



A Sanctified Art



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ART, REFLECTIONS, & PROMPTS
FOR 12 STORIES OF UNRAVELING

UNRAVELED

SEEKING GOD WHEN OUR PLANS FALL APART

 *A Sanctified Art*
sanctifiedart.org

STUDY JOURNAL

What happens when our world falls apart? How do we press onward when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose threads? What do we become when our identity—or the path we're on—comes undone? What if all of this is not the end we fear it will be? In our unraveling, sometimes life surprises us with unexpected joy, love, and hope—with a new beginning we couldn't have imagined. Sometimes we need God to unravel us, for we long to be changed. This study journal explores 12 stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations.

We invite you to complete this journal at the pace and order that suits you. You may wish to ponder the reflections and prompts individually or with others. We have designed this journal so that it might be used as a personal devotional or as the curriculum for a group study series.

May God meet us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans—and us—into something new.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

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A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org.



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WRiTE

Rewrite the ending of this story. How could the townspeople respond to Legion's healing instead of with fear and by forcing Jesus away? What would it look like for the community to welcome and embrace Legion?

Handwriting practice lines. There are 10 rows of lines for handwriting practice, each consisting of a solid top line, a dashed midline, and a solid bottom line.



PRAY

Unravel my temptation to marginalize those I fear or do not understand so that all may be welcomed home. Amen.

RESPOND

JESUS HEALS LEGION, A MAN POSSESSED BY DEMONS

The Unraveling of the Mind

LOOK

Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for each of the figures?

REFLECT

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Imagine this story through the lens of fear. How does fear impact each of the characters and their actions?
- Whom do you identify with the most in this story and why?

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The Heir | Hannah Garrity



UNRAVELED

JESUS HEALS LEGION,
A MAN POSSESSED BY DEMONS

The Unraveling of the Mind

READ // MARK 5:1-20

FROM THE ARTIST // HANNAH GARRITY

Have you ever seen the illustration of equity vs. equality? There is a young child standing next to a young teenager and an adult. They all wish to see over a fence. In the description of equality, they each get a box that is the same size. The adult now towers over the fence, the teenager can see, but the child is still unable to see what's on the other side. In the depiction of equity, they each get a different sized box. Now, all of their heads are peering comfortably over the fence. Why are we afraid of equity?

In the land of the Gerasenes, Jesus shows us what it looks like. He provides healing for an outcast of society, the man shows gratitude, and he evangelizes. This sounds like a moment we would rejoice in. Instead the townspeople beg Jesus to leave. Do they fear scarcity? But we know that God provides in abundance. Do they fear grace? But we yearn for God's grace. Do they fear for their safety?

Why do humans fear the radical grace of God? Why did the people of Gerasene fear Jesus? We laud Jesus' work in the gospel as the work we must replicate. We teach our children to think of what Jesus would do. However, time and again history shows us that when we truly work toward the embodiment of the gospel, humans interrupt the work. Humans killed Jesus.



Begged to Leave | Hannah Garrity



READ // GENESIS 18:1-15; 21:1-7

FROM THE ARTIST // HANNAH GARRITY

Sarah, mother of Isaac, joyfully nurses her newborn son, giving him the nutrients he needs to grow and thrive. Abounding liquid—as a mother, I know what that is like. The feeling of a pouring out; a pouring out of milk, of blood, of tears, of joy; a pouring out of depression, of fear, of baby blues, of awe.

In this image, I have expressed the feeling of pouring out. The flow throughout the background relates directly to the pain and joy that Sarah and Hagar have struggled through in their discordant parallel lives. Expressed in shades of milk, blood, and water, this image is deeply feminine. The blood that delivers life is the same blood that is shed in sexual abuse. The milk that sustains life is produced by the body whether a child is conceived by choice or by force. A new mother's emotions run the wide gamut from overwhelming joy, to emotional pain, to previously unmet fear, and to lack of control. They extend from postpartum depression to baby blues. The experience is nothing like anything I have ever felt before or after, a paradigm shift in life. The deep and painful multiplicity of new motherhood is often summed up in perfectly constructed highlight reel photographs on baby announcements. In this painting, I depict Sarah putting up a front of pure joy. It's honest, but it's only one small sliver of the real story.

As women we stand at once in vulnerability and beauty, in strength and love, in pain and joy. The moments of our lives envision God's grace in deep complexity.



RESPOND

SARAH LAUGHS

Unexpected Joy & Surprise



Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for each figure?



- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- How does God respond to Sarah's and Abraham's disbelief and doubt? How does God respond to us when we are closed off to newness?
- Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes of this passage, *"Laughter is a biblical way of receiving a newness which cannot be explained. The newness is sheer gift—underived, unwarranted."*¹ What might it look like for our disbelief to unravel into joy?



WRITE

In the space below, write a letter to Job. Share what you might want to hear from a friend in the midst of inexplicable grief. Offer empathy and presence over answers and explanations.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of ten horizontal lines for writing practice, including solid top and bottom lines and dashed midlines.



PRAY

Unravel my need for answers into awe for the wonders of your expansive mystery. Amen.

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *Interpretation: Genesis*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982. 182.



RESPOND

JOB'S LAMENT & LOSS

Seeking Understanding When Everything Has Fallen Apart



— 1 —

Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. If you were to place yourself in this scene, where would you be and how would you interact with what surrounds you?



REFLECT

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Job searches for an explanation for his suffering.
How do you seek to make meaning of your own pain?
- Scholar Michael Coogan writes, *“Perhaps the ambiguity of Job’s final reply to Yahweh, and of the book as a whole, is deliberate: No easy answer exists to the problem of suffering, no formula that can adequately explain the justice of God.”*⁴ When have you embraced the mystery of God, even in the midst of suffering?

6 Coogan, Michael D. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 481.



WRITE

When have you been unraveled by unexpected joy and surprise? In the space below, reflect on this experience and what allowed you to receive that joy.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of ten sets of horizontal lines. Each set includes a solid top line, a dashed midline, and a solid bottom line.



I PRAY

When I need it most, unravel me with blessed newness and boundless joy. Amen.



Step Into the Swell | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



UNRAVELED

JOB'S LAMENT & LOSS

*Seeking Understanding When Everything
Has Fallen Apart*

READ // JOB 28:12-28

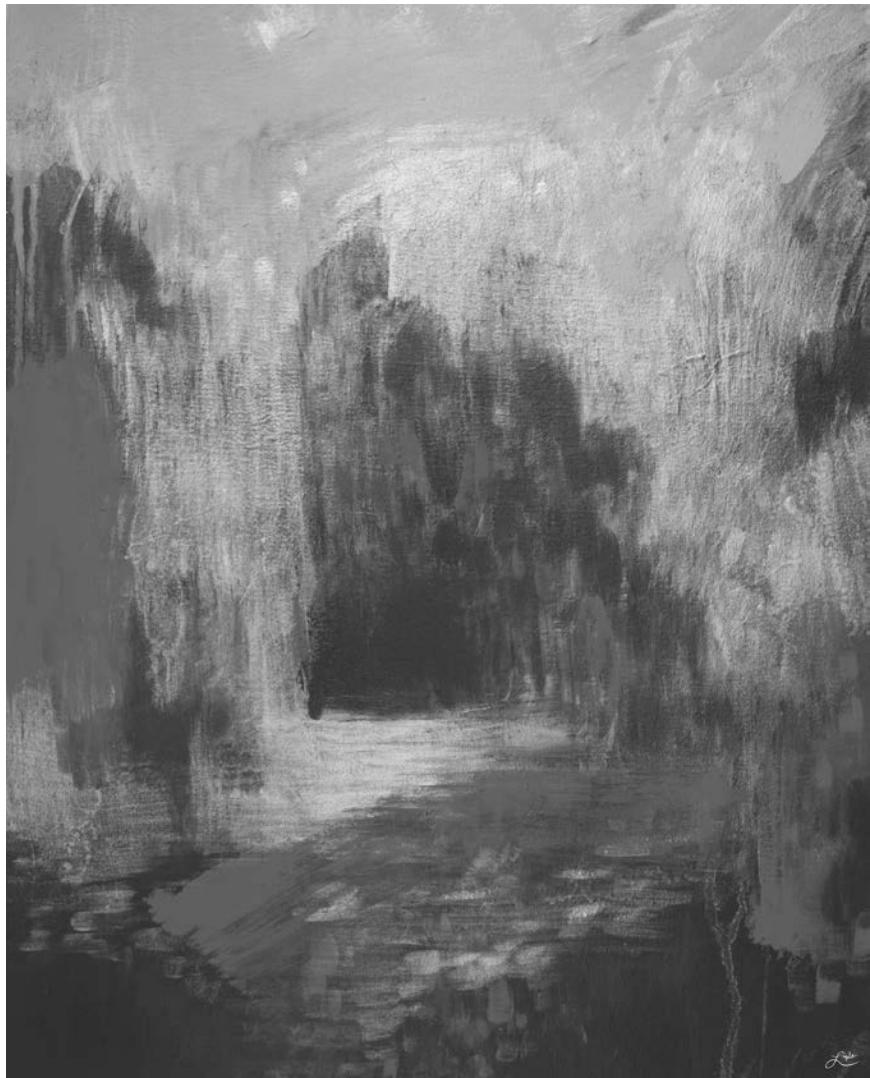
FROM THE ARTIST // LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Everything Job holds dear—his property, his family, his wealth, his physical health—has been taken from him. His life has unraveled in every way imaginable. How can we possibly make sense of the pain we endure, especially the pain we don't cause or deserve?

Much of Job's journey requires him to untangle the punitive, quid pro quo theology he has absorbed. *If I do good things, God will reward me. If I do bad things, God will punish me.* On a cerebral level, I disagree with the logic of these words. But I remember how easily I can fall into the trap of feeling these words viscerally and bodily in moments of pain, especially in suffering that is so awful and unfair.

When I first began this painting, I hoped to render Job's hymn to wisdom visually. I imagined being stuck in the deep, as if my body was anchored underwater and I was looking up to the surface. I imagined textures and symbols emerging in the swirl of the dark to portray Job's search for meaning, his grasping to find a way out. But as the painting came together, it was all wrong. The strokes and symbols were too literal, too formulaic. I almost scrapped the canvas altogether, but decided to keep going, to add more layers, more depth, more gold.

A window, doorway, or portal emerged in the middle of the painting. I felt a release and realized that, while I started with lament, I ended with awe. "To fear God is wisdom" (Job 28:28). The Hebrew word for "fear," *yirah*, literally translates to "awesome." True wisdom lies in breathless reverence for God's mystery and expansiveness—for God's presence that is beyond what we can control, or reason, or make far too small.



The Way to Wonder | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



UNRAVELED

PETER SINKS IN THE WATER

Unraveled by Uncertainty

READ // MATTHEW 14:22-33

FROM THE ARTIST // LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

At the start of this chapter, John the Baptist is brutally beheaded. Jesus withdraws from the crowds to a deserted place, yet is followed by the masses—perhaps many of them former followers of John the Baptist. Moved with compassion, he heals the sick and miraculously generates bounty from a meal of five loaves and two fish.

Then, he “immediately” rushes the disciples into a boat, dismisses the crowds, and retreats to a mountain by himself. Perhaps he needs space to grieve John and to grapple with the gravity of his calling. The crowds and demands of his ministry were surging; in the same way, the waves and the wind begin to batter the boat that had drifted far from shore. If you’ve ever been in open water during a storm or even high winds, you know the shockwave of fear that pulses through your veins. Yet, as dawn breaks, a mirage beckons to them, casting out words to buoy them up: “Do not fear.”

What I find in Peter’s response is not a challenge or a profession of doubt, but a willingness to step into the swell, like a trust fall into the unknown. Perhaps in seasons when our sense of certainty and security unravels, our desperation is more likely to convert into courage. Is there something about unraveling that makes us a bit less risk-averse, a bit more willing to try what we wouldn’t have dared when everything felt predictable and sure?

Imagine this same scene with no storm, no raging seas, no ghostly glimpse of Jesus skimming the surface. Would Peter have stepped in then? Would he have expanded his definition of what’s possible? Would he have experienced the divine so surprisingly, so surely? Would you step in?



RESPOND

PETER SINKS IN THE WATER

Unraveled by Uncertainty



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Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. If you were to place yourself in this scene, where would you be and how would you interact with what surrounds you?



REFLECT

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Why do you think Peter asks Jesus to order him to walk on water in Matt. 14:28? What is he hoping to accomplish? Do you find yourself acting similarly when you are filled with doubt?
- During seasons of uncertainty, how do you release anxiety and practice trust?



WRITE

Consider the role of Pharaoh's daughter in this story. In your own life, what does it look like to be an ally to those whose lives are unraveling due to systemic oppression? An ally is someone who uses their power, privilege, and resources to work for justice alongside those who are oppressed. Be specific about ways you can serve as an ally.



PRAY

When necessary, unravel my attachment to power so that I can walk with others in the journey toward freedom. Amen.



RESPOND

MOSES' MOTHER GIVES MOSES UP SO HE CAN LIVE

When Our Plans for Our Children Unravel

When Our Plans for Our Children Unravel



LOOK

Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. If you were to place yourself in this scene, where would you be and how would you interact with what surrounds you?



REFLECT

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Imagine this story from the perspective of each character—Pharaoh, Moses' mother, Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter. Why does each character do what s/he does?
- What causes Pharaoh's daughter's heart to soften when she finds Moses in the river? Why does she choose to nurture and adopt Moses as her own? What can we learn from her actions?



WRITE

Imagine you are Peter. What are the stormy waters that threaten and overcome you? What events and forces unravel your trust? In the space below, name these threats as a way of releasing their power over you.



PRAY

Unravel my uncertainties, my fears, and my doubts into courage to step forward. Amen.



Rizpah | Lauren Wright Pittman



UNRAVELED

MOSES' MOTHER GIVES MOSES
UP SO HE CAN LIVE
When Our Plans for Our Children Unravel

READ // EXODUS 1:22; 2:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST // LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Moses' mother and Miriam plot a clever plan, but it's far from foolproof. The risks far outweigh their chances for success. What if the basket they place him in leaks, drowning him instead of keeping baby Moses afloat? What if the current gets too strong, or the winds pick up, or he gets stuck in a tangle of reeds? What if the wrong person finds him and fulfills Pharaoh's command? What if Pharaoh's daughter is moved with disgust when she sees what floats into her private bathing quarters? Even if Pharaoh's daughter decides to keep the child as her own, what will keep Pharaoh from killing Moses when she's not looking?

Their plan is too perilous, too fraught with danger for any infant to endure. And yet, we know of mothers who risk desert heat, fatigue, illness, dehydration, criminalized border crossings, and facilities with cages to pursue the slight chance—the mere hope—of survival for their child. Why would they do this? Because to stay home and succumb to the sure threats of genocide—or gang violence, or civil war—is far more dangerous.

In this image, I gave the viewer the vantage point Pharaoh's daughter might have had. What melts her heart with mercy when she sees this Hebrew child float downstream? Was a well of rebellion rising up within her, making her eager to subvert her father's orders? Was she poisoned like most Egyptians with bias against the Israelites, but did the innocence and vulnerability of an infant shift her heart toward love? Had she desperately wanted a child of her own? Regardless of her motives, Pharaoh's daughter uses her power and privilege to act as an ally to Moses and his family in their worst unraveling. It's not a perfect solution, but God doesn't need perfection to achieve liberation.



An Imperfect Ally | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



READ // 2 SAMUEL 3:7; 21:1-14

FROM THE ARTIST // LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

I don't know what to say. This story leaves me without adequate ways to fully process the searing pain and utter wrecking of the life of this woman, Rizpah. She is a "low status" wife of Saul.² She is raped by a man who denies his actions. Her two sons are sentenced to death as a king fumbles to rectify wrongs that cause a famine in the land.

She gathers her sackcloth and climbs the mountain of God to defend the bodies of her children and their half brothers. She spends day and night for up to six months fighting off birds of prey and animals of the night from ripping apart the bodies of her children and what shred of hope she has left.³ David hears of her passionate, radical, public grief and is moved to delayed justice. He calls for the burial of Saul and Jonathan, but also sees to the proper burial of the seven sons that he carelessly offered up to appease God. Justice in this scenario looks like sheltered, buried, dry bones. Rizpah's public unraveling causes the unraveling of David's distorted version of justice. God doesn't require a human sacrifice for the end of the bloodguilt. God ends the famine when David listens to the voice of this strong, fierce, unraveling woman. I pray that we learn from Rizpah. When we see injustice may we, like Rizpah, climb the mountain of God and defend those who cannot defend themselves. When we see someone unraveling in inexplicable grief, may this sight unravel us from the ways we are entangled with injustice.

² Gafney, Wilda C. *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017. 198.

³ Ibid, 199.



RESPOND

RIZPAH MOURNS HER SONS *Public Grief That Inspires Action*



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Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for each figure?



- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Think of a time when you have witnessed someone's public display of grief. How did their actions affect you and others?
- Imagine if Rizpah grieved quietly in solitude. How might this story end differently?



WRITE

Thomas seeks tangibility to bolster his faith. Belief is shaped by lived experience. In the space below, reflect on a moment or memory when you have tangibly experienced God through sight, touch, or sound.



PRAY

When I am unraveled by brokenness, breathe your peace into my lungs so I might feel and know you are near. Amen.



RESPOND

DOUBTING THOMAS

When the Unimaginable Has Happened



Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for the figure?



- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Why is Thomas isolated from the other disciples when Jesus appears? Where is he? What is he doing and why?
- In verses 21 and 26, the Greek word for “peace” is *eirene*, stemming from the verb, *eiro*, which means to join or bind together that which has been separated. How does this definition for peace impact your reading of this story? What is being bound together?



WRiTE

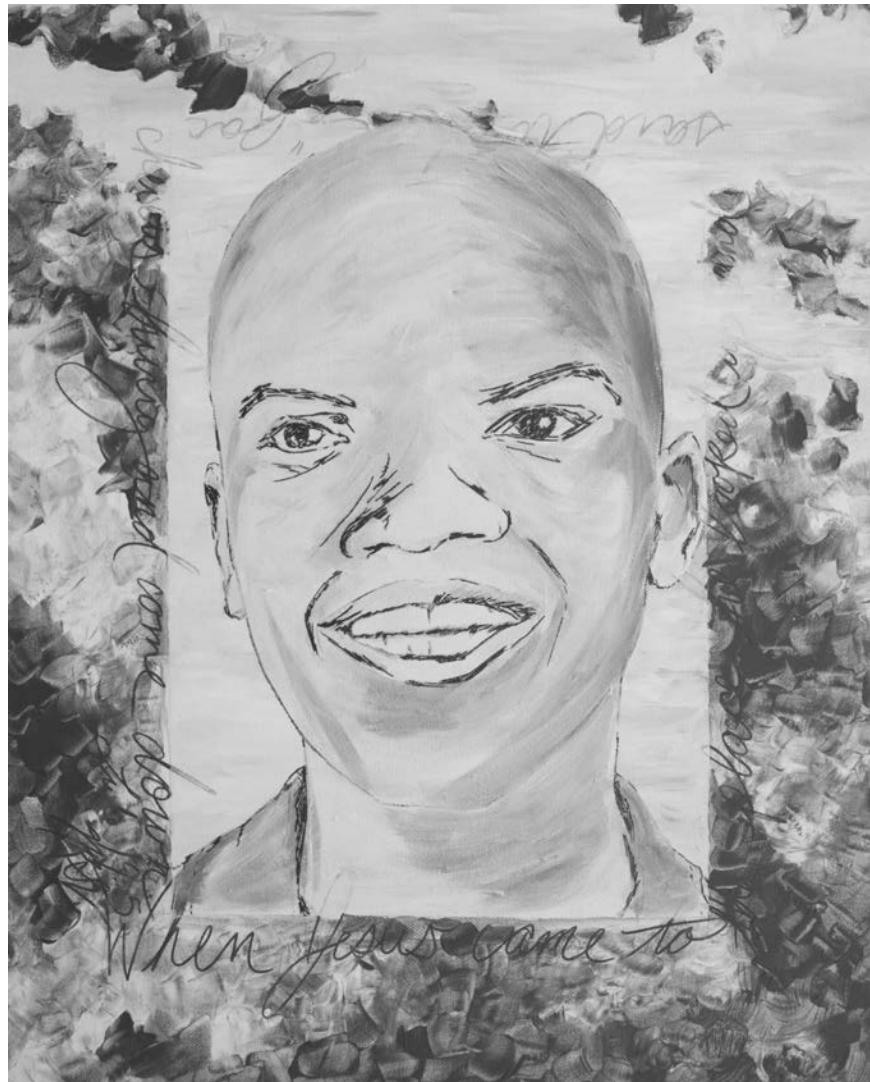
Return to a memory of witnessing someone's public display of grief, perhaps in the midst of death or tragedy. In the space below, reflect on how their grief made you feel. How did their grief impact your actions or the actions of others? How did this event impact your own approach to grief?

Handwriting practice lines. There are 10 rows of lines for handwriting practice, each consisting of a solid top line, a dashed midline, and a solid bottom line.



PRAY

May I be moved by and responsive to the unraveling of others. Amen.



Jesus Looked Up | Hannah Garrity



UNRAVELED
DOUBTING THOMAS
When the Unimaginable Has Happened

READ // JOHN 20:19-29

FROM THE ARTIST // LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

When the unimaginable happens, we can find ourselves drowning in doubt. We flail, reaching for something to bolster our faith in a sovereign, living God. Here we see Thomas needing tangibility: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Thomas has just experienced the death of his teacher, close companion, and the long-awaited Messiah. Reeling in grief, Thomas needs a buoy to keep him afloat. Jesus offers Thomas peace, meeting him where he is instead of offering condemnation or a condescending nickname. He welcomes Thomas to do what he needs to find footing, but we aren’t told that Thomas actually acts upon the invitation. Instead, he says, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas is separated from Christ in death and all he asks is to be close to him again. Instead of poking Christ’s wounds in doubt, he reclaims relationship with Jesus.

When I visited India, I learned of “St. Thomas Christians.” It is said that during Thomas’ extensive travels he began several churches in southern India. To this day people proudly identify with his name. These Indian Christians do not define Thomas by his doubt; they define their own faith by his ministry. They know Christ because of Thomas. Thomas moved forward from that place of doubt, and his impact stretched to the far southern tip of India.

I chose to depict Thomas rubbing his eyes as he awakens from his grief to the reality that Christ has not left him. Lotus flowers (a symbol for India) swirl around his head in the waters that image the depth of his mourning. His ministry blooms out of this raw, authentic moment of appropriate doubt.



Grieving Thomas | Lauren Wright Pittman



UNRAVELED

ZACCHAEUS THE WEALTHY TAX COLLECTOR

Radical Unraveling of Vocation

READ // LUKE 19:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST // HANNAH GARRITY

Seeing, taking notice, acknowledging, lifting up—Jesus did all of these things as he looked up at Zacchaeus, calling him down, resting love and responsibility on his shoulders. I teach middle school art. I have spent this school year testing the waters. Each day I try a new collection of inputs for various situations. The most effective one is to stop in at every single student's seat to have a personal conversation with them. In these conversations, I reiterate the assignment, glean information about what the student plans to do, and answer any questions. The byproduct is positive productivity. Is it because I've shown that I care? Is it because I've clarified the expectations? Is it because I simply acknowledged their existence in the room? Is it because I saw them? Middle schoolers don't realize that you can hear and see them from across the room. Their maturity level is simply not there yet. In this image, Jesus looks up with grace. A shimmer of gold on his skin represents the presence of God in him. He takes notice of a selfish, greedy, and immature adult. Zacchaeus' actions make me think he did not mature much after middle school. By the standards of society, exhibited by the comments of those around him, this man does not deserve to be acknowledged. When he is finally seen, all of his immaturity melts away. He immediately rises to the occasion. Take notice, acknowledge, lift up. See.



RESPOND

ZACCHAEUS THE WEALTHY TAX COLLECTOR

Radical Unraveling of Vocation



Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for the figure?



- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- Why does Zacchaeus anticipate Jesus' arrival? What converts his greed into radical generosity?
- Imagine Zacchaeus' new vocation of generosity and compassion. What does he gain from this transformation? How are others impacted?



WRITE

Researcher and storyteller, Brené Brown,⁵ says, “Shame is the most powerful, master emotion. It’s the fear that we’re not good enough.” In the space below, name and release any feelings of shame you carry.

Handwriting practice lines. The page features ten sets of horizontal lines for handwriting practice. Each set consists of a solid top line, a dashed midline, and a solid bottom line.

 PRAY

Unravel my shame, O God, with the promises that I am always loved and forever worthy. Amen.

5 Learn more about Brené's work by visiting: <https://brenebrown.com/>



RESPOND

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

Unrevealed Shame



Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

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Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for the figure?



REFLECT

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- What racial, cultural, gender, and religious barriers exist between Jesus and the Samaritan woman? How are these barriers broken down in their encounter?
- What do you imagine is the woman's story? What layers of shame does she carry and why?



WRITE

Are there ways that you, like Zacchaeus, participate in economic systems that oppress and defraud others?

What spending practices may require your examination and consideration? In the space below, name small and practical ways you might practice financial generosity.



PRAY

Unravel me from the ways I am entangled with systems of oppression and harm. Amen.



Anti-Creation Narrative | Lauren Wright Pittman



UNRAVELED

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL
Unraveled Shame

READ // JOHN 4:1-29

FROM THE ARTIST // HANNAH GARRITY

Why are you asking me? As a woman in a patriarchal society, I have been faced with subordination throughout my life. I mostly do not feel it. I have learned self control from a young age and I have been taught to appreciate what I have. These skills are the reasons that I have the extensive happiness and comfort that I enjoy on a daily basis. However, the patriarchy still exists. Along with the external blocks, the glass ceilings, I am finding that I stand in my own way, too. Despite the tireless efforts of my parents to teach us of a world of equality and opportunity, I have still imbibed the societal belief that I, as a woman, am lesser; that my skills do not measure up, that my salary should not be equal or more, that I work too much, that I spend too little time with my children, or that I will not succeed at the next challenge. None of these things are true, and yet I throw the roadblocks of patriarchy before myself anyway. The woman at the well had multiple levels of societal oppression standing like a wall between Jesus and her. She was not of the same race or gender as he, and she was unwed, unprotected. I can understand why she questioned God's call for water. Why would he address her as an equal? Are you asking me? Are you sure you meant to do that? Are you sure that I measure up?



You Ask of Me? | Hannah Garrity



UNRAVELED

PHARAOH HARDENS HIS HEART TO
MOSES' REQUESTS
When Humans Unravel God's Plans for Justice

READ // EXODUS 5:1-2; 7:8-23

FROM THE ARTIST // LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

As I sketched this image of Pharaoh, I realized how cartoonish and irrelevant this character had become in my mind. What would Pharaoh look like today? I sat with this question as a creeping sense of irony came over my body. I would argue, to my surprise, that a modern Pharaoh might look a bit like the reflection in my mirror, and maybe in yours.

This story of Pharaoh's hardening heart leads to a kind of anti-creation narrative—one where the world is coming undone and actively being destroyed. Sound familiar?

As a society, we are actively undoing God's creation through our consumption while clinging to ease, convenience, and our power over our environment. We harden our hearts to the ways our actions cause harm. We value our comfort over the health of our coastlines while the first climate refugees flee their homes due to rising tides and sinking land. As water becomes scarce, violence will increase. Many will have to fight for their basic needs. I believe Pharaoh's hardening heart is prophetic. This narrative reveals to us how a person's clinging to power can literally unravel creation. We often undo the threads of creation, while God entreats us to become co-creators. We have seam rippers in our hands when God wants us to have needle and thread. There is a difficult hope in the narrative, however. Our own unraveling of God's dream for creation is not strong enough to thwart God's plan. Ultimately the Israelites find liberation. In this image, the waters of the parted Red Sea frame the chaos of the plagues. We will succeed, with God's help, in healing the earth. We just need to allow God to soften our hearts, to take initiative in changing our perspective, and to welcome the challenge of restoring creation.



RESPOND

PHARAOH HARDENS HIS HEART TO MOSES' REQUESTS

When Humans Unravel God's Plans for Justice

When Humans Unravel God's Plans for Justice



Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. If you were to place yourself in this scene, where would you be and how would you interact with what surrounds you?



REFLECT

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- To what, exactly, is Pharaoh's heart hardened? Why is he driven by power and control?
- Artist Lauren Wright Pittman writes, *"This narrative reveals to us how a person's clinging to power can literally unravel creation."* In what ways is your heart hardened? What might it look like to soften your heart to actions and practices that cause harm?



WRITE

In the space below, write a letter to yourself imagining the letter is from God. What do you imagine God might say to you about setting roots in the place you currently call home? What might God say to you about fostering the welfare of your local community?



When my life unravels in transition, root me in a community of support and flourishing. Amen.



RESPOND

ENCOURAGING THE ISRAELITES IN EXILE TO PLANT GARDENS & BUILD HOUSES *When Dreams Unravel*



Take a few moments to look deeply in quiet contemplation at the qualities of the object, its shape, form,

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for each of the figures?



- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- What kinds of dreams need to die in order for your community to prosper?
- Where do you see social exile occurring in your own city? What communities have been uprooted, disempowered, and marginalized? What does it look like to garden—literally and metaphorically—in these spaces?

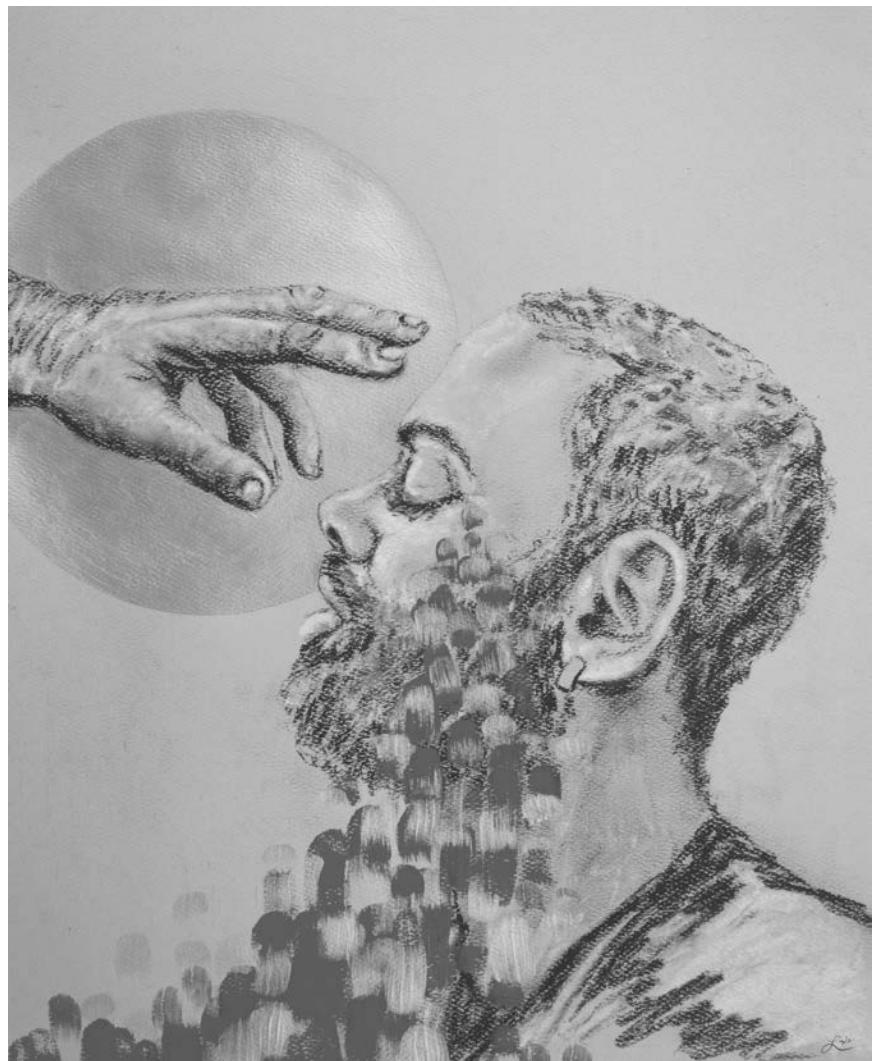


Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes, “*The Book of Exodus records the contest between the liturgy of generosity and the myth of scarcity—a contest that still tears us apart today.*”⁴ In the space below, confess the ways you fall for the myth of scarcity—in your finances, time, energy, relationships, work, etc. Then, imagine tangible ways to live out a liturgy of abundance in all aspects of your life.



Soften my hardened heart and unravel me from living a life led by scarcity. Amen.

4 Walter Brueggemann. "The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity." Published on *Religion Online*. Article first published in the *Christian Century*, March 24-31, 1999. https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-liturgy-of-abundance-the-myth-of-scarcity/?fbclid=IwAR1fxG2e4k1TWshJDp4EfW5jd0pTz88Dw6bSAbTzDCwXp7df_v1sDSq7Ro#content



Restored | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



UNRAVELED

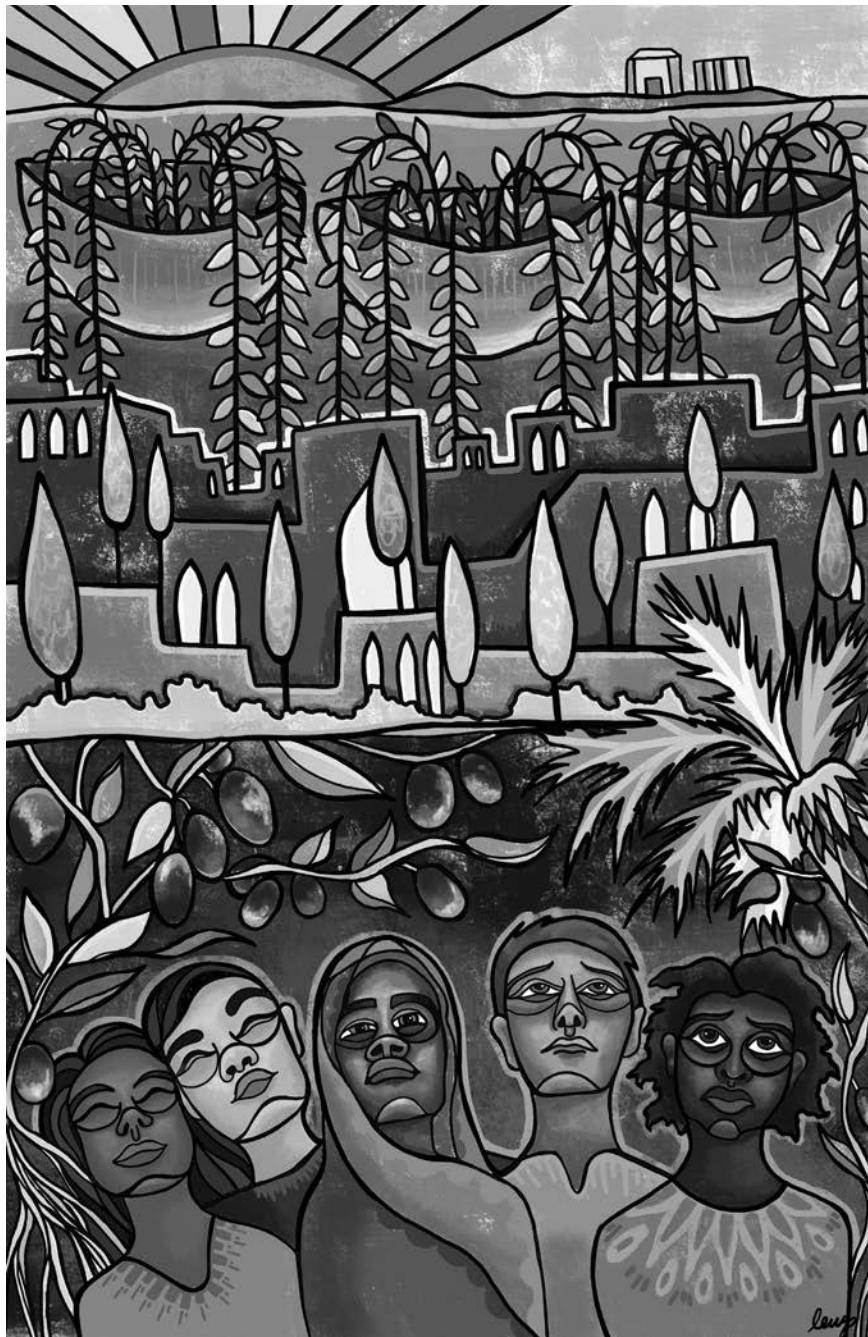
ENCOURAGING THE ISRAELITES IN EXILE
TO PLANT GARDENS & BUILD HOUSES
When Dreams Unravel

READ // JEREMIAH 29:1-7

FROM THE ARTiST // LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

I moved to a new state. As I write, I'm living out of boxes, the trunk of my car, and a storage unit. It's a jarring experience to move, even when it's a conscious choice. I've found myself in a place that resembles almost nothing like what I'd envisioned for my life. I left a city burgeoning with opportunities and culture; now I'm in a small town where I'd be thrilled to find one decent, local coffee shop. I'm beginning to realize visions about the future I wasn't even aware of. These unrealized dreams took root in my being in a way that feels defining to who I am.

Something happens deep in our core when we feel out of place. The day I moved my immune system failed and I became sick and disoriented. The Israelites were forced into exile, ripped from their homes, places of worship, and way of life. They find themselves in Babylon where they dream of the day they'd return to where they belong. Jeremiah's words are comforting, yet painful. They are told to stay, plant gardens, and allow their families to flourish in this strange land. I'm sure this was disappointing, but when you hold onto the past, you miss the richness of the present. "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you" (Jer. 29:7). Maybe when our lives unravel in transition, the loose ends of our dreams, the friends we leave behind, and the paths untraveled can become the roots that stabilize us in the new place where we find ourselves. These threads can create grounding that nourishes and transforms us into something new. This new place can be a gift—a place of flourishing and a conduit for deep, authentic connection with self and community.



New Roots | Lauren Wright Pittman



UNRAVELED

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL TO PAUL

Discovering a New Path

READ // ACTS 9:1-20

FROM THE ARTIST // LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Saul doesn't just persecute Jesus' followers, he breathes threats and murder. His hatred fumes out of him like fire, perhaps a fire tended by fear—fear that his Jewish tradition will become impure or distorted, fear that the walls he's built around who's in and out will crumble, fear that his own hard-earned piety will diminish. He's a force of terror, sculpted by self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. He's a religious extremist not so unlike the ones we know of today.

Until God smacks him down, pulling his sight and self-reliance out from under him like a rug. God softens Saul's steely heart by forcing him to confront those whom he harms, and by making him utterly dependent on relationship and others to survive. Perhaps Saul's conversion is ultimately a radical healing—God soothes his fear and hatred with empathy and intimacy.

But this isn't just a story about Saul's transformation. His companions on the road to Damascus are changed too, as they hear the voice of the risen Christ and escort a stumbling Saul to the city. Ananias' conversion is the most courageous of them all. He risks everything, including his own life, to come close to one with the power to have him stoned. Only in the moments when Ananias' fingers touch Saul's eyes, does Saul see, for the first time, the image of the divine in one who is not his enemy, but his brother.

In this image, a halo hovers around the hand of Ananias, nodding to the sacred courage required to melt the hatred of his oppressor with intimacy and connection. Scales pour out of Saul's eyes, purging him, cleansing him, igniting him with a new and particular mission: to pour out God's grace wherever humans try to limit it.



RESPOND

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL TO PAUL

Discovering a New Path



Take a few moments to gaze upon the artwork. Breathe deeply in quiet meditation as you observe the visual qualities of what you see: color, line, texture, movement, shape, form.

Now take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you overlook?

Now engage your imagination. What story do you imagine for the figure?



REFLECT

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- In this story, what events and elements fulfil Paul's conversion?
- Throughout your life, what identities, beliefs, or practices have you shed? How has unraveling from former patterns and identities helped you to grow or become more whole?



WRITE

Imagine you are Ananias. If God came to you in a vision and asked you to offer grace and belonging to someone you perceive as an enemy or threat, who would that person be and how would you respond? In the space below, write a letter addressed to this person, practicing the challenge of offering radical grace.

Handwriting practice lines. There are 10 rows of lines for handwriting practice, each consisting of a solid top line, a dashed midline, and a solid bottom line.



PRAY

Unravel my assumptions and animosities so that I might become a vessel of your radical grace. Amen.