



December 2025 Newsletter

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We Are What We Love

By Daniel Norris



Gospel Reading: Luke 12:32-34

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

What do you want?

What is your heart's desire?

What do you long for?

Continued....

What keeps you scrolling late into the night or dreaming in moments of quiet?
For what do you hunger and thirst?

This is the first question Jesus asks in the Gospel of John. Not “What do you believe?” Not “What is your theological position on the atonement?” But: *What do you want?*

This question — so disarmingly simple, so radically direct — cuts through our posturing and performances. It bypasses our intellectual defences and reaches the centre of who we are. Because, I want to suggest, we *are* what we want.

Our desires shape us. They direct our habits, our decisions, our relationships, and our deepest allegiances. They inform the causes we champion, the people we admire, the things we are willing to sacrifice for. Jesus’ call to follow him is not a doctrinal exam. It’s a reorientation of desire. It’s about learning to want differently. Learning to love more deeply. Learning to hunger for what truly satisfies.

And if that’s true, then Christian discipleship — at its most honest — is not about knowing all the right answers. It’s about desiring the right things. It’s about aligning our hearts with the heart of God.

We Are What We Love

This echoes the wisdom of the early Church. St Augustine wrote, in his *Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.” That line feels especially relevant now — in a time when restlessness has almost become a cultural identity.

So many of us live lives of quiet yearning. We are exhausted, overstimulated, overextended, and yet — still longing. Longing for connection. Longing for wholeness. Longing for meaning. And we’re not alone in recognising that. In his book ***You Are What You Love***, the philosopher and theologian James K.A. Smith argues that our desires are shaped — often subconsciously — by the culture around us. He calls this the *formative power* of the world. In other words, the things we repeatedly do form us. They shape what we want.

Smith’s provocative claim is that we all live by liturgies — even if we don’t go near a church. The habits and rituals of our daily lives are shaping our souls, whether we realise it or not.

The Smartphone as Cathedral

Let's test this. Let's take a little pilgrimage — not to a shopping mall or a distant temple, but to something much closer. Reach into your pocket, your bag, your bed side table — and there it is. Your smartphone. This device — small, glowing, ever within reach — is not just a tool. It's a kind of cathedral. A sacred space we return to again and again, often without thinking. We bow our heads, we touch the screen, and we open the doors.

It promises so much. Connection. Comfort. Distraction. Belonging. We check it first thing in the morning and last thing at night. We turn to it in moments of boredom, in anxiety, in loneliness. We scroll not just for updates, but for reassurance — that we're not forgotten. That we matter. That we're not missing out. And slowly, almost without noticing, it begins to shape what we want.

The feeds are endless. The content is curated. The algorithm whispers: Here's what beauty looks like. Here's success. Here's what's worth your time. Here's who you should envy. Here's who you should become. There are saints here too — influencers, icons, polished lives behind glowing screens. And the gospel they preach is always just out of reach: If you had more — more followers, more likes, more control, more discipline — then maybe you'd finally be enough.

So we give it our attention. Our affection. Our time. We carry it like a lifeline — and in some ways, it is. It holds our memories, our messages, our maps. But also our anxiety. Our comparison. Our loneliness. And here's the trap: it never really satisfies. We put it down and still feel empty. We close the app and still feel alone. We scroll past a thousand images and still feel unseen. The smartphone hasn't made us more connected. It's made us more distracted, more performative, more restless.

We are being formed — every day — by this liturgy of longing. And not always in the image of Christ.

Liturgies That Reorient the Heart

That's why we need alternative liturgies. Counter-rituals that speak a deeper truth.

We gather here, in this community of broken, beautiful people, not to escape the world but to recalibrate our hearts within it. We come to be reminded of who we truly are and what we were made for. That you are beloved. That you are already enough. That God delights in you. Worship isn't just a Sunday morning activity — it's soul training. We come here to resist the lies that we are what we buy or what we post on social media. We come to learn how to be human again.

Here, we practise gratitude, not entitlement. We share bread, not accumulate it. We confess, instead of curate. We acknowledge our dependence on God, and on one another.

In a world obsessed with more, we learn to say: *God, you are enough. And I have enough.*

And when we dare to say that — even quietly, even haltingly — we create space for justice, for simplicity, for generosity, for rest.

A Kingdom Not of Consumption, But of Grace

Our gospel reading ends with a line as powerful as it is countercultural:

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

God is not selling us something. God is not a brand. God is not waiting for us to be fixed before we can belong. The Kingdom is not a reward for good behaviour. It is a gift, freely given. So Jesus says: *Don't cling to your possessions. Let go. Give generously. Live lightly.* Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. In a world of scarcity, this sounds naive. But in a world of grace, it's the truest thing you'll ever hear.

Living the Better Story

As we look ahead — into a future of economic uncertainty, ecological fragility, and deep political anxiety — this message could not be more urgent. The world is asking us to choose our story. Will we choose the myth of endless consumption, where value is measured in clicks and cash? Or will we live the better story — the story of God's Kingdom, where treasure is shared, not hoarded, and where every heart can find rest?

Come again to this feast — the feast of worship, the feast of grace. Not as customers, but as guests. Come with empty hands and open hearts. And let God shape your desires, renew your spirit, and send you out into the world not to consume, but to love.

Rev **Daniel Norris** is a self-supporting priest at St James's Piccadilly. The above is a sermon preached on 10 August 2025. Daniel is moving to become Rector of the parish of Ramsey and the North East on the Isle of Man in February 2026, and will assist the Bishop of the Diocese with schools links and education. Daniel said "As a UNESCO Biosphere, the Isle of Man offers wonderful opportunities for collaboration with the Earth Justice group, as well as connections through Celtic Christianity, pilgrimage, and walking ministry within its stunning landscapes."

Peace with Creation while facing the reality of War

by Penelope Turton



Penelope explores the devastating human, environmental, and spiritual costs of war, challenging the myth of redemptive violence and urging a turn toward nonviolent resistance as the only path to lasting peace.

The social, economic and political consequences of war are plain to see. Their outworkings and agonising human costs are exposed in news and media outlets daily. Despite this, it is almost universally accepted that war is justified or even necessitated where other channels of preventing slaughter and destruction have failed. The fact that there has never been a period of history in which battles were not raging somewhere on the planet demonstrates how deeply warfare is 'hard-wired' in our species. All too often, wars end without any real or just resolution of conflict. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the horrors perpetrated in wars often harden pre-existing tensions between people, ideologies, and nations, leaving all parties with bitter resentments and irredeemable losses which provide fertile ground for future conflict.

The belief that evil can ultimately only be defeated by 'good people' taking and violently wielding power over 'bad people' has achieved quasi-religious status, employing the language of redemption or salvation. It is a belief that is often found, glorified or romanticized, in storytelling, mythology, religion, and popular culture. The theologian Walter Wink, whose work the Earth Justice group has been engaging with for some time now, describes how almost all superhero stories employ the same familiar narrative arc, with heroes and villains engaging in mortal combat, the hero eventually emerging victorious and the villain crushed ... until the inevitable next epic battle. Wink calls this 'the myth of redemptive violence'.

At a time when the world faces the dual existential threats of ecological collapse and the highest number of armed conflicts since WW2, it feels important to take note of the significant environmental costs of war, before considering 'COULD there be another way?'

1. Climate. It is widely accepted that military activities account for about 5.5% of total carbon emissions. Current rearmament programmes will increase this significantly, endangering critically important global climate goals. Greenhouse gas emissions by Nato alone have been estimated to rise by almost 200m tonnes a year. The production of weapons, vehicles, aircraft, and other military hardware involves highly energy-intensive processes, and fossil fuel emissions during operational phases of war are immense. In the post-war phase, rebuilding war-torn areas involve high emissions from construction and transportation activities. In addition, forest clearance for military and rebuilding use reduces the planet's capacity to absorb CO₂.
2. Pollution. Chemical weapons and other pollutants such as oil spills, heavy metals and unexploded ordnance leave long-lasting contamination in soil and water. Disposal of conventional weapons, particularly from burning, detonation or dumping, causes widespread pollution. Bombings and the burning of fossil fuels by military vehicles and aircraft contribute significantly to air pollution, releasing particulate matter, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide into the atmosphere, with significant impacts on human physical and psychological health.
3. Ecosystems and biodiversity. Widespread destruction of terrestrial and marine habitats and major direct loss of more-than-human life occur at all stages of war: training exercises; building of infrastructure; deployment of weapons and bombs; deforestation; deliberate or inadvertent attacks on oil, industrial or nuclear facilities, movement of tanks and heavy machinery, burning and scorched earth practices, disposal of military waste and weapons, and mass population displacement.

In his book *'The Powers that Be'* Wink discusses an alternative "third way" to address acts of violent domination. This model is neither passive submission nor violent retaliation. It is exemplified in gospel stories where evil is opposed without being mirrored, the oppressor resisted without being emulated and the enemy neutralised without being destroyed. Citing three stories in particular (the turning of the other cheek, carrying the Roman soldier's burden an extra mile, and the impoverished debtor) Wink overturns familiar interpretations of the texts to show how Jesus's teaching in each of these passages, far from representing exaggerated submission to ill-treatment, is in fact a highly specific and brilliantly subversive way of disarming the oppressor's domination and regaining the oppressed person's control

and dignity – without resort to violence. Wink views the cross of Christ as the ultimate symbol of redemptive nonviolence, demonstrating God's way of dealing with violence, not simply by absorbing it but by transforming it. Wink states clearly that the church should oppose violence in all its forms – because it utterly rejects domination as a solution to wrong-doing.

Nonviolent resistance has been a powerful tool for successful challenges to unjust regimes throughout history. Persistent and determined tactics such as civil disobedience, non-cooperation, boycotts, hunger strikes, sit-ins, peaceful protests, marches, and legal challenges have brought about real change, including regime change. Examples from the last century include the Indian Independence Movement where Gandhi's philosophy of *satyagraha* (truth-force) was instrumental in India gaining independence from colonial rule, and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States which achieved major legislative victories contributing to the dismantling of racial segregation and expanded voting rights.

Analysis of factors associated with the success of these movements include widespread engagement and participation, moral 'high ground', clear achievable goals, identifying the oppressors' weaknesses, strong leadership balancing both confrontation and negotiation, strategic targeted non-cooperation, effective communication, tactical flexibility, and international support. Many of these factors apply to the peaceful pro-Palestine movements that are now active round the world. While they appear to be having little discernible effect on halting the merciless carnage that is being inflicted on Gaza by, in Wink's terms, the '*Powers that Be*', is it naïve to hope that they could be instrumental in turning the tide on what the world will now consider acceptable in the ultimate outworking of these terrible hostilities that so heart-breakingly demonstrate that war cannot bring about peace when the fires of hatred are being so violently stoked?

As war becomes ever-more dangerous to people and planet, can we learn from Nature that life will spring back, not by destroying the destroyer but by finding its own way to flourish, no matter how disastrous the circumstances, when the world affords it peace?

Penelope Turton is a social scientist and a member of the Earth Justice Team at St James's Piccadilly, and of Living Spirituality Connections' Journeying Together group. This article first appeared as a Thought for the Week during the Season of Creation 2025.

The Truth of Thanksgiving

By Lyla June



This comes from the Plimoth Plantation in the USA, where our forebears began a colonisation process that would devastate and nearly obliterate the civilizations that inhabited these lands. Watch **The Truth of Thanksgiving** here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vHVxr7txqU> and join in reflecting on history, gratitude, and the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Dr Lyla June Johnstone, known as Lyla June, is a musician, orator, scientist and servant to future generations <https://www.lylajune.com/>

How Living Spirituality Connections has developed since 2012

By Linda Courage



Some 13 years ago, when funding had run out for the Living Spirituality Network (LSN), a

small group of us, at the instigation of Petra, began our time working together. We had not wanted to let the then Living Spirituality Network vision go. We had all been fed by the articles and book reviews that appeared in the Living Spirituality Network (LSN) newsletters and didn't want to lose those connections. This group included Heather-Jane Ozanne and myself, who are still part of our core group, as well as Rev Elizabeth Baxter.

In the beginning we met in Jenny Sandler's beautiful home in London, enjoying her warm hospitality, wisdom and delicious soups each time we gathered. Petra guided us in collating what we believed to be true and important in the work we wanted to take forward and this gave rise to our first leaflet and mailing list of people who might be interested in the vision we put forward.

Our new name emerged, our website too with the generosity of Francis Miller. Our projects to help anchor and nourish people in their faith in this changing world became clearer. We piloted and published guidelines for setting up groups for spiritual sharing, as well as group agreements for the Living Conversation process, and for the Journeying Together group. Our meetings clarified the areas we could develop and offer - reflected in the structure and content of our webpages.

Heather- Jane and Petra developed some workshops on Pathways to Human and Earth Flourishing in partnership with the Institute for Theological Partnerships at the University of Winchester, and with EarthChurch in Brighton. I offered in-person and online workshops and courses relating to the creative spirit at St Bede's Pastoral Centre in York. Pre-covid there were also annual talks in partnership with St James's Piccadilly on contemporary theological themes.

In a sense we walked our talk. Each meeting has embodied what Heather-Jane brought to us as 'Living Conversations'. With Petra's light touch we begin with a time of sharing how our lives are, and end with a time of how we now connect to Living Spirituality Connections. This has nurtured a valued peaceful knowing, trusting and cherishing of one another.

During Covid I worked with Bridget Cambridge to develop our Gallery space for the arts as a way of gently anchoring people in beauty and creativity in those unprecedented times. Since 2012 Petra has been producing quarterly 'Listings' of events relevant to our key themes, happening around the country, and sometimes beyond if they are online. We have also been sending an online Newsletter of themed articles. Both of these are archived on the website. I have brought my proof-reading skills to the task, and Bridget has been helping us to get our mailings together in a creative way.

We have worked alongside other organisations, developing relationships and co-hosting events for people face to face and online, and we are grateful for each of these.

During Covid Petra started offering online Deep Abiding Prayer sessions rooted in the

Christian contemplative tradition, updated with insights from Heartmath which offers science-based ways of working from our heart. These sessions continue monthly, and feedback includes comments such as: *These DAP sessions are rich and deep. Petra chooses amazingly varied and profound passages and the sharing in groups of two or three people is wonderful. We touch personal and sensitive, deep and wise truths and thoughts. The sessions are so nourishing!*

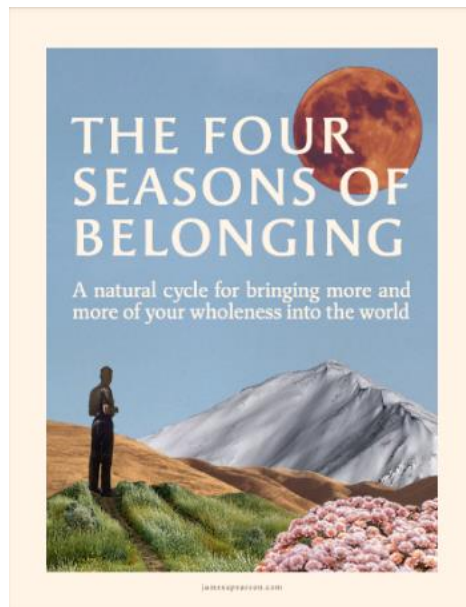
Now we are at a time of transition in Living Spirituality Connections. We would very much welcome any reflections from our readers about what is important to you at this time.

Linda Courage is a retired nurse with a background in science. She lives with her cat, Molly, and is currently enjoying her allotment and being a foster mum to hedgehogs. Recent decades have seen her discover and share expressive art and spirituality practices. A contemplative who likes people, she is drawn to local community projects that foster wellbeing and move us towards net zero. She is a member of the Living Spirituality Connections core group.

West by James A. Pearson

Turn with me to the west,
where the sun falls
into the horizon's open arms
and the rising tide
of cold and dark
sends the shiver of change
through every living thing.
You will know the autumns of life,
when cherished pieces
of your world and yourself
wilt and whither,
when what has sustained you
is slipping away,
and only your faith -
that renewal
is the dancing partner of loss
- helps you trust
that the seeds of your
future wholeness
have already been planted.

James A. Pearson's latest book **The Wilderness that Bears Your Name**, walks with you through seasons of heartbreak, rebirth, and homecoming. James is also author of



“Even the hardest season can bring you closer to who you long to be.” This book is free for new email subscribers here: <https://jamesapearson.com/>