

“**Worship sharing**” is patterned after the Quaker practice of open worship. Like open worship, worship sharing is a time for listening. There are some differences, however. In open worship, Friends tend to speak only if they feel compelled. In the context of worship sharing, you are *encouraged* to speak. Self-disclosure is an integral part of the process. Even if your thoughts seem unrefined, consider sharing them. Sometimes, catching a glimpse of someone “in process” can be more helpful than viewing their finished project. Here are some other guidelines for worship sharing:

Listen to learn. Keep in mind that each person will speak from his or her own perspective. People will feel safest if they can speak from the heart without receiving any advice or correction. If your experience has led you to a different conclusion, there is no need to be anxious. Perhaps there is a larger truth behind the seeming contradictions. In any case, try to learn from what others have said.

Listen with patience. Allow a suitable interval of silence between each speaker. This pause will give everyone an opportunity to reflect on what has been said. In the silence, see if God will bring insight. In general, do not speak a second time until each person has had the opportunity to speak. No one person should speak at great length.

Speak from your experience. In a debate, speakers often quote outside authorities to “prove” their point. It is also common for people to generalize by saying, “we” or “they,” “everybody,” “always,” “never.” In worship sharing, it is more helpful to speak only for yourself and from your own experience. Try to describe the process behind your conclusions.

Some groups may have a hard time holding to the discipline of worship sharing. If your group just wants to talk informally about these things, that’s okay – just be clear (so people don’t enter the discussion with mixed expectations).



Cloud of Witnesses

Discussion Guide

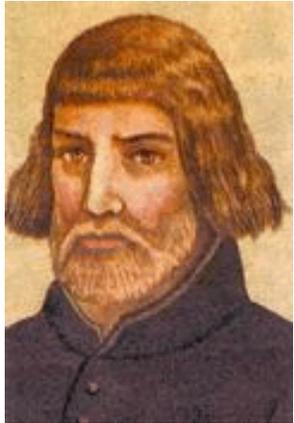
West Hills Friends
Winter 2007



Brigid of Kildare
"Inclusion"
A.D. 451-528
Ireland



Søren Kierkegaard
"Leap of Faith"
A.D. 1813-1855
Denmark

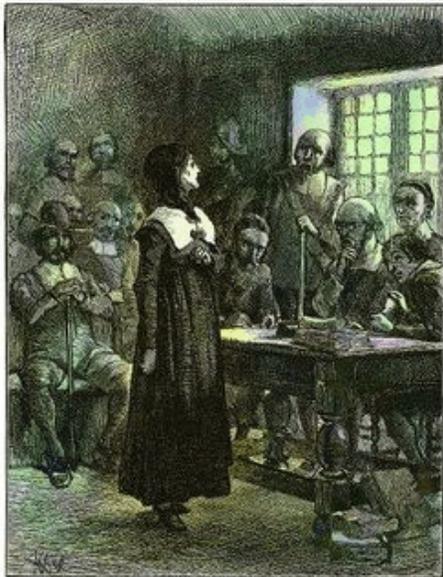
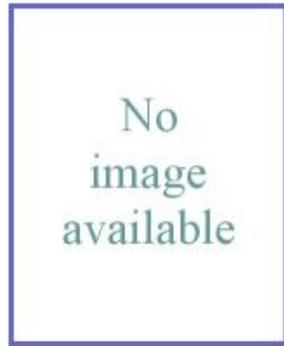


Petr Chelčický
"Relinquishing Power"
A.D. 1390-
Czech Republic



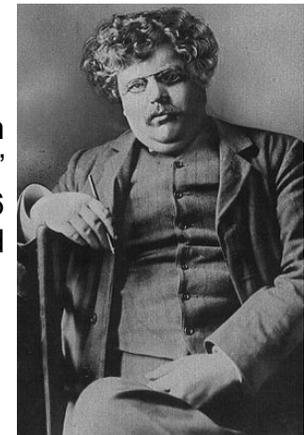
Evelyn Underhill
"Mysticism"
A.D. 1875-1941
England

Piccolomini of Siena
"Dissent from Within"
A.D.
Italy



Anne Hutchinson
"The Price of Faith"
A.D. 1591-1643
United States

G.K. Chesterton
"Spiritual Outsider"
A.D. 1874 -1936
England



“CLOUD OF WITNESSES”

Because he held the faculty of imagination in such high regard, C.S. Lewis once concluded that he could never be a Christian. He wrote, “Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.” As a young man, Lewis placed Christianity on the grim side of this equation. Only later did he find a way to approach Christian faith *through* his imagination.

Sadly, there are many good reasons to approach Christianity with skepticism (if not outright alarm!). If Lewis found Christianity unimaginative, we might find it arrogant, male-dominated and violent. This way of embodying “faith” is repugnant.

I think some of us may feel the impulse to dwell in a Quaker ghetto. We would rather be “peculiar people,” and separate ourselves from the likes of Pat Robertson and the legacy of the Crusades. However – just like C.S. Lewis – we may find ourselves drawn toward Christianity through some door we never knew existed. After all, the first Quakers clearly drew from a Christian source (seeing their movement as “primitive Christianity revived”). Our roots go deeper than George Fox and Margaret Fell. Our spiritual tradition extends to Jesus – and though Jesus to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This study guide will introduce you to a variety of Christian voices. From week to week, I hope these different voices will feel like guests at your gatherings. I hope you will find a deep sense of kinship with at least some of your guests. They are fellow travelers on the path we share. More generally, I hope your encounter with these figures will inspire you take a second look at Christian history. Historically, how has the Spirit of Christ been working through people like us? How does their story inform our own?

Personally, I feel a sense of vindication whenever I find a kindred spirit in church history. It’s like finding the notebook of someone who has walked the path ahead of me. These are people who long as I do, who see the same Light I glimpse from time to time. It’s nice to know there are people who walked this path ahead of me.

The phrase, “Cloud of Witnesses” comes from Hebrews 12:1. The author of Hebrews outlines a list of familiar heroes (like Abraham and Moses), then writes, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” For this first discussion, please reflect on your own spiritual heroes.

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider who inspires you to “run with perseverance.” Which authors, historical figures or personal encounters linger with you as a source of strength? After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you think about your own “Cloud of Witnesses,” choose one person who continues to influence your journey. Who did you choose? What is a word or short phrase that identifies this person’s influence on you?
2. After everyone has spoken briefly, say more about the person you chose. How did you first come to know about this person? What attracted you to him or her? When are you most likely to feel this person’s influence?
3. The author of Hebrews expects his audience to be inspired by a list of great heroes from the past. In what ways might our attitude toward historical figures be different today? How might this shift in attitude impact our spirituality?
4. What fears arise for you as you anticipate a discussion of Christian “heroes?” What are your hopes?
5. From your perspective, what would be the significance of finding “kindred spirits” in church history?
6. To what extent do you expect your faith to have historical “roots?” To what extent do you see your spiritual journey as something entirely unique to you?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

BRIGID OF KILDARE

Brigid's life reads like a fairy tale: it's not easy to separate fact from legend. Regardless, her story offers a glimpse into Celtic Christianity as it was practiced in the 5th and 6th Centuries. (Brigid lived from 451-528). As you might expect from a fairy tale, it is said that Brigid's father was a king. He followed the old ways of pagan Ireland (taking Brigid's mother as a spoil of war and naming Brigid herself after the goddess of fire).

At the age of 17, Brigid became a Christian. The king was especially mortified by his daughter's generosity. According to one story, Brigid gave her father's bejeweled sword to a leper. By the time she was 20, Brigid left home to start a monastic community.

Brigid's abbey at Kildare was a little different than what you might expect. For example, it included both men and women. Since Celtic lands were beyond the reach of the Roman Empire (which withdrew from Britain in 409), Christianity was free to develop outside the power structure of a "state religion." In contrast to the Latin church, Celts were less focused on the lines of authority. In fact, according to legend, the local bishop consecrated Brigid to the role of *bishop* rather than to the more humble (and clearly feminine) role of *abbess*. When told of his "mistake," the bishop replied, "So be it... she is destined for great things." While this story may be a myth, the women who succeeded Brigid as abbess of Kildare enjoyed authority *equal* to that of bishop until 1152.

The abbey at Kildare became an important center of learning and of the arts. Since artistic expression was a key characteristic of the early Celtic church, I will end with this beautiful example:

The love and affection of the heavens be to you,
The love and affection of the saints be to you,
The love and affection of the angels be to you,
The love and affection of the sun be to you,
The love and affection of the moon be to you,
Each day and night of your lives,
To keep you from haters, to keep you from harmers,
to keep you from oppressors.

Sadly, finding women for our list of "witnesses" took some real effort. Officially, Patrick and Brigid are *both* listed as "patron saints" of Ireland. Yet for every volume on Patrick, there is a scarce paragraph on Brigid. Why are women so invisible in "official" versions of church history? What is your experience today?

Please take five or ten minutes of silence to reflect on "inclusive" and "exclusive" approaches to spirituality. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on spiritual "inclusion/exclusion," what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind as you?
2. After everyone has had a chance to speak briefly, say more about your experience. When do you feel most included in a spiritual community? When do you feel most excluded? In what ways have you tried to include others in your spiritual path? Have you ever felt it necessary to excluded someone?
3. Not only was Brigid the goddess of fire, the pagans kept a sacred flame burning at Kildare. With so many parallels between Brigid the goddess and Brigid the saint, the church seems to have "adopted" some pagan symbols as it set down roots in Celtic areas. To what extent can those on a Christian path include other faith traditions? To what extent must other traditions be excluded?
4. Irish communities (like Kildare) helped preserve classical learning through the Dark Ages. To what extent does a commitment to education foster *inclusion*? What role does learning play in your spiritual journey?
5. To what extent does a commitment to the arts foster *inclusion*? What role does creativity play in your spiritual journey?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

PETR CHELČICKY (Kell-chits-key)

Martin Luther is usually given credit for starting the Protestant Reformation. It's worth noting, however, that Czech Christians rejected Roman authority 100 years before Luther nailed his paper to the door of a Wittenberg church. Instead of using a door, the Bohemians used a window: they expressed their views by tossing a papal envoy out the window!

The Pope responded with a Crusade. Mercenary knights from across Europe invaded Bohemia. Against tremendous odds, the Czechs were able to defeat these invaders. Petr Chelčický was born in 1390 and witnessed all these events first-hand. While he had no love for Rome, he rejected war as something *inherently incompatible* with the teachings of Jesus.

Petr used a story from the end of John's Gospel to illuminate the situation. In that story, the disciples spend a fruitless night searching for fish in the Sea of Galilee. As they approach shore the next morning, the resurrected Christ appears to them. The disciples cast their nets as Jesus directs, and catch more fish than they can haul into their boat. Petr sees the "full net" as a metaphor for the church: when the followers of Christ obey his instruction, *countless* people are attracted. However, if the net of faith is broken, then the community cannot hold together. If Christians go to war, Petr proclaimed, the net of faith is obviously *broken*.

The net of faith was broken because it had been *misused*. It had been stretched around something it was never meant to hold. According to Petr, two "great whales" had entangled themselves in the net; namely, the **emperor** and the **pope**. The church of Christ was never meant to legitimate earthly rulers – people who achieve power through violence and the threat of violence.

Petr urged all Christians to be humble and Christlike. Only when we renounce violence, live simply and embrace all people as brothers and sisters will the net of faith be restored. Nearly 600 years ago, Chelčický recognized that the quest for power is antithetical to following Christ.

For this discussion, please reflect on in the intersection between

faith and power. Did Christianity lose something essential when it became the "official religion" of the Roman Empire? To what extent might political power undermine Christian influence, today?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider the tension between "using influence" and "seizing control." After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on what makes for a credible spiritual influence, what word or short phrase comes to mind for you?
2. After everyone has spoken briefly, say more about spiritual credibility. What characterizes those people or institutions that you find spiritually credible? When does your own spiritual experience seem most credible to you?
3. How do "Great Whales" in the net of faith make it more difficult for the community to hold together? Petr makes this observation without really elaborating. It might help to identify people or institutions that serve as the "great whales" of today. How do these "great whales" make it more difficult for the "community to hold together?"
4. If Christians lost something by becoming the state religion, we certainly gained something by it, too (e.g. freedom from persecution, cushy government jobs). Spend some time reflecting on *why* we are attracted to earthly power. When do **you** most wish you had power to impose your values? How does this self-knowledge inform your spiritual journey?
5. Since it is unlikely anyone in this group will become emperor or pope in the next few years, what are other ways we exert power over others? How might these more common uses of power damage the "net of faith?"

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

PICCOLOMINI OF SIENA

As you probably remember, Galileo's research got him into trouble. According to the church, the earth was the *center stage* for all of creation. The sun, the moon and all the stars were all assumed to revolve around *us*. Based upon his observations, Galileo redrew the celestial map – effectively *demoting* the earth to a body in orbit around the sun. While Galileo saw no conflict between his research and his faith, the Inquisition was not so open minded.

Galileo was put on trial for heresy. His books were banned, his ideas were censored and he was taken prisoner. For many of us, Galileo's story has become emblematic of the bad blood between science and religion. We have come to see Galileo as a prophet of science, crying out in the wilderness of narrow-minded superstition.

There's more to the story. When the trial concluded in 1633, Archbishop Piccolomini of Siena petitioned the pope for permission to take custody of the famous prisoner. Piccolomini was from a prestigious family (counting two popes among his ancestors). He was also a great admirer of Galileo.

Galileo went to live in the archbishop's palace. Not only was he made very comfortable, he was provided with everything he needed in order to continue his research. Piccolomini restored Galileo's crushed spirit and provided the scientist with everything he needed to continue his research and to publish his results. When Piccolomini's kind treatment became too controversial, Galileo was allowed to relocate to his villa near Florence.

When Galileo died in 1642, supporters from within the church made sure he was entombed in a place of honor. Galileo was buried in Florence. His body was placed beside that of Michelangelo in the Church of Santa Croce.

Archbishop Piccolomini should be remembered as a noteworthy example of Christian resistance to Christian hierarchy. Officially, the Vatican didn't rescind its condemnation of Galileo until 1982. Unofficially, some Christians have been standing beside Galileo all along.

Not even those who wrote the gospels saw everything from the same perspective. As Quakers, we have long been a dissenting voice within Christianity as a whole. For this discussion, please reflect on how those of us in the *minority* might influence the institution at large.

As you enter into five or ten minutes of silence, reflect on what it's like to hold a minority position. As a person in the minority, when do you advocate for your position? When do you keep your mouth shut (perhaps working quietly behind the scenes)? After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you think about being in the minority, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. After everyone has spoken briefly, please say more about your experience. To what extent do you feel at home in the Christian mainstream? To what extent do you consider yourself part of the dissenting minority?
3. When you find yourself in the minority, what motivates you to advocate for your position? When do you keep silent? Does being in a "spiritual minority" feel different to you than being in a political minority? Have you experienced being in some other sort of minority?
4. Some have said that Quakers pioneered the role of "loyal opposition" (because we've opposed governments without taking up arms to overthrow them). Have you ever felt like the "loyal opposition?" Or would you rather be completely on the outside (where you can launch missiles!).
5. Did Piccolomini do *enough* to help Galileo? In a situation like this, what's the appropriate balance between *risk* and *preserving* the resources (like office of archbishop) that makes influence more likely?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

ANNE HUTCHINSON

In 1634, Anne Hutchinson left her home in London and joined the Puritan settlement in Massachusetts Bay Colony. Like so many who traveled across the Atlantic in those days, Anne and her family were hoping to practice their religion without interference from a hostile government.

Right away, Hutchinson made an impression on her new Puritan neighbors. She invited other women into her home for a weekly Bible study. Soon, these gatherings were attracting both men and women – a startling departure from the Puritan etiquette of the day. Not only did this group examine the Scripture directly, they began to discuss the merits of each sermon. Anne’s admirers included noteworthy members of the community, like Henry Vane (who was elected governor of the colony in 1636).

Hutchinson’s success also drew its share of controversy. Some Puritans wanted their society to reflect a rigid sense of divine order. As they saw it, Anne had no business teaching men or commenting on the words of ordained clergy. When John Winthrop became governor in 1637, he pronounced Anne’s gatherings “not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God, nor fitting for [her] sex.” In 1638 – just 4 years after her arrival – the Puritan hierarchy brought formal charges of blasphemy and lewd conduct against Hutchinson.

The Puritans of Massachusetts would have considered themselves *diametrically opposed* to the Catholics in Rome. Even so, there are obvious parallels between the trials of Hutchinson and Galileo. For Anne, however, there was no one like Piccolomini to offer shelter. Instead, she was banished from the colony. She was exiled into the more remote areas of the New World, where she was killed by Native Americans in 1643.

Hutchinson was uncompromising in her challenge to the Puritan hierarchy. At her trial, she expressed her doubt about original sin. She claimed to hear *directly* from God (lessening her dependence on outward authority). Although some were drawn to Anne’s leadership, her forthrightness came at the price of her own life.

For this discussion, please reflect on the high cost of “speaking

truth to power.” To what extent has being true to your beliefs come at a price for you? Have you ever decided to refrain from something because the price was simply too high? What beliefs are non-negotiable to you (no matter what the cost)?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider the price of what we hold dear. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect upon the cost of what we believe, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. When everyone has had a chance to speak, say more about your experience. What is more *costly*, speaking of belief to unbelievers or speaking the “wrong” belief to believers? Which of your beliefs are worth any price? Are there some “prices” that are too high for any belief? Is it melodramatic for middle-class Americans to talk about the cost of belief?
3. Today, we are shocked by the Puritan attitude toward women. Which attitudes of our society that will seem shocking in 300 years? What would it cost to challenge those attitudes today? Do you ever feel called to do so?
4. Take a moment to reflect on the similarity between Galileo’s trial in Catholic Rome and Hutchinson’s trial in Puritan Boston. Do you see any significance in these similarities? To what extent do these two conflicts go deeper than the theology on the surface? If you can identify something deeper, how might this dynamic be at work today?
5. Some of the Puritans who fled persecution in England became persecutors in Massachusetts. How do those seeking tolerance become so intolerant? Have you experienced anything like this today?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

Michael Kierkegaard was a man of wealth and privilege. He was also very unhappy. He outlived one wife, then another. One by one, he had to bury 5 of his 7 children. Michael viewed all this tragedy through the lens of his own guilt. Outwardly, he had all the trappings of success; but inwardly, he felt certain that God was punishing him for the sins of his youth. Growing up in this death-haunted family, Søren Kierkegaard came to know that things are not always as they appear. As a philosopher, Søren applied this very personal insight more broadly to the world of Christendom.

Søren lived in the first half the 19th Century (1813-1855). In those days, the people of Western Europe were “automatic Christians.” Christian identity was bestowed upon anyone who lived in countries like Denmark or Italy. Kierkegaard challenged this way of thinking. He insisted that authentic Christianity was *always* founded upon a personal choice. We have to *decide* who we will be.

Significantly, Kierkegaard reasserted the preeminence of *mystery* at the heart of Christian faith. Those who follow Jesus do so because they choose to embrace the mystery. There is no other way. Reason cannot lead us into faith, neither can objectivity nor force of argument. Authentic faith always arises from a subjective decision to believe. Consider the disciples: they had the unique opportunity to walk beside Jesus and to hear him speak. Perhaps they saw things that were hard to explain. Even so, they had to *decide* whether or not Jesus was something more mysterious than a gifted teacher and healer. Even the disciples had to decide.

“Objectivity” can become dangerous if it leaves us detached from the universe around us. Reporters can describe the horrors of genocide in the language of a neutral third party, but this is not how we are meant to *live*. This outlook shields us from making a decision or committing ourselves to any course of action. We can use the trappings of objectivity as a way of isolating ourselves.

Kierkegaard reminds us that there is more to life than what we can know conclusively. To fully be engaged, we must take what Søren calls, “a leap of faith.”

For this discussion, reflect on what it means to take a “leap of faith.” Have you ever taken such a leap? Remember, this isn’t necessarily about religious belief. Have you ever committed yourself to something *beyond* what you could know conclusively? If so, what was the process like? If not, what might entice you to make a decision like this?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider leaps of faith. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on taking a “leap of faith,” what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. When everyone has shared briefly, please elaborate on your perspective. In what aspects of your life are you familiar with leaps of faith? In what aspects of your life do you shy away from leaps of faith?
3. How might coming to believe that “things are not always as they appear” bring you closer to a leap of faith? If you can’t always trust your eyes, what do you trust?
4. How can you tell the difference between a leap of faith and being foolish? How do you know it is time to embrace the mystery?
5. Søren suggests that even the disciples had to decide whether or not they would take the leap of faith. What do you think? Would it have been easier for the disciples? What would you need to see or experience before a leap of faith felt “easy?”
6. Can we be *both* completely objective and completely engaged? If you had to err on one side or the other, which would you prefer?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

EVELYN UNDERHILL

There has always been a *mystical* side to Christianity. Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) was a British writer who helped popularize the mystical tradition for the modern followers of Jesus. She thought of mysticism as a way of life, open to all but “achieved by the few whose lives were transformed by what they love.”

Evelyn pursued spiritual experience with a compelling sense of adventure. As she saw it, mystics are “explorers and pioneers.” They come face-to-face with what artists can only imagine and theologians can only debate. As an adventurer, Evelyn cared more for “what works” than “what was proper.” In her desire to connect more deeply with God, she made use of psychology, other faith traditions and *especially* her experience of nature.

For Evelyn, nature was a reliable source of *revelation*. She found “something of Bethlehem” in “the rapturous vitality of the birds, in their splendid glancing flight: in the swelling of buds and the sacrificial beauty of flowers: in the great and solemn rhythms of the sea.”

As a mystic, Evelyn embraced the presence of God in nature, then declared that the same Spirit is alive **in us**. Our soul is “a little bit of ivory, on which the same Artist works with an intimate and detailed love.” We can put our lives into the hands of that same creative Artist who fashioned the mountains and stars. We can offer our lives as a canvas upon which God can work. The spiritual life is a process of “self-offering” in response to God. “Self-offering” is the way of the cross. It is choosing God's authority over our own – even in small choices and actions. Rather than a burden or obligation, Underhill looked upon the process of self-offering as a work of joyful creativity

Evelyn came to believe that nothing is gained by “playing it safe.” For the mystic, the artist, and the lover, life is a risky adventure. Evelyn urged her readers to abandon the humdrum, and to embrace the joyful possibility of a more intense and more significant life. Give yourself to God as a canvas upon which God can work.

For this discussion, consider what it means to approach God as a *mystic*. For Underhill, mysticism is the path of *intimate relationship* with God. To what extent do you consider yourself a mystic? What makes a relationship with God *intimate*?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider mysticism. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you think about an intimate relationship with God, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. When everyone has shared briefly, say more about your experience. To what extent do you see the Quaker path as a mystical one, too? What moves you toward intimacy with God? What prevents you from finding intimacy with God?
3. What role does the natural world play in your relationship with God?
4. Inspired by God's handiwork in nature, Evelyn wanted to submit her own life to God's creative Spirit. In this context, what is your gut reaction to a word like, “submit?” Does it surprise you that Underhill saw this process of “self-offering” as an *adventure*? How might “self-offering” relate to living as an “explorer and pioneer?”
5. Underhill fully understood that self-offering can be painful. She wrote, “Pain, or at least the willingness to risk pain, alone gives dignity to human love, and is the price of creative power.” In your experience, what is the connection between risk and deep joy? Risk and love? Risk and spiritual growth?
6. Evelyn proclaim that only a **few** are “transformed by what they love.” What keeps us from being transformed by what we love?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

Although he lived at the turn of the last century (1874 -1936), G.K. Chesterton understood that the prevailing culture no longer embraced Christianity out of reflex. Today, Christian authors often address themselves to a “post-Christian” audience but Chesterton was one of the first to take this perspective. He continues to be one of the best. His writing offers keen insights into both “modern” culture and Christianity.

G.K. made excellent use of humor. When the New York Times invited authors of the day to address the question, “What is wrong with the world?” Chesterton’s reply was very brief: “Dir Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton.” Famously, Chesterton used his humor to challenge assumptions. In this case, G.K. challenged the assumption that all the problems of the world could be traced to some external source (like the price of oil or migrant labor).

Because he didn’t expect his audience to share his Christian frame of reference, Chesterton often approached his subject matter obliquely. For example, most of his readers would have nodded their heads when G.K. wrote, “Pragmatism is a matter of human needs.” But then he proceeds to *challenge* our assumptions. In this case, he goes on to say, “One of the first human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist.” Instead of a concrete discussion about the high cost of housing, readers find themselves in a conversation about what makes us *fully human*. You can almost see the twinkle in Chesterton’s eye. He’s maneuvered us into the middle of a spiritual discussion!

Chesterton also had a talent for presenting Christianity in a fresh light. Instead of talking about the cross as “atoning sacrifice,” G.K. wrote that the crucifixion demonstrates that an “omnipotent God” is an *incomplete God*. He wrote, “God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king.” The cross shows us a *courageous God, defying the authorities*: “For the only courage worth calling courage must necessarily mean that a soul passes a breaking point – and does not break.” Doesn’t *that* change the framework of the discussion?! Jesus reveals God as brave resistance fighter!

For this discussion, please reflect on what it means to be a “spiritual outsider.” To what extent has your spiritual journey taken you outside the mainstream of the dominant culture? What has been your experience trying to communicate about spiritual matters across the divide of culture?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider these questions. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on living in a society that doesn’t necessarily share your spiritual perspective, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. After everyone has had a chance to speak, say more about your experience. Some “spiritual outsiders” (like the Amish) separate themselves from the dominant culture. Others (like street preachers) loudly condemn the dominant culture. When you feel like an outsider, how do you relate to the mainstream? How do you *want* to relate?
3. Outsiders are in a position to notice things that those of us embedded in a culture will take for granted. This is the role of a *prophet*. Can you think of people who play the role of prophets today? If so, who are they? What are they like? If you can’t think of anyone, what do you imagine such a person would be like today?
4. What prophetic word would you speak to the dominant culture, today? What about the dominant church culture?
5. In what ways have you found the dominant culture resistant to talking about spiritual matters? In what ways have you found the dominant culture open to this sort of discussion?
6. Chesterton used humor as a way to bridge the cultural gap. What do you think of this tool? What are some others?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.