

40-DAY JOURNEY WITH MARTIN LUTHER

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40-DAY

Journey

WITH MARTIN LUTHER

40-Day Journey Series

Gracia M. Grindal, Editor

Augsburg Books 

Minneapolis

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Imagine spending forty days with a great spiritual guide who has both the wisdom and the experience to help you along the path of your own spiritual journey. Imagine being able to listen to and question spiritual guides from the past and the present. Imagine being, as it were, mentored by women and men who have made their own spiritual journey and have recorded the landmarks, detours, bumps in the road, potholes, and wayside rests that they encountered along the way—all to help others (like you) who must make their own journey.

The various volumes in Augsburg Books' *40-Day Journey Series* are all designed to do just that—to lead you where your mind and heart and spirit long to go. As Augustine once wrote: *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."* The wisdom you will find in the pages of this series of books will give you the spiritual tools and direction to find that rest. But there is nothing quietistic in the spirituality you will find here. Those who would guide you on this journey have learned that the heart that rests in God is one that lives with deeper awareness, deeper creativity, deeper energy, and deeper passion and commitment to the things that matter to God.

An ancient Chinese proverb states the obvious: the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. In a deep sense, books in the *40-Day Journey Series* are first steps on a journey that will not end when the forty days are over. No one can take the first step (or any step) for you.

Imagine that you are on the banks of the Colorado River. You are here to go white-water rafting for the first time and your guide has just described the experience, telling you with graphic detail what to expect. It sounds both exciting and frightening. You long for the experience but are somewhat disturbed, anxious, uncertain in the face of the danger that promises to accompany you on the journey down the river. The guide gets into the raft. She will

accompany you on the journey, *but she can't take the journey for you*. If you want to experience the wildness of the river, the raw beauty of the canyon, the camaraderie of adventurers, and the mystery of a certain oneness with nature (and nature's creator), then you've got to get in the boat.

This book in your hand is like that. It describes the journey, provides a "raft," and invites you to get in. Along with readings from your spiritual guide, you will find scripture to mediate on, questions to ponder, and suggestions for personal journaling, guidance in prayer, and a prayer for the day. If done faithfully each day, you will find the wisdom and encouragement you need to integrate meaningful spiritual practices into your daily life. And when the 40-day journey is over it no longer will be the guide's description of the journey that stirs your longing for God but *your own experience* of the journey that grounds your faith and life and keeps you on the path.

I would encourage you to pick up other books in the series. There is only one destination, but many ways to get there. Not everything in every book will work for you (we are all unique), but in every book you will find much to help you discover your own path on the journey to the One in whom we all "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

May all be well with you on the journey.
Henry F. French, Series Editor

PREFACE

Not long after Martin Luther realized that we are saved by faith alone, he also realized that he had to provide devotional resources for his followers consistent with his discovery. As he developed devotional resources for the laity, he understood that the materials needed to be simple and easily grasped by even the youngest child. To that end he based his major devotional resource—the Small Catechism—on the three parts of the Catechism long accepted in Christendom, namely, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer.

Luther noted many times that the Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer were so simple anyone could say them, but even he, a learned Doctor of Theology, could not plumb their depths. "For in these three parts everything contained in the Scriptures is comprehended in short, plain, and simple terms." They "summed up the teaching, life, wisdom, and learning that constitute the Christian's conversation, conduct and concern."

Your 40-day journey begins with selections from Luther in which he advises us how and when to pray—advice which should serve as a helpful guide for the rest of the forty days when Luther's Catechism itself is the subject of study.

Take the opportunity to focus intently on the Catechism and Luther's answers. Commit them to memory if you will. Linger on small parts of it throughout the day as it occurs to you. In the text you will find several suggestions from Luther as to how to live a life of prayer. One of the best known is what he called "a garland of prayer." The garland consists of four questions to ask of any biblical text you read: (1) What does it teach? (2) What should I give thanks for? (3) What does it convict me of or cause regret about in my daily life and (4) What will I ask for or petition for. Let these questions, this "garland of prayer," guide you as you meditate on the texts given to you in your *40-Day Journey with Martin Luther*.

One note: as you make your way through this material, you will see clearly that Luther's time was very different from ours. He uses language and metaphors that may seem strange to modern ears and minds. It will take careful and critical thought, but there is a rich reward for those who make the journey. Try to see into his age and use what you can for your own life.

For Luther the Christian life, a pitched battle between Christ and Satan, was to be lived in confidence and serenity because Christ had thwarted sin, death, and the power of the devil. For Luther, Christ is always the victor, the one who went to the depths to win us over. His words should give us the same confidence as we learn to trust more simply and profoundly in Christ.

Gracia Grindal

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Your 40-day journey with Martin Luther gives you the opportunity to be mentored by one of the great spiritual writers and Christian leaders of the past millennium. The purpose of the journey, however, is not just to gain “head knowledge” about Luther. Rather, it is to begin living what you learn.

You will probably benefit most by fixing a special time of day in which to “meet with” your spiritual mentor. It is easier to maintain a spiritual practice if you do it regularly at the same time. For many people mornings, while the house is still quiet and before the busyness of the day begins, is a good time. Others will find that the noon hour or before bedtime serves well. We are all unique. Some of us are “morning people” and some of us are not. Do whatever works *for you* to maintain a regular meeting with Luther. Write it into your calendar and do your best to keep your appointments.

It is best if you complete your 40-day journey in forty days. A deepening focus and intensity of experience will be the result. However, it is certainly better to complete the journey than to give it up because you can't get it done in forty days. Indeed, making it a 40- or 20-week journey may better fit your schedule and it just might be that spending a whole week or half a week reflecting on the reading, the scripture, and the prayers, and practicing what you are learning could be a powerfully transforming experience as well. Again, set a schedule that works for you, only be consistent.

Most days of the journey begin with a reading from Luther's *Small Catechism*, and his commentary on the topic from the *Large Catechism*. You will note that the readings, from day to day, build on each other and introduce you to key ideas in Luther's understanding of Christian life and faith. Read each selection slowly, letting the words sink into your consciousness. You may want to read each selection two or three times before moving on, perhaps reading it out loud once. Luther recommended that one could spend a lifetime of devotions on the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the

Lord's Prayer. You might want to memorize them, if you haven't already, before you begin to focus on them during your daily time of study and prayer.

Following the reading from Luther, you will find the heading *Biblical Wisdom* and a brief passage from the Bible that relates directly to what Luther has said. As with the selection from Luther, read the biblical text slowly, letting the words sink into your consciousness.

Following the biblical reading, you will find the heading *Silence for Meditation*. Here you should take anywhere from five to twenty minutes meditating on the two readings. Begin by getting centered. Sit with your back straight, eyes closed, hands folded in your lap and breathe slowly and deeply. Remember that breath is a gift of God, it is God's gift of life. Do nothing for two or three minutes other than simply observe your breath. Focus your awareness on the end of your nose. Feel the breath enter through your nostrils and leave through your nostrils.

Once you feel your mind and spirit settling down, open your eyes and read the Luther text and the biblical text again. Read them slowly, focus on each word or phrase, savor them, explore possible meanings and implications. At the end of each day you will find a blank page with the heading *Notes*. As you meditate on the readings, jot down any insights that occur to you. Do the readings raise any questions for you? Write them down. Do the readings suggest anything you should do? Write it down.

Stay at it as long as it feels useful. When your mind is ready to move on, close your eyes and observe your breath for a minute or so. Then return to the book and the next heading—*Questions to Ponder*. Here you will find a few pointed questions on the reading from Luther and the Scripture. These are general questions intended for all Christians and communities of faith. Think them through and write your answers (and the implications of your answers for your own life of faith and for your community of faith) in the *Notes* section.

When you have finished with the *Questions to Ponder*, move on to the *Psalms Fragment*. Luther was a Professor of Old Testament, and he lived passionately in the psalms. He thought of them as the prayers of Jesus that we could also pray with Christ. The *Psalms Fragment* is a brief passage from one of the Psalms that relates to what you have already read. Again, read it slowly and savor the words. It may give you another perspective on the day's readings and help unpack their meaning further.

Following the *Psalms Fragment*, you will find the heading *Journal Reflections*. Several suggestions for journaling are given that apply the readings to your own personal experience. It is in journaling that the "day" reaches its climax and the potential for transformative change is greatest. It would be best to buy a separate journal rather than use the *Notes* section of the book. For a journal you can use a spiral-bound or ring-bound notebook or one of the

hardcover journal books sold in stationery stores. Below are some suggestions for how to keep a journal. For now, let's go back to the 40-day journey book.

The *Questions to Ponder* and *Journal Reflections* exercises are meant to assist you in reflecting on the Luther and Scripture quotations. Do not feel that you have to answer every question. You may choose which questions or exercises are most helpful to you. Sometimes a perfectly appropriate response to a question is, "I don't know" or "I'm not sure what I think about that." The important thing is to record your own thoughts and questions.

After *Journal Reflections*, you will find two more headings. The first is *Prayers for the Life of Faith*. Luther recommended that we bring simply everything to God in prayer and these suggestions are merely ideas that bubble up from the readings. Under this heading you will find suggestions for petitionary and intercessory prayer that relate to the key points in the day's readings. The last heading (before *Notes*) is *Prayer for Today*, a one line prayer to end your "appointment" with Luther, and to be prayed from time to time throughout the day.

HINTS ON KEEPING A JOURNAL

A journal is a very helpful tool. Keeping a journal is a form of meditation, a profound way of getting to know yourself—and God—more deeply. Although you could read your 40-day journey book and reflect on it “in your head,” writing can help you focus your thoughts, clarify your thinking, and keep a record of your insights, questions, and prayers. Writing is generative: it enables you to have thoughts you would not otherwise have had.

A FEW HINTS FOR JOURNALING

1. Write in your journal with grace. Don't get stuck in trying to do it perfectly. Just write freely. Don't worry about literary style, spelling, or grammar. Your goal is simply to generate thoughts pertinent to your own life and get them down on paper.
2. You may want to begin and end your journaling with prayer. Ask for the guidance and wisdom of the Spirit (and thank God for that guidance and wisdom when you are done).
3. If your journaling takes you in directions that go beyond the journaling questions in your 40-day book, go there. Let the questions encourage, not limit your writing.
4. Respond honestly. Don't write what you think you're supposed to believe. Write down what you really do believe, in so far as you can identify that. If you don't know, or are not sure, or if you have questions, record those. Questions are often openings to spiritual growth.
5. Carry your 40-day book and journal around with you every day during your journey (only keep them safe from prying eyes). The 40-day journey process is an intense experience that doesn't stop when you close the book. Your mind and heart and spirit will be engaged all day, and it will be helpful to have your book and journal handy to take notes or make new entries as they occur to you.

JOURNEYING WITH OTHERS

You can use your 40-day book with another person—a spiritual friend or partner—or with a small group. It would be best for each person to first do his or her own reading, reflection, and writing in solitude. Then when you come together, share the insights you have gained from your time alone. Your discussion will probably focus on the *Questions to Ponder*, however, if the relationship is intimate, you may feel comfortable sharing some of what you have written in your journal. No one, however, should ever be pressured to share anything in their journal if they are not comfortable doing so.

Remember that your goal is to learn from one another, not to argue, nor to prove that you are right and the other person wrong. Just practice listening and trying to understand why your partner, friend, or colleague thinks as he or she does.

Practicing intercessory prayer together, you will find, will strengthen the spiritual bonds of those who take the journey together. And as you all work to translate insight into action, sharing your experience with each other is a way of encouraging and guiding each other and provides the opportunity to correct each other gently if that becomes necessary.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

When the forty days (or forty weeks) is over, a milestone has been reached, but the journey needn't end. One goal of the 40-day series is to introduce you to a particular spiritual guide with the hope that, having whet your appetite, you will want to keep the journey going. At the end of the book are some suggestions for further reading that will take you deeper on your journey with Martin Luther.

WHO WAS MARTIN LUTHER?

Martin Luther (1483-1546) stands at the hinge of the last millennium. As the last years of the twentieth century came to an end, scholars and pundits almost universally agreed that Luther's mind and influence were second to none in the millennium except for Albert Einstein.

When Luther, a young Augustinian monk, pounded his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Saxony, in the southeastern part of Germany, he drove a stake into the heart of the medieval world. The medieval church, by almost everyone's estimation, was ripe for reform, and Luther spoke at just the right time. He—as many before him—had watched with growing disgust the corruption of Rome, basically the only Christian church in Europe at the time.

For Luther it came to a head when he observed the selling of indulgences—forgiveness—to people who were genuinely terrorized by the thought of ending up in the clutches of Satan in Hell, a fate vividly portrayed in the iconography of the time. When he had his legendary flash of insight, the story has it that he was reading Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Everything changed. *He was not to make peace with God; God made peace with him through Jesus Christ.* Faith was a gift given to him by a gracious God who, at the cost of his only son, had won eternal salvation for him and snatched him from the hands of sin, death, and the power of the devil. At last, Luther had found peace.

In many ways Luther's reform of the church began as a devotional or spiritual crisis. As a young monk, Luther suffered terrors that came from his spiritual “scrupulosity.” He was tormented by the impossibility of keeping the First Commandment—to love God above all things. He had entered monastic life to please God and find peace. Becoming a monk, however, made the problem worse. Following the remedies of the spiritual disciplines

recommended by the church—more devotion, more fasting, more praying, more self-denial—simply drove him further into despair. The more he knew about God, the more he knew he could not measure up. God became a torment to him. After his discovery he found peace and began to work his insight into the gospel through everything he did from then on.

His nailing of the Theses to the door shook Christendom to its foundation. Europe, ruled by a combination of princes and bishops who had both spiritual and temporal powers, was ready for reform. At the same time, the powers that be viewed any threat to their hegemony with alarm. One could expect a brutal response from the civil and religious authorities if one attacked them as Luther did. After his Ninety-five Theses became well known, the church and empire watched Luther closely for any signs of heresy or insubordination.

The crisis came to a head in Leipzig during June of 1519, when Luther debated with John Eck. At issue was whether or not the church was over Scripture or not. Luther argued that popes and councils can err; Christ did not. This direct attack on the power of the church and papacy could not be overlooked by Rome. Not long after the debate, Luther was threatened with excommunication if he did not recant. In the meantime, he continued writing some of his most provocative treatises, most enflaming among them his *Address to the Christian Nobility*, in which he argued for the priesthood of all believers, a direct attack on the power of the clergy. Not long after that, he produced his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, which attacked the Roman sacramental system point by point, and finally, *The Freedom of a Christian*.

Each of these writings brought him closer to excommunication; at the same time, however, they were greeted with astonishment by many who agreed with him. All without exception caused great offense to both Rome and the Emperor. His prince, Duke Friedrich the Wise, proud of this exciting theologian at his new university in little Wittenberg, protected Luther from the increasing threats of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, and the Pope.

At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Luther was formally asked to recant his writings, which he most spectacularly refused to do with the famous words, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” With that he was declared an outlaw in Europe and could not be guaranteed safe-conduct anywhere. Luther’s life was in danger. On his way home from Worms, Luther’s prince had him “kidnapped” and brought to the Wartburg Castle. There he stayed for some months disguised as Junker George.

While hidden away, Luther began to translate the Bible into a rich idiomatic German, which shaped the German language much as the King James Version of the Bible (1611) did for English. When violence broke out in Wittenberg over the reforms begun by Luther’s followers, Luther could not remain hidden any longer and returned to his home in the Black Cloister in

Wittenberg. Although in great danger, he lived in Wittenberg for the rest of his life, protected by his prince.

His production of treatises, translations, and devotional reforms continued apace even while he was under great duress. After the translation of the Bible, he turned his attention to other resources for the education and edification of the laity, always informed by his theological discovery that faith was a gift kindled by the word of God. In the area of prayer and worship, the most important thing was to hear the word of God first, not to perform deeds of spiritual virtuosity that we imagined would please God. By 1523 he had prepared a German language version of the Holy Communion service, as well as several hymns in German that the people began to sing lustily in their services—for now they had the gospel in their own language. These hymns not only taught the new evangelical faith, they helped the laity to preach God's word to one another, something we hear most clearly in his greatest hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, a sermon on Psalm 46, with images of medieval Germany, not ancient Israel.

By 1526 he had prepared a new version of the Communion Service (the German Mass), this time with German hymns and liturgy to be sung in place of Latin. During this time, he also was embroiled in a theological debate on free will with the great humanist Desiderius Erasmus. Luther's response was the magisterial *Bondage of the Will*.

In the civil realm he had to deal with the horrifying outbreak of the Peasant's War, in which the peasants took his ideas to mean something he had not intended. His reaction against the peasants and their leader, Thomas Münzer, encouraging the prince to violently put them down, seems brutal and shocking to us today, but it was consistent with the times.

During these very same years, in June of 1525, he surprised himself by marrying Katherine von Bora, a run-away nun. Together they founded the Protestant parsonage, establishing its traditions of hospitality and mercy to the needy in the community. Martin and Katie modeled the Christian family as they raised and taught their children the faith.

By the end of the decade, Luther, now the theological leader of a new church known in Europe as the Evangelical Church, (Americans call it Lutheran) was appalled to discover, in visitations to the congregations in Saxony, that the people knew very little about their Christian faith, nor were their poor and ill-educated pastors able to teach it very well.

Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatsoever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christians, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament,

they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the gospel has been restored, they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.

To remedy this situation he began preaching regular sermons on the basics of the Christian faith in the city church in Wittenberg. These resulted in his classic *Small Catechism*, which came out in May, 1529, followed by his *Large Catechism*. This, his most productive decade, concluded fittingly with these resources for people who needed to be taught the Christian faith so they could practice it in their homes, work, and congregations. Until his death, he thought the *Small Catechism* to be among his best work.

It is well to remember that this most brilliant of scholars did his best work when he saw how a theological idea affected the spiritual lives of his people. He did not think it beneath him to devote himself to the teaching of children and the laity, and he provided parents with resources so they could teach their children in the home. Thus, his *Small Catechism*, which is the basis of this *40-Day Journey with Martin Luther*, became the backbone of the Lutheran movement in Europe. After the *Small Catechism* became part of the life of the early Lutherans, when pastors and church leaders would try to abandon its simple teachings, the people would rise up against them with the words of their dear Dr. Luther.

When Luther died in 1546, Europe and Christendom were changed utterly. Luther had been the crucial voice at the crucial time. His passionate conviction that faith and salvation came from Christ alone, his protean theological imagination, and phenomenal productivity quickly spread his ideas throughout Europe.

His capacity to change and grow in his own life gave him what became a happy and joyful marriage—he would very soon be calling his wife, the gifted and strong Katherine von Bora, Herr Katie, and the stories of the marriage between these two strong-willed people continued to amuse and amaze people who might not have predicted much success for such a marriage.

While in his youth his spirituality had advised strongly against marriage and the dangers of women, he was able to change those opinions for himself and his followers when he began to see the joy there was in family and children. This had a remarkable effect on western spirituality, which since Augustine had devalued the carnal world.

Although violence, war, famine, and terror followed in the wake of the Reformation, Luther's voice still speaks loudly and clearly to Christians throughout the world as they struggle to understand who God is, what God did for us in Christ Jesus, and the blessings and complications of our vocation in this world devoted to the work of God as we serve the neighbor. While

he was no saint, and history is replete with the records of his failures (most lamentably his statements on the Jews), he is the theologian most theologians concede understood God the best. His attack on the corruption of the church, his holding up of the rights and responsibilities of the laity to practice their vocations as holy callings blessed by God, his recommendation that both boys and girls learn to read and write so they could study the Scriptures, still resonate throughout secular, liberal democracies around the world. His voice, though now not so well known, is still working its way through our daily lives as we struggle to be Christians in a rich, complicated, and troubling world.

May your *40-Day Journey with Martin Luther* deepen and enrich your life of faith.

40-DAY

Journey

WITH MARTIN LUTHER

Journey

Day 1

I WILL TELL YOU AS best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I! Amen.

First, when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thought (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little Psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.



BIBLICAL WISDOM

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Ephesians 6:17

SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- What is Luther's solution for coolness and joylessness in prayer? Does it seem a good solution? Why or why not?
- How do you, your faith community, and your culture think about the "devil?"
- Why does the "devil" want to impede us in our prayer? What obstructions to prayer have you experienced?

PSALM FRAGMENT

*Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,
who stand by night in the house of the LORD!*

*Lift up your hands to the holy place,
and bless the LORD.*

*May the LORD, maker of heaven and earth,
bless you from Zion. Psalm 134:1-3*

JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

- Describe in your journal your own present practice of prayer.
- Write the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, in your journal. If you haven't already done it, memorize them.
- Write down what you want to learn about the life of faith as you begin these forty days.

PRAYERS FOR THE LIFE OF FAITH

Pray that God will give you (and any others who join you in this journey) joy in these next forty days as you study the Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer.

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Lord Jesus, thank you for your great disciple Martin Luther. Help me learn how to dwell in your word always.

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