meaningful.

Many of us have a nagging sense that this can't be it, that there has to be more to life than what we're experiencing. Most of us have moments where we dream of a different life and a different world. We look around us and we can't help but feel that there has to be a better way of organising the world. We look within us and we can't help but wonder if there isn't a better way to live. We long for a world where no one tells us who our enemies should be or who our friends should be, where no one tells us who we can or cannot love, where we don't have to just accept the way things are, and where we, and everyone, can do more than just survive.

But, in most cases, we just can't see what that different way might be. We don't see the hidden forces—what the Bible calls 'principalities and powers'—that shape our world. And we don't know how to break out of the inequality, injustice, and division until someone comes along and teaches us, in Da Vinci's language, how to see. And that is what the Pentecost celebration is all about.

Jesus was the classic "see things differently" guy who refused to abide by the illusions of his time and society. When the authorities said he couldn't heal on the Sabbath, he did. When the authorities labelled people as outcasts, unclean, or sinners Jesus called them friends. Jesus chose to see things differently and he showed us that it is possible to live differently: to love in a world of hatred and division, to give in a world of accumulation and need, to serve in a world of power-mongering and elitism.

But Jesus knew that we can't live like this in our own strength. He knew that we would never learn to see differently unless there was something—Someone—to show us and to lead us into a new kind of life. And so he made a promise to his disciples that, if they would wait for it and open to it, they would receive a gift that would change how they saw and that would empower them to live differently. That gift is the Holy Spirit.

It's not that God's Spirit wasn't around before Pentecost. It's that the disciples weren't able to see and experience the fullness of the Spirit's presence and power until Pentecost. But, when the day of Pentecost came, all heaven broke loose! Where they had been afraid of the authorities, they were now bold and outspoken. Where they were caught up in ethnic and religious differences, they now crossed all those boundaries in the Spirit's power—which is the meaning of the different languages they spoke. Where they had been unable to stand up for their faith, or to do the kind of things that Jesus did to heal and liberate people, now they had a power beyond themselves and they found themselves changing people's lives.

Some of those who witnessed this Pentecost moment were dismissive. Others recognised the significance, and asked, "What does this mean?" Peter's answer was that God was calling all people out of the default way of being that their culture and society imposed on them. God was telling them that there was a different way of seeing the world and a different way of living that was shaped not by the broken values of human society but by the values of God's love and justice. That's why Peter quoted from the prophet Joel: "Your young will see visions, and your old will dream dreams..."



C.S. Lewis noted that the world we live in feels so real and permanent to us. But he called this world the “Shadowlands” because he knew that the world of God’s reign of love is far more real. We will never find abundant life, the creativity to solve our problems, the wisdom to make the best choices, the courage to forgive, or the vulnerability to love deeply in our current systems of accumulation, power struggles, and separateness. We have the world we have because we see and live the way we do. It is only when we live in God’s reign—when we see the world through the eyes of the Spirit and live according to God’s values by the Spirit’s power—that we discover what REAL life is like.

And so, the Pentecost moment, the moment of receiving the gift of God’s Spirit, is a bit like going down a rabbit hole into the Wonderland of Love and justice that Jesus called the reign of God. It’s an experience of breaking out of the world of ‘this is just how it is’ and of letting God open our eyes to a whole new reality. And if we allow the Spirit to awaken our hearts and minds to God’s world everything will change for us. We and our world will never be the same because we will become those who see differently and therefore live differently.

So, what does this all mean for us now? It means that there is an invitation, a challenge, to which we must respond. God is offering us an opportunity to go down the rabbit hole and open ourselves to a new Pentecost, a new experience of the Spirit. And God asks us to allow the Spirit to lead us into God’s Wonderland, God’s new way of seeing and being. If you want to give it a try, here are some thoughts to guide you.

Firstly, you’ll need to learn to listen to your longing. Resist the urge to silence that part of you that believes things can be different. That longing is God’s call for you to participate in the real world—God’s world.

Secondly, jump down the rabbit hole. Invite the Spirit to overwhelm you, to open your eyes, and to lead you into God’s new Wonderland. In Luke, Jesus said that when we ask and keep on asking God will give us the Holy Spirit. And as we open ourselves more and more to the gift of Spirit, so we will find ourselves diving ever deeper into God’s reign.

Finally, prepare for some disorientation. You may not feel anything strange or different at first. You may not notice anything changing at all. But it will. You’ll get to the point where you look back and realise that you don’t see the world the same way anymore and that your life has changed radically. Things that you once accepted as normal will no longer make sense to you. Things that you didn’t know you were missing will become inspiring, life-giving, and essential to your life. And you will begin to see possibilities, opportunities, and wonders that fill you with hope and joy and love in a whole new way.

If you believe that the world is just fine as it is, then forget everything I’ve said. But if, somewhere deep inside you have a nagging feeling that the world could be different—more just, more compassionate, more joyful and free, not just for some, but for all—then I encourage you to let God’s Spirit awaken you, or awaken you again, awaken you more. Let God show you that this is not ‘just the way it is’—things can change. Let the Spirit lead you into another way of seeing and living that is more real, more alive, and more liberating than anything else can you could possibly imagine.

As George Bernard Shaw said, “Some people see things as they are and ask why? I dream things that never were and ask why not?” Imagine if those words described every one of us.



LISTENING EXERCISES

Insert the **Listening Exercises** for the relevant day at this point in your spiritual practice.

Responding

As you spend some time working with this week's reflection, you may want to play some music that speaks to your spirit, or just sit in silence for a few moments.

When you're ready shift your focus to the following two questions:

- What did you hear God say to you today?
- What will you do with God's word to you in the week to come?

After a few moments focus on your breathing as a meditation. As you inhale, breathe in a deeper awareness of the Spirit. And as you exhale offer the following breath prayer either as a whisper or silently:

Spirit, open my eyes to the Wonderland of God's reign.

Repeat the inhale and breath prayer exhale three times. And then end this response practice with a few more moments of silence.

Integrating

End your practice by doing the following A-B-C exercise:

Begin by seeking intentionally to AWAKEN to the Spirit's presence, work, and life around you, within you, through you.

As you notice the Spirit's activity in your world, BREATHE as a way to open to, and receive, more of this gift in this day.

And finally, CHOOOSE one thing you can do to share this gift with the people around you.

Close your spiritual practice with a short prayer or affirmation like this one:

I now go in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God's praise and glory.

Listening Exercises

DAY ONE (PENTECOST SUNDAY)

Return to the reflection at the start of this Chapter, or to any sermon notes you may have taken if you shared in a worship service this Sunday. Take note of anything that stood out for you. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke particularly to you. Or you can use the following focus to guide your prayer and meditation today.

- To what extent do you live from a belief that the world just is the way it is, and nothing can really change?
- Do you ever feel that there has to be a better way to live and to organise our world than the way we do now? When do you feel this and why? Or if not, what is your feeling about the world as it is?
- How willing are you to challenge your way of seeing and being in your world?

DAY TWO

Return to the reflection at the start of this Chapter, or to any sermon notes you may have taken if you shared in a worship service this Sunday. Take note of anything that stood out for you. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke particularly to you. Or you can use the following focus to guide your prayer and meditation today.

- Do you ever dream of a different life and a different world? Take some time to outline that dream in as much as detail as you can. You may want to journal your thoughts.
- How easy is it for you to imagine a world that is kinder, more compassionate, more connected, and more just?
- What, in your view, gets in the way of you creating a life like that for yourself, and of us creating a world like this together?

DAY THREE

Return to the reflection at the start of this Chapter, or to any sermon notes you may have taken if you shared in a worship service this Sunday. Take note of anything that stood out for you. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke particularly to you. Or you can use the following focus to guide your prayer and meditation today.

- Would you agree that Jesus was a “see things differently” person? Why or why not?
- How would you describe Jesus’ ministry, especially with regard to people who were outcast or marginalised? How does this relate to your experience of Christ in your own life?
- In what ways has Jesus shown you how to live differently?

DAY FOUR

Return to the reflection at the start of this Chapter, or to any sermon notes you may have taken if you shared in a worship service this Sunday. Take note of anything that stood out for you. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke particularly to you. Or you can use the following focus to guide your prayer and meditation today.

- How have you experienced God’s Spirit in your life?
- What is your response to the idea that “It’s not that God’s Spirit wasn’t around before Pentecost. It’s that the disciples weren’t able to see and experience the fullness of the Spirit’s presence and power until Pentecost”?
- In what way does the Spirit call us out of the default way of being that our culture and society impose on us?

DAY FIVE

Return to the reflection at the start of this Chapter, or to any sermon notes you may have taken if you shared in a worship service this Sunday. Take note of anything that stood out for you. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke particularly to you. Or you can use the following focus to guide your prayer and meditation today.

- If it's true that "we have the world we have because we see and live the way we do" what is it about how we live that shapes the world in which we live?
- What does it mean to you to live in God's reign?
- What can you do to allow the Spirit to awaken you even more to God's values and priorities?

DAY SIX

Return to the reflection at the start of this Chapter, or to any sermon notes you may have taken if you shared in a worship service this Sunday. Take note of anything that stood out for you. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke particularly to you. Or you can use the following focus to guide your prayer and meditation today.

- What longings for a different world do you hold in your heart? How can you listen to those longings more intentionally?
- What would you like to do today to allow the Spirit to lead you a little more deeply into God's reign?
- How comfortable are you with being a little disoriented as you learn a new way of being? What can you do today to allow yourself to feel this disorientation as you follow the Spirit's lead in your life?

DAY SEVEN

Return to the reflection at the start of this Chapter, or to any sermon notes you may have taken if you shared in a worship service this Sunday. Take note of anything that stood out for you. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke particularly to you. Or you can use the following focus to guide your prayer and meditation today.

- What rituals or practices would you like to build into your life to allow yourself to be repeatedly awakened and inspired by the Spirit?
- What would it mean for you to live as a 'Pentecost person' every day?
- What other insights, challenges, or inspiration have you received from the Spirit this week? What will you do to make sure that you don't lose them and that they get integrated into your life?