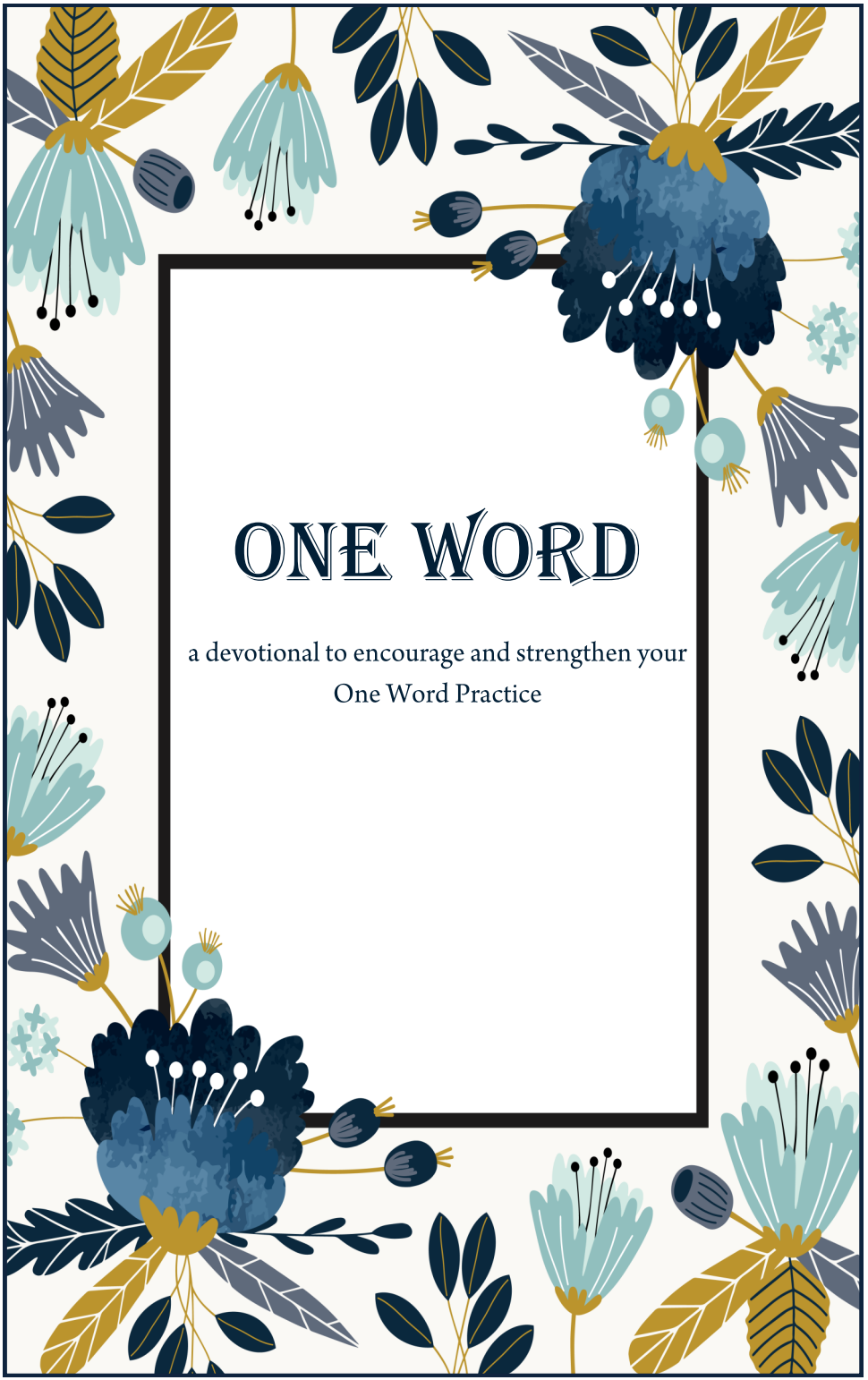
ONE WORD
a devotional to encourage and strengthen your
One Word Practice

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ONE WORD

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Reflection 1: Feels Like Work

"Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?"

-Song of Songs 8:5 (NIV)

Getting into your "one word" can feel like work. It can feel like a gasp of air after being under water too long. It can feel like being lost in the desert--knowing there is thirst-quenching life to be found, but you are out of your element and not sure how to get started.

It's okay. When we choose our one word, we often choose a lofty one (peace, enough, acceptance, gratitude), a word that represents something in our life that has held us back, kept us small, or made us overwhelmed. Our one word feels like the key to unlocking the chains that have held us captive and opening up a freedom in our lives that we've not felt before.

Truthfully though, our one word doesn't have that kind of power.

There is one word that does, though: Jesus.

Jesus has the power to set us free and to unlock those chains of whatever it is that holds us captive. While your one word may offer you a touchstone, only Jesus can bring us up from the wilderness. Lean on him, the one who calls you beloved. -AB

Journaling Prompts

How have you struggled to begin work on your one word? Is there any particular thing holding you back?

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How does Jesus call you by name? Do you imagine him using endearments? If not, can you?

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Write a one-sentence love note from Jesus to you.

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REFLECTION 2: IN HIS TIME

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end." -Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV)

Like a New Year's Resolution, we can be all "gung-ho" about getting started on our one word at the beginning. It's new, it's fresh, it feels good and exciting. But like anything, after the first couple of weeks, it can be hard to recapture that enthusiasm.

The beauty of one word is that it isn't meant to be completed all in a day or a week or one month or, maybe, even all in one year, especially, if your one word is meant to counteract a way or an act that you have been living into since you were born. Our one word practice doesn't necessarily have a clear cut end, just a movement toward. It takes time to live into that word, because it isn't JUST a word. It's a feeling. It's an act. It's a state of being.

While you chose your one word, the Holy Spirit is the one making it real within you. And, while we are called to do our part in moving forward, the Holy Spirit also moves at God's own pace. We know that God time and our time don't necessarily line up, that God's beginnings and endings are sometimes outside of ours.

Give yourself permission to work outside of a timeline. Think of it more as a journey towards and that you'll know you've arrived when you get there. –AB

Journaling Prompts

How are you feeling about your progress with your one word? Are you okay with those feelings? Why or why not?

On a scale of 1 to 10 (one being “I’m still plotting my course” and 10 being “I’ve Arrived!”), where are you at with your one word? How do you feel about that?

Write a prayer below asking for acceptance of God’s timing.

Reflection 3: Like a Child

"And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." - Matthew 18:3-4 (NIV)

How often do you allow yourself to feel like a child? Did you play today? Did you have fun?

Our one word doesn't have to feel like adult-style work. It should have elements of creativity and fun and discovery. There should be joy in the baby steps! Think about how we rejoice over a tiny child's firsts: first word, first step, first day of school. We celebrate those milestones and know that through them, children learn and grow and move closer to becoming all that they will be in this world.

Have you created baby steps to your one word? If not, take some time to create 10 "baby steps" that move you closer to your word--ideally, taking less than 15 minutes each. (Even better if these baby steps could be categorized as play!) These baby steps help us feel progress, even if we haven't had hours or a whole day to dedicate to our personal growth.

As adults, we don't always give ourselves permission to play because it isn't productive or it feels like we don't deserve that kind of time for ourselves. BUT, play unlocks something inside of us that helps us become more aware. So, when Jesus urges us to "become like children", maybe he's also encouraging us to play, to get messy, to make something useless, to not let fear keep us from doing something fun. -AB

Journaling Prompts

List 10 “baby steps” here:

Do you have a hard time making space for your one word because it doesn’t feel productive?

What does it mean for you to become like a child?

REFLECTION 4:YOU LEAD

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." -Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

Just because you chose your word doesn't mean that you see how it will play out in all the areas of your life. That probably means you chose the right word--it shouldn't be TOO easy or you would have just done it already!

It may be easy to see how your word fits into certain areas of your life and may be second nature to begin living it in those areas. There may be other areas where it's WAAAAY more challenging to implement.

* "Acceptance" is easy with friends that we love dearly. "Acceptance" is crazy hard with that brother-in-law we didn't really choose.
* "Peace" can be present in our quiet and loving home. "Peace" is less present in a workplace filled with conflict.
* "Less" can feel simple when in your head you know you have more than you need. "Less" can be hard to walk toward when confronted with a 75% off sale at your favorite store.
* "Enough" can be real when you've just cruised through today's to-do list. "Enough" can feel impossible when faced with your mother's voice inside your head, critiquing your every move.

Trust that whether you feel like you are making progress or not, your word is real and present. And you may not yet see how it's playing out in all areas of your life, but know that God sees where you've been and where you are going. Just keep doing the next right thing, and pretty soon, you'll be surprised by how far God has led you. –AB

Journaling Prompts

In what ways do you feel like you've made real progress toward your one word?

Where are you feeling stuck? Is it something that you can actively work toward or is it a situation that requires a reframing of how you react?

What's one way you can trust in God's leading today?

Reflection 5: Light My Path

"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path." (NRSV)

-Psalm 119:105

With your one word to guide you through each day, you may find that decisions about how to spend your time and money may come easier, and lifestyle choices may be clearer. Each day your word moves you one step closer to the promise of whatever your word holds for you.

And, at the very same time, your word may frustrate you and challenge you. The weight of the word may begin to feel like a burden holding you back instead of pushing you forward. When the going gets tough, you may even begin to wonder if you selected the right word in the first place!

When that happens, it is good to look to The Word, Jesus Christ, who will never let you down nor leave you disappointed. Jesus is The Word that promises you are on the right path and that wherever that path leads, our Lord and Savior is your constant companion cheering you onward and lighting your way.

Remember to ask God to bless your journey with your word even as He blesses you with the abiding presence of The Word.

–CLM

Journaling Prompts

Write a prayer asking God's blessing on your journey through 2017 with your word. Ask for strength and encouragement and awareness of God's presence.

How has your word been a light to your path? Don't forget to express your gratitude!

How has your word frustrated you? Don't be afraid to ask for strength!

Reflection 6: Anam Cara

"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers." - Proverbs 11:14 (NIV)

In the Celtic spiritual tradition, there is the idea of the "anam cara" or "soul friend" who has done some of the hard work of the soul and can be a companion in your journey. It's more than a mentor or a friend, but a spiritual companion and guide. The anam cara is someone with a little more wisdom, a little more experience and maybe just a few more answers about how we move through this life.

Have you invited anyone else into your "one word" journey?

There are very few things in this life that we can do all on our own. We need the encouragement and sometimes the advice of others whom we trust or have been there before. Maybe you don't need someone to work through your project with you, but perhaps just someone to check in with and see how it's going. Is there someone who might be able to serve as an "anam cara" for you in your one word project?

Or, perhaps it doesn't need to be a flesh and bones companion, but rather a mentor and guide who can be found in the pages of a book, magazine, or video. Perhaps it's found in the determination of Mary Lennox that new growth is possible. Or in the inspiration of Vianne that self-care does not need to be seen as indulgence and sin. Or maybe Brene Brown gives you the courage to finally embrace vulnerability.

Our anam cara can take on many forms--who's yours? -AB

*Mary Lennox is from *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodegsen Burnett. Vianne is the protagonist of the movie *Chocolat.* Brene Brown is well-known for her book *Daring Greatly*.

Journaling Prompts

Make a list of books, movies, or magazines that could inspire you in your one word journey.

Who could you invite into this journey? Why?

Write a prayer here asking for God to bring resources and people into your life that can inspire your one word work.

REFLECTION 7: PROGRESS

"Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress . -1 Timothy 4:15 (NRSV)

Because I was with you all on the Women's Retreat, may I just say once again how amazing it was to go around the circle during worship and hear all your holy words, gifts from the Spirit??!! So awesome! Beginning that very evening, I have been trying to focus on my word, LESS. If you have been to my office, or seen my purse collection, or my pen collection, or my books, or all the clothes I have and do not wear, or the drawers full of stuff I no longer use so that the stuff I do use is on top of the dresser instead…. Well, you get the picture. I need my word. And I really need to live into it.

I believe that the Spirit gave me my word as we worked through the process together. It was a bit of a toss up between Less and Brave. Maybe focusing on Less this year will help me be less encumbered so that I can be more Brave next year. Not sure. In fact, when I get to next year, the Spirit may give me something else. Hmmm…. I wonder if God has our words in mind far into the future!

I am truly excited about my word Less. My word Less hasn't quite gotten to a place where it stops me from buying new metallic gel pens, but my word Less does have me *thinking about* not buying them. I'm going to call that progress.

In 12 Step programs they say, "We are after progress, not perfection. " 1 Timothy says something similar to us, "Christian, practice your word from the Spirit and make progress." Sound good? -VSP

Journaling Prompts

What does progress, not perfection look like for you?

What kind of change or growth were you hoping for? Have you seen it? How can you celebrate your progress today?

If you haven't seen any change or growth yet, can you give yourself a break and just start fresh? What would it look like to push the "reset" button?

Reflection 8: Live, Move, Be

"God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'" (NIV)

-Acts 1:27-28

Eight people could choose the same "one word" and pursue it in eight different ways. That one word can have eight different meanings to those eight people because words have power in the way that they sound and the ways they resonate in our lives.

You may even be able to think of words you like (or especially don't like!) and how they create certain feelings and reactions within you. Words I love: sibilance, onomatopoeia, poetry, inexhaustible. These words just roll off the tongue, stir images in my head, and feel good. In my mind, words aren't just letters arranged in a certain way, but they are living, breathing, moving things. Powerful things.

Think about your word. What was it about this word that spoke to your heart and soul? And what is this word's power? Does it create momentum or inspire movement? Does it ask you to be in a different way that you have before? How does your word inhabit the living, moving, and being of your daily life?

God and the Holy Spirit guided you to your word in the beginning. They inspired you to choose it. You were meant to receive something from this word. What does it look like to "live and move and have [your] being" within this word? –AB

Journaling Prompts

Write down 3 ways that you are living, moving and being within your word.

Think about some synonyms (or look them up in a thesaurus) that you could have used for your word and write them below. Why did you choose the particular word that you did?

What inspired you to choose your word in the first place?

Reflection 9: Life & Light

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

-John 1:1-5 (NRSV)

The possibilities inherent in this passage are staggering! That The Word was not only there at the very beginning, but a full participant in creation, and that The Word is responsible for ushering life and light into the broken and dark world we know—it is almost too much to imagine. What power! What love! What marvelous good news!

Cling to The Word (co-creator, life, and light) as your anchor and your compass. Cling to the Way and the Truth. Cling to Jesus.

And, consider your word, along with, The Word in everything you do and say. Let your word be an expression of your relationship with The Word. Remember always to live your word in light of The Word. –CLM

Journaling Prompts

What connections do you see between your word and The Word?

How can The Word provide support for your journey with your word?

Tell someone about your word and The Word and your journey so far.

Reflection 10: Increase & Decrease

"You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but am sent ahead of Him. 'The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom stands by and listens for him, and is overjoyed to hear the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must increase; I must decrease."

-John 3:28-30

It was difficult to find my word used in the Bible in a way I could appreciate. There was St. James the Less, also called the Younger or the Minor or the Little, which seemed like an unfortunate kind of name. In Ecclesiastes there is "The more the words, the less the meaning," so I guess I should make this devotion short! I could probably paraphrase that, "The more the stuff, the less the meaning."

At first, I wasn't crazy about John the Baptist's words from John 3 either. One translation said, "Jesus must become greater and greater and I must become less and less." I know I want less physical stuff and I know I want less internal clutter… but less *of me*? What is that all about? Maybe it has to do with the feeling of satisfaction and grace I feel when I get out of the way. I move out of the way and then I get to see the Spirit moving in a conversation or in my prayer time. Maybe it has something to do with relying less on me and more on the Spirit. Maybe it's time to resign as Chairman of the Board of the Universe and give that title back to God. -VSP

Journaling Prompts

Have you found a scriptural connection for your one word? What is it? Why?

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If you looked at this passage in connection with your word when you began this journey, revisit it now. Has the meaning changed? What do you notice, looking at it now?

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Write a prayer asking for guidance, to teach you about your Word through God's Word.

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REFLECTION 11: ENRICHED

"You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." -2 Corinthians 9:11 (NIV)

Are you one of those people, who when you find something really good, you can't help but share your product/idea/recipe/book with everyone that you meet? It's easy to want to spread the news about the "next great thing" that we've found. When you are talking about goods and services, you become an walking, talking advertisement for it and the business loves it. Word of mouth is always the best way to let people know about stuff.

Have you become an apostle of the one word process yet? Has it enriched your life in ways that just have to be shared with everyone you meet? It can be tempting to hoard our results or to want to keep it for ourselves, but by being generous with sharing our experience, we are also offering thanksgiving to God and the Holy Spirit who have used this process for transformation and new life.

And then it becomes a circle of new life...the friend you told tells another friend, then that friend blogs about it and a colleague shares it with her book club, and before you know it, there is a whole new circle of people who are hearing, and seeing, and experiencing God's renewing presence through this practice. Like the good news of the Gospel, we are called to share generously those things which enrich our lives. Your word blesses not only your life, but other's lives as well. –AB

Journaling Prompts

What has been the most enriching experience of your one word so far?

If you were to write a commercial for your one word, what words would you use to sell it?

Make a list of ways that you have been generous in letting your one word bless others.

REFLECTION 12: DONE

"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. "

- Genesis 2:2

Are you over it?

One year, I made it to August living into my one word, and then, suddenly, I woke up one morning and felt like I was done with it. I didn't stop with because of bad feelings or frustration or lack of interest, I just felt done.

I hadn't checked everything off my list or completed every "assignment" that was supposed to be fulfilled that year, but the realization that I had accomplished what I wanted to from my one word felt good, freeing.

When you are an artist or a writer (or do anything really), sometimes more difficult than coming up with an idea is knowing when to quit. When God got to the end of the week of creation, it might have been easy to keep adding more. In God's infinitely creative mind, there was probably an impulse to just go and go and go, each creation more wondrous than the last.

But instead, God decided to be done. To rest. To look back at what God had accomplished and to say, "It is very good." -AB

Journaling Prompts

How will you know when you are done?

What feelings will accompany you as you get to the end of your one word for 2017?

Write some words of gratitude and thanksgiving for the wonders that have been revealed this year through your one word.

There are a lot of things that you can do to support your one word journey—here are some of the things we've loved:

* Art journaling or regular journaling
* Use the Internet to search for quotes and Bible verses that include your one word.
* Create a reward system to keep you motivated.
* Commit 30—planner system
* Balance Wheel exercise: how does my word inform each area of my life?
* Weekly check-in with an accountability partner
* Create a private Facebook page to connect with others who are sharing this same practice.
* Take time to reflect at the end of each month on where you are at. We love the handout from Susannah Conway
* Create a Pinterest Board of images, quotes, or ideas that tie in to your one word...look at it often.
* Display it everywhere: post its notes left in surprising places, glass markers, write encouraging cards to yourself and then give to a friend to mail to you as a surprise.