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FEATURED SELECTION

February 2009

THE GOD OF OUR DEEPEST LONGINGS

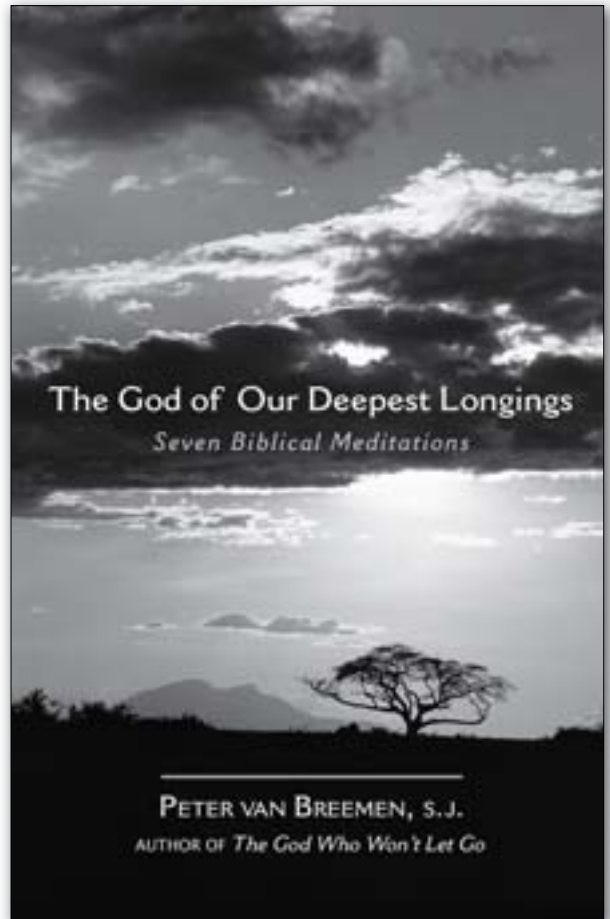
Seven Biblical Meditations

Peter van Breemen, S.J.

Internationally acclaimed author Peter van Breemen, S.J., draws on the spirituality of John's gospel and Ignatius of Loyola to stress that our deepest desires and God's will for us coincide when we let go of selfishness; and that God's deepest longing is to dwell in us, to make a home in our souls. In this masterful exploration of spiritual journeying, van Breemen suggests that life is not a series of problems to be solved, but rather a wonderful mystery to be appreciated and lived fully.

Drawing on the work of Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, Blaise Pascal, and Antoine de Saint Exupery, van Breemen weaves a picture of what it means to be Jesus' light in the world, and to live in personal peace, without fear.

ISBN: 9781594712005 / 128 pages / \$11.95



A Preview of the March 2009 Selection

WAYFARING

A Gospel Journey in Everyday Life

Margaret Silf

In this latest book from internationally best-selling author Margaret Silf, we are guided through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This book is an ideal gift for fans of Ignatian spirituality, interfaith spiritual seekers, and lovers of Silf's compelling prose.

ISBN: 9781933495170 / 256 pages / \$16.95

STARTING WITH A THOUGHT

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: “How small a thought it takes to fill a whole life!”

A proof of that exclamation might be found in the work of the contemporary minimalist composer Steve Reich. Reich turned Wittgenstein’s sentence into a fourteen-minute piece of music for five singers and four musicians. Titled *Proverb*, the piece has as much in common with the Early Music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance as it does with the musical form Reich and a few others all but invented in the twentieth century. Wittgenstein’s observation, in Reich’s interpretation, engages not just a life, but generations of musical expression.

It is fascinating to see how “small” thoughts can take hold of us. It is not uncommon for readers of the Bible to latch on to (or, perhaps, to be seized by) a single verse or phrase. Matthew 5:48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” captured me in my teens, especially in the wording and cadence of the King James Version—no other translation is as striking or impactful. Talk about a thought that could fill a whole life! Or Isaiah 3:10–11: “Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” How many times, since singing those lines in Randall Thompson’s *The Peaceable Kingdom* in high school choir, have those thoughts reverberated in me, especially, say, upon hearing news of swindlers and frauds being caught red-handed: Woe unto the wicked! Such urgent, insistent words apply again and again as we face life’s trials and hardships.

J. D. Salinger’s extraordinary character Seymour Glass permeates much of Salinger’s fiction. In *Seymour: An Introduction* the narrator, Seymour’s brother Buddy, remarks that “Seymour once said, on the air, when he was eleven, that the thing he loved best in the Bible was the word WATCH!” We need to go to our King James concordance (many recent translations choose words other than *watch*) to appreciate Seymour’s observation. Consider, for example, “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:33); “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:37); “And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:40–41). These are indeed powerful verses, all of which hinge on the word *watch*, and inspire us to wonder just what we will see if we simply keep paying attention.

In his novel *A Long and Happy Life*, Reynolds Price describes a conversation between a preacher and Rosacoke Mustian, the story’s main character:

“It is six-thirty and I am preaching in an hour. What must I preach on, lady?”

“Well, if you don’t know by now,” she said, “I’m glad I haven’t got to listen.” But she smiled a little.

And he wasn’t offended—“What I mean to say is, you give me your favorite text, and that’s what I’ll preach on.”

Rosacoke said, “Then Jesus asked him what is thy name and he said Legion.”

“Yes ma’am,” he said, “that is a humdinger” (which wasn’t the same as committing himself to use it).

The preacher is right about that verse being a humdinger, and if we were doing a character study of Rosacoke we would most definitely want to look into why the story of the Gerasene demoniac and the multitude of demons that possessed him is so close to the surface of her consciousness.

Clearly, the size of a thought is not to be judged by the number of words that comprise it. These biblical thoughts, even if just a single word, captured and held the people who repeated them. They may have even helped define their lives (Salinger’s Seymour, for instance, was nothing if not radically watchful and attentive in his short life).

In *The God of Our Deepest Longings*, Peter van Breemen begins his series of biblical meditations with a question—What are you looking for?—which is, not coincidentally, the first sentence uttered by Jesus in the Gospel of John. The question Jesus asks begins a remarkable exchange with some of his new, and first, disciples. The answer that spools out through van Breemen’s meditations leads us to encounter the relationship of God the Father with God the Son. It leads us to reflect on our own willingness to be open to our place in that relationship, in suffering, in joy, in reconciliation.

It all starts with a single thought, a deceptively mundane question. Anyone who chooses to follow Jesus is wise to begin to reflect upon that question, because answering it with honesty and clarity is the work of a lifetime.

J. D. Salinger, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959), 177.

Reynolds Price, *A Long and Happy Life*. (New York: Atheneum, 1987), 55. (Original edition published in 1962.)

READER'S GROUP GUIDE

AN EXERCISE FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

“How small a thought it takes to fill a whole life!” Choose a verse from the Bible that is, for you, a touchstone by which you measure the authenticity or integrity of words or actions. Write the verse—for example, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14)—at the top of a large sheet of paper. In brainstorming fashion, without regard for the lines on the paper or creating a logical order, write down any words, phrases, sentences, Bible verses, or quotations from other literature that

- explain what the verse means to you
- demonstrate how the verse influences your reactions to things that happen around you
- relate to, expand, or illuminate your understanding of the verse
- exhibit ideas that are in opposition to your understanding of the verse

Study the sheet of paper and draw connecting lines between the various results of your brainstorm. Then, on a new sheet of

paper, create an outline for a brief essay or reflection that will answer these questions:

- How might I paraphrase this verse?
- How can I deepen my understanding of the verse?
- In what ways does this verse influence the way I act in the world?
- What forces are opposed to the meaning of this verse, and how can I overcome them?

Write your essay thoughtfully and with clarity, but without concern for creating a finished product. Take your ideas as far as you can, and then put the essay aside. Wait for a week and then revisit the essay, making any changes or additions you feel will answer the questions with more precision. If you wish, share the essay with a friend, or exchange essays with someone who has also completed this exercise, and discuss them.





SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP USE

Each chapter of *The God of our Deepest Longings* concludes with a prayer, a summary, a list of the key Bible passages encountered in the chapter, and several questions for reflection. To facilitate group discussion, use these resources as you see fit—they may be used for spontaneous discussion, for example, or as the basis of journaling to be shared at the group’s meetings. One goal of group reading is to find new ways to deepen one’s faith, so utilize these resources with this goal in mind.

Groups may also enjoy doing the Exercise for Reflection and Discussion either as a group or separately. In either case, group members could exchange essays with a fellow member and discuss what they have learned. Sharing via e-mail or an online group platform such as Yahoo! Groups is another way to facilitate discussion and opens the experience to individuals who may not be able to work group meetings into their schedules, or who live in another place.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST



The Daily Gospel
www.dailygospel.org

A visit to this website offers the day’s scriptural readings from the Catholic lectionary, along with commentary. Visitors can also subscribe to the site and receive the readings in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Polish, Armenian, Dutch, German, or Italian.



The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology
www.salvationhistory.com

Among the many resources available at this website are several online Bible studies. From the main page, click on “Studies” and follow the link.

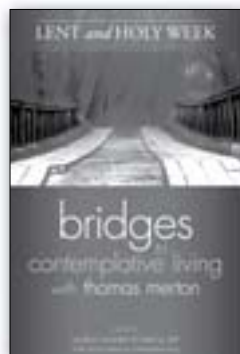


BibleGateway.com
www.biblegateway.com

It can be helpful and instructive to compare various translations of Bible passages. BibleGateway.com makes this easy by enabling users to look up specific passages, chapters, keywords, or whole books of the Bible in twenty different English translations. It also has translations from forty other languages.

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SMALL GROUP / PARISH RESOURCE



NEW!

LENT AND HOLY WEEK

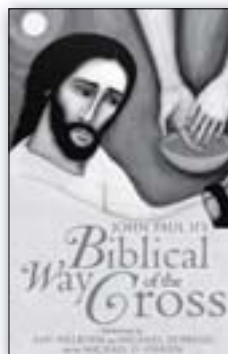
*The Merton Institute for
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Edited by Jonathan Montaldo and Robert
G. Toth

This eight-session small group resource presents the writings of Thomas Merton in easily digestible pieces and eloquently pairs them with the words of other great spiritual thinkers. Designed for small

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ISBN: 9781594711282 / 32 pages / \$2.50

PERSONAL PRAYER



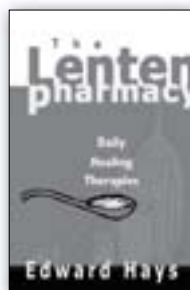
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ISBN: 9781594711817 / 128 pages / \$2.25



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CYCLE B READINGS!**

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pies*

Edward Hays

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**A HOLY WEEK
RETREAT**

HEART SPEAKS TO HEART

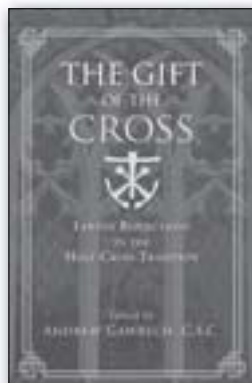
*Three Gospel Medita-
tions on Jesus*

Henri J.M. Nouwen

This collection follows Nouwen during a Holy Week retreat when he desired to write about the Sacred Heart but as his words took shape, he instead spoke directly to the heart of Jesus.

ISBN: 9781594711169 / 64 pages / \$7.95

MEDITATION BOOKLETS



NEW!

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