

Thrive – 3rd Edition

Creating a Thriving Life Week Twelve – August 16, 2021

Faith and Trust

In this final week of *Thrive*, we acknowledge the inherently mysterious spiritual heart of creativity. We address the fact that creativity requires receptivity and profound trust – capacities we've developed throughout our work together over the past weeks. We will set our creative goals for the future and take one final look at last-minute sabotage. We renew our commitment to the ongoing use of the tools: Morning Pages and Creative Soul Dates.

Trusting

Creativity requires faith. Faith requires that we relinquish control. This is frightening, and we resist it. Our resistance to our creativity is a form of self-denial, and we throw up road-blocks on our path. We do this in order to maintain an illusion of control. Resistance shows up as anger, anxiety, depression, and it creates a feeling of dis-ease. This manifests itself as sluggishness, confusion, "I don't know..." The truth is, we do know and we *know* we know.

Each of us has an inner dream we can unfold if we will just have the courage to admit what it is, and have the faith to trust our own admission. This admitting is quite difficult. Affirmations can come to our aid here. "I know this is what I want to do, " "I trust my own inner guide." I have used for years now, a mantra that begins with these words: "I am healed, I am whole, I trust deeply in my soul." That last line always invites me to do that very thing more deeply.

Some of you are familiar with the well-known verse in Proverbs 3:5 - "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge God, and God will make your paths straight."

These words seems to contradict the idea of trusting ourselves. But a distinction is to be made. When the Hebrews use the word "heart," it does not refer only to emotions. The heart is the seat of the deepest knowledge and discernment. Heart specialists now understand that the heart is made up of a high percentage of neuron-like cells. The heart and the mind are deeply connected. It's as if the ancient writer of this proverb, was making a distinction between what the heart can trust, and what the ego can come up with. As we have said from the beginning, we are made in the image of the Creator, and that image resides deeply in our creative soul, and it shows up in the heart. To acknowledge God in all our ways, is to acknowledge the creative soul within each of us. There is a distinction between our small self, ego, and our True Self, the image of the Creator in us. So when we "trust our inner guide" we trust something more than our ego. Frankly, that scares us.

The resistance is understandable. We are not accustomed to thinking that God's will for us and our own inner dreams can coincide. Instead we have mostly bought into the message of our culture – get a good job (whether you like it or not), make lots of money (whether it gives meaning to you or not), retire early (whether you've ever done what you really wanted to do), and play golf (whether you like golf or not) until you die (whether you've actually lived your life or not). The truth is we are meant to be bountiful and *live*. The Universe will support our True Self's aspirations, but not necessarily how we picture it. Our truest dream for ourselves is God's will for us, although it may not turn out as we imagine it. I keep learning this over and over again.

Joseph Campbell wrote, "Follow your bliss and doors will open where there were no doors before." This speaks both to the Universe's support of our joy, our dreams, and the surprising way unknown and unsuspecting doors open. It is not our *idea* of the dream, but the *dream itself*, that comes to life. It is the inner commitment to be true to ourselves and follow our dreams that triggers the support of the universe. While we are ambivalent, the universe will also seem to be ambivalent.

If we look back at the times when the world seemed to be a capricious and untrustworthy place, we can see that we were ourselves ambivalent and conflicted in our goals and behaviors. Once we trigger an internal yes by affirming our truest goals and desires, the universe mirrors that yes and expands it.

It's so easy to *talk* about trust. *Doing* it is another thing altogether. I want to share with you a true story about *talking* about faith, that turned into an *experience of* faith powerfully embedded in the body. It has become for me the touchstone for whether or not I am trusting.

I was serving as the Transitional Pastor at the Brighton Presbyterian Church. The leaders of the Boy Scout Troup asked me to talk to the scouts about *Faith in God*. Sure. I walked into our Fellowship Hall on the designated night and there were about fifteen Scouts all seated in folding chairs arranged in a semi-circle. Seated, mind you, as most pre-teen or early teenagers sit. Leaning back, slouched, sideways, tipping back on the hind legs, playing with the balance, nonchalant. "This is going to be fun," I said to myself. Formalities would be a waste of time, so I dove right in. "Tonight, our topic is 'Faith in God.' So what exactly is faith in God?" The question hung in the air for a good while, but I'm a patient man. Besides, I just knew, someone in this group wants to be the center of attention. A hand shot up. "Yes?" "Faith in God, that means trust, trust in God. "Thank you," I said. And then I asked, "So what does it mean to trust in God?" Another hand shot up. "You have to have faith in God." "So, what does it mean to have faith in God?" Somebody else said, "Trust, trust in God." Round and round it went, going nowhere.

Then, I has a revelation. Everything I planned to say went right out the window. I said, "We're going in circles, here. But I see a way out. Do you want to know what faith, trust, looks like, feels like?" Their nods told me they were as anxious to get out of this quagmire as I was. "All of you, right now, are trusting in something as deeply as you can. Do you know what it is?" Silence. But their eyes told me they were scanning, searching, for something. A hand shot up tentatively in the back row. "Our chairs?" "Yes!! You are trusting completely, implicitly in your chairs right now!" And you could see their eyes light up! They got it! They knew what trust was in their bodies, and now their mind was catching up to what their bodies knew so naturally and completely.

I said, "You didn't even think before you sat down in that chair, did you? You just walked up, plopped down, and even tipped back on the hind legs, but you knew, in your bones, the chair would

hold you. You trusted it deeply. This is what it feels like to trust in God's love for you." Silent explosions went off in their heads. They got it.

Then I had another revelation. I take no credit for any of this. It just showed up in my head. I asked the scouts, "Would you show me what it would look like to *not* trust your chair?" In the next 3-4 minutes I was treated to the most comical, and most spot-on metaphor, for how most of us live our lives. The Scouts displayed an amazing ability to *almost* sit down but not quite, to almost fall in but not trust the chair, and they acted out for me our anxiety, distraction, and exhaustion!!! They could NEVER completely sit down! They wore themselves out, displaying our inability to trust our life, life itself, God. It's absolutely exhausting and anxiety ridden. It only made their experience of deep trust more palatable.

By trusting, we learn to trust. So what is it that you and I trust implicitly, without having to think about it? Let that teach us. Let it show we can trust our Creator, our creative souls, like that.

Mystery

Creativity – like human life itself – begins in darkness. We need to acknowledge this. All too often, we think only in terms of light. "The light bulb went on and I got it!" It is true that some of these flashes may be blinding. It is, however, also true that such bright ideas are preceded by a gestation period that is interior, murky, dark, and completely necessary.

We speak often about ideas as brainchildren. What we do not realize is that brainchildren, like all babies, should not be dragged from the creative womb prematurely. Ideas, like stalactites and stalagmites, form in the dark inner cave of consciousness. They form in drips and drops, not by squared-off building blocks. We must learn to wait for an idea to hatch. Or, to use a gardening image, we must learn to not pull our ideas up by the roots to see if they are growing.

Mulling on the page is an artless art form. It is fooling around. It is noodling, doodling, on a guitar, on a business plan, on a new form of administration, on a book idea. It is the way ideas slowly take shape and form until they are ready to help us see the light. All too often, we try to push, pull, outline, and control our ideas instead of letting them grow organically. The creative process is a process of surrender, not control.

Mystery is at the heart of creativity. And surprise. All too often, when we say we want to be creative, we mean that we want to be able to be productive. Now, to be creative is to be productive – but by cooperating *with* the creative process, not *forcing* it. Let me share with you two examples of mystery and surprise, one arrived at through insight, one arrived at involuntarily.

Grace was going through a difficult period in her life. It seemed like everything had dried up, nothing was clear, she had no direction, and she was frustrated. In a spiritual direction session she put it this way, "It's like I'm in a cold, dark fog and I can't get any sense of direction. I'm completely lost and scared." We had worked with metaphors before, so I asked her if she would be willing to be with, be in, this cold, dark fog, and allow God, Spirit, to show up any way it wanted to show up. She closed her eyes, sat still, and I waited. After five minutes a calm smile came across her face. The wrinkle above her brow softened. She said, "It was so dark, cold, and foggy, but it changed. I suddenly saw it differently. It became a chrysalis, and once that happened, I knew I was going through a transformation. The experience of not knowing, of being lost, changed from fear to trust."

The second example is the story of Jonah in the Bible. God tells him to cry out against Nineveh's wickedness. Instead, he boards a ship to Tarshish to run away from God's presence. Talk about a creative U-turn. Big storm, sailors cast lots to find out whose God has been offended. It's Jonah. Throw me overboard, and you'll be okay. Jonah was tossed overboard, swallowed by a whale, in the dark for three days and three nights. Time to pray, mull over, ponder. He is spit back up, not in Tarshish, but near Nineveh. This time he "obeys" – rooted in the Hebrew word "to hear, listen." Jonah is brought, against the will of his ego, to his creative soul's purpose. Mystery, indeed.

As creative souls, we need to trust the darkness. We need to learn to gently mull instead of churning away like a little engine on a straight-ahead path. Hatching an idea is a lot like baking bread. An idea needs to rise. If we poke at it too much, keep checking on it, it will never rise. A loaf of bread must stay for a good long time in the darkness and safety of the oven. This is the best way to let ideas rise. Let them grow in dark and mystery. Let them hit the page in droplets. Trusting this slow and seemingly random drip, we will be startled one day with the flash of, "Oh! That's it!"

The Imagination at Play

We are an ambitious, and a structured, society. It is often difficult for us to cultivate forms of creativity and spirituality that do not directly serve us and our career goals, or fit in our culture's boxes, although if they do, wonderful! Creative soul recovery urges us to reexamine definitions of both creativity and spirituality, and expand them beyond "hobbies, crafts, and Art with a capital-A", and "Religion with a capital-R" as it is commonly understood in its historic forms. The experience of creative living and the expression of spirituality are essential to the joyful life.

Gardening, for example, puts one in touch with the seasons as metaphors of the seasons we go through creatively. Adding fertilizer reminds us of the good ideas that arise out of the detritus of failed ideas. Meditation, or getting in touch with our Higher Power, reminds us we are not all by ourselves in this world. There is something larger than our mind, ego, self. The imagination is the playing field of both creativity and spirituality. Our practice of, and playing with, our "hobbies" or "religious rituals," free us from having to fit in a box, and allow us to merge with a greater source.

It is a paradox of creative soul recovery that we must get serious about taking ourselves lightly. We must work at learning to play. Creativity and spirituality must be freed from the narrow parameters of capital-A art and capital-R religion.

I had forgotten all about those painting I did in high school. I loved doing that!

As a kid I used to place my dolls like they were in a class room, and I was their teacher. I loved teaching them about everything I knew!

I used to talk with God all the time, and it really helped me when I was going through rough times as a kid. I don't believe in that idea of God, now, but what is to stop me from having that some kind of intimate conversation with life itself?

As we write our Morning Pages, digging ourselves out of denial, our memories, dreams, and creative plans all move to the surface. We discover anew that we are creative, spiritual beings. The impulse cooks in us all, simmering along all the time – without our knowledge, without our encouragement, even without our approval. As Julia Cameron says, "It moves beneath the surface of our lives, showing in bright flashes, like a penny, in our stream of thought, like new grass under snow...The fire of our dreams will not stay buried. The embers are always there, stirring in our

frozen souls like winter leaves. They won't go away." We doodle in a meeting and it turns into a new project. In an unsuspecting moment we sense life is a gift rather than our possession, and our spirit soars. Restive in our lives, we yearn for more, we wish, we chafe, we long. We sing in the car real loud, we slam down the phone, make lists, clear out closets. We want to *do something*, but we think it needs to be the *right something*, when we're really desiring to *do something meaningful, important, vital*; something that comes from our soul.

We are what's meaningful, important, vital. And the something we do can be something festive but small: dead plants tossed; tired socks pitched; clear a space for an altar; you splurge on a new hat; you take a *real* vacation. We are stung by loss, bitten by hope. Working with our Morning Pages, a new – perhaps gaudy? – life takes form. We're losing our mind, or we are gaining our soul. Life itself, is meant to be a creative soul date. And that, to me, is spiritual. It comes as a surprise to our ego, when it realizes it is not the real us. We discover there is a soul in us that is deeper than our personality, the roles we play, and the culture we grew up in. It's Us with a capital U. And this soul is deeply connected with Source, Spirit, The More, whatever words or metaphors we use for life, Being itself. We are a part of it, and it is inextricable from the heart of us. That's why we were created. To love *life*, to love *our* life, and to *live* it.

A dear friend came for a three-day visit. We took a hike, talking, stopping to appreciate the beauty, sharing unhurried silence. As we hit the steep section, I noticed a shift in her disposition. It was "just put one foot in front of the other." We came upon a shaded spot with rocks to sit upon, and I suggested we stop for a "breather" and split an energy bar. Her mood shifted, she began to talk about a relationship that she decided to end, and then added. "I have found a new lover." In a flash, I knew what she was going to say, and she said it: "My new lover is me." She did not mean this in an egotistical way. She meant really getting to know and love her creative soul; embrace it, take good care of it, and by doing this she finds herself treating others with more kindness and compassion, too. This is when our creative souls start to take off, take flight.

Escape Velocity

Julia Cameron tells a story about her friend, Michelle, to describe the concept of "Escape Velocity." Cameron writes:

*My friend Michelle has a theory, a theory born of long and entangled romantic experience. In a nutshell, it goes: "When you're going to leave them, **they know**."*

*This same theory applies to creative soul recovery. It occurs when you reach what Michelle calls "escape velocity." As she puts it, "There's this time for blast-off, like a NASA space launch, and you're heading for it when **wham**, you draw to you the **TEST**."*

"The TEST?"

"Yeah, the TEST. It's like when you're all set to marry the nice guy, the one who treats you right, and Mr. Poison gets wind of it and phones you up."

"Ah."

"The whole trick is to evade the TEST. We all draw to us the one test that's our total nemesis."

A lawyer by trade and a writer by avocation and temperament, Michelle is fond of conspiracy theories, which she lays out in sinister detail.

"Think of it. You're all set to go to the Coast on an important business trip, and your husband suddenly needs you, capital-N, for no real reason...You're all set to leave the bad job, and the boss from hell suddenly gives you your first raise in five years...Don't be fooled. Don't be fooled."

Listening to Michelle talk, it was clear that her years as a trial attorney stood her in good stead as a creative person. She, at least, was no longer fooled. But is it really as sinister as she implied? Do

we really draw to us a TEST? I thought about everything Michelle had told me and I concluded that the answer was yes.

I thought of all the times I'd been fooled. There was the agent who managed to undo some done deals but apologizes so prettily...There was the editor who asked for rewrite upon rewrite until gruel was all that remained, but who always said I wrote brilliantly and was her brightest star.

A little flattery can go a long way toward deterring our escape velocity. So can a little cash. More sinister than either is the impact a well-placed doubt can have, particularly a "for your own good, just wanting to make sure you've thought about this" doubt – voiced by one of your nearest and dearest.

As recovering creatives, many of us find that every time our career heats up we reach for our nearest Wet Blanket. We blurt out our enthusiasm to our most skeptical friend – in fact, we call him/her up. If we don't, he/she calls us. This is the TEST.

*Our artist is a child, an inner youngster and when he/she is scared, Mommy is what's called for. Unfortunately, many of us have Wet Blanket mommies and a whole army of Wet Blanket surrogate mommies – those friends who have our second, third and fourth thoughts for us. The trick is not to let them be that way. How? **Zip the lip. Button up. Keep a lid on it. Don't give away the gold.** Always remember: the first rule of magic is self-containment. You must hold your intention within yourself, stoking it with power. Only then will you be able to manifest what you desire.*

Let me share with you another way to think about this. It comes from the poet and writer, David Whyte. The Virtues of Hiding.

Hiding is a way of staying alive. Hiding is a way of holding ourselves until we are ready to come into the light. Even hiding the truth from ourselves can be a way to come to what we need in our own necessary time. Hiding is one of the brilliant and virtuoso practices of almost every part of the natural world: the protective quiet of an icy northern landscape, the held bud of a future summer rose, the snow bound internal pulse of the hibernating bear.

Hiding is underestimated. We are hidden by life in our mother's womb until we grow and ready ourselves for our first appearance in the lighted world; to appear too early in that world is to find ourselves with the immediate necessity for outside intensive care. Hiding done properly is the internal faithful promise for a proper future emergence, as embryos, as children or even as emerging adults in retreat from the names that have caught us and imprisoned us, often in ways where we have been too easily seen and too easily named.

We live in a time of the dissected soul, the immediate disclosure; our thoughts, imaginings and longings exposed to the light too much, too early and too often, our best qualities squeezed too soon into a world already awash with too easily articulated ideas that oppress our sense of self and our sense of others. What is real is almost always to begin with, hidden, and does not want to be understood by the part of our mind that mistakenly thinks it knows what is happening. What is precious inside us does not care to be known by the mind in ways that diminish its presence.

Hiding is an act of freedom from the misunderstanding of others, especially in the enclosing world of oppressive secret government and private entities, attempting to name us, to anticipate us, to leave us with no place to hide and grow in ways unmanaged by a creeping necessity for absolute naming, absolute tracking and absolute control. Hiding is a bid for independence, from others, from mistaken ideas we have about our selves, from an oppressive and mistaken wish to keep us completely safe, completely ministered to, and therefore completely managed.

Hiding is creative, necessary and beautifully subversive of outside interference and control. Hiding leaves life to itself, to become more of itself. Hiding is the radical independence necessary for our emergence into the light of a proper human future. (Excerpted from David Whyte: "HIDING" in CONSOLATIONS: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words.)

I think this is what Jesus was getting at when he said, “Don’t throw pearls before swine.”

An invitation. Make a list: the friends who will support you. Make another list: the friends who won’t. Name your W.B.’s for what they are – Wet Blankets. Wrap yourself in something else – dry ones. Fluffy heated towels. Do not indulge or tolerate **anyone** who throws cold water in your direction. Forget good intentions. Forget they didn’t mean it. Remember to count your blessings and your toes. Escape velocity requires the sword of steely intention and the shield of self-determination. It requires good hiding; it requires us to hold onto those pearls so they can truly shine.

Weekly Tasks:

1. Write down any resistance, angers, fears you have about going on from here. We all have them.
2. Take a look at your current areas of procrastination. What are the payoffs in your waiting? Locate the hidden fears. Do a list on paper.
3. Honestly, what would you most like to create? With an open-mind and heart, what paths would you dare to try? Willingly, what appearances are you willing to shed to pursue your dream?