

# Wayfinding Through Prayer and Reflection

## August 25, 2022

### Formational Exercise: Julian of Norwich's Body Prayer

Julian of Norwich was a 14<sup>th</sup> Century mystic, anchoress, and spiritual advisor and companion. After experiencing severe bodily pain, she began to receive mystical visions, which she recorded in what became known as *Revelations of Divine Love*. As an anchoress, Julian lived in a sealed room attached to St. Julian's Church in the city of Norwich, England, where she devoted herself entirely to prayer and union with God.

In her lifetime, she experienced the first and second wave of Black Death in England, leaving thousands dead from the disease. This was then followed up by a season of political unrest known as the Peasants Revolt in 1381. The backdrop to her life, seems eerily similar to the time in which we find ourselves today.

The room attached to St. Julian's Church had a window to the outside world which was located in the center of Norwich. Julian would often speak with local residents and travelers, functioning in many ways as a spiritual director for those seeking closer union with God.

She is most known for her visions, her description of God as mother, a vision of a hazelnut in her hand, signifying God being in all things, and perhaps most famously, for her assertion that "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."—a message of confidence in God's absolute goodness. Beyond her visions, a body prayer is attributed to her, using four movements around four words. This prayer is a means to connect one to their body as they connect with the Divine.

Much of seminary work lends itself to the work of the intellect. Yet, your body is on this journey with you. As much as the seminary journey is a spiritual journey, you are physically taking this journey as well. You loaded your body into some mode of transportation to physically get here to orientation. Your mind just couldn't show up. Your soul couldn't just show up. Your body had to come along too.

I follow a couple on TikTok that spend four to five months each year hiking some of the most beautiful, and ruthless terrains. They are currently journeying from Mexico to Canada on the Continental Divide Trail, some 3028 miles on foot. I am amazed at the level of preparation involved. They've mapped out the course thoroughly, had provisions delivered at posts along the way like food, different clothes and shoes for varying climates and terrains etc. While the mental

planning and preparation is astounding, I am equally amazed at the role of the body in this endeavor. There would be no hike without the body. I'm amazed at the level of care they provide their feet, skin (especially parts that tend to rub together), eyes, mouth and teeth, hands, and even have an extensive journal of their numerous bio-breaks along the trail. What may start out as a little blister or cut, can quickly turn into a major issue that can derail their entire journey. I never realized how deadly wet socks can be until digitally following their journey. While they are attentive to the map, the landscape, the terrain, and their gear, they are perhaps even more attentive to their bodies along the journey.

While the seminary journey will stretch, shape, and mold your mind and spirit, it will also impact your body. Your fingers will type pages, and pages, and pages. Your eyes will scan word after word after word. Your brain will decipher, codify, and hopefully store and retain a lot of information. You will have long nights of reading and writing, all while trying to maintain relationships, work, and religious obligations. Without proper sleep, nutrition, and exercise, without a proper relationship to your own body, it will be easy to lose it along this journey. At the end, you will find yourself physically changed, and if not attended to, your changed body will not be for the better.

So much of faith has been relegated to the mind and heart. Yet, one of the most profound mysteries of our faith, the incarnation of God in Jesus, is a physical, body-centered, incarnation—*the Word put on flesh and dwelt among us*. Spirituality is equally ethereal as it is physical. You can't have one without the other.

Julian of Norwich's body prayer, while only one form among many other body prayers, seeks to help anchor our experience of God within the body, connecting soul and body together. Using four words—Await, Allow, Accept, and Attend—this simple prayer connects words, postures, and intentions with our body as we move through the physical motions. Each word is associated with a body posture. As we move in between the words, you'll be invited to move slowly between the motions.

## Participating in the Body Prayer

I will give you instruction and model each motion. During each motion, I will ask some reflective questions for you to consider that connects with your seminary journey up to this moment, as well as what you hope and anticipate your journey might be in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

**Be attentive to the following:**

During each word movement what thoughts, words, images, or themes may come up with in you.

Do you have any specific sensations in your body? Where is that sensation? Be curious about that sensation and make a mental note of it. Example: Do you feel your heart beating stronger during a certain motion? Does your breathing increase or decrease? Do you feel anything in your belly or another area of our body?

Let's begin...

You may choose to stand or sit comfortably. Anchor yourself in this moment. Slow your breathing and seek to clear your mind. Feel the ground underneath you. Be mindful of other people's bodies around you. You are not alone in this space.

## **AWAIT**

Take a deep breath in.

Hear this movement's word — **AWAIT**.

Slowly raise your hands to your waist. Face your palms upward to the sky, cupped and ready to receive.

Await God's presence, not as you expect, hope, or imagine, but as it comes to you in this moment.

As you await God's presence, be mindful of the journey you've been on. Where have you seen God's presence with you so far? Have you experienced God's presence these last two days? Where?

Continue to AWAIT God's presence with you now. What are you experiencing as you wait?

## **ALLOW**

Take a big breath in.

Hear this movement's word—**ALLOW**

Slowly reach your arms up, hands open, above the shoulders if you can, in an “I surrender” posture.

Allow a sense of God’s presence to come and be what it is. Allow God to show up to you as God desires.

As you make this journey in seminary, where do you need to allow God’s presence to come in more fully? What have you already given up? What might you need to give up more of as you continue this journey?

Allow yourself to feel whatever it is you’re feeling.

## ACCEPT

Take a big breath in.

Hear this movement’s word—**ACCEPT**

Slowly move your hands and arms down. Place your hands over your heart, cupped toward your body.

Feel your heart beating. Feel the breath in your lungs, slowly coming in and out.

Accept as a gift whatever grace comes to you in this moment.

What has already been a gift to you on this journey? Who has been a gift to you?

Accept that you are not in charge. Feel the freedom that comes when we let go of control. What do you find challenging to accept? Be mindful of what you feel when you think about or actually let go of control. Do you feel fear? Joy? Peace?

Accept the infinity of God’s presence with you throughout your discerning process to come to seminary. Accept the infinity of God’s presence with you as you begin the next chapter of this journey.

## ATTEND

Take a big breath in.

Hear this movement’s word—**ATTEND.**

Slowly move your hands outward, palms skyward again, like you are about to catch something large.

Attend to what you are being called to do during your seminary journey. What call has God placed on your life? Is it clear? Is it unfolding? Is it still a mystery? Does this call feel like a heavy load? A burden? A blessing?

How is God attending to you?

Feel the openness to the journey as your arms are stretched outward.

What lies ahead of you?

Now, slowly move your arms to your side. Be mindful again of the ground beneath you, the bodies around you. In your own way, give thanks to God for this moment. What has come up and what has still remained hidden within you is all a gift. What has been said and what has been unsaid is all a gift.

Rest for a moment in the stillness of God's presence.

AMEN.

## **QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION & TABLE CONVERSATION**

Take some time to journal your response/reaction to this body prayer. Eventually, you'll come back and have a table conversation about your experience.

What was the experience like for you? Awkward? Freeing?

Did you feel anything in your body? Be curious about why that may or may not be.

Did you connect with one motion or word more than another? If so, why do you think that is?

Did an image, phrase, theme emerge for you?

What might God be saying to your Spirit right now?

During Table Conversation, was there a common response/theme? What might God be saying to your whole table? Your whole seminary class?