

INTENTIONAL SEEKERS EMBRACE THE DESERT



ST. DOMINIC'S
MARCH 2015

*A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!*

Isaiah 40:3

INTENTIONAL SEEKERS

Overview

What do you mean by Intentional Seeker?

Last year at St. Dominic's we focused on Intentional Discipleship. It was an opportunity to explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and to become more intentional about discipleship. Let's face it, before we can truly be disciples we must acknowledge and engage barriers that prevent us from starting the journey. We all have barriers! The question is not whether or not we have barriers, it is whether we are willing to seek ways to overcome those barriers. This series is a way we can all explore some of the most common barriers present in our own lives and in the lives of those around us.

What is asked of me?

First, pick up a booklet at St. Dominic's each month and follow along. If you can, attend one of the *Explore* sessions (everyone is welcome) offered each month. If you want to go deeper, sign up for a *Small Christian Community*. Small communities will meet twice a month to discuss. We hope to be able to offer committed small communities and drop-in small communities as we get a better understanding of people's interests. Please see the back cover for specific dates.

When did the Intentional Seeker initiative start?

St. Dominic's kicked off the Intentional Seeker initiative in September 2014. We are gradually rolling it out to the whole parish. We hope to be able to connect people whenever they learn about the initiative or are ready to get involved.

What if I'm not sure how much of this I'm ready to do?

Pick up a booklet, and try it out. Pray about it.

I'm interested, but I just don't have the time.

We understand that this will not fit everyone's interest or schedule. We would like to ask you to pray for this initiative in the parish.

*Dear Jesus, grant your way to all who seek you,
your truth to all who want to know you,
and your life to all who share your love.*

Format

Each month we'll have a theme based around a common question or barrier. We'll pick scripture passages and other writings that will help us explore this theme. We'll spend the month going deeper and challenging ourselves. In September and October, we will roll this out to the parish. We will form several small communities. It is not too late to join one if you are interested (see the back cover). We plan to make this a yearlong initiative. Here's the planned format for each month:

WEEK 1 - EXPLORE

Break open the texts and explore the questions and barriers. Our goal here is to recognize that we not alone in our search. Many people today and many people throughout history have traveled this road. What are some of the answers that others have found? What insights speak to me? What difference would it mean in my life if I overcome this barrier? How can I help others who are struggling with this barrier?

You can explore the theme on your own through this book, or you can attend a presentation (see the upcoming schedule on the back cover).

WEEK 2 - SHARE

Consider joining a small community to discuss the themes and barriers in our lives. There is something powerful about gathering with others to explore our desires and our struggles.

If you can't join a small community, you can take time each day to pray the texts and reflect on your own journey.

WEEK 3 - ACT

This week we'll challenged ourselves to take some practical step in our daily lives. We'll do this on our own, so if you're part of a small community, there will not be a meeting this week.

WEEK 4 - SHARE

Gather again in your small community or reflect on your own.

INTENTIONAL SEEKERS EMBRACE THE DESERT

Starter

What images come to mind when you think of a desert?

What biblical moments do you connect with the desert?

Why do you think some early Christians went to the desert?

What connects the desert with Lent?

WEEK 1 - EXPLORE

The LORD, your God, has blessed you in all your undertakings; he has been concerned about your journey through this vast desert. It is now forty years that he has been with you, and you have never been in want.

Deuteronomy 2:7

The forty days of Lent echoes the forty years the Israelites spent wandering in the desert after being freed from slavery in Egypt and before reaching the Promised Land. Jesus fasted in the desert for forty days after his Baptism and before starting his public ministry. Why are the writers of the biblical text so fascinated with the desert? Why do people of faith keep coming back to the desert as an integral part of their faith journey? Ultimately, we're in the desert until we learn the lessons of the desert. This month we'll explore some of those lessons.

When we think of the desert we probably think of a place that is difficult. Difficult to find food, water, shelter. Difficult to live. When we enter the desert everything gets stripped away (the busyness of life, the noise that fills our days, the abundance that is all around us), and we are left with our needs. Ultimately, the the desert is a place where we come face-to-face with our relationship with God:

- Do we need God or are we self-sufficient?
- Can we hear God when all of the other stuff is stripped away?
- Can we trust in a God we cannot see?
- Can we let go of the false gods that we've embraced?
- Can we discover the essence of a life worth living?

The desert brings quiet and clarity, temptation and trust, need and dependence, conversion and growth.

*They did not thirst when he led them through dry lands;
Water from the rock he set flowing for them;
he cleft the rock, and waters welled forth.*

Isaiah 48:21

Exercises

Take some time to reflect the noise and busyness of everyday life:

1) Make a list of things that fill your time

2) Make a list of things that fill your thoughts

e.g., belief in God, religious practices, politics, goodness of others, ...

(1)

(2)

When do I encounter silence in my life?

When do I have downtime?

When do I encounter my needs? (or do I meet all my needs?)

Main Texts

Quiet and Clarity

¹ Kings 19:11 Then the LORD said [to Elijah], "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will be passing by." A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD—but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake—but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake there was fire—but the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound. ¹³When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave. A voice said to him, "Elijah, why are you here?"

John 9:1 As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. ... ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, ⁷and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see. ... ³⁵[Later, Jesus] found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him. ³⁹Then Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind."

Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?

Bread of Life

Exodus 16:2 Here in the desert the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³The Israelites said to them, "Would that we had died at the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!" ⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion"... ³¹The Israelites called this food manna. It was like coriander seed, but white, and it tasted like wafers made with honey. ³²Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded. Keep an omerful of manna for your descendants, that they may see what food I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of the land of Egypt."

John 6:27 [Jesus said,] "Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." ²⁸So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" ²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." ³⁰So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? ³¹Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³²So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?

Living Water

Exodus 17:3 Here, then, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? A little more and they will stone me!" ⁵The LORD answered Moses, "Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink." This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel. ⁷The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

John 4:7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ... ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" ¹³Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?

Life Out Of Death

Ezekiel 37:12 Thus says the Lord GOD: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! ¹⁴I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD. I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.

John 11:17 When Jesus arrived [at Bethany], he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ... ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world." ... ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." ... ⁴³And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go."

Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?

Key Insights

General

- The story of the Exodus is a central theme in life.
- From captivity, to the desert, to the Promised Land.
- The journey through the desert seems to take forever.
- Sometimes, in the desert, we'd rather go back to captivity.
- Can we embrace the desert, and trust in God to lead us through?
- Can we enter the desert to help ourselves turn to God?
- Or do we prefer to grumble?

Quiet and Clarity

- Where do we expect to hear God's voice?
- We fill our days with noise and busyness.
- Our senses become blind.
- Are we afraid of silence?
- What clarity comes from embracing silence?

Bread of Life

- We grumble...that's what we do.
- We can't see our way forward, so we get nostalgic about the past.
- Can we trust God to give us what we need?
- Do we know what we really need?
- How does Jesus meet our needs?

Living Water

- Water is life!
- Next to oxygen (which comes to us), water (which we have to seek) is the thing we need the most to survive.
- Where do we find living water? ("welling up to eternal life")
- "Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

Life Out Of Death

- Ultimately we face life itself
- What does it mean to live, really live?
- What is a life worth living?
- How do we get back to what is really important?

Extra Reading: Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*

86. ... Yet “it is starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today’s world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive”. In these situations we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink. At times, this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!

265. Jesus’ whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life. Whenever we encounter this anew, we become convinced that it is exactly what others need, even though they may not recognize it: “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). Sometimes we lose our enthusiasm for mission because we forget that the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters.

272. Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God; indeed, one who does not love others “walks in the darkness” (1 Jn 2:11), “remains in death” (1 Jn 3:14) and “does not know God” (1 Jn 4:8). Benedict XVI has said that “closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God”, and that love is, in the end, the only light which “can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working”. When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord’s greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then, we must constantly be missionaries. ... We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide.

Recap & Prepare for Week 2

- Reread the text for this week.
 - Underline phrases that speak to your heart
 - Pick a phrase each morning, and write it on a slip of paper
 - Hold that theme in your heart throughout the day
 - At the end of the day, pray an Examen (below)
- Reflection questions:

What do I need to let go of to enter the desert?

What do I seek in the desert of Lent?

To what degree do I trust God?

A Daily Prayer - The Examen

The Examen is an extremely fruitful daily prayer (set aside 5-15 minutes):

1. Take a moment to recognize that you're in the presence of God
2. Thank God for the many gifts in your life
3. Invite the Spirit to walk back with you through your day, focusing on the specific theme of the day. Take the time to stop and really see that moment with new perspective.
4. Pray for God's guidance for tomorrow.

WEEK 2 - SHARE

Individual Option

- Find 20-30 minutes where you won't be interrupted.
- (10-15 minutes) Follow the prayer format (*Lectio Divina*) in the group exercise below.
- (10-20 minutes) Spend time reflecting on the questions outlined above.

Advice For Participating In Small Christian Communities

- The facilitator's role is to guide the flow of the meeting. They are not in the group to be experts. Help the facilitators by following their lead.
- During the discussion period, there will be multiple questions or topic for conversation. It is best to take them one at a time (i.e., let everyone share about one before moving to the next).
- Don't attempt to give the "right answer." Just share your experience, insights, and perspective.
- Please stay on topic (the questions asked).
- Pay attention to time. Keep your answers on the shorter side. You can always add more later.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak (i.e., give others a chance to speak before sharing a second time).
- It's ok to not share if you don't feel comfortable, but challenge yourself to share occasionally.
- Give your attention to the person speaking. Please don't start side conversations.
- Avoid asking follow-up questions. Let people share what they want to share. It is always good to affirm others.
- Avoid answering other people's questions (i.e., taking on the role of expert).



How To Pray The Scripture Using *Lectio Divina*

- Goal:
 - Engage one of the scriptures at a deeper level
 - Allow the Spirit to teach our hearts
 - Provide fruit to lead into the discussion and sharing
- Steps (Should take 10-15 minutes):
 - *Lectio* (Reading, 2-5 minutes)
 - A participant reads the scripture passage
 - 30-60 seconds of silence
 - A participant reads the scripture passage
 - As the scripture is being read, the participants are invited to find a word, phrase, image, or idea that resonates with them. We'll call this the *focus*.
 - Example: Imagine reading the Our Father text from Matthew 6. People might focus on: "Thy Kingdom Come," "Lead Us," "Our," the idea of fatherhood, an image of God's Kingdom, Do I forgive others? Etc.
 - *Meditatio* (Meditate, 5-10 minutes)
 - Stay with the focus from above.
 - There are different ways to do this: Why does it resonate? What does it mean in my life today? Repeat it as a mantra. Imagine it. How is this connected to seeking God?
 - *Oratio* (Pray, 1-2 minutes)
 - Whatever comes up in meditation, form into a silent prayer offered to God.
 - *Contemplatio* (Contemplate, 1-2 minutes)
 - After speaking a prayer to God, sit and listen or rest in God's love.
 - This leads into discussion and sharing.
 - Start with insights from the prayer.
 - Transition to sharing about seeking God.
- Tips
 - There is no "right way," do what works for you
 - Embrace the silence
 - Let God find you

Small Christian Community Process - First Meeting

(Suggested timing based on a 60/90 minute meeting)

- Welcome & Check In *(5/10 minutes)*
- Review Format *(5/5 minutes)*
 - Review the participant's advice (page 15)
 - Prayer will be about 15 minutes
 - Review the prayer format : *Lectio Divina* (page 16)
 - Discussion will follow based on the prayer and the questions (page 18).
- Prayer *(10/15 minutes)*
 - *Transition Passage*: "They did not thirst when he led them through dry lands." *(Isaiah 48:21a)*
 - *Lectio Divina*: 1 Kings 19:11-13 & John 9:1-7, 35-39 on page 8.
- Discussion *(30/45 minutes)*
 - Begin with insights from the prayer experience
 - Discussing the reflection questions (page 14)
- Action/Request *(5/10 minutes)*
 - The practical exercise is listed on the next page
 - Participants can share thoughts and plans
 - Review date of the next group session
 - Participants can request prayers from the group

WEEK 3 - ACT

Revisit the exercise on page 6-7

Action for Lent:

Pick something you need to let go of to enter the desert:

Pick something you need to embrace in the desert:

WEEK 4 - SHARE

Preparing

- Continue to use the phrases you highlighted when you prepared for Week 2:
 - Pick a phrase each morning, and write it on a slip of paper
 - Hold that theme in your heart throughout the day
 - At the end of the day, pray an Examen (page 14)
- Week 3 exercise:
 - Plan to share something about your Week 3 exercise
 - If you were not able to do it, plan to share your barriers.

Individual Option

- Find 20-30 minutes where you won't be interrupted.
- (10-15 minutes) Follow the prayer format (*Lectio Divina*) in the group exercise below.
- (10-20 minutes) Journal about the experience of the exercise from Week 3.

Small Christian Community Process - Second Meeting

(Suggested timing based on a 60/90 minute meeting)

- Welcome & Check In (5/10 minutes)
- Review Format (5/5 minutes)
 - Review the participant's advice (page 15)
 - Prayer will be about 15 minutes
 - Review the prayer format : *Lectio Divina* (page 16)
 - Discussion will follow based on the prayer the Act exercise (page 18)
- Prayer (10/15 minutes)
 - *Transition Passage*: "In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!" (Isaiah 40:3)
 - *Lectio Divina*: Exodus 17:3-7 & John 4:7-14 (page 10)
- Discussion (30/45 minutes)
 - Begin with insights from the prayer experience
 - Discussing insights from the Act exercise
- Action/Request (5/10 minutes)
 - Review date of the next Explore session
 - Participants can request prayers from the group

THREE WAYS TO GET INVOLVED WITH INTENTIONAL SEEKERS

1. Pick up a booklet, and explore on your own. -or-
2. Attend an “Explore” session to learn about this month’s scripture. Everyone is welcome. - or-
3. Check out a Small Christian Community to join with others to go deeper.



UPCOMING “EXPLORE” SESSIONS

Monday, March 2, 7:30-9 PM, Aquinas Room

Young Adults’ Session*, Wed., March 4, 7:30-9 PM, Parish Hall

Sunday, March 8, 10:30-11:30 AM, School Basement

* The Young Adults group is a community of single and married Catholic adults in our 20s and 30s; to find out more, visit: <http://stdominics.org/youngadults>



CONNECT WITH A SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Contact Scott Moyer at scott@stdominics.org
or come to an Explore session to get connected