

2026



TURNING TOWARD LIFE IN A WOUNDED WORLD

A LENTEN STUDY

REV VERNON FOSTER

TABLE OF CONTENT

TURNING TOWARD LIFE IN A WOUNDED WORLD	2
USING THE CONVERSATION PARTNER TALKS	3
Watching or Listening	3
HOW TO ACCESS THE CONVERSATION PARTNER TALKS	4
LENT 1 – THE STORIES THAT TEMPT US	5
LENT 2 – STEPPING OUT OF THE DARK	7
LENT 3 – TRUTH THAT MAKES ROOM FOR BELONGING	9
LENT 4 – LEARNING TO SEE AGAIN	11
LENT 5 – HUNGERING FOR A LIFE THAT MATTERS	13

TURNING TOWARD LIFE IN A WOUNDED WORLD

Lent is often described as a season of reflection, repentance, and preparation. But at its heart, Lent is an invitation — an invitation to turn toward life.

This year's Lent study, **Turning Toward Life in a Wounded World**, is shaped around that simple movement. Week by week, through the Gospel readings appointed for Lent, we listen to stories of people encountering Jesus in moments of temptation, uncertainty, truth-telling, healing, and deep longing. These are not tidy stories. They are human, searching, and sometimes uncomfortable. Yet in each one, Jesus meets people not with condemnation, but with an invitation into deeper life.

The theme of this study is not about having the right answers, fixing ourselves, or striving for spiritual perfection. Instead, it is about learning to pay attention — to our hunger, our fears, our questions, and our hope — and noticing how God meets us there. Lent becomes a season not of turning inward for its own sake, but of turning toward God, toward one another, and toward a life shaped by truth, compassion, and meaning.

This study is designed to be **accessible, flexible, and hospitable**. You are invited to take part in whatever way fits your life best:

- Join a **weekly in-person gathering on Wednesdays at the church**
- Take part in the **Tuesday evening Zoom group at 6:00 pm**
- Work through the material **on your own at home**, at your own pace
- Or gather **with a few friends** and create a small study group of your own

Each session includes Scripture, reflection, a short conversation partner, and questions for prayerful discussion. You do not need any special background or preparation — only a willingness to listen and to wonder.

Wherever and however you participate, my hope is that this Lent study will offer space to pause, to breathe, and to notice what truly gives life. May this season help us turn, again and again, toward the life God is offering — even, and especially, in a wounded world.

Reverend Vernon Foster

St Paul Anglican Church – Nanaimo

USING THE CONVERSATION PARTNER TALKS

Each week of this Lent study includes a short **Conversation Partner** — usually a TED Talk — offered as a companion to the Scripture reading. These talks are not essential to the study. Rather, they are included because they can help open up the themes of the Gospel, offer another angle of insight, and spark thoughtful conversation, especially when working in a small group.

Watching or Listening

The Conversation Partner talks are videos, but it is not necessary to watch them in order to benefit from them. Many people find that simply **listening** works just as well. You are welcome to view or listen to as much or as little of each talk as feels helpful.

Whether you engage the Conversation Partner on your own or with others, think of it as an invitation rather than a requirement — a tool to help you enter more deeply into the Scripture and to support conversation, reflection, and prayer.

HOW TO ACCESS THE CONVERSATION PARTNER TALKS

There are two simple ways to access the Conversation Partner talks, depending on how you are using the study materials.

If you are using an electronic (digital) copy of the study:

The web links are provided directly in the document. You can click on the link and it will open the talk in your web browser.

If you are using a printed copy of the study:

A **QR code** is included for each Conversation Partner. Scanning the QR code with a mobile device will take you directly to the talk.

How to Use a QR Code (Step by Step)

1. Open the **camera app** on your smartphone or tablet. Most newer devices are able to scan QR codes using the camera alone.
2. Point the camera steadily at the QR code, making sure it is clearly visible on the screen.
3. After a moment, a **link or notification** should appear on your screen. Tap on it to open the talk.
4. If nothing happens, try holding the camera a little farther away, improving the lighting, or keeping the device still for a few seconds.

On some devices, you may need to use a **QR code scanner app** instead of the camera. These apps are widely available and free to download from your device's app store. If you are unsure, a quick search for "QR code scanner" on your device will usually help.

LENT 1 – THE STORIES THAT TEMPT US

Matthew 4:1–11

“If you are the Son of God...” — Matthew 4:3 (NRSV)

Reflection

The wilderness is not a punishment. It is a place of clarity.

Jesus does not wander into the desert by accident. The Spirit leads him there — into hunger, silence, exposure. Away from the noise of crowds and the comfort of certainty. The wilderness strips life down to its essentials, and that is precisely why voices become louder there. Not only the voice of God, but the voices that question who we are and what we are worth.

Each temptation Jesus faces is not really about power, spectacle, or control. They are about story.

You are what you can produce. You are safe only if you are in control. You are valuable only if you can prove it.

These are familiar stories. They are the stories many of us live inside without realizing it — stories that whisper to us when we are tired, afraid, or unsure of our place in the world. They promise relief, certainty, and belonging, but they always come at a cost.

Jesus resists not by force, but by remembering. He remembers who he is, and whose he is. He refuses the false narratives offered to him and stays rooted in a deeper truth: that life is sustained by God, not by performance; that trust is stronger than control; that identity is gift, not achievement.

Lent begins here, in the wilderness — not because God abandons us there, but because the wilderness reveals the stories we have been living by. And once those stories are named, they can be released.

Conversation Partner: Brené Brown: Listening to Shame

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame

This talk helps us name how shame shapes the stories we tell ourselves about scarcity, worth, and belonging. Shame thrives in secrecy and silence; the Gospel, by contrast, brings truth into the open and restores dignity. As you listen, notice how the temptations Jesus faces echo the same fear-based narratives Brené Brown describes.

Invitation

- What stories do you hear most clearly when you feel vulnerable or afraid?
- Where do you notice pressure to prove your worth — to yourself or to others?
- What would it mean to trust that you are already enough, already held?

Prayer

God of the wilderness, meet us in the places where we feel exposed and unsure. When false stories whisper that we are not enough, help us remember who we are in you. Teach us to trust your sustaining love more than the promises of control or certainty. Lead us through this season with honesty and courage, that we may turn toward life. Amen.

Breath Prayer

Inhale: Rooted in truth

Exhale: I release false stories



LENT 2 – STEPPING OUT OF THE DARK

John 3:1–17

“How can these things be?” — John 3:9 (NRSV)

Reflection

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night.

John tells us this detail not simply to set the scene, but to name a posture. Night is where we go when we are unsure, cautious, or not ready to be fully seen. Nicodemus is a leader, a teacher, a person with standing — and yet something in Jesus unsettles him enough to risk this quiet, private encounter.

He comes with good intentions and serious questions. But Jesus does not answer him in the way he expects. Instead of clarification, Jesus offers disruption. Instead of reassurance, Jesus speaks of birth — of beginning again in a way Nicodemus cannot control or manage.

“To be born from above,” Jesus says, is to enter a life that is not engineered or earned. It is a life that comes as gift. And gifts, by their nature, require trust.

This is why Nicodemus struggles. Like many of us, he wants understanding before commitment, certainty before risk. But Jesus gently refuses that order. New life does not come from having all the answers; it comes from stepping into relationship — from allowing ourselves to be known and changed.

Lent invites us into this same movement. Out of the shadows of self-protection. Out of the night where questions stay safely unspoken. And into a faith that does not promise control, but offers presence.

Conversation Partner: Brené Brown: The power of Vulnerability

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability

In this talk, Brené Brown explores how vulnerability is not weakness, but the doorway to connection, courage, and transformation. Nicodemus' nighttime visit mirrors our own reluctance to be exposed — and reminds us that new life begins when we risk being seen without guarantees.

Invitation

- Where do you notice yourself staying “in the dark” — cautious, protected, or hidden?
- What questions are you holding that feel risky to voice?
- What might it mean to trust God without first resolving every uncertainty?

Prayer

God of new beginnings, you meet us not with condemnation, but with invitation. When fear keeps us in the shadows, call us gently toward the light. Give us courage to trust what we cannot yet explain, and grace to receive the life you offer as gift. Lead us from night into day, that we may be born into hope. Amen.

Breath Prayer

Inhale: Held in love

Exhale: I step into the light



LENT 3 – TRUTH THAT MAKES ROOM FOR BELONGING

John 4:5–42

“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” — John 4:23 (NRSV)

Reflection

This story unfolds in the heat of the day, at a well that should have been empty. Instead, Jesus meets a woman who carries the weight of isolation, social judgment, and unfinished stories. Their conversation crosses boundaries of gender, ethnicity, religion, and moral reputation. Nothing about it is safe — and yet nothing about it is cruel.

Jesus does not begin by correcting her life or exposing her failures. He begins by asking for water. He places himself in a position of need. What follows is not an interrogation, but a conversation that slowly opens into truth.

When the truth finally comes — about her relationships, her history, her longing — it is not weaponized. It is held. The woman is not reduced to her past; she is revealed to herself as someone seen, known, and still worthy of dignity. Truth here does not shame; it creates belonging.

This is one of the most radical claims of John’s Gospel: that truth is not opposed to grace. When spoken within compassion, truth becomes life-giving. It frees rather than confines. It sends the woman back into her community not silenced, but entrusted with good news.

Lent invites us into this same risky space — to allow truth to surface, not so we can be judged, but so we can be healed.

Conversation Partner: Krista Tippett – *Reconnecting with Compassion*

https://www.ted.com/talks/krista_tippett_reconnecting_with_compassion

In this talk, Krista Tippett describes compassion not as agreement, sentiment, or fixing, but as the practice of staying present to another’s story with openness and respect. Compassion, she suggests, creates the conditions in which truth can be spoken without fear. Jesus’ encounter at the well models this same posture: attentive presence that allows honesty to emerge without humiliation. This talk helps us reflect on how communities — and conversations — become places of belonging when truth is held within compassion.

Invitation

- Where do you notice Jesus creating safety before speaking truth in this story?
- When has truth been life-giving for you — rather than shaming?
- What might it look like to practice compassionate truth-telling in your own relationships?

Prayer

God of living water, you meet us where we least expect to be seen. Hold us gently as truth comes to the surface. Free us from shame that isolates, and draw us into the joy of belonging. Teach us to speak truth with compassion, and to receive it as gift. Amen.

Breath Prayer

Inhale: Living water

Exhale: Make me whole



LENT 4 – LEARNING TO SEE AGAIN

John 9:1–41

“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” — John 9:25
(NRSV)

Reflection

The story of the man born blind is not only about healing; it is about learning how to see.

At the beginning of the passage, the disciples want an explanation. *Who sinned?* they ask. They are looking for a cause they can name and contain. Certainty is comforting. It gives the illusion of order and control. But Jesus refuses their question. He does not explain suffering; he responds to it.

As the story unfolds, a reversal takes place. The man who was blind grows clearer and more confident in his testimony, while those who insist they can see become increasingly defensive and rigid. Sight, it turns out, is not the same as vision. One can have perfect eyesight and still refuse to see what is unfolding before them.

This Gospel unsettles us because it exposes how easily certainty can harden into blindness. When we cling too tightly to a single explanation — about God, about others, about ourselves — we close ourselves off from the living truth that is still emerging.

Lent invites us to loosen our grip on what we think we know. To allow our stories to be interrupted. To learn again how to see — not with judgment or fear, but with humility and openness to God’s surprising work.

Conversation Partner: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – *The Danger of a Single Story*

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

In this talk, Adichie explores how reducing people or events to a single story limits our ability to see them fully. The religious leaders in John’s Gospel cling to one explanation, while the healed man discovers a truth that cannot be contained by their categories. This talk helps us examine how our own certainty can become a form of blindness.

Invitation

- Where do you notice a desire for simple explanations when life feels complex?
- What “single stories” might be shaping how you see others — or yourself?
- How might faith call us to greater humility rather than greater certainty?

Prayer

God of light, when we cling to what we think we know, soften our hearts and open our eyes. Free us from the fear that keeps us defensive and teach us to see with compassion. Where our vision has narrowed, widen it with your grace. Lead us into truth that heals rather than divides, that we may walk in your light. Amen.

Breath Prayer:

Inhale: Open my eyes *Exhale:* Teach me to see



LENT 5 – HUNGERING FOR A LIFE THAT MATTERS

John 6:51–58

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life.” — John 6:54 (NRSV)

Reflection

By the fifth week of Lent, the questions have become sharper and more personal. We have turned toward the truth of who we are, learned to see again, and allowed compassion to hold what is difficult. Now Jesus speaks in language that unsettles and divides.

His words are intimate, physical, and demanding. Many of those listening struggle to hear them. This is not spiritual metaphor at a safe distance; it is an invitation into communion — into receiving life that cannot be separated from commitment.

The crowd wants bread that satisfies without changing them. Jesus offers himself instead: a life that nourishes and transforms, but only if it is received rather than controlled. To eat and drink is to acknowledge dependence. It is to admit that life, meaning, and hope are not things we manufacture for ourselves.

In John’s Gospel, eternal life is not about escape from the world, but about participation in God’s life here and now. This teaching presses the question Lent has been asking all along: what are we truly hungry for? Comfort, certainty, and self-sufficiency — or a life shaped by love, trust, and surrender?

Some walk away. Others remain, not because they fully understand, but because they have begun to recognize where real life is found.

Conversation Partner: Emily Esfahani Smith – *There’s More to Life Than Being Happy*

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/qH9jeqYn>

In this talk, Emily Esfahani Smith challenges the pursuit of happiness as the highest goal, suggesting instead that meaning — found through belonging, purpose, and commitment — is what sustains us through difficulty. Her insights echo Jesus’ invitation in this passage: a call to seek not what is immediately satisfying, but what gives depth and direction to life. This talk helps frame our hunger not as a problem to be solved, but as a guide toward what truly matters.

Invitation

- What do you notice yourself hungering for at this stage of the journey?
- Where do you seek satisfaction that does not truly sustain?
- What might it mean to receive life as gift rather than achievement?

Prayer

God of abundant life, you know the depths of our hunger. Where we cling to what is familiar, open us to receive what truly nourishes. Give us courage to trust your life within us, and to follow where it leads. Shape our desires toward love, that our lives may bear lasting fruit. Amen.

Breath Prayer

Inhale: Bread of life

Exhale: Sustain me

