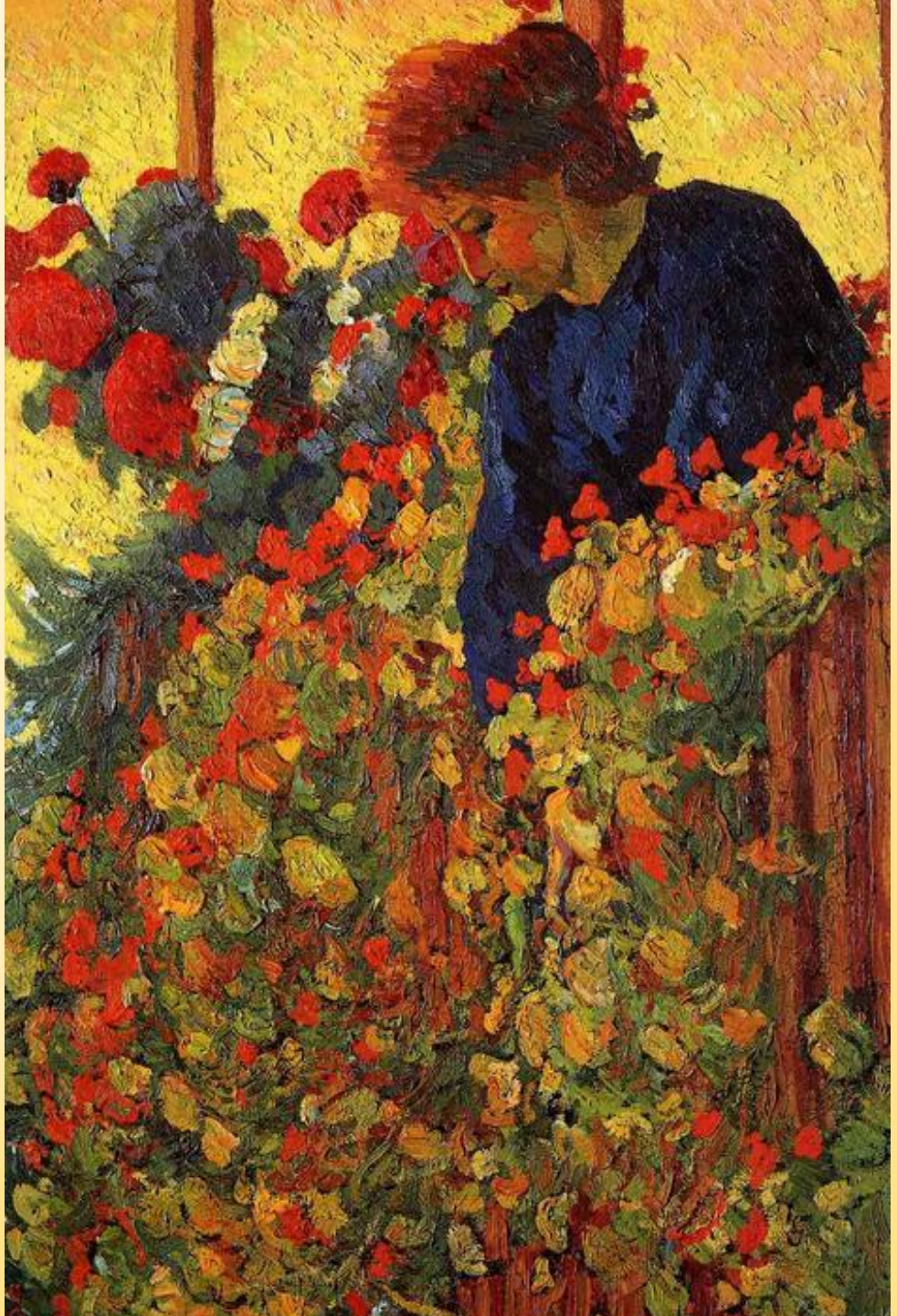
A Brief Introduction to Embodied Listening

"Discernment, then, is the process of intentionally becoming aware of how God is present, active, and calling us as individuals and communities so that we can respond with increasingly greater faithfulness.…

Entering into discernment, then, means becoming increasingly able to notice where God is at work in the world and in one's own life, increasingly desirous of choosing the "more," and, God willing, increasingly generous with one's own life in response."

— **Elizabeth Liebert,** ***The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making***



“THE BODY is a powerful carrier of wisdom. Everything we have experienced lives on in the body. Indeed, the body is life as we know it. Our senses registering the world, our muscles carrying us, the digestive system breaking food into nourishment—this is the body at work. Our activities, people living together, tending to children, working, falling ill, exercising—these are our embodied selves.



All experience, and hence, all information for vocation discernment and other types of decision-making, must come to us first through our bodies. Sometimes sensations can be subtle and take practice to notice and learn to interpret. Others, like the headache I typically get when my computer breaks down, can be glaringly obvious. Still, unless their revelatory power is taken seriously, the wisdom they offer goes unclaimed.

Psychologist Eugene Gendlin points out that what he calls “felt sense” is different from an emotion, which we could more readily recognize. Emotions also reside in the body, but the felt sense is more basic than emotions. We usually know when we are happy, sad, angry, or wistful, for example, but a felt sense, because it lacks such an emotional resonance, may elude detection at first. It might register as an ache, a twitch, a tension, or even more vague lightness or heaviness. In noting a negative body reaction, people may feel a knot in the stomach, a tightness in the chest, a catch in the throat, or simply a lack of energy. More positive sensations might be buoyancy, energy, freedom from twitches, knots, or pressure. This subtlety and lack of explicit language makes reading the body a challenge.



Consequently, learning to understand the language of our bodies can take some practice. I encourage you to notice and interpret the wisdom your body holds about how God is calling you.” -Sister Elizabeth Liebert, S.N.J.M.

https://vocationnetwork.org/en/articles/show/733-embody-your-decisions



Our discernment question:

How are we being called to be ministers of peace?

The Body Matters to God

Our bodies make us uniquely who we are and we are beloved!

A broad brushstroke (brief comments) through the lens of the importance of the physical body:



GENESIS

The Exodus



The Gospels:

Now picture Jesus, God's Son being born…



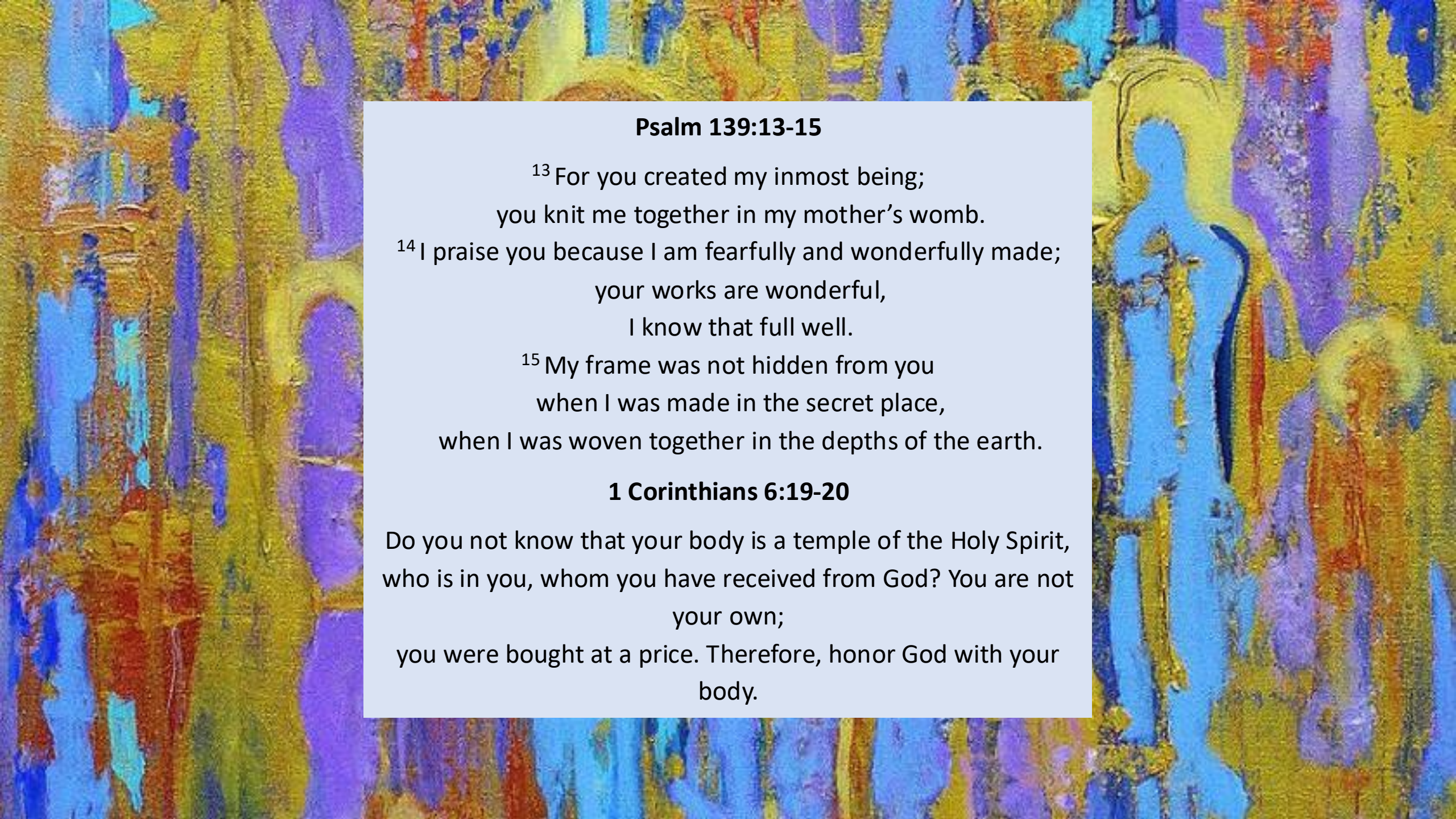
growing up…

walking among us…



loving us…

Yongsung Kim



Psalm 139:13-15

13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;
you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

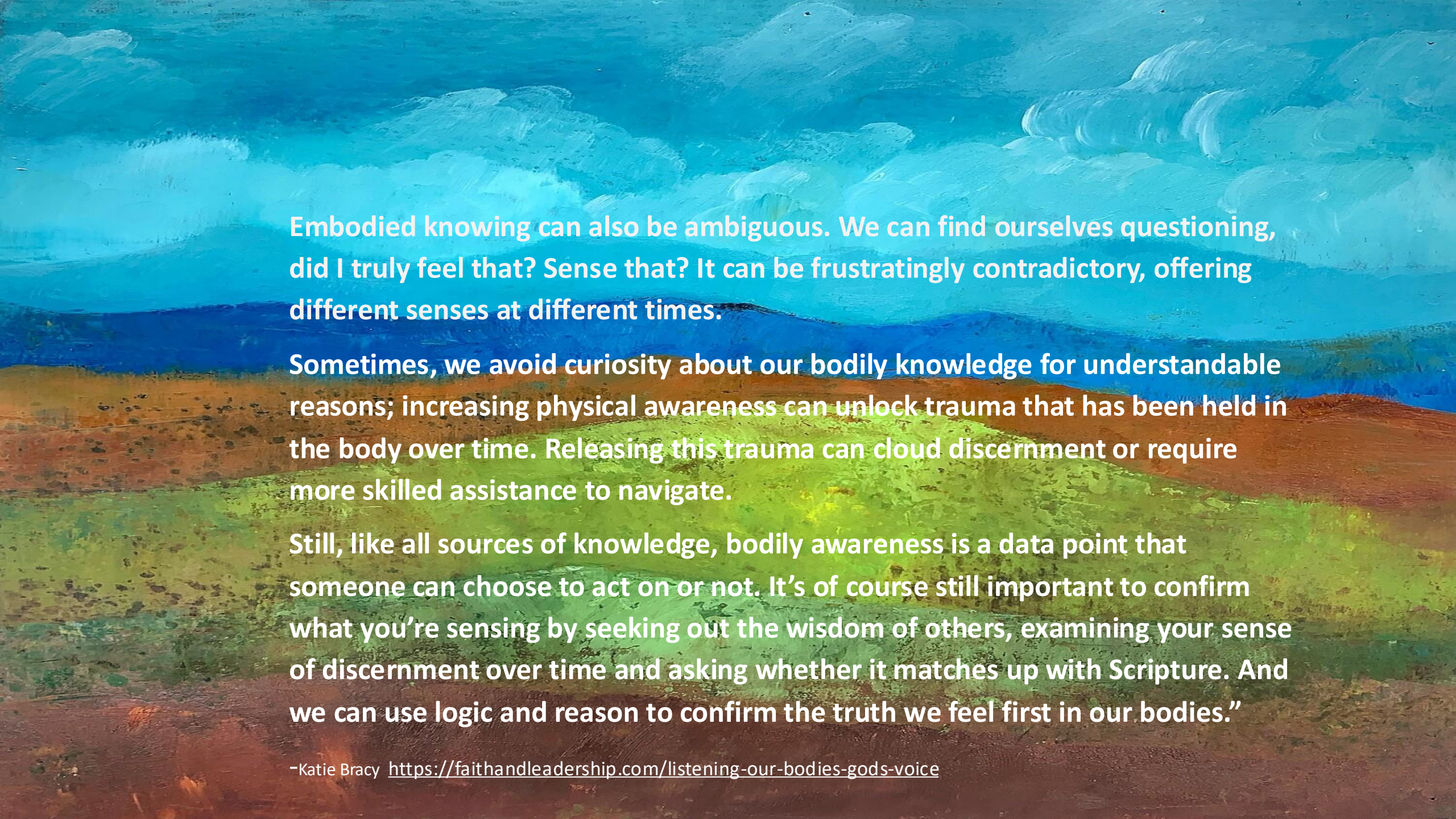
A Note on Listening With the Whole Self:

Listening with the whole self includes the head, heart, *and* body. How might we listen to the body with openness, curiosity, and a non-judgmental stance? Noticing, welcoming, and making space for how the body is "speaking" without grasping, correcting, or defending may take some practice. Staying present in the body can offer space for what is still emerging or unclear.

"In her book *"The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making,"* Catholic sister and scholar of discernment Elizabeth Liebert lifts up this "body sense" or "felt sense" as a valid source of information for discernment. A body sense is a type of intuition, akin to using one's imagination or gut sense to make a decision, but one grounded in physical sensations. It's a kind of immediate knowing without a conscious use of reason.

Practitioners may find new insights from this close attention or may even find that their body feels out of sync with their initial thoughts about their decision. By attending to this physical and emotional dimension, looking at a question less directly than through rational processes alone, we can uncover knowledge we might not even know that we have.

That said, we live in a cerebral culture that often values logic and reason as the most valid sources of knowledge, and so being attuned to our bodies is not necessarily natural for many of us. That reality makes it hard to perceive this information as a clear sign.



Embodied knowing can also be ambiguous. We can find ourselves questioning, did I truly feel that? Sense that? It can be frustratingly contradictory, offering different senses at different times.

Sometimes, we avoid curiosity about our bodily knowledge for understandable reasons; increasing physical awareness can unlock trauma that has been held in the body over time. Releasing this trauma can cloud discernment or require more skilled assistance to navigate.

Still, like all sources of knowledge, bodily awareness is a data point that someone can choose to act on or not. It's of course still important to confirm what you're sensing by seeking out the wisdom of others, examining your sense of discernment over time and asking whether it matches up with Scripture. And we can use logic and reason to confirm the truth we feel first in our bodies."

-Katie Bracy https://faithandleadership.com/listening-our-bodies-gods-voice



Prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things pass. God does not change. Patience achieves everything. Whoever has God lacks nothing.

God alone suffices.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which He blesses the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours. Amen.

"St Vincent de Paul at the Table of the Poor" by Kurt Welther