



LIVING THE
THE RISEN CHRIST
RESURRECTION
IN EVERYDAY LIFE

EUGENE H.
PETERSON

Foreword by Eric E. Peterson

Eugene Peterson is a man on whom God's wonder is not lost. Thanks to his pen, not even a day passes that I don't read and sigh, *I never thought of it that way*.

MAX LUCADO, teaching minister of Oak Hills Church

Make it real. Make it possible. That was Eugene's way, in everything he did. Here, he guides us into the most important power of Christian experience—finding the resurrection life of Jesus available to each of us, every day. You will love this.

JOHN ELDREDGE, author of *Wild at Heart*

Eugene Peterson's *Living the Resurrection* is a great gift—inspiring a major shift from understanding the Resurrection as an event to *experiencing* it as a practice we can engage in every day. And the result of practicing resurrection is no less than our transformation into the image of Christ! My heart soared in reading this work that connects dots that so desperately need to be connected; I am confident yours will as well!

RUTH HALEY BARTON, founding president/CEO of Transforming Center, author of *Sacred Rhythms*

As spiritual formation bids to become a fad among contemporary evangelicals, Eugene Peterson's *Living the Resurrection* offers an alternative path rooted in wonder and gives results that are more than cosmetic.

FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN, author of *The Illumined Heart*

In this work, the Resurrection ceases to be an abstract idea and is released again to be a force of wonder and fear that shapes our practice and life.

JOHN ORTBERG, senior pastor of Menlo Church

Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ in Everyday Life has had a profound influence on my ministry and writing. Peterson is among the few who write about the Resurrection in the present tense—as a reality for us to live into and experience in the here and now. I'm grateful for this summons to not just believe but experience the center of our faith—today.

ROBERT GELINAS, lead pastor of Colorado Community Church,
author of *Disciplined by Jesus*

Our love for the Lord of glory will surely swell to new heights thanks to the wondrous faith displayed in this book that at once instructs and inspires. May our reading of Eugene Peterson's heartfelt reflections be an Easter treat all year long.

SUSAN MUTO, cofounder of Epiphany Association Academy of
Formative Spirituality

Eugene Peterson is a master interpreter of Scripture, a master teller of tales, and in this book, a master practitioner of resurrection. Peterson enables the Easter faith to become a vivid reality.

WILLIAM H. WILLIMON, professor of the practice of Christian
ministry, Duke Divinity School

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FOREWORD

“I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body.” This creedal affirmation, a cornerstone of Christian orthodoxy, cleverly couples two central pillars of our faith: incarnation and resurrection. The flesh with which Jesus arrived on Christmas Day did not vanish on Ascension Day; he did not morph from a physical into a spiritual being once he was done with this world. From the beginning, the body of Christ has been intimately involved in all the details of God’s creation, God’s revelation, God’s salvation. Even now, that body sits at the right hand of the Father, reigning, praying, preparing. He’s as physically alive and well today as he was at his Bethlehem nativity.

Since the life of faith is nothing if it is not embodied, it must be lived—lived in the flesh. While Jesus’ body has been, for now, returned to heaven, the body of Christ remains incarnated through the church.

Manifesting the bodily presence of Jesus, the Christian life is pursued in the ordinary details of the here and now grounded in planet earth. The Holy Spirit (which is the Spirit of Christ) dwells in the baptized, creating a mysterious convergence of all that is past, present, and future, a reality which gets celebrated in the liturgy of the Eucharist: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” For now, he lives in people like you and me.

Living the incarnation and living the resurrection are two sides of the same discipleship coin; it is the union of our mortality and our immortality. It leaves nothing out.

Few gifts in my life compare to that of being with my dad during his dying days. On the afternoon when he was first placed under the care of hospice, I summarized for him the reality of his condition by telling him three things:

1. You are deeply loved.
2. We are going to take good care of you.
3. The remainder of your life is likely going to be measured in days and weeks, no longer months and years.

When I asked him how he felt about the prospect of dying, after his customary thoughtful pause, he said, “I feel good about that.” And indeed, he did. His remaining days were accompanied by an uncommon joy as he delighted in the visits with his family and friends, as he enjoyed a last supper of butter pecan ice cream, and as he interacted with people (angels?) on the other side of the threshold between earth and heaven who were, I am persuaded, preparing to welcome him into paradise. As a result, I do now, more than ever, believe in the resurrection of the body. His death, like his life, was a compelling witness to the resurrection to which he is now a full heir.

While Eugene’s funeral was open to the public,¹ the brief graveside service that followed was an intimate, family-only affair. As we gathered around his casket for our final farewell, and just before offering the “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” commendation, it seemed fitting that Eugene’s voice should be heard one last time. On a grassy hillside in the Conrad Memorial Cemetery of Montana, I read these words from his memoir, one of the last books he wrote.

Resurrection does not have to do exclusively with what happens after we are buried or cremated. It does have to do with that, but first of all it has to do with the way we live right now. But as Karl Barth, quoting Nietzsche, pithily reminds us: “Only where graves are is there resurrection.” We practice our death by giving up our will to live on our own terms. Only in that relinquishment or renunciation are we able to practice resurrection.²

We left the cemetery and joined several hundred friends for a reception nearby. We told stories. We shared food and drink. We straddled the emotional line between crushing grief and grateful wonder—which is to say that in the immediate wake of death, we joined Eugene in living the resurrection.

Eric Eugene Peterson
Pentecost, 2019

The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. “Good morning!” he said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him.



MATTHEW 28:8-9, MSG

Chapter One

RESURRECTION WONDER

I've always liked Billy Sunday's formula for the ideal Christian life. Billy Sunday was the quintessential American mass evangelist. He crisscrossed North America one hundred years ago with his flamboyant revival showmanship, which attracted enormous crowds. He was an ex-baseball player, and he used his pulpit as a pitcher's mound, winding up and letting go of his fastball, screwball, knuckleball sermons night after night in his huge revival tents. One of the features of these tents was the sawdust trail. The wide aisle leading from the entrance of the tent down to the elevated pulpit from which Sunday preached was layered with a couple of inches of sawdust. It kept down the dust in

dry times and moderated the mud in wet times. But it also marked the trail from row after row of folding chairs to the altar at the front of the tent, just below the pulpit. As Billy Sunday would wind up his sermon, he would give his famous “altar call,” calling men and women who had come to the tent that night to step out of their seats, walk down the sawdust trail to the altar, and, kneeling there, become Christians. “Hitting the sawdust trail” entered the North American vocabulary as a synonym for repentance and conversion.

THE PERFECT FORMULA

I don't know if “hitting the sawdust trail” was coined by Billy Sunday, but he was most certainly the one who gave it currency as a stock phrase in our language. His often-repeated formula for the ideal Christian life was this: “Hit the sawdust trail, fall on your knees, and receive Christ as your Savior. Then walk out of this tent into the street, get hit by a Mack truck, and go straight to heaven.”

You must admit, I think, that it's a wonderful formula for getting to heaven the quickest and easiest way. And virtually foolproof. There is no time to backslide, no temptations to bother with, no doubts to wrestle with,

no spouse to have to honor, no kids to put up with, no enemies to love, no more sorrow, no more tears. Instant eternity.

Billy Sunday is an extreme case of what is more or less typical of the North American approach to these matters: Get it right, but then get it done as quickly as possible. Define your goal and then go for it, devising the most economical and efficient means. As a culture, we are great at beginnings. We set magnificent goals. But in the in-between, we don't have much to write home about. When things get bad enough, we just make a new beginning, which we are very good at doing. Or we set a new goal or "vision" or "mission statement," as we call it, which temporarily distracts us from what is going on right around us.

WHAT THE CHURCH LEAVES OUT

Let me paraphrase something that Pope John Paul II once said as he addressed a group of leaders from Third World countries: Don't look at the Western nations for models in your development. They know how to make things, but they don't know how to live with them. They have acquired a mind-boggling technology, but they've forgotten how to raise their children.

This is the context for this book. It's a cultural context in which souls are pretty much ignored in the rush of getting something or making something. The formation of souls is a major responsibility of the Christian church—lives formed by the Holy Spirit “to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). But by and large, it is a neglected responsibility. We have a lot of special programs to take care of it, but they are always at the periphery of something else. There is far more attention being given to spiritual formation in the secular world of New Age spirituality and psychological development than in the church. And however laudable the attention being given by the teachers and guides of this world, they are attempting to do it quite apart from Jesus Christ or with Jesus only at the margins. Therefore, they are leaving out the biggest part, which is resurrection.

My conviction is that the church is the community that God has set at the center of the world to keep the world centered. One essential aspect of this centering is commonly called spiritual formation—the lifelong formation of the life of Christ in us. It consists of what goes on between the moment we realize and accept our identity as Christians and the time when we sit down to

“the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9). It deals with the way we live in the time being, the time that intervenes between kneeling at the altar and getting hit by the Mack truck.

I take up this subject with considerable urgency, not only because of the widespread secularization of spiritual formation in the culture around us, but also because the church in which I live and have been called to write and speak has become more like the culture in these matters than counter to it. The enormous interest in “spirituality” these days is not accompanied by much, if any, interest in the long and intricate and daily business of formation in Christ—that is, the practice of the dispositions and habits of the heart that changes our word *spirituality* from a wish or a desire or a fantasy or a diversion into an actual life lived to the glory of God. A phrase from a Wendell Berry poem gives focus to what we’re doing—“practice resurrection.” I’m going to anchor this book in the resurrection of Jesus.

RECOVERING OUR RESURRECTION CENTER

We live the Christian life out of a rich tradition of formation-by-resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection provides the energy and conditions by which we “walk before the

LORD in the land of the living”—the great psalm phrase (116:9). The resurrection of Jesus creates and then makes available the reality in which we are formed as new creatures in Christ by the Holy Spirit. The do-it-yourself, self-help culture of North America has so thoroughly permeated our imaginations that we ordinarily don't give attention to the biggest thing of all—resurrection. And the reason we don't is because resurrection is not something we can use or control or manipulate or improve on. It's interesting, isn't it, that the world has had very little success in commercializing Easter—turning it into a commodity—as it has Christmas? If we can't, in our phrase, “get a handle on it” or use it, we soon lose interest. But resurrection is not available for our use. It's exclusively God's operation.

What I want to do is recover our resurrection center and embrace the formation traditions that develop out of it. I'm going to deal in turn with three aspects of Jesus' resurrection that define and energize us as we enter the practice of resurrection lives. I will then set this resurrection life lived out of the reality and conditions of Jesus' resurrection in contrast to what I consider the common cultural habits and assumptions that are either oblivious to or make detours around resurrection.

I will name this “the deconstruction of resurrection.” Finally, I will suggest something of what is involved in cultivating the practice of resurrection: living appropriately and responsively in a world in which Christ is risen.

REVERENCE AND INTIMACY NEED EACH OTHER

Our four Gospel writers all complete their narrations of the gospel of Jesus with a story or stories of Jesus’ resurrection. They come at it from different directions and provide different details, but one element is common to each of them: a sense of wonder, astonishment, surprise. Despite the several hints scattered throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus’ three explicit statements forecasting his resurrection (see Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34), when it happened, it turned out that no one—no one—expected it. The first people involved in Jesus’ resurrection were totally involved in dealing with his death. Now they had to do a complete about-face and deal with a life. As they did it, they were suffused with wonder.

Matthew gives us Mary Magdalene and a woman he names “the other Mary” making an early Sunday morning visit to the tomb in which on late Friday afternoon

they had watched Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus' crucified body (see 28:1-10). As they approach the tomb, the ground suddenly shakes under their feet—an earthquake. This is followed by a blaze of lightning, which turns out to be an angel. The combination of earthquake and lightning puts the Roman soldiers who are guarding this tomb out of commission. Scared out of their wits, they sprawl on the ground in a dead faint.

But the two Marys stay on their feet and hear the angel address them personally with two phrases: “Do not be afraid” and “He has risen” (verses 5-6). The angel then gives them a message to be delivered to the disciples. They leave the site of the tomb, as ordered by the angel. Deep in wonder and full of joy, they are off on the run to share the news with the disciples. But then they are stopped in their tracks by a greeting: “Good morning!” (verse 9, MSG). They hear a welcome in the greeting and fall to their knees before the resurrected Jesus. Their first response to the risen Christ was to kneel in awed reverence. There was also an element of intimacy in that reverence, for they dared to touch and hold on to his feet: They “worshiped him” (verse 9).

The two elements together became worship. Falling

to our knees before Jesus—an act of reverence—is not in itself resurrection worship. Touching and holding the feet of Jesus—an act of intimacy—is not in itself resurrection worship. The acts of reverence and intimacy need each other. The reverence needs the infusion of intimacy lest it become a cool and detached aesthetic. The intimacy needs to be suffused in reverence lest it become a gushy emotion. These women knew what they were doing: They were dealing with God in the living presence of Jesus, and so they worshiped.

Jesus then repeats the angel's earlier reassurance—"Do not be afraid"—and repeats the message to be delivered to the disciples. And that was it.

I love the contrast between those Roman guards—insensible and sprawled on the ground, paralyzed by fear—and the two exuberant women kneeling on the same ground, energized by fear. It's the same word in both cases—*fear*. But it's not the same thing. There is a fear that incapacitates us for dealing with God, and there is a fear that pulls us out of our preoccupation with ourselves, our feelings, or our circumstances into a world of wonder. It pulls us out of ourselves into the very action of God.

SHATTERING ASTONISHMENT

Mark adds another woman—Salome—to Matthew’s two Marys on their early Sunday morning visit to the tomb, and then he adds some details that reinforce the sense of resurrection wonder (see 16:1-8). Mark tells us that the three women are coming to the tomb prepared to do a job—embalm Jesus’ body with spices. As they approach, they are preoccupied with a problem: How are they going to get into the tomb and do their work? A huge stone had been rolled in front of the entrance, and they would never be able to move it. But when they arrive, they find that the stone has been rolled back. Big surprise! They expected to have to deal with a big problem, but there is no problem. They expected to do an important and essential job, but there is no job to do.

Their surprise is compounded when they enter the tomb and find a young man—we assume it was an angel—sitting there ready to talk with them. These women are “completely taken aback, astonished” (verse 5, MSG). Who wouldn’t be? But he reassures them. He tells them that Jesus has been raised and gives them the message to deliver to the disciples.

Mark, in his terse, abrupt ending, highlights the shattering astonishment experienced by these three women.

The women were “beside themselves, their heads swimming.” They were “stunned” and “said nothing to anyone” (verse 8, MSG). Resurrection wonder, indeed.

REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS

Luke includes a number of unnamed women with the two Marys and Salome in this opening resurrection scene (see 24:1-12). These unnamed women are “the women who had come with him [Jesus] from Galilee” (23:55). They are also referred to as “the women” (24:1, MSG) and “the other women” (verse 10). He also adds a fourth named woman, Joanna (see verse 10). They show up with their burial spices, intending to go to work on Jesus’ body. But, of course, there is no body. They are “puzzled” (verse 4, MSG). They scratch their heads and look around. This is the right tomb, isn’t it? On Friday afternoon they had been right there watching Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus’ body in it. They had spent Saturday getting the burial spices and ointments together. By now, they have spent hours in preparation getting ready for this devout act of loving service to this person who had meant so much to them and whom they are now mourning. And now this. *What’s going on here, anyway?*

Then, suddenly, two men are right there before them.

Clean light cascades through and off their clothes. They have got to be angels. Totally frightened, the women fall down—their faces to the ground. The two men in the tomb reassure them by saying, “Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?” (verses 5-7, MSG).

Well, these women do remember. They had heard those words. But never in their wildest dreams had they expected it—not in their lifetimes. They are understandably disoriented. But the two men’s matter-of-fact words reconnect them with matter-of-fact reality. They remember where they had been—those very real Galilean roads and meals and conversations. They remember what they have just lived through—an excruciating Jerusalem crucifixion. They remember Jesus’ words—words they had heard with their own ears. How could they forget them?

The women remember. No, they are not crazy. Soon they have their feet under them again and go back and tell the disciples. They have no luck getting the disciples in on what they now know and experience. The disciples

dismiss their report as an idle tale. They don't believe a word of it. They think they are making it all up.

THE NATURE OF WONDER

It's not easy to convey a sense of wonder, let alone resurrection wonder, to another. It's the very nature of wonder to catch us off guard, to circumvent expectations and assumptions. Wonder can't be packaged, and it can't be worked up. It requires some sense of being there and some sense of engagement.

Luke adds still another detail. He introduces the person of Peter as the first male to enter this scene of resurrection wonder. In the midst of the disciples' general disbelief that greets the women, Luke tells us that Peter jumps to his feet, runs to the tomb, stoops to look in, and sees a few grave clothes. That was all. He walks away puzzled, shaking his head. Obviously, we are not dealing with something that, as we say, "makes sense." Nor has anyone so far been able to "make something of it."

Two of our primary ways of dealing with reality are by understanding and by using. Understanding takes a new item of experience or information and makes sense of it by fitting it into all the other things we already know. Using tests out the new experience or

information in the actual routines of what can be or has to be done. But this resurrection is inaccessible to either of these. Understanding and using are displaced by sheer wonder, astonishment, amazement—first by the women and then by Peter, who was just as stumped by what he was dealing with as were the women.

A GIVEAWAY DETAIL

John, as is often his wont, does something quite different from his canonical brothers (see 20:1-19). He ratchets the sense of resurrection wonder up still another notch. John begins with Mary Magdalene arriving predawn on that Sunday morning at the tomb and then completely misinterpreting what she sees. She discovers that the tomb is empty and jumps to what would appear to be the obvious conclusion—robbery. Grave robbers. Grave robbery was a common and serious problem in those days, enough so as to provoke an imperial Roman edict against it.¹ Mary's sense of reality, it seems, was completely intact. She was quite able to look at evidence and come to a sober conclusion. Why else would the grave be empty?

Mary runs to tell Peter and “the other disciple”—we think it was John (verse 3). The two men immediately take off running to the tomb. They enter the tomb

(Mary herself, it seems, hadn't gone in). They find that it is indeed empty, but they come to a completely different conclusion than Mary did. The conclusion they come to is resurrection.

And here's how they did it. John notices a striking and, as it turns out, giveaway detail. The kerchief that was used to cover Jesus' head was separate from the cloths that wrapped his body and was, in his phrase, "neatly folded by itself" (verse 7, MSG). John, with the quick mind of a born detective, deduces that robbery is out of the question. Grave robbers would not have unwrapped the corpse. And even if by some strange perversity they had, it is difficult to imagine them taking the time to neatly fold the head kerchief and set it aside. John—his mind working with surprising coolness under the emotion of the moment and on the strength of that single clue (the neatly folded kerchief)—comes up with what turns out to be the truth. Resurrection. And with that, John and Peter leave the tomb.

RABBONI!

The Gospel writer now returns the story to Mary. After delivering her message to the disciples—the message that fired the starting pistol that sent Peter and John

running off on their resurrection-morning race—she comes back to the tomb, still operating under the misapprehension that Jesus' body was stolen. She is outside the tomb, distraught and heartbroken and weeping. When she kneels to look inside the tomb, she sees two angels. They ask sympathetically about her weeping. She tells them the reason and then turns away. Peripherally, she notices the figure of a man she doesn't recognize but assumes is the gardener. The man asks her the same question as the angels, and she gives the same answer. Then he speaks her name: "Mary" (verse 16).

She turns to face him, her tear-blurred eyes now clear. She sees Jesus, and she answers, "Rabboni!"—Teacher (verse 16). The term *Rabboni* combines the deep reverence for a person (rabbi) with an affectionate intimacy (probably something like "my dear Teacher").²

The fourth Gospel presents the opening scene of Jesus' resurrection somewhat differently from its predecessors but is no less charged with wonder. To Peter, who is mentioned briefly by Luke, another man is added to the scenario: "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20)—the beloved disciple, whom we think was John. The two men get a story of their own. Their story is framed by Mary Magdalene first running from the tomb to

sound the alarm and then returning to the tomb weeping, disconsolate in her loss. Her alarm kicked off the famous Peter-John race, which resulted in the first solid resurrection thinking. After the race, her tears lead us into the intimate resurrection recognition exchange: “Mary . . . Rabboni—my dear Teacher!”

WE CAN’T MASTER SPIRITUAL FORMATION

As we take in and meditate on the four resurrection accounts, our sense of resurrection wonder accumulates. It is a cumulative, building sense. These four stories are spare, compact, economically narrated. No purple passages in here. From this bedrock narrative austerity, though, a few things emerge with clarity, things that are significant as we ponder for ourselves formation-by-resurrection.

First, however many resurrection “hints and guesses” there may have been in the Hebrew, Mediterranean, and Near Eastern centuries preceding this, when it happened, it took those who were closest to the event and best prepared for it totally unawares. I think this is important. We’re never in a position to know very much about formation-by-resurrection. This is not in continuity with or analogous to anything we’re familiar

with—psychological development, for instance, or moral metaphysics.

Second, it is obvious that no one did anything to prepare for what actually happened. There was no working-up readiness for it. The two Jewish religious groups who at the time were working most diligently to prepare the resurrection and Messianic ground for something just like this—the Pharisees and the Essenes—were looking the other way, and they missed it totally. Everyone is a beginner in this business. There are no experts.

Given the care that we, in our way of going about things, take to prepare, plan, and train for something that is big and important, that's more than a little disconcerting. Spiritual formation is not something we master. It's not something over which we have much, if any, control.

Third, marginal people in the culture—in this case, women—play a prominent role in perception and response. Although recognized leaders, such as Peter and John, aren't excluded, Mary Magdalene—perhaps the most marginal of any of the early followers of Jesus—is the chief resurrection witness and the only person to appear in all four accounts. The only fact that we know about Mary Magdalene before she joined Jesus

is that she was possessed by “seven devils” and had been delivered from them. The “seven devils” could refer to an utterly dissolute moral life or to an extreme form of mental illness. Either or both of these pre-Jesus conditions, coupled with being a woman in a patriarchal society, put her at the very far edge of marginality.

Given the importance that we in our society give to celebrity endorsements, that’s more than a little disconcerting. The men and women who are going to be most valuable to us in spiritual formation-by-resurrection are most likely going to be people at the edge of respectability: the poor, minorities, the suffering, the rejected, poets, and children.

Fourth, the resurrection was a quiet business that took place in a quiet place without publicity or spectators. There was, of course, much energy and emotion (tears, running, astonishment, bewilderment, and joy), but there was nothing to catch the attention of outsiders. (Matthew’s earthquake is a partial exception to this. But the only outside people who were told or who were affected were the Roman guards who were knocked insensible by it.)

When I was young, I played a trumpet. In Montana where I grew up, Easter always took place just at the

edge of winter. I was up at five, five thirty, or six every Easter morning for a sunrise service. Everybody wanted a trumpet player on Easter. My lips numb with cold on a frozen mouthpiece, I was there playing cracked notes on some hilltop around our town. But the point is that you make a lot of noise. This is important, and you let the whole world know it's important. Well, my church didn't get that from these Gospel texts.

Given our accustomed ways of surrounding the important events with attention-getting publicity and given the importance of this event for the gospel, that's a big surprise. Bright lights and amplification are not accessories to spiritual formation.

ENCOUNTERING THE "MORE AND OTHER"

And a fifth observation is fear. Fear is the most frequently mentioned resurrection response—six times in these four stories. We're afraid when we're suddenly caught off our guard and don't know what to do. We're afraid when our presuppositions and assumptions no longer account for what we're up against, and we don't know what will happen to us. We're afraid when reality, without warning, is shown to be either more or other than we thought it was.

But these six fear references take place in a tradition of storytelling in the Hebrew culture and the Hebrew Scriptures in which the word *fear* is frequently used in a way that means far more than simply being scared. Here's the thing: It *includes* all the emotions that accompany being scared—disorientation, not knowing what's going to happen, the realization that there is far more here than we had any idea of. But that “more and other” is God.

Fear-of-the-Lord is the stock biblical term for this either sudden or cultivated awareness that the presence or revelation of God introduces into our lives. We are not the center of our existence. We are not the sum total of what matters. We don't know what's going to happen next.

Fear-of-the-Lord keeps us on our toes with our eyes open. Something is going on around here, and we don't want to miss it. Fear-of-the-Lord prevents us from thinking that we know it all. And it therefore prevents us from closing off our minds or our perceptions from what is new. Fear-of-the-Lord prevents us from acting presumptuously and therefore destroying or violating some aspect of beauty, truth, or goodness that we don't recognize or don't understand.

Fear-of-the-Lord is fear with the scary element deleted. So it is often accompanied with the reassurance: “Fear not.” But the “fear not” does not result in the absence of fear but rather the transformation into fear-of-the-Lord. We still don’t know what’s going on. We’re still not in control. We’re still deep, deep in mystery.

In the canonical resurrection stories, there are six occurrences of various forms of the root word *fear*. Twice the word is used to express terror: the Roman guards before the dazzling angel at the empty tomb (see Matthew 28:4) and the confounded disciples later running away from that same tomb (see Mark 16:8). In three of the occurrences, reassurance is given to relieve the fear. Luke tells of the women being frightened but immediately reassured in the presence of the angel at the tomb (see 24:5). And in Matthew, first the angel and later Jesus tell the women, “Do not be afraid” (28:5, 10). Sandwiched between these reassurances in Matthew, the word conveys a sense of reverent joy (see 28:8).

Fear is accompanied by several other wonder-evoking words—*amazed* (Mark 16:5-6), *trembling*, *astonishment* (Mark 16:8), *perplexed* (Luke 24:4), *frightened* (Luke 24:5), *wondering* (Luke 24:12). The ease with which

the same root word of *fear*—first as a noun and then as a verb—can be used so differently but without confusion in context is evident in the Matthew reference: “For fear of him the guards did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not” (28:4-5, KJV).

WHERE SPIRITUAL FORMATION GOES WRONG

Spiritual formation operates in a resurrection atmosphere of this “more and other” in which we have to cultivate responses of awed reverence or risk missing the very heart of what is going on. There are too many clichés and too much glibness in our language on the formation of the Christian life. Wonder permeates these resurrection stories—resurrection wonder.

The five elements of surprise here that I’ve gone through—the unpreparedness, the uselessness of experts, the prominence of marginal companions, the quiet out-of-the-wayness, and the fear—give a rich texture to wonder. Nothing here travels along the lines of our expectations, especially the expectations that we bring to something we consider important and life-changing. And if Jesus’ resurrection is at the center of our spiritual formation—which I’m convinced

it is—then this sense of wonder is a big part of what goes on. Puzzlement, astonishment, surprise. God is at work—and right here in Jesus, in you, in me.

Without wonder, we approach spiritual formation as a self-help project. We employ techniques. We analyze gifts and potentialities. We set goals. We assess progress. Spiritual formation is reduced to cosmetics.

Without wonder, the motivational energies in spiritual formation get dominated by anxiety and guilt. Anxiety and guilt restrict; they close us in on ourselves. They isolate us with feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness; they reduce us to ourselves at our worst. Spiritual formation is distorted into moral workaholism or pious athleticism.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF WONDER

Unfortunately, we do not live in a world that promotes or encourages wonder. Wonder is natural and spontaneous to all of us. When we were children, we were in a constant state of wonder. The world was new, tumbling in on us in profusion. We staggered through each day fondling, looking, tasting. Words were wondrous. Running was wondrous. Touch, taste, sound were all wonders. We lived in a world of wonders.

But gradually the sense of wonder gets squeezed out of us. There are many reasons, but mostly the lessening of wonder takes place as we develop in competence and gain mastery over ourselves and our coordination and our environment.

The workplace, when we become adults, is where this diminishing of wonder goes on most consistently and thoroughly. It's difficult to cultivate a sense of wonder in the workplace. Knowledge and competence are the key values here. We don't want any surprises. We don't want to waste time just staring at something, wondering what to make of it. We're trained and then paid to know what we're doing.

And so, for most of us, the morning after our conversion we get out of bed and go to work, having luckily escaped being hit by the Mack truck. For most of us, it is a job that excites us. It demands our best and rewards us with recognition and satisfaction. We're doing something significant that makes a difference, that makes the world better and makes people's lives better. It makes us useful and gives us money to take care of ourselves and our dependents. Work is a wonderful thing. We're involved firsthand in God's creation and among God's creatures.

A SUBTLE BUT DISASTROUS SHIFT

But then after a few weeks or months back on the job, the feelings, convictions, and ideas that clustered around our becoming Christians become background to the center stage drama of our work with its strenuous demands, energizing stimuli, and rich satisfactions.

Along the way, the primacy of God and his work gives way ever so slightly to the primacy of *our* work in God's kingdom. We begin to think of ways to use God in what we're doing. The shift is barely perceptible, for we continue to use the vocabulary of our new identity. We continue to believe the identical truths. We continue pursuing good goals. It usually takes a long time for the significance of the shift to show up. But when it does, it turns out that we have not so much been worshipping God as enlisting him as a trusted and valuable assistant.

On the job, we are dealing with what *we* know and what *we* are good at. What we know is our work. Why not ask God to help us in our work? He invited us to do it, didn't he? "Ask and you shall receive." Well, yes, he did. The problem is that taken out of the context of resurrection wonder, any prayer soon becomes an act

of idolatry—reducing God to what we can use for our purposes, however noble and useful.

It rarely occurs to us to name such seemingly innocent, natural, and pious behavior as idolatry. None of us would think of placing a plastic Saint Christopher on our Pontiac dashboard to prevent accidents, installing a big-bellied Buddha in a shrine in our family room to put a break on our helter-skelter running around and pursuing illusions, or planting a Canaanite fertility Asherah grove in our backyard to promote bigger tomatoes in our garden and more babies in our nursery. But idolatry it is, all the same. It's using God instead of worshiping God. Not full-grown idolatry at first, to be sure, but the germs of idolatry that thrive in the workplace.

SLOGGING THROUGH THE DAILY MUD

For others of us, the job to which we return the morning after our conversion—having been *unlucky* enough not to get hit by the Mack truck—is sheer drudgery. A boring, lackluster job to which we drag ourselves day after day, week after week. For a few weeks the new reality that we have in Christ displaces the burden and boredom of the workplace. Prayers murmur quietly like

a mountain stream under the surface of our speech. Songs of praise reverberate in our imaginations. We see everyone and everything with fresh eyes. We are new creatures set down in a world of wonders.

And then one day we realize that the “all things new” into which we have been introduced by Christ doesn’t include our workplace. We’re still in the same old dead-end job in which we’ve been stagnating for ten or twenty or thirty years. With our new energy and sense of unique identity and purpose sparked by our conversion, we look around for a way out. We fantasize jobs in which we can wholeheartedly work, in the wonderful phrase, “to the glory of God.” A few people risk everything and break out. But most of us do not. We have a mortgage to pay or children to put through college. We don’t have the training or schooling necessary. Our spouse is content just as things are and doesn’t want to jeopardize the security of familiarity. And so we accept the fact that we’re stuck and return to slogging through the daily mud and boredom of our routine.

CHRISTIAN IDOLATRY

But what we also do is look around for ways to affirm and cultivate our new life in Christ outside our workplace.

And we soon find, quite to our delight, that there is a lot to choose from. A huge religious marketplace has been set up in North America to meet the needs and fantasies of people just like us. There are conferences and gatherings custom-designed to give us the lift we need. There are books, videos, and seminars that promise to let us in on the Christian “secret” of whatever it is we feel is lacking in our life—financial security, well-behaved children, weight loss, sex, travel to holy sites, exciting worship, celebrity teachers. The people who promote these goods and services all smile a lot and are good-looking. *They* are obviously not bored.

It isn't long before we're standing in line to buy whatever is being offered. And because none of the purchases does what we had hoped for, or at least not for long, we're soon back to buy another, and then another. The process is addicting. We become consumers of packaged spiritualities.

This also is idolatry. We never think of using this term because everything we're buying or paying for is defined by the adjective *Christian*. But idolatry it is, nevertheless. It's God packaged as a product—God depersonalized and made available as a technique or a program. The Christian market in idols has never been

more brisk or lucrative. The late medieval indulgences that provoked Luther's righteous wrath are small potatoes compared to what's going on in our evangelical backyard.

AN INTOLERANCE OF MYSTERY

Every Christian man or woman who gets out of bed and goes to work walks into a world in which idolatry is the major temptation for seducing him or her away from the new life of being formed-by-resurrection into the likeness of Christ.

There are endless variations and combinations on these "good" and "bad" workplaces that I've sketched. But the probabilities of idolatry are ever-present if we work—and most of us do. (The obvious exceptions are children, the elderly, the disabled, and the unemployed.) We live most days and most of the hours of those days in a world permeated with the making and purchasing of idols.

Most of us spend a lot of time at work, which means that our Christian identity is being formed much of the time under uncongenial, if not outright hostile, conditions—conditions marked by an intolerance of mystery (information and know-how are always required

in the workplace). A premium is put on our competence and being in control (incompetence and out-of-control behavior will get us dismissed in short order). And personal relationships are subordinated and conformed to the nature of the work to be done.

Technology is one of the primary promoters of idolatry today. It's ironic, isn't it? Idolatry, which is associated at least in popular imagination with superstitions—the unenlightened, uneducated, primitive child mind with its myths and mumbo jumbo—now finds itself with a new lease on life with the help of technology, which is associated with no-nonsense, scientific research using the pure language of mathematics to create a world of computers that dominate the workplace and before which virtually everybody is bowing down in respectful reverence. Impersonal *things* that dominate our time and imagination offer extravagant promises of control and knowledge. But they also squeeze all sense of mystery and wonder and reverence out of our lives.

The workplace has always been a threat to spiritual formation because it is the place where we don't wonder very much. Wonder is pretty much banished on principle. In the workplace, we know that we are competent or that we are bored and inattentive. In today's

culture, the threat posed by life diminished by wonder is accelerated many times over.

That is why Christian formation—formation-by-resurrection—demands endless vigilance. The workplace is the arena in which idolatry is constantly being reconfigured by putting us in a position of control and giving us things and systems that enable us to exercise our skills and carry out our strategies in the world.

Wonder, that astonished willingness to stop what we're doing, to stand still open-eyed, open-handed, ready to take in what is “more and other,” is not encouraged in the workplace.

THE CULTIVATION OF RESURRECTION WONDER

Does that mean that we put spiritual formation on hold during working hours and pick it up again after-hours and on weekends? I don't think so.

For here is the striking thing: The opening scene in the resurrection of Jesus occurs in the workplace. Mary Magdalene and the other women were on their way to work when they encountered and embraced the resurrection of Jesus. I'm prepared to contend that the primary location for spiritual formation—for formation-by-resurrection—is in the workplace.

So how do we who work for a living and spend a huge hunk of our time each week in a workplace that is unfriendly to wonder cultivate wonder, the resurrection-wonder in which spiritual formation thrives?

To those who take the Bible seriously as the text for our spiritual formation, the answer is unequivocal: Keep the Sabbath holy. This is the focal practice set down in Scripture and practiced by the church in which to cultivate wonder.

Do you realize that those first participants in the resurrection had just spent the previous day keeping Sabbath? On Friday evening, shortly after Jesus had been taken from the cross and placed in Joseph's tomb, devout Jews in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Capernaum, Alexandria, Babylon, Athens, Rome—devout Jews everywhere—lit two candles and welcomed the Sabbath: “Blessed art Thou, O God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by Thy commandments and has commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights.”

One candle was lit for the Exodus command, which says, “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. . . . You shall not do any work. . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day” (Exodus 20:8, 10-11, NRSV).

The other candle was lit for the Deuteronomy command, which says, “Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . You shall not do any work. . . . Remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 5:12, 14-15).

On Saturday at sundown the prayer was repeated, the candles again lit, and the final prayer, the Havdilah, closed the holy day of rest.

THE HABIT OF SABBATH-KEEPING

We don't know exactly what Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, Joanna and Salome, Peter and John, and the other unnamed followers did during those twenty-four hours of remembering and observing. But it seems unlikely that the habits of a lifetime would have been discarded. They were devout Jews, after all. The entire city was keeping Sabbath that day, and they would be too. It is unlikely, also, that they went to the synagogue. Leaders in opposition to Jesus would have been there, and they might well have felt unwelcome and even endangered. The one thing we know they did not do is what was most pressing and what they were most motivated to do—embalm Jesus' body. And they didn't do it

because they were remembering God's work of creation and their deliverance from slavery.

I'm not supposing that they talked or prayed about these things deliberately by having, let's say, a Bible study. But I am imagining that the habit of Sabbath-keeping was working subconsciously in them, providing an underlying awareness of the immensity of God at work in the world and the personalness of God at work for them. I am thinking that their Sabbath observance set them in a far larger context as reported by them in the events of Friday or by their own devastated feelings. The huge catastrophe and horror and disappointment of crucifixion were settling into a larger context of God's world-making work and soul-making salvation during those twenty-four Sabbath hours. Nothing they could do or wanted to do was important enough to take precedence over what God had done and was doing in creation and salvation as it came into focus in the Exodus and Deuteronomy commands and which had been internalized in a lifetime of Sabbath practice.

So when they set out for work the next morning, having kept the Sabbath, there was a deeply developed

instinct for God, a capacity to respond in wonder to mysteries that were beyond them, to be surprised by what they did not understand and could not anticipate. Their Sabbath-keeping was a weekly housecleaning. And so they entered the workweek uncluttered with idols—all those subtle but obsessive attempts to give us a god or a routine or a program we can handle or use that get tracked into our kitchens daily from off the street. For them, Sabbath-keeping provided a certain detachment from the world's way of doing things and from their own compulsions to take things into their own hands. Keeping Sabbath—a day of studied and vowed resistance to doing anything so they could be free to see and respond to who God is and what he is doing—was basic to formation-by-resurrection in those five named women and two men narrated by our Gospel writers.

GOD IN THE WORKPLACE

The capacity to see God working in our workplace, which he most certainly is doing, and to respond in astonished wonder requires some detachment from the workplace. How do we cultivate that detachment? Keep the Sabbath.

We cannot understand the character or significance

of Sabbath apart from work and the workplace. Sabbath and work are not in opposition. Sabbath and work are part of an organic whole—either one apart from the other is maimed and crippled.

The simplest way to comprehend this is to observe that God comes into view on the first page of our Scriptures as a worker. We see God working in his workplace. This is so important. Our first look at God is not as an abstraction—a higher power, eternal love, or pure being—but as a creator, making the workplace that all of us continue to work in: light to work by, the ground under our feet, the sky above us, the plants and trees that we grow, the rhythms of the year, fish and birds and animals in the food chain. As God works through the days of the week, detail after detail comes into being, and a refrain develops: “And God saw that it was good.” Good, good, good . . . seven times across the six days we hear it. “And God saw that it was good.” The final statement—the seventh one—is a superlative: “And behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Good work, good workplace.

And then the Sabbath. But only then. We cannot rightly understand Sabbath apart from work, nor rightly do our work apart from Sabbath. Wendell Berry makes

workday and Sabbath rhythmic—one with another—in one of his Sabbath poems:

. . . workday
And Sabbath live together in one place.
Though mortal, incomplete, that harmony
Is our one possibility of peace.³

Sabbath is the final day in a series of days of work, all of which are declared good by God. The work context in which Sabbath is set is work emphasized by the three-time repetition of the phrases “his work which he had done” (Genesis 2:2), “all his work which he had done” (2:2), and “all his work which he had done in creation” (2:3). But the distinctive Sabbath character is conveyed by the four verbs: God *finished* his work . . . he *rested* . . . God *blessed* the Sabbath day and *hallowed* it.

These verbs all take us beyond the workplace itself. There is more to work than work—there is God: God in completion; God in repose; God blessing; and God making holy. The workplace is not the whole of life. But without a Sabbath, in which God goes beyond the workplace (but not away from it), the workplace is soon emptied of any sense of the presence of God. The work itself

becomes an end in itself. It is this “end in itself” that makes an un-Sabbathed workplace a breeding ground for idols. We make idols in our workplaces when we reduce our relationships to functions that we can manage. We make idols in our workplaces when we reduce work to the dimensions of our egos and our control.

AN OPEN RECEPTIVITY TO GOD

These days, the secular world around us is giving considerable attention to Sabbath-keeping. Corporations have discovered its benefits in health, relationships, and even in productivity in the workplace. Articles and books are showing up touting the wonderful returns that come from rest, from breaking workaholic compulsions, and so forth. All this may be true. But that’s not why we keep the Sabbath. We are not primarily interested in a longer life or emotional maturity or a better golf game. We’re interested in God and Christ being formed in us. We’re interested in spiritual formation-by-resurrection.

Sabbath is not primarily about us or how it benefits us. It is about God and how God forms us. It is not, in the first place, about what we do or don’t do. It’s about God completing and resting and blessing and

sanctifying. These are all things that we don't know much about. They are beyond us, but they are not beyond our recognition and participation. Sabbath does, however, mean stopping and being quiet long enough to see, open-eyed with wonder—resurrection wonder. As we stand or sit in surprised and open receptivity to what is beyond us, our souls are formed by what we cannot work up or take charge of. We respond and enter into what God continues to do in the foundations and in the context of our work and workplace. Christians call this resurrection.

Jesus said, "Breakfast is ready."
Not one of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?"
They knew it was the Master.

Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did
the same with the fish.



JOHN 21:12-13, MSG

