

TIME OF AWAKENING**GOD IS REAL!**

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. (Ephesians 5:14)

Julie's Story

My parents were raised Catholic, but by the time we kids came around they were not attending church. I know they believed in God but we never talked about it as a family. When we visited my grandparents we would attend church with them, but I didn't understand much of what was going on. Church was just something you did on Sundays with your relatives. It didn't mean anything more. My college roommate is the one who showed me that church was about God, not about sitting in the pew. She is the kindest person I know and I want to be like her. She invites me to church but never pressures me. She answers my questions but never argues with me. She shows me Jesus every day and that is how I came to believe.

Joel's Story

I was raised without church. God was never part of the conversation unless we were criticizing Christians. I grew up not believing in the

reality of God. Then I married Susan, who was raised Catholic, and I agreed to allow her to raise our children in the Church. I wanted to be a good father, so I attended Mass with my family even though I didn't believe. One Sunday the priest talked about St. José Sánchez del Río and I was intrigued by his story. He was just 14 years old when he died in Mexico because he refused to deny his faith. Who would do such a thing? I wondered if God could actually be real and began to investigate. I read about the lives of the saints and was drawn to the extraordinary way they lived their ordinary lives. Slowly I have come to acknowledge that God is real, and now I am searching to know the One, True God. I want the same kind of passion as the saints that I am studying.



Julie and Joel are in a Time of Awakening. They have become open to the idea that there is more than what they have known in the past. Sometimes this is triggered by a life-threatening experience or the birth of a child, or it could simply be the result of a new relationship with a person of faith. In this season our minds and hearts are open to God's movement, even if we don't recognize it as such. It is a time when we realize that faith is more than simply believing in God. It's as if someone says, "So you believe in God. So what? After all, even the devil believes in God" (James 2:19). If believing means anything, it should result in some type of response on our part. A person in this season makes a deliberate and positive response to their belief in the reality of God. They are driven to take some kind of action, however small, that acknowledges their belief. Like a seed beginning to sprout, they are beginning to know God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Regardless of their age, they are spiritually immature but are

open to learning and experiencing the wonder of God. They are the mustard seed that will grow into a great tree.

Saint Augustine describes his first conversion – the Awakening – in his *Confessions*:

Suddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after immortal wisdom. I had begun that journey upwards by which I was to return to You... For with You is wisdom. (3/4/7-8, pp. 40-41)



What's Going On?

Emotions

Our emotions during Awakening are all over the board – high and low. The highs are excitement as our eyes are opened to the supernatural reality, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35 who said, “*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?*” It is a feeling of wonder and delight as truth is gradually revealed. We might experience a sense of hopeful curiosity as we consider theological truths as puzzles to be solved and gradually become more aware of the greatness of God. We feel amazed, delighted, energized and thankful.

The emotional lows can include awkwardness, especially if we are attending church for the first time. We feel self-conscious, certain that everyone knows we don’t belong, and uncomfortable in not knowing what to do. We might also feel guilt, shame, and regret about our past.

There can be some nervous fear about where this path may lead and what it might require of us if we follow it.

Through it all, there is a hunger – hunger to know more, hunger for answers about the unseen world, hunger for the truth, hunger for rest. Augustine wrote: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” We know that restlessness and want satisfaction. We may not know how to get it or even what we are seeking yet, but we have the desire and we are ready to take the first step.

Movements of God

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (paragraph 27) states: *“The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God.”* So the first movement of God is the implanting of that desire into our souls when we are created. In a Time of Awakening the Holy Spirit is nudging us to make a move toward God, such as praying more or in a new way, returning to or seeking a church, going to Confession, or reading a spiritual book. He may place new, faith-filled people in our lives – people we admire and want to get to know better. He might show us a new side of the people who have been there all along. God makes opportunities for us to find Him on our journey home. He gently opens the eyes of the blind so we can see His hand in our lives. He is answering our heart’s desire to know Him.

Spiritual Attacks

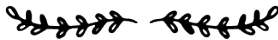
As God opens our eyes, the enemy does everything he can to close them again and to obstruct our new vision. He attacks through our comforts, our passions, our pride, and our treasures. We may struggle to resist the comfort of sleeping in on Sunday. The enemy convinces us that we can miss just one Sunday, and it really won’t matter. If

we commit to spending time in prayer each evening, he tempts us to forego that time because we've had a long day and God understands.

With regard to our passions, the enemy tempts us with the sins of our past and the sins of our present. He proposes that our sins are too great to be forgiven. He may, conversely, remind us of how good those sins felt at the time and fan the flame of that passion. He could plant the thought that God doesn't care if we sin; He just wants us to be happy and sin will make us happy. If we aren't burdened by sin, he will distract us with other interesting things – computer games, television, movies, our job, a romantic interest – anything of the world to keep us from pursuing God.

Our pride can be pricked when we explore something new. It can be challenging because we don't want to look stupid and do or say the wrong thing, so we resist going to church. If our friends are unbelievers or lukewarm Christians, we fear their rejection if we show our faith more openly.

The final spiritual attack is through our treasures. The enemy will plant the thought that churches are only after our money. He will show us the scandals of church leaders so that we avoid organized religion. He brings to mind all the ways that the church has mishandled money so that we cannot trust our treasures to the church.



What Can We Do?

As we become aware of the reality of God, there are things we can do to encounter God every day and respond to the awakening of our souls. The first is to make a commitment to daily prayer, even if it's just 15 minutes a day. Prayer is conversation with God, so talk with Him as you do a friend. Try to spend some time silently listening,

sitting with God so that you can learn to recognize His voice. Choose an amount of time that's realistic given your duties in life, and keep your "appointment with God."

Another type of prayer is meditation on God's Word – the Bible. Get a Bible or download a Bible app. Start by reading or listening to the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Join a Bible study to learn more. This is the Word of God and will help you better recognize His Voice and encounter Him throughout your day.

It is important to be part of a faith community. Spend time with a believing friend. You don't have to have deep theological conversations (although you can). Your goal is to spend time with someone who has a living faith, to be encouraged by him or her as you journey in this new territory. Get involved at church. The abundance of small groups in every church is great. You can serve the poor, keep the church clean, pray with others (and learn to pray yourself), learn about God, visit the sick, or sing in the choir. Choose a group that works and prays. Attend Sunday Mass (or go to Sunday services if you aren't Catholic). It may feel uncomfortable since it is new to you, but go in with a spirit of adventure. Listen to the words of Scripture and the explanation given by whoever is preaching. Try to find one idea you can use and reflect on it through the next week.

Here are some helpful Scripture passages for meditation during this season:

Psalm 46: We do not fear though the earth be shaken.

Gospels: The story of Jesus Christ and salvation history.

Matthew 4:12-22: The people in darkness have seen a great light.

John 1:1-16: And the Word became flesh.

Acts 8:26-40: Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

Romans 1:19-21: God's nature is clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

As you meditate on Scripture, here are some questions to bring to God in prayer:

- *Who have You placed in my life to help me on my journey? Pray in thanksgiving for each person God brings to mind.*
- *What is Your plan for me today?*
- *What does it mean if I say "Yes" to You? What do You want from me?*
- *Who are You, God? How can I know You?*



Fruit of the Season

The movements of God are very obvious and abundant in a Time of Awakening and, because you are ready, the fruit is abundant as well. It seems like your faith is growing by leaps and bounds. You have certainty about the existence of God, which is the virtue of faith. You believe in eternal life that overcomes death, which is the virtue of hope. You have greater love for others, which is the virtue of charity. These three theological virtues – faith, hope, and charity – are the greatest fruit of the season of Awakening. And it's only the beginning!

Prayer for Meditation by St. Augustine

Late have I loved you, O beauty so ancient and so new;
late have I loved you. For behold You were within me,
and I outside, and I sought You outside and in my
ugliness fell upon those lovely things that You have
made. You were with me and I was not with You. I was
kept from You by those things, yet had they not been
in You, they would not have been at all. You called and
cried to me and broke upon my deafness; and You sent
forth Your light and shone upon me, and chased away
my blindness; You breathed fragrance upon me, and
I drew in my breath and I now pant for You: I tasted
You and I now hunger and thirst for You; You touched
me, and I have burned for Your peace.