

Personal Retreat Guide

Summer 2026

Let your roots
grow down
into him...
Then your faith
will grow strong
in the truth...
and you will overflow
with thankfulness.

- Colossians 2:7



Trees of Faith

I have been paying a lot of attention to trees this year. There is a massive oak tree in my backyard. Probably 80 years old. It is its own ecosystem. And its roots are vast, deep and wide. It's long branches reach high into the sky creating shade for many homes.

Often, when I dig in my own little garden, I hit a root from the oak tree.

When the big storms come, the branches and leaves of the tree blow in the wind, but thus far, the tree has remained standing exactly where it is. It's well-rooted. Deeply rooted.

Yes, sometimes it loses a branch here or there. Sometimes twigs fall. Not every branch is bearing fruit. Sometimes a branch needs to be pruned and has been, but the tree is steady, no matter the weather. Even the heat of summer doesn't destroy the life within it.

I want to be like that tree. Deeply rooted in Christ. My arms, like branches stretched up high in praise, stretched out wide in freedom, trusting God, who is steadfast. I want to be able to ride out the weather, the wind, the rains, the heat, drawing nutrients from deep within the earth. I want to be deeply rooted in Christ, the unchanging one.

Can you imagine for a moment, you're like a tree?

- ◆ What are the things (people, events, achievements) that are rooting you right now?

- ◆ Where are you finding security and stability?

- ◆ Where do you sense your roots needing to deepen?

- ◆ What is the weather that has passed through your yard in these last months?
How have you ridden out the storms?

- ◆ Where have you been able to be arms wide open in trust, and where have branches broken off, damaged in the weather?

- ◆ Where are you being pruned, and where is new life growing?

You may be able to answer these questions right now, or it may be helpful to do some of the exercises that follow first, and then, come back to these questions. Use them however helpful. May the Lord richly bless and renew you in this time of personal retreat with him.

With joy,
Beth Tipps

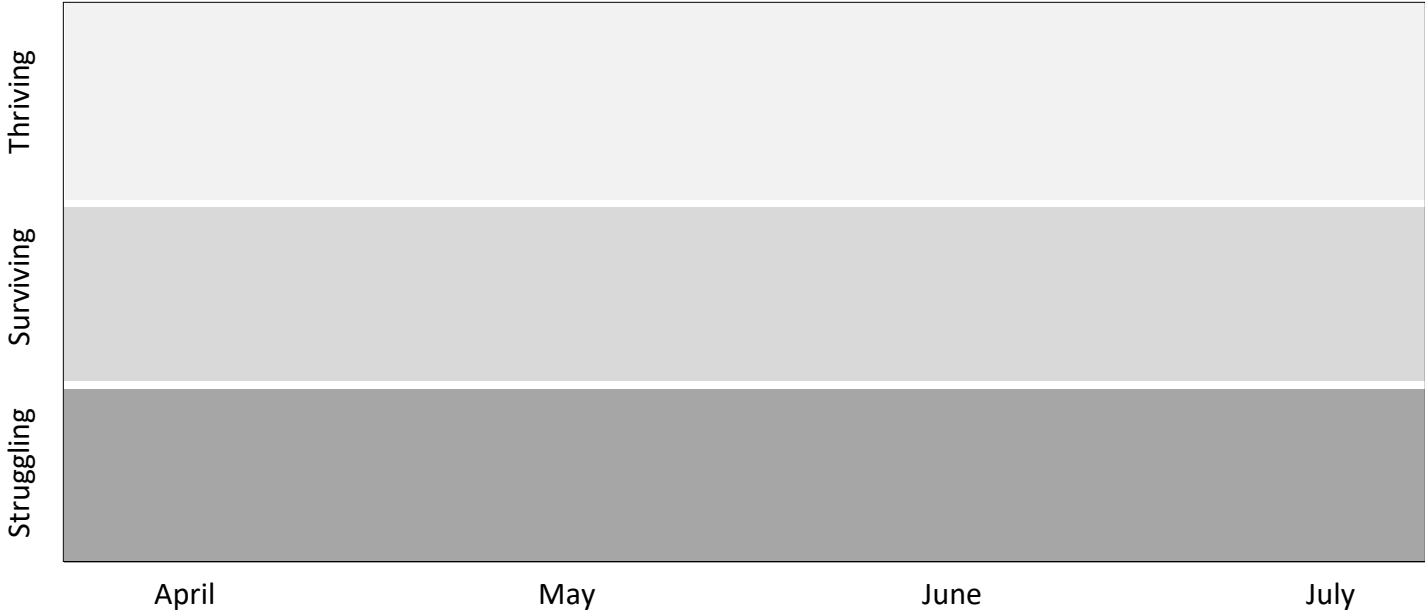
What has happened in your life in the last few months?

Scroll through your calendar or photos; what people, events and work have been part of this season?

<p style="text-align: center;">April</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">May</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">June</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">July</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>-</p>

How would you chart these months?

Plot out how you've been doing. Notice any trends in your scatter plot of life. What stands out?



What feelings have been a part of the last few months?

Circle the ones that you've experienced and jot out to the side the event or time period to which they were connected.

Amazed	Eager	Irritated	Sad
Angry	Embarrassed	Jealous	Satisfied
Annoyed	Energetic	Joy	Scared
Anxious	Envious	Lonely	Self-conscious
Ashamed	Foolish	Lost	Shocked
Bitter	Frustrated	Loving	Silly
Bored	Furious	Miserable	Stupid
Comfortable	Grieving	Motivated	Suspicious
Confused	Happy	Nervous	Tense
Content	Hopeful	Overwhelmed	Terrified
Depressed	Hurt	Peaceful	Trapped
Determined	Inadequate	Proud	Uncomfortable
Disdain	Insecure	Relieved	Worried
Disgusted	Inspired	Resentful	Worthless

Noticing God's movement in your life...

- ◆ How would you describe your life with the Lord today?

What is drawing you to him? When have you felt close to God?

What might be pulling you away from him? When has he felt far?

- ◆ In the last few months, where have you found joy?

Where have you experienced sorrow?

- ◆ What's it been like to read or hear God's word?

Have any stories or passages been particularly meaningful to you lately? If so, what has drawn you to them?

- ◆ What has prayer been like for you?

What do you find yourself talking to the Lord about the most?

What things, if any, are particularly hard to pray about?

- ◆ Does anything seem to be in the way, preventing your connection with the Lord in prayer?

The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet there are dragons and lions and poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil.

And there are rough and uneven roads; there are precipices.

But there is also God, also angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the Apostles, the treasures of grace – there are all things.

**- Macarius of Egypt
4th century**

Take some time to share with the Lord what you've noticed as you've reflected on the past months and your relationship with him. If you like, offer back to him your responses to the questions above and see what you notice in that conversation.

Scripture & Reflection

Read and imagine this story from Luke 5:1-11.

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

The lakeshore has a number of inlets with each one acting like an amphitheater carrying sound very effectively across water. Jesus sees the opportunity to increase the number of people who can hear him by getting into a boat and pushing out from shore a little.

Imagine Jesus getting into your boat. It's the one you built a few years ago. It's one of your prized possessions and the means to income for you. It's nothing amazing, but it does the job. And now this teacher, the one they call Jesus, has just asked to get into your boat. You put down your net that you've been washing and begin to listen to him teach.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

For as wise as Jesus was in his teaching, this seems like an absurd idea. No one catches fish on this lake in the daylight. You roll your eyes and let out a slightly frustrated sigh. He may be a good teacher, but he knows nothing about fishing. Reluctantly you do what he says.

⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

You and your friends grab the dirty nets you were washing and head back out, to the deep waters, trusting, or maybe wanting to trust that there is more for you there but feeling skeptical. The word "deep" sticks with you.

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

The deep waters held fish after all! At an unlikely time, with unclean nets. Jesus knew. The catch was overwhelming. The dirty nets breaking. The abundance. You can't believe there were fish, so many fish, in the deep water, during the day. How did he make something out of nothing? Was there more to this man than just a great teacher? You're stunned.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Back on the beach again, with a multitude of fish, once sold, wages for a long time, provision, more than you could have asked for, you fall on your knees. How did Jesus know that? Why did he choose to tell you? Why would he give you such a good gift?

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

You realized you had been afraid. Afraid to trust this teacher. Afraid you’d look foolish going out to fish again. And then afraid, that Jesus could never use someone like you, with your insecurities, imperfections. Jesus reorients your priorities. He invites you to be a fisher of men.

And you accept the invitation, the redirection, and you leave behind that which you no longer need. You really had no other option. He was drawing you to himself.

- ◆ What stands out to you in this story?

- ◆ What do you notice as you pretend you’re Simon Peter?

- ◆ Where in your life does it feel like Jesus doesn’t understand? Asking you to do something crazy?

- ◆ Where do you need him to surprise you? Where are you open to being wrong?

- ◆ Deep waters suggest that there is far more beneath the surface than can be seen. Like tree roots. Where might Jesus be inviting you into deeper trust in him?

- ◆ What might you need to leave behind right now in order to trust him more?

Praying Ephesians 3

God, out of your **glorious riches**,

will you **strengthen me** with power through your Spirit in my inner being,

so that Christ may **dwell** in my heart through faith.

Will you **root me** and establish me in your **love**,

so that I may have power, together with all the
Lord's holy people,

to grasp **how wide**

and long

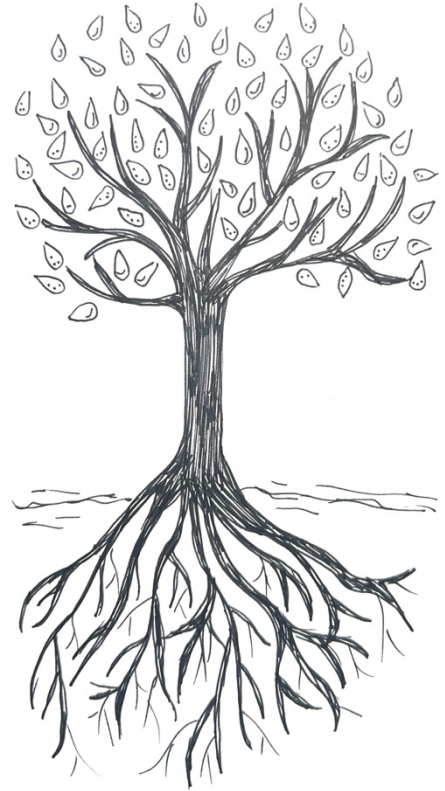
and high

and deep is the love of Christ Jesus,

and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—

that I may be filled to the measure

of all the fullness of God.



Spiritual Direction

If you would like someone to listen with you to the Holy Spirit's movement in your life; to ask you questions to help you draw closer to God and his loving presence; if you sometimes find it hard to pray but easier to talk to a friend, consider trying out a Spiritual Direction session with Beth.

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