Introduction

Life these days moves too fast. Our days are bombarded with daily meetings, transporting children, preparing meals, returning e-mails, studying for exams, or working long hours. Some of us are neck-deep in tough times: friends who forget us, complaining spouses, prolonged illnesses, an unclear path, or nagging creditors. Some of us ache with the deep soul wounds that only come from losing the person that was the other half of our heart. The result can be a disconnected soul and frenzied, frazzled, fearful, fragmented, and frustrated feelings.

It’s called soul-lag. The following reflections offer a remedy designed to provide you with a wonderfully refreshing break from what makes you feel “off” emotionally. Each page will encourage soul catch-up through adopting healthy behaviors and habits while replacing all that hinders your growth and damages your relationships. Soul work will take you inside, through activities, questions, and practices, to become inspired, hopeful, self-confident, playful, and loving as your soul catches up with the rest of yourself. Finally, you’ll turn it over to Jesus who nourishes your soul as he whispers, “I’ll take care of you.”

Find a quiet space, safe from all that is difficult, stressful, and challenging. Allow these pages to provide you with something you may need this very moment: silence, so you can bump into yourself and catch up. It’s never easy, and rarely quick, but it’s possible. And with Jesus, it can truly lead to joy.
Expect the best of you

“When you fast, do not look gloomy.” Matthew 6:16

In the Oscar-winning film *Birdman*, Michael Keaton plays Riggan Thomson, a faded Hollywood actor famous for his portrayal of a superhero. Wanting to be talked about and adored once again, he hopes to breathe new life into his stagnant career.

*Birdman* is packed with life lessons. A note taped to Riggan’s dressing room mirror reads, “A thing is a thing, not what is said of that thing.” This resonated with me. Things aren’t as they appear.

You are who you are, not who people say you are. As much as we don’t want to care about others’ opinions of us, human nature dictates otherwise. It’s up to us not to empower them. While we’ve all endured the occasional put-downs hurled at us by family members, friends, or coworkers, it’s the self-inflicted criticisms that cause the most damage.

Today as Lent begins, make a commitment to stop trashing yourself. When you catch yourself saying “I’m too fat” or “I never do anything right” or “Nobody could love me,” change that self-talk into “I’m valuable” or “I have something to contribute” or “I’m worth knowing.”

Offering practical advice, Oscar Wilde once said: “Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” Lent is a good time to expect the best of you.

**Soul work:** Listen on YouTube to Frank Sinatra’s song “I’m Glad There Is You.” Write down ten things you like about yourself. Then, throughout Lent, repeat these words: *It takes courage to grow up and become who I really am* (ee cummings paraphrase).

**Heart words:** Jesus, when I say I want to “be myself,” help me act as if I really do. Amen.
Put them on speed dial

“Take up your cross and follow me.” Luke 9:23

Tiffany awoke the morning after her mother died. She opened her eyes to a beautiful spring day. The sun was shining. Birds were singing. People were chatting in the street. “Life goes on,” she told me.

In the face of disappointment, disaster, or grief, life goes on, whether we go on or not. The cross comes in all sizes and shapes: an overdue bill we can’t pay, a terminal diagnosis, a deserting spouse, conflicts at work, rebellious children…things beyond our control.

When the crosses of life start to pile up, don’t fly solo. Many of life’s burdens can’t be tackled alone. Don’t be like so many others who are determined to face the trials alone. Admit you need help. Say it aloud: I need help!

People say to me, “I’ve finally gathered up my courage to reach out to you for some help.” I hear the same thing over and over again. And I understand. I too struggle when it comes to asking for assistance.

Why do we feel this way? Asking for help makes us feel weak, inadequate, helpless, and inferior. We don’t want to be a burden. We feel alone. But once we get past these feelings, we can take the first step, admit our struggle, and ask for help.

After you share your feelings and burdens, you may be surprised by how supportive, empathetic, and understanding your family members or friends actually are.

Soul work: Set up speed dial for people you know you can ask for help, no matter what.

Heart words: Jesus, we’re in this together. I’m not afraid to say “help me.” Amen.
The LOL remedy

“The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away.”

Matthew 9:15

Ahhh, laughter. A good belly laugh stirs the blood, expands the chest, and clears the cobwebs from the brain. William Frey of Stanford University found that a hundred belly laughs is the aerobic equivalent of ten minutes on a StairMaster. That’s why laughing is my favorite exercise, right after breathing and eating.

Go ahead and give it a try. Turn the corners of your mouth up and smile. Now laugh. No matter when or where, laughter is always good for you. Not only is it the best stress reliever to naturally boost your mood, but it’s free as well.

Lent is the perfect time to get humorically fit. Make a “Doses of Laughter” kit. Decorate a shoebox with smiley faces and bright colors. Fill it up with amusing stories, the merriest jokes, quips, cartoons, comedy movies, and anything else that you know will make you laugh.

When the clouds roll in or you hit a pothole on life’s journey that knocks the joy out of you, reach for your Doses of Laughter kit to add smileage to your life. Laughter just might be the best remedy for re-energizing your joy as it shines a fun light into your life again, helping you feel better and revamping that spring in your step.

Soul work: Make a Doses of Laughter kit for someone you know who is laughter-deficient and humor-impaired. Then invite them to your home for a laughter-noon.

Heart words: Jesus, I believe laughter makes life the merriest of go-rounds. Amen.
Tricky business

“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”
Luke 5:30

“If you mind your business, then you won’t be mindin’ mine.” This refrain from a Hank Williams song reminds us that busybodies and snoops are everywhere, waiting to slither into your personal life, collect sensitive information, and spill the beans to anyone who will listen. They delight in sticking their noses into your business.

These meddlers come across as everyone’s friend, as sociable and sympathetic, while they build a “trusting” relationship with unsuspecting prey. Once you divulge secrets, share problems, and openly complain about something, they rush to tell others. Policing your life, they interrogate your motives and question your every move.

Set limits by distancing yourself and standing your ground. You do not have to bow to them or share any personal information. Simply choose to remain private. If they cross the line and get in your face with annoying, invasive, and personal questions, be direct with them: “Don’t you have more important things to do than worry about what I’m doing? I don’t see how it’s any of your concern...”

Dealing with them is tricky business. One wrong move and they suddenly become your personal ambassador of Doom, with you as their favorite object of gossip.

Soul work: Keep the busybodies at arm’s length and avoid becoming one yourself through a Bible-quote meal. Here is a separate passage to reflect on every day of the week: Proverbs 20:19; Luke 6:45; 1 Peter 2:1; 1 Timothy 5:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:11; Romans 1:29; Ephesians 4:29.

Heart words: Jesus, help me always to ask myself: “Whose business am I minding?” Amen.