



# RE:MEMBER | RE:SET | RE:PLY

A SPIRITUAL ROADMAP TO RESILIENCE

## GOING BEYOND THE SERMON

**Dr. John Stephens**

Based around Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *An Altar in the World*, this sermon series will help attune us to the presence of God in everyday life. In our ordinary activities, can we trust that there is no way to see God apart from living real life in the real world? What is saving your life right now in the face of a pandemic, political division, cultural upheaval, and racial struggles? In a world where faith is often defined as a way of thinking, the Christian life calls us to daily living and daily practices that remind us that faith is a way of life.

**September 12**

**"The Practice of Getting Lost: Wilderness"**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

**September 19**

**"The Practice of Encountering Others: Community"**

**Matthew 25:34-37**

**September 26**

**"The Practice of Living with Purpose: Vocation"**

**Jeremiah 29:4-7**

**BIBLE S.W.A.P.**

**S—Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,’  
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

**Notes:**

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**W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?**

Like other wilderness testing stories in Scripture, Jesus’s 40 days being tempted by Satan in the desert call his identity into question. Recall Israel in the wilderness for 40 years to find their identity as God’s chosen people; Moses waiting and fasting on Mount Sinai 40 days for God to give the 10 Commandments (Exodus 34:28); and Elijah’s journey to that same mountain to hear God’s voice in a barely audible whisper. (1 Kings 19:8).

In *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor suggests that wilderness treks for a spiritual purpose are built into the DNA of God followers. “By saying yes instead – by consenting to get lost – (Abraham and Sarah) selected a family gene that would become dominant in years to come . . . follow the story with an eye for getting lost and you see how the theme sustains the plot. The prophet Elijah gets lost in the desert while fleeing the fury of a queen named Jezebel, which is how he comes to hear the voice of God in the sound of sheer silence. The people spend decades in exile in Babylon – a cultural wilderness they might never have survived without their practice in the literal wilderness of Sinai. Much later, Jesus of Nazareth consents to becoming lost, to spending forty days in the Judean desert being tested by everything from wild animals to a scripture-quoting Satan.” (pp. 74-75)

Notice the title Satan uses to tempt Jesus. “If you are the Son of God” he repeats in a mocking tone. “Seventeen times in Matthew, Jesus is identified as the “Son of God” or “God’s Son,” writes Adam Hamilton in *Incarnation*. “Twice in the Gospel, God speaks from heaven (at Jesus’s baptism and on the mount of Transfiguration) saying, “This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” In the temptations in the wilderness, the devil tempts Jesus to question his identity as the Son of God, or to prove it. When Jesus encounters the demons, they can’t help but acknowledge that he is God’s son. Jesus regularly refers to God as his Father and doesn’t deny any claims when others call him the Son of God. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus is shown to do the things we would expect God to do. He heals the sick, opens the eyes of the blind, forgives sinners, miraculously feeds the multitudes, and even raises the dead. He controls nature, walks on water, casts out demons, and conquers death.” (pp. 101-102)

To soak in the powerful of the name of Jesus, go to Matthew 3:13-17, 16:13-17, 17:1-6, 27:50-54; 28:18-20

**A-Apply**

Taylor writes, “Leaving the known path turns out to be such a boon to my senses – such a remedy for my deadening habit of taking the safest, shortest route to wherever I am going . . .” She adds that GPS has eliminated the prospect of getting lost for most folks. So to practice getting lost as a spiritual discipline, we have to be more deliberate in our attempt to put ourselves in a safe, yet vulnerable position.

“If you do not start choosing to get lost in some fairly low-risk ways, then how will you ever manage when one of life’s big winds knocks you clean off your course? Popular religion focuses so hard on spiritual success that most of us do not know the first thing about the spiritual fruits of failure. When we fall ill, lose our jobs, wreck our marriages, or alienate our children, most of us are left alone to pick up the pieces. Even those of us who are ministered to by brave friends can find it hard to shake the shame of getting lost in our lives. And yet, if someone asked us to pinpoint the times in our lives that changed us for the better, a lot of those times would be wilderness times.” (p. 72, 78)

What is a way you could disrupt your routine this week with a spiritual purpose in mind?

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How has a wilderness experience knocked you down?

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In what ways did you experience God’s presence during that time?

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How are you stronger today as a result?

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**P- Prayer**

Write a prayer thanking God for ministering to you in a time of need.

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**BIBLE S.W.A.P.**

**S—Scripture: Matthew 25:34-37**

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?’”

**Notes:**

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**W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?**

The Gospel of Matthew is written in a way that alternates Jesus’s teachings on the kingdom (chapters 5 – 7) with Jesus’s actions in the kingdom (chapters 8-9). Here’s a summary: “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues, and *proclaiming* the good news of the kingdom, and *curing* every disease and every sickness.” (9:35) Today’s text from the end of the gospel, written about the end of the age, echoes Jesus’s earlier teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, when he says, “Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father . . . who hears these words of mine and acts on them . . . will be like a wise man who built his house on rock . . . And everyone who . . . does not act on them will be like a foolish man.” (7:21, 24, 26)

So we should not be surprised to hear Jesus warn us that all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats *according to their actions* toward the hungry, thirsty, alienated, sick, and imprisoned persons in their community. “This orthopraxis of the disciple in the kingdom has to do fundamentally with the neighbor, and specifically with the neighbor in need (25:31-45). Students of Matthew have found that structurally, thematically, and programmatically the last commission to the nations in 28:16-20 cannot be separated from the last judgment to the nations in 25:31-46.” (From *The Great Commission, Biblical Models for Evangelism* by Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson, pp. 22-23)

Taylor puts the concept like this: “In this and countless other passages, Jesus taught the practice of encounter. He taught it not only by what he said but also by what he did. He did not leave any of his clothes in a chest to rot. Watch how this rabbi practices what he preaches and you will note that his teaching is not limited to people who look, act, or think like him. He does the same eye-to-eye thing with Roman centurions, Samaritan lepers, Syro-Phoenician women, and hostile Judeans that he does with his own Galilean disciples.” (p. 96, *An Altar in the World*)

**A- Apply**

In recent days, John Stephens has reminded the Chapelwood congregation that our two highest values as a church are spiritual formation and community. This week’s spiritual practice of community is one we take seriously and are called to demonstrate in our personal lives and as a church that seeks to be light in the world. It’s easy to think of church

community as “my church friends” or “my Sunday school class” or “my small group” and check the box of discipleship accomplished when we participate in such groups. A close reading of the Scripture says yes . . . and . . . more is needed.

We think of hospitality as a key practice for nurturing community, and it is. “In biblical tradition, the practice of encounter shows up most often as the practice of hospitality, or *philoxenia*. Take the word apart and you get *philo*, from one of the four Greek words for love, and *xenia*, for stranger. Love of stranger, in other words, which is about as counterintuitive as you can get,” writes Taylor. (p. 96, *ibid.*) “For most of us, *xenophobia* – fear of stranger – comes much more naturally, but in that case scripture is unnatural.” Taylor quotes Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of Great Britain, “The Hebrew Bible in one verse commands, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ but in no fewer than 36 places commands us to ‘love the stranger.’

Do you practice community with a small group of Christian friends, in addition to participating in worship regularly? If so, name a recent experience of community that bolstered your faith.

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If not, what barriers prevent you from participating in such a group? How can you face those barriers and walk through them?

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Do you seek out the stranger in your midst in any way? Some common ways are to serve in the community, go on mission, invite your neighbors into your home or to a local restaurant, interact with kindness toward the persons who serve you in stores, offices, and restaurants. If this is a growing edge for you, what could you do this week to practice community toward a stranger?

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**P-Pray**

Lord, give me eyes to see the “least of these” all around me and give me a heart of compassion that compels me to offer hospitality to those closest to me and to the strangers as well. Help me see your face in the faces of others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**BIBLE S.W.A.P.**

**S—Scripture: Jeremiah 29:4-7**

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

**Notes:**

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**W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?**

This passage is part of a letter sent by the prophet Jeremiah, who lived in Jerusalem, to the exiles living in Babylon. He encouraged them to prepare for a long stay in captivity. We know that stay lasted 70 years. The idea that the captive Israelites would remain away from their homeland, their customs, and their Temple was not well received, and Jeremiah’s message was rebuked. And yet, Jeremiah persisted, trying to offer hope. One of the most quoted verses in all of Scripture appears in this chapter, just a few verses later: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” (29:11) How often have you quoted this verse without an awareness of the context?

The decades-long exile was the outcome of disastrous political events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah believed that the population was displaced as a direct result of divine anger at Israel’s continued apostasy. And yet, he urges the Hebrews now living in Babylon to “play the part of good citizens of their new country, for in its welfare lies their own. But they are not to cease to be Yahweh’s people, even in a strange land. This Jeremiah can say because his religion is free of all limitation, either geographical or cultic,” according to “The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary on the Bible,” p. 391. (Abingdon Press, 1971)

When Jeremiah instructs the people to seek the welfare of the city, the Hebrew word there is “shalom.” Jews are usually told to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, but in this case, they are to pray for the peace of Babylon. In our study of the passage, with a view to our own vocation, it is helpful to know that Jeremiah is a most likely a descendent of the priestly line of Abiathar, which lost its Temple privileges when King Solomon favored the priestly line of Zadok. His forefathers languished out in the rural areas. It is likely that Jeremiah was steeped in the tribal traditions and values that opposed the “Jerusalemite” policies of Solomon and other kings down to Josiah, who reigned with great success and religious reform in Jeremiah’s day. It would not be unusual for someone with his background to see the possibilities of true devotion to Yahweh from wherever a person and their family was located and whatever culture prevailed.

**A-Apply**

As we move from this passage to Barbara Brown Taylor’s “An Altar in the World” Chapter 7 on vocation, think about the role that expectations play in your own work life. The Israelites exiled in Babylon never expected to raise their families, work, and practice their faith in a different country and culture. They could have gotten stuck thinking they would just endure until it was “over.” Taylor writes, “One common problem for people who believe that God has one particular job in mind for them is that it is almost never the job they are presently doing. This means that those who are busiest trying to figure out God’s purpose for their lives are often the least purposeful about the work they are already doing. They can look right through the people they work with, since those people are not players in the divine plan. They

find ways to do their work without investing very much in it, since that work is not part of the divine plan. The mission to read God’s mind becomes a strategy for keeping their minds off their present unhappiness, until they become like ghosts going through the motions of the people they once were but no longer wish to be.” (P. 119)

If this describes your current situation, break down the thoughts and make some lists:

Who are the people I work with? What do I know about them? How can I be present to them?

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What is my work? What are my responsibilities? How can I invest more deeply in the work that I do?

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Who benefits from my work? Taylor says “any worker with a good imagination should be able to come up with hundreds of people whom his or her work affects.” Make a list and pray for those people.

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**P-Pray**

“The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” – Irenaeus of Lyons

Lord, I ask for the grace to be fully alive in the work of my hands, the work of my mind, and the work of my heart. Give me a sense of purpose, so that my work may bless the world. In Jesus’s name I pray. Amen

*Going Beyond the Sermon is written by Teresa Rossy, Chapelwood’s Director of Adult Discipleship Ministries. Source material is quoted throughout. The sermons are streamed online and worship is in person in the Sanctuary of our Greenbay campus.*

*Go to [www.chapelwood.org](http://www.chapelwood.org) for details. To get Going Beyond the Sermon in your inbox, e-mail Laura Frost, [lfrost@chapelwood.org](mailto:lfrost@chapelwood.org).*

## Fall Weekday Studies

### Monday

Monday Morning in the Word: Book of Romans with Rev. Tammy Heinrich

10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m., LC211-212 and Zoom (begins Sept. 13)

Women's Lunch study: The Cry of the Soul with Women's Ministry Director Nicole Nehring

12:15p.m.-1:30 p.m., LC201 (begins Sept. 13)

### Tuesday

Men's Spiritual Bootcamp with Rev. Josef Klam

6:00 a.m. —7:30 a.m., Fellowship Hall, breakfast \$10 (begins Sept. 7)

Men's Prayer Breakfast and Golf, with Dr. Wick Stuckey

7:00 a.m.-8:00 a.m., Fellowship Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays

### Wednesday

Old Testament Bible study of books of Joshua—Daniel with Rev. Andy Noel and Al Hoppe

6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m., East Rooms and Zoom (begins Sept. 8)

Women's Evening study: Cry of the Soul with Women's Ministry Director Nicole Nehring

6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m., LC201 (begins Sept. 15)

Men's Wednesday Night study with Men's Ministry Director Chris Ferguson

7:30 p.m.- 8:10 p.m., Fireside Room and Zoom (begins Oct. 6)

### Thursday

Men's Breakfast Study with Rev. Andy Noel

7:00 a.m.—8:15 a.m., Fellowship Hall and Zoom, ongoing

Joy of the Lord Women's Bible Study: Books of John with Amy Eggert and Small Group Leaders

9:30 a.m.—11:30 a.m., various rooms (begins Sept. 9)

Pastors Bible Study with Rev. Josef Klam

10:00 a.m.- 11:30 a.m., Fireside Room and Zoom (begins Sept. 9)

*An Altar in the World* Book Study with Rev. Rachel Sciretti

10:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m. **Zoom only** (begins Sept. 23)

Second Touch Spiritual Formation Group

10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m., W201 and Zoom (begins Sept. 9)

### Friday

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Bible with Dr. Matt Russell

12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m., **Zoom only** (begins Sept. 3)

