

**FOR ALL WHO
HUNGER
STUDY GUIDE**



EMILY M. D. SCOTT

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PROLOGUE: COMMUNION



JOURNAL

In the prologue, the author introduces the notion of “call,” which “generally, makes us want to run like hell in the opposite direction.” At the same time, she describes a call as “something alluring and compelling and a little intoxicating that we can’t help responding to, despite our best intentions and the flutter of fear.”

How have you experienced call in your life? Is there some component of your call that you are struggling against right now?

DISCUSS

1. What do you notice about the worship service at St. Lydia’s the author describes? Do you think it would feel sacred to you? What is it about worship that connects you to the holy?
2. The chapter ends with a reflection on bread. Tell a story about a time bread, or a shared meal, has changed something, for you or others.
3. The book opens with an epigraph from Flannery O’Conner (recounting a conversation with a correspondent). Do you think of the Eucharist as a symbol? If it isn’t a symbol, what do you think is happening when we break the bread and share the cup? Is what you believe different or similar to what your denomination teaches about communion?

ACTION

Go and look at the table in your home where meals are shared. Sit down, touch it, and remember the meals that have taken place here. Those memories might be happy, painful, or both. How has Jesus been present at this table? Is it possible that this table is also a communion table? Decide on a prayer or ritual that will help you remember that wherever bread is broken, Jesus is there.

WOMB



JOURNAL

Scott opens the book with images tied to creation: the darkness of the cosmos, the void at the beginning of creation, and the womb.

Write about the feelings these images bring up for you as you read. Are there times when you rush through times of “gestation,” so that you can finish the job? What would it feel like to stay in that place of darkness, void, and unknowns

DISCUSS

1. The author remembers the experience of attending church at the cathedral where she grew up. While she experiences so much beauty in the liturgy, she also describes a sense of dis-ease, and a “distance between our rituals and that beating heart of God.” Have you ever felt that we miss God in the process of doing church? How does that happen, and why?
2. St. Lydia’s is founded as a response to the spiritual hunger the author encounters in New York City. In her case, she meets young adults who are seeking an honest and intimate expression of faith. What spiritual hungers do you think exist in your community that are not being met by the church?
3. Scott hopes that the symbols at St. Lydia’s will “speak for themselves.” What symbols are present in your worship service? Do the symbols present in your worship service speak for themselves? How might they speak more clearly, especially for those encountering Christian worship for the first time?

ACTION

Is there a call that’s been nudging you for some time? Perhaps something you’ve been afraid to pursue or wanting to ignore? Get out a piece of paper and begin to sketch what that call looks like. You might draw a picture, or write out a vision.

QUICKENING



JOURNAL

Write about a time in your life when someone saw something in you you couldn't see in yourself. What did that person do to encourage you? Are there people in your life who you hope to lift up, encourage, and help feel seen?

DISCUSS

1. In this chapter, we're introduced to Trinity Lower East Side. At this church, the first floor is dedicated to the soup kitchen, and the sanctuary is on the second floor. What does the architecture of your own building communicate about what's important to your church community?
2. We also meet Pastor Phil, who welcomes Emily and Rachel and offers them space. Did you notice that Pastor Phil doesn't charge rent, even though the congregation could likely use some extra income? How might your church offer substantial support to a new initiative in a way that's relational, not transactional?
3. What is the deep need that you bring to church? If you were to create a new church, how would you express this deep need? Are there places in your life where this need is met?

ACTION

While Trinity Lower East Side doesn't have much, they are a church of generosity, feeding 200 people a day and supporting the fledgling St. Lydia's.

How might your church be similarly generous with the resources you have? Spend some time with your church budget. What percentage goes to supporting under-resourced communities? What would it take to dedicate a significant portion of your budget to make the world more just? What feelings come up when you think about doing so? What holds you back or inspires you to give?

FEAR AND TREMBLING



JOURNAL

The author describes learning to tolerate awkwardness as her congregation gets off the ground. What negative feelings keep you from starting a new project or moving forward in your own life? What would it look like to befriend those feelings?

DISCUSS

1. In this chapter, we catch a glimpse of how scary it is—and how vulnerable it makes us feel—to do something new. If your church were to embark on a new project, what kinds of feelings might come up for you and others? How might you respond to those feelings as a community?
2. How was Ula's arrival important to the development of St. Lydia's? What did Ula teach the congregation?
3. In this chapter, Scott shares with her friend Mieke that she's afraid becoming a pastor will mean she'll never get married. What were you taught as a child about the relationship between religion and sex? Why do you think there has traditionally been a chasm between the two?

ACTION

The next time you find yourself in a difficult spot or an awkward situation, pray the words of Julian of Norwich the author prays, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." Ask yourself how God might be present in this moment.

CARDBOARD WINGS



JOURNAL

The author references the “Magnificat”—the song sung by Mary after she learns she will bear God’s child. Reflect on the excerpt from the text below. If Mary’s prophecy came to pass, what would the world look, feel, sound, and smell like?

“God has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty . . .”

DISCUSS

1. Did you ever participate in a church Christmas pageant as a child? What messages did you receive from that experience about who God was, and what happened at Christmas?
2. When the St. Lydia’s Christmas Pageant Parade reaches the public housing units in their neighborhood, the author is distinctly uncomfortable. She writes, “What can we say that the teenage girl on the sixth floor of the houses hasn’t already lived?” In his work *A Theology of Liberation*, theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P. writes of God’s “preferential option for the poor,” meaning that throughout scripture, God is located on the side of the poor and the oppressed. We might then make the argument that the poor and oppressed are those best equipped to interpret scripture. How might people of privilege position themselves when reading and interpreting the Bible, to account for this?
3. How does it impact you to imagine the holy family as a couple of teenagers who live in public housing in Brooklyn? Does the holy family need to be respectable, or even good, for their child to be the child of God? If every child born was treated as God’s incarnate, how would the world be different?

CARDBOARD WINGS (CONTINUED)



ACTION

Go online, and find artwork that depicts the holy family as Black, brown, or LGBTQ+ people. Put them up in a place where you'll see them frequently. How does their presence change your image of God and your neighbors?

THREE MIRACLES



JOURNAL

The author faces “not-enough-ness” in this chapter. She feels she never has enough time or energy to meet her congregants’ needs. Where do you experience “not enough-ness” in your own life? Are there ways the society around you has robbed you of resources that those of more privilege have access to? If you are a person of privilege, is it possible that God is providing you with everything you need?

DISCUSS

1. In this chapter, Scott introduces us to the Rude Mechanical Orchestra, a protest marching band whose members she describes as living lives similar to the early Christians. Have you ever entered a secular community and encountered people who seemed to be better Christians than most actual Christians? What were they like, and how did they live out love and generosity?
2. All three miracles in this chapter show God’s abundance, even when it seems like there won’t be enough. When has there been a time of “something from nothing” in your life? What did you learn about God during that time?
3. “We have nothing but an empty room, a lit candle, a bucket of water, and a loaf of bread, but it’s enough to claim Zachary as a child of God,” the author writes. What would your church be like if you didn’t have any of the things you’re used to? If your building, musical instruments, and altar table were suddenly gone, how would you still worship God?

ACTION

Keep a scarcity journal. Each time you have a thought about not having enough (money, material items, personal characteristics), jot it down. At the end of a month, look through the journal for common themes. Are your feelings of scarcity tied to systemic oppressions you’ve experienced? Maybe they’re based in fears, or messages you received from your family.

The following month, make an “enough” banner. Tie up a string and cut out triangles from paper or cloth. Each day, write something you’re grateful for and pin up the flag. 7

LOST THINGS



JOURNAL

When you think of something you've lost, what's the first thing that comes to mind? How does that loss inform who you've become? Where do you find relief from that loss?

DISCUSS

1. In this chapter, the author connects with a group of actors who are telling an ancient Greek myth. How does your church listen to people who tell a very different story from you — people who will never come to church or put an offering in the plate. What does Scott learn from the cast of *The Dreary Coast*?
2. What do you think an outside observer would see if they peeked into your church and “caught you in the act” of celebrating communion? What would they make of this ritual?
3. Part of this chapter is focused on memory, especially how the memory of the indigenous people who lived in the author's neighborhood have been wiped away. How are sins such as genocide and racism remembered in your church? Are there stories that are glossed over? What might it look like to remember these stories?

ACTION

Research the land where you currently live (or where your church is located). Who were the indigenous people who lived on the land you now inhabit? How did settlers come to own the territory? Is there a history of enslavement, internment, or other forms of systemic oppression that had an impact on the land where you now live?

How does knowing this history change your relationship to the place you inhabit?

DEEP WATERS



JOURNAL

This chapter tells the story of Hurricane Sandy's impact on the author's neighborhood. Thinking back on your life, was there a cataclysmic event that changed the way you saw the world?

DISCUSS

1. Have you had an experience of disaster or disorder in your life? What did that experience feel like? Was there something you hadn't seen before revealed by this experience?
2. The author experiences grief and despair as she sees the radically different ways people in different economic situations weather Hurricane Sandy in her neighborhood. What do you think keeps her from looking away, and just focusing on herself? When you encounter suffering, do you want to look away? What allows you to stay engaged?
3. The residents of the Gowanus Houses were at greater risk from the hurricane because their apartments had been built on a polluted waterway without an adequate plan for flooding. In our country, lower income people are often most vulnerable to risks created by poor stewardship of the Earth. Are there places in your neighborhood where low-income people suffer from the impact of the climate crisis? How about around our country?

ACTION

Research ways the climate crisis has had a negative impact on low-income people in your area. Give money or volunteer for an organization that is working to mitigate these risks. Choose an organization that centers the leadership of those directly impacted by environmental injustice.

GOOD FRIDAYS



JOURNAL

What lessons did you learn as a child about your own racial identity, and that of those around you? From whom did you learn these lessons? Were they spoken out loud or signaled in other ways? Do you still carry some of those lessons with you?

DISCUSS

1. In the circles you move in, whose voices are given the most value? How do those whose voices are not as valued seek to be heard? Are there ways you might amplify their voices?
2. Have you or your family members experienced harassment, discrimination, or violence based on your race? How about sexual or gender identity, physical appearance, or disability?
3. In this chapter, the author describes how St. Lydia's sought to listen to their neighbors. They engaged in one-on-ones, invited neighbors to preach at the church, and held a "season of listening" every spring. What do you know about your neighbors, and what do you need to learn? How might your congregation seek to listen to your neighbors in an intentional way?
4. If you are Black or a person of color and would like to share, what feelings do you experience when you think about the injustices of the world, some of which you bear? How do you find solace and connection as someone who experiences these oppressions? If you are white, what feelings come up when you think about the injustices others suffer that you aren't exposed to? What is your response to those feelings? How do you seek to respond to them?

GOOD FRIDAYS (CONTINUED)



ACTION

If you are not aware, research the instances of police brutality and violence toward Black people and people of color in your area. Learn the names of the victims of this abuse. Add these names to your personal prayer lists, or your prayer lists at church.

Decide on an additional action to take, individually or with your church. You might attend a bystander training, give to a Black-led organization working for police reform, go to a protest, read and research to further educate yourself, or write a letter to your representatives about your concerns.

EMPTY TOMBS



JOURNAL

“My personal tomb has the word ‘perfection’ written across the top.” The author imagines that we all have a tomb that we circle around. If this is so, what is yours? What death-dealing practice do you continue to return to? What word would be written across your tomb?

DISCUSS

1. The author describes the ultra-rich engaging in prepper culture. Jesus said, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:24). Why would wealth keep someone from being able to access God’s kingdom? What messages did you receive about money and wealth growing up?
2. This chapter includes a description of the election on Donald Trump, and the reactions of Pastor Emily’s congregants. Do you resonate with their fears, or find them unfounded? What rights were the Lydians afraid of losing?
3. The author and congregants at St. Lydia’s begin to work with a community organizing group called Faith in New York. What do you notice about the leadership of this organization, their goals, and how they set about doing their work together?

ACTION

If you are not already connected to one, research the faith-based and non-faith-based organizing networks in your area. What work have they accomplished? What are their methods and how do they structure their leadership?

Might your congregation be called to engage this long-term work of organizing? If so, what issues are most resonant for your congregation?

BROKEN BREAD



JOURNAL

Marching in the Pride parade, the author asks, “What does it mean to live fully in your body, unfurling yourself like a banner, releasing your soul to flutter toward joy?” What moments in your own life have brought you closest to this embodied freedom?

DISCUSS

1. Scott describes teetering on the edge of burnout. What are the symptoms of this burnout for her? What might have kept burnout from taking place? Have you ever experienced this kind of exhaustion? If so, what did you do to restore yourself?
2. After living through so much loneliness, an intimate encounter with a kind stranger brings life and liberation to the author. Were you taught that sex needs to take place within the confines of marriage (or a long-term relationship) to be holy? What do you think now? How do the Church’s attitudes toward sex help or hinder our relationship to God?
3. As Scott participates in the Pride Parade, she speaks of a liberation she is experiencing. She doesn’t yet identify as Queer, but a new understanding of her identity is emerging. Why is it important for us to continue to explore and understand our sense of identities? Is our sense of identity important to God?

ACTION

Research suggests that sexuality and gender exist on a spectrum, rather than a binary scale. Consider where you fall on this scale. What parts of yourself might be considered more “masculine” or “feminine” by the culture around you? How did you experience your gender as a child, and how was it received by the people around you?

DISTANT SEAS



JOURNAL

Scott describes a “scattering” that’s present in the Gospels when the disciples are sent out or left on their own. This scattering is also taking place in her life as she leaves St. Lydia’s for a time on the road. When have you felt scattered or disconnected from the story of your life? How did you find your way home?

DISCUSS

1. After building a new community, Scott feels a great pull to be on her own for a while, “to belong to no one.” What biblical and religious figures spend time alone? What is the impact of that time, and what sorts of things do they discover?
2. What roads have you followed in your life? Did you have a plan, and where did they lead you? Where do we see roads in the Bible, and what do they signify?
3. What has been the most difficult goodbye you’ve had to say? How did you approach it, and what did it teach you?

ACTION

Find some time to be by yourself. It could be an afternoon, a few days, or a week. You could also plan a silent retreat with your church. What did you notice during this quiet time that you wouldn’t otherwise? What did you discover?

FINAL QUESTIONS



1. For who do you hunger?
2. Who is hungry in your church and in your community? What are they hungry for?
3. Where is God stirring in your church and in your community?
4. What would it mean to follow the call you've heard, but not answered?
What would you have to let go of? What might you discover?

