Reflecting on Forgiveness

- Recall moments when you have experienced forgiveness from God and others in your life.
- Who are the people I need to forgive?
- Are there resentments or grudges I need to let go of in my life?
- Am I open to receive forgiveness?
- What does it mean for me to love as Jesus loved?

Scripture Passages about Forgiveness

Luke 5:1–11 Jesus Calls the First Disciples
Luke 15 The Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin, and the Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother
John 8:1–11 The Woman Caught in Adultery
2 Corinthians 5:16–21 Living by Faith

7 Generosity: The Call of the King

Whoevers wishes to come with me must labor with me.

We experience a sense of being loved and forgiven in the Principle and Foundation and in the First Week of the Exercises. Gratitude for this love and forgiveness expands our hearts. It leads to a desire to share the good news that God loves us and forgives us. Gratitude opens us to service. At the same time, freedom enables us to hear the call to discipleship and to respond in openness. Gratitude empowers us to let go of whatever may hinder our response to God. Freedom from attachment becomes freedom for service.

In the Gospels, two stories of Peter highlight the dynamic connection between forgiveness and service. In the first story, Peter catches nothing after fishing all night. Jesus tells Peter to cast the net on the other side. The skeptical Peter complies and
If we believe this, our response is likely to be, "Yes, yes I'll do it. I know it's going to be hard, but I'm willing."

Ignatius tells us this person actually exists. His name is Jesus, and he is inviting us to bring about the reign of God. Ignatius wants us to get in touch with spontaneous generosity and readiness to serve. He wants to capture in this consideration the passion within all of us. As Michael Ivens puts it, the parable of the king is intended to make the person aware "of the resources of energy, love, ambition, and idealism which Christ wishes to enlist in the service of the Kingdom."¹

The remaining Exercises make sense in this context of openness, generosity, and the desire to serve.

This also answers the question, "What ought I do for Christ?" You'll recall this was asked at the foot of the cross in the First Week of the Exercises. It is the call of the rich young man in the Gospel: Sell everything and come follow me if you want to be perfect. Some people call this the second Principle and Foundation, but now the Principle and Foundation is much more clearly focused on Jesus and on following Jesus.

In the Call of the King, the grace we pray for is not to be deaf to the Lord's call. We should be ready to accomplish the Lord's most holy will. We pray to be open, to be ready, and to be generous. We ask God to give us a generous heart so that we may follow him and be part of the plan. We should all want to be part of this plan and bring about the great work God is involved in.

Moreover, the Call of the King mobilizes our energy. It invites us to get in touch with our dream of making a better world and to see how Jesus fulfills it. Jesus is a leader, a living king who is actively at work in the world around us. He is seeking to bring about the reign of God and is asking us to labor alongside him.

The Call of the King is one of commitment to the person of Jesus and to the mission of Jesus. William Barry says that retreatants making the Exercises at this point desire that "Jesus reveals himself, his values, his dreams, his loves, and his hates so that the retreatant will actually love him as a true friend and leader and become more like him. Retreatants, at this stage, are asking whether they can and may make Jesus and the mission of Jesus the center around which they will organize their lives."²

Ignatius envisioned his own relationship with Jesus in the context of the feudal world of earlier centuries. Ignatius thought of himself as a vassal and Jesus as the Lord. It was a personal relationship of love and friendship, of entering into and sharing the experience of the other person. It was mutual service and fidelity. It was that kind of personal bond that Ignatius had with Jesus and that he invites us to have as well. Jesus for him was his provider, his protector, his leader, and his friend; and he invites us to relate to Jesus as provider, protector, leader, and friend.³

Our God Is a Generous God

Generosity is a spontaneous movement of the heart to give of oneself and share one's resources. "What shall I give to the Lord for all the Lord has given to me?" (Psalm 116:12). Christian generosity is first a response to the generosity of God toward us.

The Principle and Foundation focuses on God's generosity in creating the world and everything in it. We have nothing that we have not received from God. All of this flows from God's boundless generosity. The very nature of God is to give in unmeasured love. The history of salvation is a history of God's generosity toward God's people. God protects and sustains
people. God’s offer is repeated covenants filled with promises of faithful love.

For Christians, God’s generosity comes to fullness in the gift of his Son. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus is the incarnation of God’s generosity, and a total outpouring of self in love. Jesus’ own life embodies that divine generosity. The ministry of Jesus models a generous life of service to those in need. He teaches, heals, feeds, and forgives the people. In the end, he gives himself completely by embracing his passion and death. For example, we read in Paul’s letter to the Philippians:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the
point of death—
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 5–8)

Moreover, Paul emphasizes God’s generosity again in his second letter to the Corinthians: “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). God’s generosity is revealed in Jesus coming among us and giving his life for us. Furthermore, Jesus also reveals the generosity of God by inviting us to friendship and a share in the very life of God. God’s generosity pervades the Scripture and challenges us to be generous toward others. Our generosity flows out of and mirrors our experience of God’s generosity toward us.

Magis: Ignatius’s Call to Generosity

Ignatius believed that a spirit of generosity is necessary for anyone making the Spiritual Exercises.

The persons who make the Exercises will benefit by entering upon them with great spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord, and by offering all their desires and freedom to him so that His Divine Majesty can make use of their persons and of all they possess in whatsoever way is in accord with his most holy will. (Sp. Ex. 5)

The Call of the King brings generosity to the forefront. To hear and respond to the invitation of Jesus, we need a generous heart and a desire to do more in the world. To go forward in the Exercises, we need a desire to serve without reservation. Generosity is especially urgent because those who follow Jesus face great challenges. In the Call of the King Jesus says, “Therefore whoever wishes to come with me must labor with me, so that following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory.” (Sp. Ex. 95)
The Call of the King is a diagnostic exercise that tests a person’s
degree of generosity. One cannot be a disciple unless one is willing
to offer oneself freely for others. Only those with generous hearts
can follow Jesus to the cross and suffer and die with Jesus for love
of others. Only those with generous hearts can respond to the call
of Jesus to “love one another as I have loved you.”

Ignatius’s word for this quality of generosity is *magis* (more). The driving force of his spirituality is a desire to always do more,
to ask himself, “What more can I do?” With Ignatius, there is
never a sense that we can be satisfied with what we have already
done. We have never done enough. He searches for the way of
greater service and love. How can we be more generous, more lov-
ing, more compassionate, more zealous, and more involved in the
work of the Kingdom?

Ignatius’s *magis* is not the drive of the perfectionist to do
what is best or most demanding. It is the drive to reach higher
and seek the greater good. As Michael Ivens points out, the *magis*
is not the product of compulsive behavior that relies only on one’s
own efforts.

This insistence on the ‘more’ must nevertheless
be dissociated from a self-driven ethic (“must try
harder”) with which the Ignatian *magis* is some-
times associated. We are concerned with the ‘more’
of Christ’s invitations and of the expanding possi-
bilities of his grace, not the ‘more’ of compulsion.

The Ignatian commitment to the “Greater Glory of God” cap-
tures this passion to respond ever more generously to the call of
God to labor alongside Jesus in the work of the Kingdom.

Ignatius says as much as he concludes the Call of the King. He says:

Those who desire to show greater devotion and to
distinguish themselves in total service to their etern-
al King and universal Lord . . . will make offerings
of greater worth and moment, and say: “Eternal
Lord of all things, I make my offering, with your
favor and help. I make it in the presence of your
infinite Goodness, and of your glorious Mother,
and of all the holy men and women in your heav-
ently court. I wish and desire, and it is my delib-
erate decision, providing only that it is for your
greater service and praise, to imitate you in bearing
all injuries and affronts, and any poverty, actual as
well as spiritual, if your most Holy Majesty desires
to choose and receive me into such a life and state.”
(Sp. Ex. 97–98) (Italics are added by the author)

Ignatius asks the retreatant to listen to this prayer and not to
say it. In the words of David Fleming, “we listen to the prayer
response of those who want to be more devoted and to signalize
themselves in their service to their Lord.” We can say the prayer
ourselves only when we receive the grace of generosity.

We pray for this grace in the Prayer for Generosity, a prayer
attributed to Ignatius because it gives expression to the desire of
his heart in response to the call of the King.

Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God,
Teach me true generosity.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.
To give without counting the cost,
To fight heedless of wounds,
To labor without seeking rest,
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.
Amen.

Growing in the Virtue of Generosity

The virtue of generosity is a disposition of the heart to give spontaneously of oneself, to reach out to others in love and concern, and to seek the good of others. A generous heart does not measure its response and goes beyond what is expected or required or owed. A generous heart asks for nothing in return.

Generosity prompts us to act selflessly and to share our resources of time, talent, and treasure. We call someone generous when we are surprised, humbled, and touched by their actions, and when there is no rational explanation for their gracious gestures of love and sharing. Generosity moves us to service of others. The heart of a disciple is shaped by generosity. It is not surprising that Paul lists generosity among the fruits of the Spirit. Paul writes, “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). Generosity is a grace to be prayed for and desired by anyone who hears the call of the Lord.

Ignatius tries to elicit this generous attitude of heart because he believed that God had planted it in every heart. We are made in the image and likeness of God who is generous. Our spontaneous generosity may have been muted by our sin and selfishness, but it can be enlivened by an experience of the unconditional love of God that knows no bounds.

The call to generosity will be deepened as the retreatant contemplates the generosity of Jesus narrated in the Gospel stories of his life, death, and resurrection. The Call of the King is a first step in putting on the generous heart of Christ and forming us into a person who will carry on the selfless ministry of Jesus.

Reflecting on Generosity

- What are the ways I experience the generosity of God?
- What specific scenes in the Gospels speak to me about Jesus’ generosity?
- What inhibits my generosity in reaching out to others and sharing my resources with them?
- How can I respond more generously to God’s love and Jesus’ call to discipleship?

Scripture Passages about Generosity

Psalm 116:12 Thanksgiving for the Recovery from Illness
Isaiah 1—13 “Here I am, Lord, send me.”
Mark 10:17–31 The Rich Man
2 Corinthians 8:9 Encouragement to be Generous