

# *The Mirror of the Word*

*A Daily Devotional For Eastertide and Pentecost*



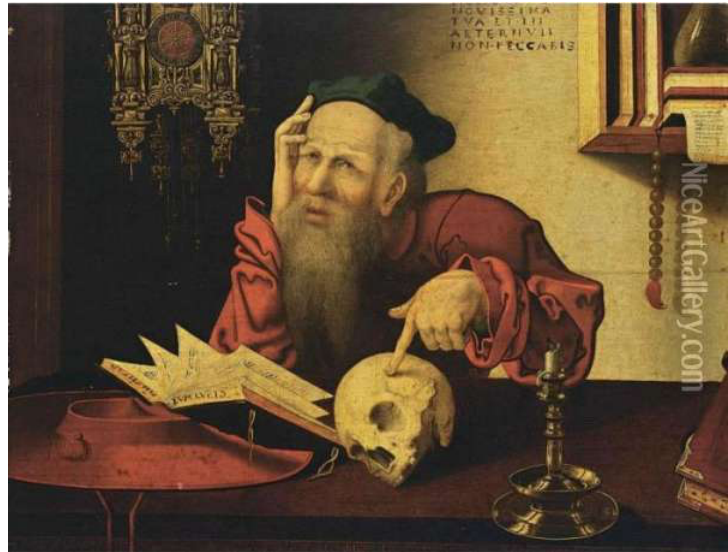
***Section I. What is Required in Order to Look at Oneself with True  
Blessing in the Mirror of the Word?  
(Fifth Sunday after Easter)***

**Day One**

**Scripture Reading: James  
1:22-27**

**From *For Self Examination*:**

The best thing to do, therefore, is promptly to say to yourself: I will promptly begin to prevent myself from forgetting—promptly, at this very moment, I promise myself and God—even if it is just for the next hour or for this very day—this long it shall be certain that I do not forget [...] It is far better to do that than to bite off more than you can chew and promptly say, “I will never forget.” Ah, my friend, it is far better that you never forget to remember *promptly* than that you promptly say: I will *never* forget it. Earnestness is precisely this kind of honest distrust of oneself, to treat oneself as a suspicious character[.] (44)



**Questions for Reflection:**

1. Why is this passage from James a pertinent passage of Scripture for the Easter season?
2. When you look into the mirror of God’s Word, do you trust yourself to remember what you saw there?
3. We tend to emphasize earnest self-examination in the season leading up to Easter, but our tone shifts once we move into Eastertide. What about this tonal shift seems right, and what seems problematic?

## Day Two

**Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37**

### **From *For Self-Examination*:**

Now when you read, “But by chance a priest came down that same road, and when he saw him he passed by,” then you shall say to yourself, “It is I.” You are not to resort to quibbling, even less to be witty (true enough, in the secular world a witticism may compensate for even the vilest infamy, but such is not the case when you read God’s Word). You are not to say “It is not I; after all, it was a priest, and I am not a priest; I do, however, find it admirable of the Gospel to have it be a priest, because the priests are the worst of all.” No, when you read God’s Word, it must be in earnest and you must say to yourself, “This priest is I myself.” (40)

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. Do you find the “It is I” approach difficult when you read this passage of Scripture, or does it come naturally to you?
2. What are some possible limitations of this approach to reading?
3. A little later in the passage, Kierkegaard tells us we can take a break from saying “It is I” when the Good Samaritan comes along:

“But a Samaritan on a journey came to him.” Lest you become weary of incessantly saying, “It is I,” for a change you may here say, “It was not I—ah, no, I am not like that!”  
(41)

Is Kierkegaard being fair here? Can we really *never* identify ourselves as Good Samaritans??

## Day Three

### Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

#### From *For Self-Examination*:

But Holy Scripture! Why, almost everyone owns it; one does not hesitate to present this book to each confirmand (consequently, at the most dangerous age) [...] To be alone with Holy Scripture! I dare not! If I open it—any passage—it traps me at once, it asks me (indeed, it is as if it were God Himself who asked me): Have you done what you read there? And then, then—yes, then I am trapped. Then either straightway into action—or immediately a humbling admission.

Oh, to be alone with Holy Scripture!—and if you are not, then you are not reading Holy Scripture. (31)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Kierkegaard reminds us that if we're reading Scripture correctly, we should feel pretty nervous about it. However, just like Timothy, many of us have known these texts since childhood. Does familiarity hinder you from approaching Scripture with fear and trembling?
2. What do you think Kierkegaard means by being alone with Scripture? Are we not supposed to read it in community?
3. What would it look like for you to allow yourself to truly be alone with Scripture?

## Day Four

### Scripture Reading: John 1:14-18

#### From *For Self-Examination*:

[...] we have fabricated the notion that to think about oneself is—just imagine how sly!—vanity, morbid vanity (which it may indeed be in many cases, but not when it is a matter of letting God’s Word have power over oneself). Fie on me if I were to be so vain! To think about myself and say “It is I” is, as we scholars say, the subjective, and the subjective is vanity [...] You also see what a depth of slyness and cunning it is when in Christendom a culture of the world—availing itself of what is undeniably true, that always selfishly asserting one’s *I* and one’s personality is vanity—availing itself of this has made into vanity precisely that which in relation to God’s Word is earnestness, so that one exempts oneself from earnestness and the strenuousness of earnestness, and precisely thereby assures oneself a reputation for being earnest and cultured. Oh, what depth of cunning! One makes God’s Word into something impersonal, objective, a doctrine—instead of its being the voice of God you shall hear. (36, 39)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Think back on the way you’ve been reflecting on God’s Word so far this week. Does reading John’s description of Christ as God’s Word made flesh change anything for you?
2. Kierkegaard critiques the tendency to avoid a truly earnest “It is I” approach to Scripture by hiding behind a self-righteous notion that thinking about oneself is mere vanity. Can you think of any particular ways that our society turns earnestness on its head so that it looks like vanity, in the way Kierkegaard describes?
3. What are some ways that you de-personalize or objectify God’s Word in your own life?

## Day Five

### Scripture Reading: John 3:16-21

#### From *For Self-Examination*:

Christianity's requirement is this: your life should express works as strenuously as possible; then one thing more is required—that you humble yourself and confess: But my being saved is nevertheless grace. (17)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Based on what we've thought about this week, how would you describe what it means to believe in the Son?
2. How does God's character as a loving and gracious Father play into all of this?
3. Is it easy to be saved by God's grace?



***Section II. Christ is the Way  
(Ascension Day)***



**Day One**

**Scripture Reading: John 14:1-7 and Matthew 7:13-23**

***From For Self-Examination***

Christ is the way. These are his own words; so it certainly must be the truth.

And this way is *narrow*. These are his own words; so it certainly must be the truth. Indeed, even if he had not said it, it still would be the truth. Here you have an example of what it is, in the highest sense, “to preach.” Even if Christ had never said, “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life,” look at him and you see immediately: the way is narrow. (57)

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. How might last week's reflections about the incarnate Word help as you think about Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life?
2. Based on what Kierkegaard says about Christ, what does it mean to preach in the highest sense?
3. What do you think makes the road that leads to life so hard?



## Day Two

### Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

#### From *For Self-Examination*:

[...] he lives in poverty and lowliness and has no place where he can lay his head.

Humanly speaking, this certainly would already be about enough to require calling a way narrow. Yet this is no doubt the easiest part of the narrow way.

The way is narrow in a totally different sense, and from the very beginning. His life from the very beginning is a story of temptation; it is not only one particular period in his life, the forty days, that is the story of temptation—no, his whole life is a story of temptation (just as it is also a story of suffering). Every moment of his life he is tempted—that is, he has this possibility in his power, to take his calling, his task, in vain. (58-59)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. In the passage from Matthew, in what ways is Christ tempted to take his calling and his task in vain?
2. What do you generally think of when you think about the Christian life as a narrow way? Does Kierkegaard's emphasis on the temptation to take one's calling in vain, rather than on physical suffering, as the more difficult part of the narrow way change anything for you?
3. How do you experience this temptation in your own life?

## Day Three

### Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:28-30

#### From *For Self-Examination*

And this way, which is Christ, this narrow way, as it goes on, becomes narrower and narrower to the end, to death.

It becomes narrower; consequently, it does not become easier little by little. (61)

#### Questions for Reflection

1. Does it seem accurate to you to say that the narrow way only becomes more narrow as we go through life?
2. Is there a contradiction in the narrowness of Christ's way and the easiness of his yoke? Does anything you've thought about so far in this study help you to square the two?
3. Have you experienced any times in which both things clearly co-existed in your own life?

## Day Four

### Scripture Reading: Acts 1:6-11

#### From *For Self-Examination*

Oh, what extremity of superhuman suffering! Oh, a human heart would have burst a little sooner—only the God-man must suffer all through this final suffering. – Then he dies.

Do remember, my listener, what we said at the beginning: This way is narrow—is it not true?

But we go on, and *Christ is the way*. Christ is the way: he climbs the mountain, a cloud takes him from the disciples' sight; he ascends into heaven—and he is the way!

Perhaps you are saying, “Yes, and this is what you should have talked about today instead of talking almost as if it were Good Friday.” Ah, my friend, are you the kind of person who precisely on the hour and day can fall into a particular mood, or do you think that it is Christianity's intention that we should be like that, or do you think that instead we should as far as possible combine the various essentials of Christianity? Precisely on Ascension Day it ought to be brought to mind that he is the narrow way, for otherwise we could easily take Ascension Day in vain. Remember, the way was narrow until the end; death comes between—then follows the Ascension. (64-65)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you found yourself getting frustrated with all Kierkegaard's talk about how hard and narrow the way is when we're supposed to be celebrating Christ's Resurrection and Ascension?
2. Think back to Day Two of this week. How is the temptation to take our calling in vain related to what Kierkegaard says here about taking Ascension Day in vain?
3. Why is it important to remember that death comes before the Ascension?

## Day Five

### Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:1-16

#### From *For Self-Examination*

So some have doubted. But then in turn there were some who sought to refute doubt with reasons. As a matter of fact, the connection was actually this: first of all they tried to demonstrate the truth of Christianity with reasons or by advancing reasons in relation to Christianity. And these reasons fostered doubt and doubt became the stronger. The demonstration of Christianity really lies in *imitation* [...] those whose lives are marked by *imitation* have not doubted the Ascension. And why not? In the first place, because their lives were too strenuous, too much expended in daily sufferings to be able to sit in idleness keeping company with reasons and doubt, playing evens or odds. For them the Ascension stood firm, but because their lives were so active and on the narrow way they perhaps seldom thought about it or dwelt upon it. (68)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Based on this reading from Ephesians, what is the calling to which we've been called?
2. What would it look like to take that calling in vain?
3. What do you think is the correct response to the problem Kierkegaard raises? Should we intentionally seek out suffering in order to save ourselves from spiritual doubt? Or does the narrow way entail something else?

### *Section III. It Is the Spirit Who Gives Life*



*(Pentecost)*

#### **Day One**

**Scripture Reading: Genesis 22:1-19**

#### ***From For Self-Examination***

Not to see one's wish, one's hope, fulfilled or to be deprived of the desired one, the dearest one—that can be painful enough, selfishness is wounded—but it does not follow that this is dying to. And personally to have to deny oneself, if it was indeed one's dearest wish—that can be painful enough, selfishness is wounded—but it does not follow that this is dying to. No, but personally to have to shatter one's fulfilled desire, personally to have to deprive oneself of the dearly desired one who is now one's own: that means to wound selfishness at the root, as it was with Abraham when God demanded that Abraham himself, personally—how appalling!—with his own hand—what horrible madness!—should sacrifice Isaac—Isaac, the so long and so longingly awaited gift [...] Do you think death can be as painful as

this? I do not think it can. In any case, when it is death, it is definitely over, but dying to is not over in this way, because he does not die, indeed, perhaps a long life lies before him, the one who has died. (79)

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. Kierkegaard makes a distinction between *dying* and *dying to*. How would you describe the difference between the two?
2. How is this act of “dying to” related to the temptation to take one’s calling in vain?
3. Do you think each individual Christian is called to this type of sacrifice and “dying to”? Or are we called to rely on Christ’s sacrifice and death? Is it one or the other?

## Day Two

### Scripture Reading: John 16:1-15

#### From *For Self-Examination*

Harder sufferings! Who is so cruel as to dare say something like that? My friend, it is Christianity, the doctrine that is sold under the name of the gentle comfort, whereas it is eternity's comfort, yes, truly, and for all eternity—but it certainly must deal rather severely. Christianity is not what we human beings, both you and I, are all too eager to make it; it is not a quack doctor. A quack doctor is promptly at your service and immediately applies the remedy and bungles everything. Christianity waits before it applies its remedy; it does not cure every brief little indisposition with the help of eternity—indeed, this is surely an impossibility just as it is self-contradictory! It cures with the help of eternity and for eternity when the sickness is such that eternity can be applied, is at the point, that is, where you must die to. (80)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Pretend for a moment that Christianity *is* just the kind of quack doctor Kierkegaard describes. What do you think Jesus would say differently in this reading from John if that were the case?
2. What type of sickness is the sickness to which eternity can be applied?
3. Based on Christ's words in this passage, what is the role of the Spirit? How does the Spirit bring "eternity's comfort"?



## Day Three

### Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11

#### From *For Self-Examination*

The Spirit brings *faith, the faith*—that is, faith in the strictest sense of the word, this gift of the Holy Spirit—only after death has come in between. We human beings are not very precise with words; we often talk about faith when in the strictly Christian sense it is not faith [...] this endurance, this healthy confidence in oneself, in the world, in mankind, and, along with all this, in God, we call faith. But in the stricter Christian understanding it is not faith. Faith is against understanding; faith is on the other side of death. And when you died or died to yourself, to the world, then you also died to all immediacy in yourself, also to your understanding. It is when all confidence in yourself or in human support, and also in God in an immediate way, is extinct, when every probability is extinct, when it is dark as on a dark night—it is indeed death we are describing—then comes the life-giving Spirit and brings faith. (81-82)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. What different roles does death play in Hebrews 11?
2. What does Kierkegaard mean by losing confidence in God “in an immediate way?” Can you think of some ways the faithful people catalogued in Hebrews 11 might have lost confidence in God in this way?
3. Why does death need to happen before the Spirit can come and give life and faith?

## Day Four

### Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13

#### *From For Self-Examination*

Truly if ever there was anyone [...] who was justified in saying “I have learned to know mankind in such a way that I know they do not deserve to be loved,” it was the apostles of Christ! And this is embittering; it is so natural to wish to find in people what one can love [...] To find no such thing, to find the opposite, to find it on such a scale as the apostles did—ah, that is enough to be the death of one! In a certain sense this really did happen to the apostles. They died, everything grew black around them—it is indeed death we are speaking about—when they had had the dreadful experience that love is not love, that it is hated, that it is mocked, that it is spat upon, that it is crucified in this world and is crucified while judging justice calmly washes its hands and while the voice of the people clamors for the robber. Did they then indeed swear eternal enmity to this unloving world? Well, in a certain sense, yes, because love of God is hatred toward the world, but in another sense, no, no—by loving God, in order that they might continue in love, they joined with God, so to speak, in loving this unloving world—the life-giving Spirit brought them love. (84-85)

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. Does Kierkegaard’s description of the apostles’ experience during Christ’s crucifixion give you any new ways to imagine what it might have been like to be in their shoes?
2. What are some specific things that make loving this world difficult for you?
3. Why is love “the greatest of these?”

## Day Five

### Scripture Reading: Acts 2

#### From *For Self-Examination*

When I think of myself and the countless people I have come to know, I have often said to myself sadly: Here are capacities and talents and qualifications enough, but the coachman is lacking [...] because of this we lack elevation and it follows from this in turn that we are able to endure very little; we are impatient and promptly use the means of the moment and impatiently want to see instantly the reward for our work, which for that reason is not very good. [...]

It is Christianity that must go through. And these twelve men carried it through. In one sense, they were men like us, but they were driven well—yes, indeed, they were driven well. (86-87)

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you think “dying to” and then receiving life from the Spirit was easier for the first generation of Christians than it is for us today? Why or why not?
2. What do you think needs to happen in your own life, and in our collective life as the current generation of Christians, in order for yourself and for all of us to be driven well?
3. What sort of life does the Spirit give?

Passages from *For Self-Examination* taken from Kierkegaard, Søren, *For Self-Examination/Judge for Yourself!* Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

