



UNITED THANK OFFERING



*An Invitation to
a Holy Autumn*

Fall 2025

An Invitation to a Holy Autumn

An Introduction to the Materials



Many of us look forward to Lent and use it as an opportunity to recalibrate our lives, spiritual practices, or habits, and it all begins with an "Invitation to a Holy Lent". This year, UTO Board members wondered what that might look like if we were invited to consider a holy autumn. Our materials were created with the hope to help individuals or groups consider the spiritual aspects of rest, specifically the idea of Sabbath. In the Northern Hemisphere, autumn is typically when the fields are plowed, and earth rests, but humans tend to fill this time of rest with a lot of activity, many centered around holidays. In addition to this, we live in a time where rest and self care are discussed but often not rewarded. This fall, UTO wants to invite you to take time to consider what rest looks like for you through this booklet created by two of our Board Members, Linda Kennedy, Diocese of Alabama, and Caroline Carson, Diocese of New Jersey.

We recommend the following options for using the resources:

Individuals:

Reflection
Scripture
Journal
Activities
Prayer

Groups:

Prayer
Scripture
Reflection
Discussion Questions
Prayer

If you would like more resources for use alongside these materials, UTO has materials for use by children and their families. These materials look at ways we can practice gratitude to spur creativity when we're experiencing boredom. UTO also has bulletin inserts and other resources to help support congregations in using our materials this fall. You can find all of these resources (and more) at www.unitedthankoffering.com/fall.

A note regarding the scripture section: when reflecting on scripture, there are numerous ways of doing so, and whatever works best for you and your context is the right choice. We are using the response model from *A Disciple's Prayer Booklet* from the Indigenous Ministries Office. You can find the full text of the booklet in English and Spanish here: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/indigenous-ministries/>

To find resources to add gratitude practices to your Thanksgiving Holiday, please use the QR code to the right.



It takes courage to say "yes" to rest and play in a culture where exhaustion is seen as a status symbol.
- Brené Brown

Week One: An Invitation to a Holy Autumn

Prayers and Scripture Suggestions



Prayer Suggestions for Week One

Our loving God, all good gifts come from you. You send the sunshine and the rain, and it is through your love and care that we enjoy the harvest time. Thank you for providing so richly for our needs and help us to share the good things we have with those who have little or nothing. Amen.

The Lord is good to me and so I thank the Lord for giving me the things I need: the sun and the rain and the apple seed. The Lord is good to me. Amen.

Eternal God, you crown the year with your goodness and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season: grant that we may use them to your glory, for the relief of those in need and for your own well-being; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Suggestions for Week One

The land has yielded its harvest: God, our God has blessed us.

Psalms 67:6

The earth is filled with the gifts of the Lord: wine, and oil, and bread,
to strengthen and cheer our hearts.

Psalms 104: 13, 15

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4 1-20; or Luke 8:4-15

Scripture Reflection and Response

Reflect and Respond to one or more of the verses listed above.

1. What word(s), idea(s), or sentence(s) stand out for you in the reading?

(Reread the passage.)

2. What is Jesus (or the text) saying to you?

(Reread the passage.)

3. What is Jesus (or the text) calling you to do?

Week One: An Invitation to a Holy Autumn

A Reflection by Linda Kennedy



If you are like me, Autumn doesn't always feel like the ideal time to find the quiet needed for prayer or contemplation. We arrive at the time of Autumn after long days of summer and vacations and rushing back to school and work routines. At church, we "rally" the congregation for a new year of Sunday school. And on top of that, there are fall sporting events, Halloween and planning for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Work projects must be completed and budgets spent by year end. It is not a relaxing time UNLESS we recall what this season should be about.

Traditionally, in the church, Autumn continues the "season of growth" starting with the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and with lessons from Christ on how we should live our days. It is the time of Harvest—in our fields and in our souls. Apples and pears and squash and root vegetables all come forth to remind us of the work we did in the spring and summer to cultivate our gardens and fields. Children and adults and visitors come through those "red" doors to rally and celebrate another year of hearing the lessons and prayers heard through the ages.

To everything there is a season—a time to plant and a time to reap. (Ecclesiastes 3:2).

A Holy Autumn celebrates the season of reaping and sowing. In the Parable of the Sower, we are reminded of the importance of planting seeds correctly. If the ground or the foundation is too shallow, the seeds will not establish deep roots. If they are sown in an area with lots of other plants, the sun will not reach them and roots will get tangled, not bearing good fruit. The same is true if they fall along the path between gardens where they can easily be scattered or uncovered. But, if they are planted in the right soil, receiving the water and the sun they need and not disturbed by other things in the garden, they will be fruitful and multiply. The words of Jesus will not flourish if not planted deep in our souls either.

A Holy Autumn means being intentional in our work in God's garden. It means that no matter how busy or distracted we might get with all that is going on in our lives and the world, we remember the great commandments to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. And it means we stop to celebrate and share the bounteous gifts and grace that we have received.

This is the beauty of Harvest Sundays. Several years ago, our family was in the United Kingdom during mid-September. It seemed as if every church we attended was celebrating Harvest Sunday. There were displays of cornucopias full of bountiful fruit and vegetables, baskets for collecting canned goods to give to neighbors who did not have access to as much of the Harvest and lots of prayers thanking God for all of the gifts we have received from the earth.

Harvest Sunday is a wonderful way to celebrate the "grace upon grace" we have received both in our earthly gardens and the gardens of our souls. In our reflections over the coming weeks, we will emphasize the need to rest from our work just as God rested after creating the earth. We will give practical ways to celebrate and rest during these Holy Autumn days.



Week One Journal/Discussion Questions

WHAT DOES THE PHRASE, "A HOLY AUTUMN", MEAN TO YOU?

HOW DO YOU CELEBRATE THE "HARVESTS" OF YOUR LIFE?

WHAT ARE YOUR NEIGHBORS NEEDS AND HOW CAN YOU REACH OUT TO THEM?

Week One: An Invitation to a Holy Autumn



Activities and Resources for Further Learning

Suggested Activities:

1. **Prepare a blessing box** to give to those who are in need. Blessing boxes are small boxes or bags that one can keep in their car to give to folks asking for help around town, or donated to a local outreach organization. They can be decorated and put together by all ages and could contain the following: peanut butter crackers, granola bars, meat sticks, (or other shelf-stable foods), bottled water, gatorade, juice boxes, body wipes, toothbrush and travel-size toothpaste, deodorant, or other small/travel-sized personal care items.
2. **Volunteer** at a local food bank or feeding ministry.
3. **Have a canned goods drive** at your place of worship or set up an angel tree but instead of toys at Christmas, work with a local organization to stock the pantries of a family in need.
4. **Try your hand at canning or making jam** to save the flavors of summer for the cold days of winter. (There are great recipes for making refrigerator or freezer jam if you're not sure about the canning process.)

Resources for Further Learning:

Consider hosting a harvest worship service at church or at home.

- One option: Harvest Festival Worship, prayer and Bible resources for Year C as found in: *Wonderstruck: Awaken to the Nearness of God* by Margaret Feinburg
- Another option: *Faithful Celebrations: Making Time for God in Autumn* by Sharon Ely Pearson is a great resource for building prayer filled events at home during the harvest season. This book also has a thoughtful process for intergenerational gatherings.

Week Two: Keeping THE Sabbath

A Reflection by Linda Kennedy



"Where does the strength come from to see the race to its end? From within. Jesus said, the Kingdom of God is within you." -Eric Liddell speech in Chariots of Fire

One of our family's favorite movies is Chariots of Fire, the 1981 winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture, which tells the story of two British runners competing in the 1924 Paris Olympics. The quote above is from Eric Liddell, a Christian and Scottish missionary, who wouldn't compete in his best race as it was scheduled on the Sabbath. Eric knew that his strength was from God and that he must keep the Sabbath Holy. If he didn't, he would not have what he needed to compete.

God set an example for us when on the seventh day he rested after creating "the vast array" of the Universe and our world. God rested and admired the work completed. And, God saw that it was good. God also saw that resting was good and commanded us to do so by keeping the Sabbath. Rest is what keeping the Sabbath is all about. You can not rest without work. You can not work without rest. It is just part of the process but it is very counter to our culture. It is a bit like making bread. You work to mix and stir the ingredients and then you let it rest. While it is resting, all kinds of creative processes are happening. You work it again and let it rest again. Then, hopefully, you can see and taste that it is good (or at least see ways to make it even better the next time!)

"Shabbat Shalom!" (have a peaceful rest) is both a greeting and a blessing that our Jewish friends say to each other as they near their day of rest on Friday. They see this as a festive time—a time to rest and celebrate the awesomeness of God. A time to share a festive meal and to sing praises to God, and converse with family and friends.

In *the Well of Living Insights*, Arthur Green states, in reference to the Shabbat morning liturgy, "I believe that Shabbat is indeed a great gift. The ability and obligation to cease from our labors, especially those we do in pursuit of our livelihood, has an essential role in defining and preserving our humanity. This is the great wisdom of our Torah in placing the creation of Shabbat immediately following the creation of the first humans. "There can be no humanity," it is saying, "without the ability to get off the treadmill and rest."

Green continues "Without rest we would not even be able to conceive of holiness...We are living through an age of tremendous speeding up of the pace of life. Our common humanity is threatened by the constancy of demands made upon us and the speed with which we are asked to respond. We have in the treasure-house of our Jewish civilization a great antidote to this spreading poison."

In a world where there are countless articles about burnout and exhaustion, the antidote is to turn to rest. The antidote is to show our thankfulness and to be present with God.

Week Two: Keeping THE Sabbath

Prayers and Scripture Suggestions



Prayer Suggestions for Week Two

A Prayer For Marking the Sabbath

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, and author of peace. You who made the Sabbath, enter our home this night and grant us and all our loved ones rest on this Sabbath day. May the light of the candles drive out from among us the spirit of anger and the spirit of fear. Send your blessings that we may walk in the ways of your world and your light. Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your creation! It is from you that we receive every good and perfect gift. Giver of life and love, grant us your peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Those Who Didn't Get Enough Sleep Last Night

May you find peace in the sleepy space that comes with signs and drowsiness. May you also find strength in the knowledge that many of us feel the same way today, hours and days blurring together, seeming like an endless struggle. May God grant you the self-awareness and grace to give yourself a break and to create the room for the rest you need in order to keep on keeping on. Amen.

Scripture Suggestions for Week Two

God Creates the Sabbath and a Time for Rest

Genesis 2: 1-3

Further Instruction Regarding the Sabbath

Exodus 20: 8-10

A Psalm for the Sabbath Day

Psalms 92

Scripture Reflection and Response

Reflect and Respond to one or more of the verses listed above.

1. What word(s), idea(s), or sentence(s) stand out for you in the reading?

(Reread the passage.)

2. What is Jesus (or the text) saying to you?

(Reread the passage.)

3. What is Jesus (or the text) calling you to do?

Week Two Journal/Discussion Questions

HOW HAVE YOU WITNESSED REST AS BEING IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE?

CAN YOU THINK OF INSTANCES WHERE JESUS USED REST IN HIS MINISTRY?

HOW MIGHT YOU KEEP THE SABBATH IN YOUR LIFE?

Week Two: Keeping THE Sabbath



Activities and Resources for Further Learning

Suggested Activities:

This week, we want to invite you to identify ways that would help you to keep the Sabbath holy in addition to your weekly worship routine.

Try:

- Lighting candles and saying some prayers (you can use the Daily Office, or Compline)
- Lectio Divina, a four step process of reflecting on scripture:
 - Lectio (reading): read short passage of scripture slowly
 - Meditatio (meditation): reflect on the passage, what is the meaning of it and how does it relate to today
 - Oratio (prayer): respond to the scripture by offering a prayer
 - Contemplatio (contemplation): hear the scripture again, and allow yourself to be open to what God might be saying to you today through the text
- Read - pick a book to help deepen your connection to your faith or the world around you.
- Journal - you can write freely, or choose a gratitude journal to reflect on the week that has passed.
- Create - color, craft, paint, draw, sew, one way we can keep the sabbath is to use the gifts God has given us.
- Get outside - spend time in nature and give thanks for creation.

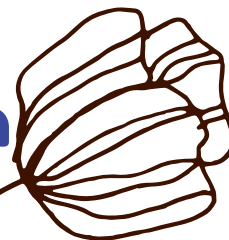
Resources for Further Learning:

The Sabbath: It's Meaning for Modern Man, Abraham Joshua Herschel

Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline, Lauren F. Winner

Week Three: Keeping “A” Sabbath

Prayers and Scripture Suggestions



Prayer Suggestions for Week Three

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

— Book of Common Prayer

Scripture Suggestions for Week Three

The following verses highlight both the physical and spiritual rest as part of a healthy and balanced life.

This passage commands us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, and gives God's rest on the seventh day after creation as the prime example.

Exodus 20:8-11

This instructs the Israelites to observe the Sabbath, linking it to their liberation from slavery in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

In this verse, the Sabbath is known as a day of sacred assembly and rest from work.

Leviticus 23:3

God invites all who are weary and burdened to find rest in God.

Jesus also emphasizes the importance of rest in other ways....for example, when he suggests to his disciples "come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31).

Matthew 11:28-30

Scripture Reflection and Response

Reflect and Respond to one or more of the verses listed above.

1. What word(s), idea(s), or sentence(s) stand out for you in the reading?

(Reread the passage.)

2. What is Jesus (or the text) saying to you?

(Reread the passage.)

3. What is Jesus (or the text) calling you to do?

Week Three: Keeping “A” Sabbath

A Reflection by Caroline Carson



In seminary at The School of Theology at Sewanee, I found myself a bit lost at being in school again after many years and finding it harder to concentrate for various reasons. Stresses reared their heads and I needed some kind of respite. The word Sabbath held meaning for me, but it was primarily about what we just read, about keeping THE Sabbath, on a Saturday or Sunday and resting or making a point to set aside business for a “day off.” What I had always found on my days “off” was that they became filled with tasks difficult to do without being on a weekday, or laundry and cleaning and errands, or any number of things that “needed” to get done. So, it was a rare even indeed, that had me relaxing or re-charging. Even my vacations morphed into teaching trips or some form of continuing education. I therefore somehow took charge of this situation and created what has become quite the stir among some of my friends and colleagues: The Magic Porch.

What in the world is that, you might ask? Well, it was my answer to needing a space for sabbath, whether that be on a Friday night, one hour on a weekday, or any other time. A “Magic Porch” has stringed lights of some sort, candles, incense, a rocking chair, perhaps your pet, plants, perhaps a magical or beautiful view, and serves as a spot to think, unencumbered by the broader world. It became intentional and THAT IS KEY! Such a thing that wherever I go, I now carry stringed lights, a tea light, one cone of incense, and I am ready to drop-and-give-me-twenty minutes of chill.

Keeping “a sabbath” is giving yourself a space to be / do / feel / experience - whatever you are called to. It’s commanding a pause. It’s saving a moment for you. It is finding an eternity within one single moment of the fray. It is allowing yourself to “steal” and cultivate a minute, five minutes, an hour, a ½ day, one day, or a week or more for YOU and your needs. You not only deserve it, but you need it for your mental, spiritual, and physical health. Claim it where you can! Of course, with the knowledge that zoning out at a stoplight might not benefit yourself or society! Keeping a sabbath in today’s world can be hard work, but as we mature into the Fall of our week’s, our lives, and our learned hearts, it can be life-saving. I think you will find that it will make your life more productive overall and perhaps it will nourish you through the dark times and bolster your energy in the good times.

Week Three Journal/Discussion Questions

WHERE IS YOUR SAFE AND RELAXING SPACE?

HOW IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BEAUTY OF CREATION? HOW DOES GRATITUDE PLAY IN?

ARE YOU CONSISTENT WITH TAKING YOUR SABBATH TIME?



HOW DO YOU FIND BALANCE BETWEEN ALL THE ELEMENTS OF YOUR
WORLD AND CALLINGS?

WHERE IS GOD IN THE NOISE OF THE WORLD? WHERE IS GOD IN THE
SILENCE?

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU COULD KEEP OR CREATE A SABBATH?

Week Three: Keeping “A” Sabbath

Activities and Resources for Further Learning



Suggested Activities:

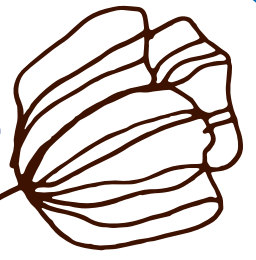
- Create your own “Magic Porch” or “safe space” to help you mark a time of rest during your week.
- Think of ten things or people for which or for whom you are grateful.
- Let your mind wander - just “be”.
- “Phone a friend” – reconnect with someone you haven’t talked to for awhile.
- Centering Prayer (~ from Episcopal glossary – “A method of quiet meditation in which a single symbolic word is used as a sign of one’s willingness to wait on God and be available to God’s presence. This word is used as a point of focus. The discipline involves setting aside twenty minutes or so for quiet prayer. This apophatic method has been widely taught and practiced in the Episcopal Church since the early 1980s. Thomas Keating’s *Finding Grace at the Center* (1978) encouraged the practice of centering prayer.”)
- Meditate or practice deep breathing.

Resources for Further Learning:

- *Faith with a Twist: A 30-Day Journey into Christian Yoga* by Amy Nobles Dolan and Hillary D. Raining
- *The Book of Common Prayer and the Bible* are great resources for daily prayer, please see the introduction for the link to a *Disciple’s Prayer Book* as another option.
- UnitedThankOffering.com has lots of gratitude resources to help you create space in your life to practice gratitude.
- *Sacred Space: The Prayer Book* by The Irish Jesuits

Week Four: Renewal/Refreshment/Rest

Prayers and Scripture Suggestions



Prayer Suggestion for Week Four

Holy Spirit,
Breath of life,
Who moves in the spaces between —
In the quiet pause,
In the empty room,
In the crowd,
In the moment of waiting,
We rest in you.
We come with hearts open but unsure,
Not knowing the path,
But trusting in your presence,
In the liminal space where time bends and is no more
And yet, is, always.
And the old has gone but the new has not yet come.
Hold us here, Holy Spirit.
Teach us the grace of simply being,
Of breathing with the earth
As we inhale and exhale,
A rhythm drawing us deeper
Into the embrace of your peace.
Let us feel the deep breath of the world,
The sigh of the trees and the mountains,
The pulse of the oceans,
As if they search for the peace of God.
May that peace surround us now,
In the tension of not knowing,

In the stillness of suspended moments,
In the quiet anticipation of what is to come.
We pray for those who walk through days of angst,
Who linger in fearful shadows or experience
devastating storms,
Who seek light yet feel none,
Who know only the ache of longing.
May they feel the gentle touch of your Spirit
On their shoulders,
A soft whisper of hope,
A reminder that even in the dark times,
God's love is steadfast and unchanging.
For you, O Spirit, are with them —
In the silence, in the waiting, in the dark.
We breathe with the earth, Holy Spirit,
And find you in the liminal,
In the quiet spaces between moments,
In the waiting and the longing,
Where peace is not a place to reach,
But a gift to receive.
Let it fill us now,
And let it overflow
Into every heart we meet,
Every soul aching for peace.
In your holy presence, we rest.
Amen.

Scripture Suggestions for Week Four

This passage expands on this theme by presenting Jesus as the true vine and believers as branches and shows that it's vital we remain connected to Jesus for spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. We might look at it as God pruning some branches that bear fruit to make them even more fruitful.

John 15:1-8

"You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?"

Matthew 7:16-20

Teaching on the Fruits of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23

Scripture Reflection and Response

Reflect and Respond to one or more of the verses listed above.

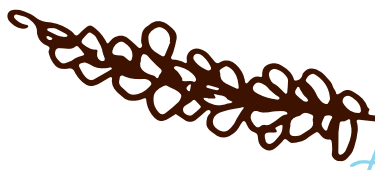
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(Reread the passage.)

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(Reread the passage.)

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Week Four: Renewal/Refreshment/Rest

A Reflection by Caroline Carson

What are we planting now to bear fruit in the spring? Can you recognize and hold onto a liminal space?

In my mid-life, I moved to New Jersey, where I expected it to be extremely industrial, filthy, and almost like one big highway system. What I found was ridiculously the opposite. People cautioned me when I told them how transformed my opinion had become, to “preserve the myth” and let folks keep on driving through so that only the necessary amount would stay for healthy tourism! HA! What I had discovered was a return to my childhood outings, walks, and my love of plants and animals in a stunning natural world, and a return to my truly feeling like I was part of our Earth and recognize viscerally our interconnectedness with it. What had been re-revealed to me in my life was the power nature has to connect with God, to take a step back from anxieties, and to refresh and renew myself. It became a liminal space of neither here, nor there; neither re-hashing the past of the day or week, nor worrying about tomorrow.

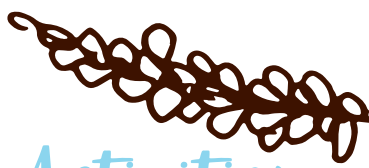
I created for myself a “Magic Porch” (from previous reflection), and I began to plant things. Mostly, I love trees and flowers, so began to root what I could, such as various acorns in bottles to watch their roots growing, and I planted bulbs. The bulbs are what I’m about to get at. WHAT are we planting in the Fall or Winter of our life rhythms or seasons or our very lives, that will bear fruit in the coming Spring, because, it WILL come, Jesus will come! How can we plan such things? With care! I say that because sometimes our planning takes on a mind of its own and we end up trying to control the outcome. How then does the Holy Spirit flow so that we experience it? Goal setting and planting gratitude / seeds / ideas / habits takes discernment, sometimes education, and often prayer and trust in God. We can achieve it with God’s help.



Week Four Journal/Discussion Questions

WHAT KINDS OF SEEDS CAN WE PLANT THAT TRANSFORM DURING THE STAGNANT WINTER SEASON AND BREATHE FORTH FROM THE GROUND IN THE SPRING IN HOLY GROWTH?

WHAT KIND OF ROOTS CAN WE SEE BEGINNING TO TAKE HOLD?



Week Four: Renewal/Refreshment/Rest

Activities and Resources for Further Learning

Suggested Activities:

- Consider what you can plant now in your area that will blossom in the Spring, your local garden center will be able to help you with ideas for plants.
- Plant a tree in the early Fall and let it get settled before Winter so that it can provide the respite of shade next Summer.
- Write out your dreams and anxieties, symbolically bury them to find later, like some folks do this with the "Alleluias" during Lent.
- Journal or craft about what it means to create fruit or fruitful scenarios (paintings, photos, sculpture, crocheted, dance or music) or that tells of blossoming.
- Go for a walk and take a super close look at what is blossoming or "showing off" in the world of plants during every season. You might just come away with a feeling of surprise at what minute beauties each season holds.

Resources for Further Learning:

- *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community* by Pádraig Ó Tuama
- *The Psalms and Creation: The Earth in the Poetry of the Psalms* by Susanne J. J. Williams



Each year the United Thank Offering creates resources like this one to help individuals and communities deepen their commitment to practicing gratitude. In addition to this work, UTO receives thank offerings from our members, given in gratitude for the good things that happen in their lives, and then grants 100% of what is collected to support innovative mission and ministry around the globe.



To make your own thank offering, or to learn more about the work of UTO, please use the QR code to the left.