

Curio: A Liturgy for the Lean
Week #2: November 14th-18th
Theme: The Dying



The Canon

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Welcome & Introduction

Welcome to Curio: A Liturgy For The Lean. I am grateful that you have chosen to participate in this liturgy that I have compiled. One definition of Liturgy means “work of the people”; it is my hope that through this material you would put in spiritual and mental work. Curio means “emaciated” or “weak.” The purpose of this liturgy is to explore the lessons learned from a period of time when my faith felt emaciated. It was during the Fall of 2012 and I had lost my way. At the time, the “turning”-the losing my way- felt terrifying. The foundations of my faith, my very being, were shifting, and I didn’t know what to do with that. I realize now that the turning was necessary to bring about something new. But at the time, it felt like death.

Each week during November, I will be sending out a 3-part liturgy. This is Week #2: The Dying. There are many types of death that people experience. Of course, there’s the traditional sense of loss from losing loved ones. But there’s also financial death (losing a job), identity death (losing a sense of who you are), political death (losing faith in the political system), or death of your religion. In the Fall of 2012, I had experienced a spiritual death. My life had revolved around my spiritual, evangelical, beliefs. The erosion of those beliefs had taken time, but by the Fall of 2012, they were skeletal. The loss was painful. Everything I knew was based on those beliefs. And now...they had died. Coping with the grief of losing my spirituality was hard, just as coping with the loss of losing a loved one, or political campaign, or a sense of identity is hard. Death hits all of us differently, and in different ways. Still, there are lessons to be learned from these seasons of dying.. This week, I invite you into these moments of demise, these cycles of termination. I invite you to be aware of the impermanence of all things-even death itself.

I invite you to be lean.

**Note: Each element of the following Liturgy is related in some way to the theme of “The Dying.” Some of the elements are optional. I invite you to engage and bring as much, or as little, energy to this as you are able. Remember: have grace with yourself. If you would like to discuss anything further, please feel free to contact me. Be Well!*

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1. Call To Worship

The purpose of a call to worship is to center ourselves as we prepare to learn and think about the theme of dying. It is an intentional practice to take a posture of learning, and of opening up, to the things around us-both that which we can see, and that which cannot be seen. The following three selections invite us into taking a "lean posture."

Selection #1: Job 3 (The Message)

Then Job broke the silence. He spoke up and cursed his fate:

"Obliterate the day I was born. Blank out the night I was conceived!

Let it be a black hole in space. May God above forget it ever happened. Erase it from the books!

May the day of my birth be buried in deep darkness, shrouded by the fog, swallowed by the night.

And the night of my conception - the devil take it! Rip the date off the calendar, delete it from the almanac.

Oh, turn that night into pure nothingness - no sounds of pleasure from that night, ever! May those who are good at cursing curse that day. Unleash the sea beast, Leviathan, on it.

May its morning stars turn to black cinders, waiting for a daylight that never comes, never once seeing the first light of dawn.

And why? Because it released me from my mother's womb into a life with so much trouble.

"Why didn't I die at birth, my first breath out of the womb my last?

Why were there arms to rock me, and breasts for me to drink from?

I could be resting in peace right now, asleep forever, feeling no pain,

In the company of kings and statesmen in their royal ruins,

Or with princes resplendent in their gold and silver tombs.

Why wasn't I stillborn and buried with all the babies who never saw light,

Where the wicked no longer trouble anyone and bone-weary people get a long-deserved rest?

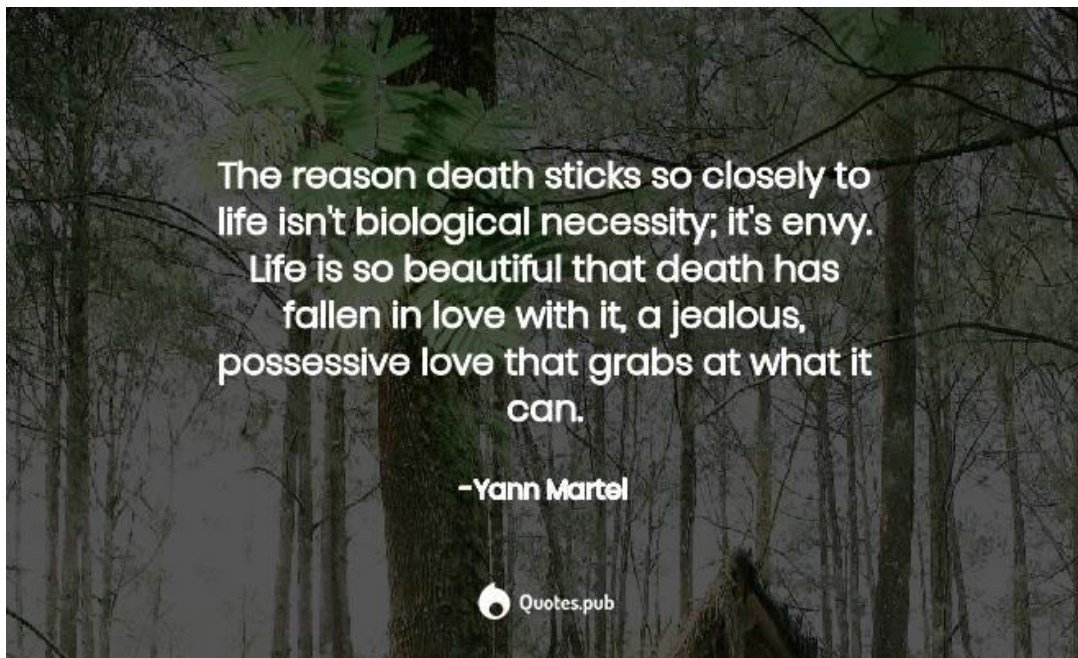
Prisoners sleep undisturbed, never again to wake up to the bark of the guards.

The small and the great are equals in that place, and slaves are free from their masters.

"Why does God bother giving light to the miserable, why bother keeping bitter people alive,

Those who want in the worst way to die, and can't, who can't imagine anything better than death,
Who count the day of their death and burial the happiest day of their life?
What's the point of life when it doesn't make sense, when God blocks all the roads to meaning?
"Instead of bread I get groans for my supper, then leave the table and vomit my anguish.
The worst of my fears has come true, what I've dreaded most has happened.
My repose is shattered, my peace destroyed. No rest for me, ever - death has invaded life."

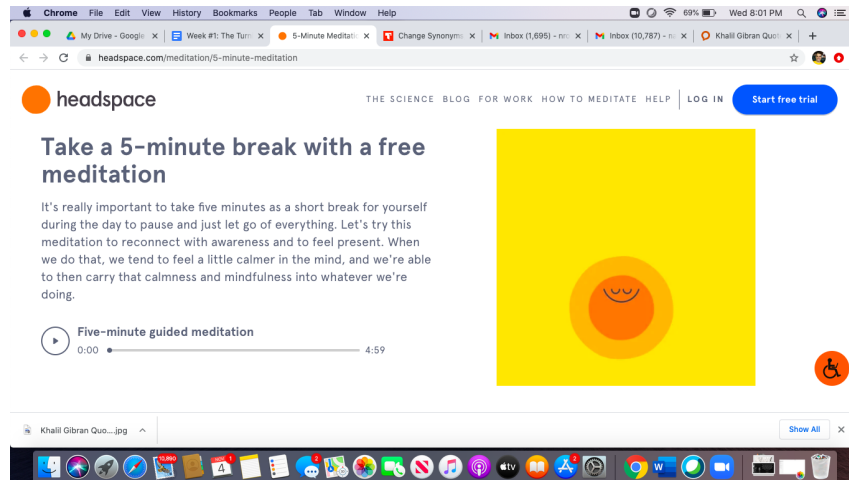
Selection #2: Yann Martel, From "The Life of Pi"



Selection #3: 5 Minute Guided Meditation (Optional)

Note: This is a link to a guided meditation on Headspace. Click on the link and it will take you to the Headspace meditation. Scroll down until you see the Meditation. Refer to the picture below.

Click Here: [Guided Meditation](#)



2. Hymn (Song)

A hymn is an ancient song that unites a community in worship of God. While various mediums are used to tell the Story, singing offers an emotional response to that which is being experienced. Songs are an artform which help to open the listener up to the spiritual. Below is a song I wrote when I was lean in the Autumn of 2012.

Note: Click the link below to hear my song *Falling Leaves (Part Two)* on Soundcloud. Once on Soundcloud, click the play button. See picture below.

Click Here: [Falling Leaves \(Part Two\)](#)

Click to open the link.
Once open, click the
orange button to play the
song.



3. *Litany*

A litany is a call-and-response in which a leader makes a proclamation, and the community, in unison, responds in a singular voice. If you are with others, feel free to say this litany together. If you are by yourself, feel free to engage however you wish. One option might be to read the "leader" parts silently, then speak the "People" parts aloud.

Litany (Dana Gioia)

L (Leader): This is a litany of lost things,
a canon of possessions dispossessed,
a photograph, an old address, a key.
It is a list of words to memorize
or to forget—of *amo, amas, amat*,
the conjugations of a dead tongue
in which the final sentence has been spoken.

P(People): Ashes To Ashes, and Dust To Dust

L: This is a prayer to unbelief,
to candles guttering and darkness undivided,
to incense drifting into emptiness.
It is the smile of a stone Madonna
and the silent fury of the consecrated wine,
a benediction on the death of a young god,
brave and beautiful, rotting on a tree.

P: Ashes To Ashes, and Dust To Dust

L: This is a litany to earth and ashes,
to the dust of roads and vacant rooms,
to the fine silt circling in a shaft of sun,
settling indifferently on books and beds.
This is a prayer to praise what we become,
"Dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return."
Savor its taste—the bitterness of earth and ashes.

P: Ashes to Ashes, and Dust To Dust

L: This is a prayer, inchoate and unfinished,
for you, my love, my loss, my lesion,
a rosary of words to count out time's
illusions, all the minutes, hours, days
the calendar compounds as if the past
existed somewhere—like an inheritance
still waiting to be claimed.

P: Ashes To Ashes, and Dust To Dust

4. Reading

A reading is a selection or selections of text that allow the reader to engage more fully in the theme presented. In this case, the theme is that of "dying", of things not being as they appear, of losing that which one holds most dear, of starving to death, of being lean. See below for information about Elizabeth Jeffries, who wrote this piece.

**Note: This selection is from Richard Rohr, entitled "The Two Kinds of Darkness."*

Two Kinds of Darkness

"Darkness is a good and necessary teacher. It is not to be avoided, denied, run from, or explained away. First, like Ezekiel the prophet, we must eat the scroll that is "lamentation, wailing, and moaning" in our belly, and only eventually becomes sweet as honey (see Ezekiel 2:9-10; 3:1-3).

By the time most people reach middle age, they've had days where life has lost its meaning, they no longer connect with an inner sense of motivation or joy. Sometimes this manifests as clinical depression and requires a therapist's skilled care and medication. But even if we don't experience depression, most of us go through a period of darkness, doubt, and malaise at some point in our lives.

There's a darkness that we are led into by our own stupidity, sin (the illusion of separation), and selfishness (living out of the false self). We have to work our way out of this kind of darkness by brutal honesty, confession, surrender, forgiveness, apology, and restitution. It may feel simultaneously like dying and being liberated. We resist going through the darkness and facing our shadow, so we usually need help, as the Twelve Steps wisely identify. An accountability partner, spiritual director, or counselor can help us navigate this difficult, ego-humiliating process.

There's another darkness that we're led into by God, grace, and the nature of life itself. In many ways, the loss of meaning, motivation, purpose, and direction might feel even greater here. The saints and mystics called it "the dark night of the soul." But even while we feel alone and that God has abandoned us, we sense that we have been led here intentionally. We know we are in "liminal space," betwixt and between, on the threshold—and we have to stay here until we have learned something essential. It is still no fun and filled with doubt and "demons" of every sort. But it is the darkness of being held closely by God without our awareness. This is where transformation happens.

The darkness that we get ourselves into by our own "sinful" choices can also become the darkness of God. Regardless of the cause, the dark night is an opportunity to look for and find God—in different forms and ways than we've become accustomed. Even if we don't feel like praying, staying committed to contemplative practice is particularly important.

Sometimes it may be tempting to remain in the darkness—it becomes familiar and we rebel against the light; the paralysis and self-pity has a strange attraction. We may feel an inner restlessness, as if we're aimlessly pacing back and forth on the same path. Allowing periods of this seemingly fruitless darkness may be part of deconstructing our false self so that we can rebuild on the foundation of our True Self. We must lose our old image of God and our old ways of experiencing God's presence to discover the absolute reality beneath all of our egoic fantasies and fears."

-Richard Rohr, "The Two Kinds of Darkness"

5. The Message

The Message, often called a Sermon, is the pinnacle of what a teacher or preacher is attempting to convey. The Message often utilizes a variety of elements to deliver a point. This "message" is an excerpt from a journal entry written during my time living in Central America. It describes the Spiritual Death that I experienced in the summer of 2008.

“Granary Burial Ground in Boston, MA took me by surprise when I first saw it. It’s tucked tightly into a city block. Row after row of neatly organized gravestones stand inside, squeezed as close to one another as possible. Tiny as it is, as soon as I glanced inside, I knew it was not ordinary. Some of the gravestones in those rows were completely plain, bearing no inscriptions, and some were ornately engraved with detailed information about the deceased person’s life. Dispersed throughout the burial ground, towering over these tightly organized lines of stone slabs, were monstrous monuments, rising out of the earth. I could tell these stones were making bold declarations of some kind. The stones bore long, elaborate and poetic descriptions, describing the influential, significant and history-making activities of the person whose remains were buried there. The importance of these dramatically memorialized individuals was certainly obvious; three of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were buried there, and numerous other influential figures of colonial America were buried there as well.

These towering, imposing monuments were not what caught my attention though. Surrounding them, lining the entire cemetery, were hundreds of other graves. These small gravestones formed tidy rows, tightly packed together. I recognized none of the names I read on those gravestones.

There were more graves than these too, and they were marked with nothing but a flat stone, an irregularly shaped rock, or a chipped, cracked piece of brick. Nothing about these

gravestones, except the fact that they were located in a burial ground, indicated that they marked a grave. If there had once been any identifying information engraved on them, that information had long since eroded away. These blank, unremarkable bricks marked graves of real people who lived real lives. Each of them once had an earthly experience of their own. They experienced their own childhood, adolescence and adulthood, with all the pain, joy and struggle of their particular experience of each phase. They built relationships, they worked hard, they created homes, they made a way for their families to survive. They beat the odds in unfriendly circumstances, survived enemy attacks, diseases, hunger and long winters. And now, just 300 years later, not even their names, the most basic information about their identities, were remembered.

We like to think we're leaving a legacy, and we're quick to recognize those figures in history who did leave an observable legacy. It only takes a few minutes strolling through a cemetery, however, to realize how flimsy these legacies are. While the John Hancocks and Samuel Adamases of the world – the select few who appear in our history texts – are remembered as heroes, even their legacies are temporary, local and fleeting. And the masses, the overwhelming majority of us never receive even this temporary memorialization, but are forgotten within a generation of our deaths.

Standing in Granary Burial Ground, it seemed more clear than ever before that my body, composed of the same chemicals that compose dirt, will eventually decompose, becoming dirt once again. I started to see my life as a circuitous and convoluted pathway for dirt in one location to become dirt located somewhere else. And it's not just us as individuals who will eventually die, it's the collective us. In 100 years, planet Earth will be populated completely by people who are not alive now. Humanity undergoes a constant turnover. We each struggle, work, love, fight

and pray, and yet, it's hard to think of anything that endures beyond our lifetimes. Once I left behind my fundamentalism and biblical literalism, I no longer saw the universe simply as degenerating; I now saw the universe as meaningless and also degenerating.”

-Elizabeth Jeffries, from “Through The Kaleidoscope”

**Note: This selection is from Elizabeth Jeffries' Book 'Through the Kaleidoscope.' Here's a little about Elizabeth:*

Elizabeth Jeffries is a science writer and creative writer based in Pittsburgh, PA. Her debut nonfiction book “Through the Kaleidoscope: How Exploring Cell Biology Transforms My Relationship with God” tells the story of Elizabeth learning to navigate the world in the absence of theological certainty. Learn more about Elizabeth’s work and purchase her book at elizabethjeffrieswrites.com.

6. *The Reader's Response (Optional)*

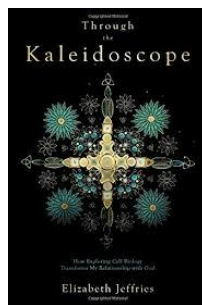
The Reader's Response is a chance for the reader to respond to the Message. This is optional. If you feel inclined, use one of the options below to respond to the message, or find your own way to respond.

Option #1: Journal

*If you are looking for more structure, write about times in your life when you have felt lean. Consider:

- What “deaths” have you experienced? Remember: there are many types of death. When have you felt grief at losing something important?
- Are there lessons that could have been learned from those seasons of death? If so, what might they be?
- Are there any feelings or emotions you are still holding onto from those seasons of death? Any unresolved anger, guilt, or sadness? Write about them.

Option #2: Read this book: “Through the Kaleidoscope” (by Elizabeth Jeffries, go to [This Link](#))



Option #3: Lectio Divina with Job 7:1-10

Below is a link for how to engage with the Ancient Practice of Lectio Divina:

[Click Here For A Lectio Divina Tutorial](#)

7. *The Lord's Prayer*

The Lord's Prayer is likely the most well-known portion of Scripture in the world. Here, I offer an alternative version of this well-known text that is appropriate for the given theme.

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives forever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

~ Algernon Charles Swinburne

8. Exhortation:

The Exhortation is a final charge, a last word of motivation to go into the world as you are, and to be your true self. Until next week, consider this charge as a parting word of encouragement.

