

Unemployment Meditations

Reflections,
Prayers *and* Practices

(to Face One of Life's Most
Difficult Challenges)



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INTRODUCTION

Layoffs. Firings. Downsizing. Furloughs. Reductions in force. Company jargon calls it lots of things, but for those of us on the receiving end of it, it's simply: unemployment. It's happened to almost everyone I know. For some, it came suddenly and unexpectedly. Others get lots of lead time, like a crash in slow motion.

In my case, I was let go three times in ten years. The first time was during the Great Recession. The second was a “shift in strategy.” The third saw the elimination of my entire department. None of these times were easy, but each one taught me something new and made me more resilient. I am not eager for there to be a fourth. But if there is, I feel prepared for it.

The following meditations are meant to be practical, personal, and actionable. As with so many other things—unemployment is equal parts art and science. We cannot simply endure the dismissal of a job loss without feeling, acknowledging, and ultimately overcoming the many feelings unemployment brings with it. Our hearts and minds may race with worry and loss—and prayers asking God to grant us specific blessings to undertake the work necessary to overcome them. And while not a tutorial, there are practices here that should help job seekers turn reflection into action.

May God grant you the endurance you need to get through this horribly difficult time. And take it from one who has been there: you will.

Your Job Is Not Your Identity

PONDER

Believing we are our jobs is an easy mistake to make. We spend so much time—often more hours than we devote to anything else in our lives—that it can feel like what we *do* is who we *are*. Whether we love it or hate it, losing a job makes us feel as though we've lost who we are.

PRAY

God, I feel lost. So much of me was wrapped up in my job, I don't recognize myself without it. Please help me to remember that I am more than my occupation. That you have blessed me with gifts that live outside my working hours.

PRACTICE

Take time to reflect on the parts of yourself that you kept safe and separate from work. If you have trouble thinking of things that make you special beyond your work, ask a loved one what they love about you.

This Is Just One Moment in a Long Career

PONDER

Whether you've lost a job after 15 years or 15 minutes, this time is just one moment in a journey. If you believe your work was ever stable, consider the number of other moments you've experienced along the way. Projects change. Colleagues move on. Customers come and go. Years are up and down. This moment—painful as it is—is simply one more moment in a long career filled with them.

PRAY

God, I feel as though this period will last forever—that it will be the final word in my work. Please help me to remember the ever-changing nature of my world against the constant promise of your love. Walk with me through this moment as you have in so many moments before it, and as you will through so many more moments to come.

PRACTICE

Remember that most people will have eleven to twelve jobs between the ages of 18 and 48. Expect and embrace change, even when it's not on your terms.

Fear and Anxiety

PONDER

The fear and anxiety that comes along with losing a job can be crippling. So much is uncertain, and life can feel unfamiliar in an instant. Feeling this way is natural, but it is not inevitable, and more importantly, it's not permanent. Conflict (like losing a job) can bring about two kinds of stress: distress and eustress. Everyone is familiar with distress; it brings with it worry and despair. Eustress, on the other hand, prompts an active response, one we can use to get things done and propel us toward our goal. Whenever you can, try to convert your worry to action and harness the power of eustress.

PRAY

God, I am filled with worry, and so much feels as though it is out of my control. Help me to face my fear. Please grant me harmony—the power to recognize that the same pressure I feel that is causing me anxiety can also be used as a motivator to take back control.

PRACTICE

The key to harnessing eustress is action. Distress is giving power to the past that cannot be changed and to the future that cannot be seen. Eustress gives power to the now. In the face of so many things out of control, you can control your job search. You control its pace, you control your effort, and you can control how prepared you are for opportunities that come your way. Don't dwell in distress. Live in the now, and put that worry to work.

The Practice of Telling

PONDER

More difficult, perhaps, than being let go is telling a spouse/loved one/child, that we've been let go. These conversations have the potential to be filled with shame, spark argument, and trigger fear, but they are necessary. Living in right relationship with those nearest to us includes sharing ourselves, especially when we are at our most vulnerable.

PRAY

God, what am I going to tell my family? My friends? My children? There are those who count on me, and I feel as though I've let them down. Bless me with the composure I need to be vulnerable without feeling weak. And help me to tell this story with dignity and honesty and infused with the hope that you will see all of us through to better days.

PRACTICE

Telling those who care about you and may depend on you about your job loss is just the beginning. As it develops, continue the story with your plan, your progress, and your expectations. Keeping those around you informed will help keep you motivated. It will help them feel involved in your search. And it may uncover unexpected help when you need it, whether vocationally or emotionally.

Be Not Proud

PONDER

Sometimes, we just need to take a job. Circumstances in our lives may demand that we do what needs to be done in order to keep food on the table and a roof over our heads. It's okay. It is not "selling out" to accept a role that provides a steady paycheck or health benefits. And accepting the resources available to us to help us through these times is not "charity" or "pity."

PRAY

God, I feel ashamed of where I am. I did not ask to be unemployed, and I feel embarrassed about accepting the kind of help I need right now. Bless me with the ability to be merciful to myself so that I can move beyond my pride and do what is necessary to ensure my own health and safety and that of my loved ones who rely on me.

PRACTICE

Use to their fullest extent the resources available to you. Claim your unemployment benefits. If you or your children have lost health insurance, look into your state Medicaid qualifications. Food shelves and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) are there to ensure you do not go hungry. Your state or even your community may have resources that can help you find a new job, write a resume, and even get an interview-ready outfit. These resources are called "safety nets" for a reason; they exist for times exactly like these. Using them shows that you're willing to do everything in your power to keep going.

Allow Others to Help

PONDER

As Americans, we have a long history of “rugged individualism.” We embrace a “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality. This is nonsense. No one gets where they want to go completely in isolation. It is perfectly okay to need—and to ask for—others’ help when you lose a job.

PRAY

Lord, grant me the humility to know when to ask for help in this time. Help me to remember that as Catholics we are more than individuals. We are a community of faith. We belong to a community of saints. Allow me the wisdom to ask for what I need from the people who can help me.

PRACTICE

Know your strengths... and your weaknesses. Friends, family, former colleagues, the internet, and the library all have resources to fill the gaps that are holding you back. Know first what you need, then identify those who can help, and then ask them.

Grieve

PONDER

Job losses are never easy. Even in circumstances where we were in something less than a dream gig, losing a job is still a blow. Allow yourself time to grieve. Not everyone can get let go one day and leap into an interview the very next. Grief finds a way out, whether we like it or not. It is better to “feel, deal, and heal” than to bury grief that will catch you unawares later.

PRAY

God, I am so sad about losing this job that I liked/loved/hated. I know that I need to move on, but grant me the grace to know that it doesn't have to be right this instant and the courage to face my grief as it comes, without guilt or a timetable.

PRACTICE

Find a way to acknowledge your grief. Write. Cry. Holler. Pray. And when that is done, honestly assess whether that is all there is. If there's more, get it out. When you have, leave it behind and move forward. You have work to find and work to do.

Unemployment Is a Full-Time Job

PONDER

For many of us, we're either working or we're not. Job losses create an unfamiliar and difficult middle ground. If your goal is to find another job, then your full-time job is to find one. There are plans to be made, tasks to be completed, and deadlines for getting them done. Jump in.

PRAY

God, help me to apply the same level of time, attention, and care to the task of finding new work that I have to my job. Help me to remember that I am more important than any task or project I would be working on if I still had my previous job.

PRACTICE

Treat your job search like you would any other project at work. Plan your day. Set an alarm clock. Get up. Shower. Get dressed. Treat your job search for what it is: your job. Devote time to it. Take breaks from it. Be persistent until it is done and done well. Just like you did for your previous employer.

Survival of the Adaptable

PONDER

Losing a job is as much a test of our adaptability as it is a test of our capability. There's probably nowhere in your resume that points out the almost-constant state of change your job demanded of you. Unemployment is no different. Getting through it will require creativity and adaptability. It will require you to be comfortable learning new ways to find, get, and do jobs in this new environment.

PRAY

*Lord, this wasn't the change I asked for or wanted.
And the world I find myself in doesn't look much like the one in which
I last looked for a job. Grant me the flexibility to accept things as they
are now, and the resilience to meet what's needed.*

PRACTICE

The work world changes around us. Sharpen your skills to meet the demands of job seeking today. Networking. Technology. Public speaking. Strong writing. Critical thinking. And an ability to do all of it in person or virtually. Be willing to learn the new ways and new skills that will make you the most adaptable candidate for every job for which you apply.

You're Not Alone

PONDER

It's a cliché, but it also happens to be true: you're not alone. As of spring 2020, nearly 40 million Americans had applied for unemployment benefits. That may be small comfort, of course, but it's also a reminder that you are not responsible for this crisis, and you are not alone in it.

PRAY

God, this journey feels lonely and frustrating. Help me to remember that others are on this path too. When I feel singled out or sorry for myself, help me to rediscover my compassion for those who are going through this with me.

PRACTICE

When you're feeling isolated, find others who've found new jobs. Although they may not be in a position to help you with a new role, ask them what they did that helped them land a new position. Keep what is useful to you, and try applying their ideas to your search.

Unemployment Is about Connection

PONDER

More than 80 percent of people who find new jobs do so because someone knew and recommended them. Job seeking (and getting) these days is about connection. Friends and family know others who may know a third person who may be able to help. Expand your circle. Now is not the time to be shy.

PRAY

God, I'm stuck. No one in my immediate circle has a job for me. Give me courage so that I can bravely and confidently reach out to others and "put myself out there." And let me trust that by doing so, you will put in my path someone who can help.

PRACTICE

Work backwards. First, identify jobs you want. Then find places you'd like to work that have those kinds of jobs. Then identify people at those companies who can help you. Keep working outward from those people until you find a path to meet, talk, or apply to them. Often, you'll find that you are closer than you knew.

Re-Employment Is about Problem Solving

PONDER

Often, coming out of an old role and looking for a new one, we fall back on what is apparent. Where have we worked? For how long? What was our title? What did we *do*? However, in today's job market, employers are looking less at what our day-to-day tasks entailed and more at what we *accomplished*. That doesn't mean winning a Nobel prize. But it goes beyond a dry, bullet-pointed list of your daily checklist.

PRAY

God, I know that, thanks to the gifts you've given me, I have accomplished many things in my career. Now please grant me the insight to put into words and action the way those accomplishments can serve as examples of the value I can bring to a new role.

PRACTICE

Review your resume. For every entry that highlights what you've done, ask yourself, "And why was that important?" Your work—no matter how routine it felt to you—had value. Describe that value. How did your work contribute to the success of your school, your restaurant, your company? Did it save money? Did it save time? Was there something missing or broken when you took on the role that is now present or fixed because of you? What problems did your contributions help to solve for your employer, and how can you carry those problem-solving skills into your next role?

There Can Be Grace in This Time

PONDER

Not all of us have the luxury of using our layoff as an opportunity to reimagine our work life. We have bills to pay, families to care for, and lives to lead. However—unexpected and unpleasant as it can be—losing a job can allow us the space to pursue new jobs we might never have considered otherwise. Maybe God is calling us to a new vocation, or maybe just to a shorter commute. Use this time to find out.

PRAY

God, I have been consumed with losing my job and finding another. Please bless me with perspective in this time of confusion and uncertainty. Help me to find the grace in this moment, that “freely given, unmerited favor and love” you give to help me discern my true next step—one that allows me to thrive and grow by honoring my talents and challenging me to be better, not just different.

PRACTICE

It's not always necessary to find a new job that is a copy-and-paste of what you just finished doing. Stop, if only for a moment. What did you like about your last job? What did you hate? Is doing the same thing the right thing for you? Or do you want something new? What do you have to do to get there? A degree or certificate? Is the “something new” you want more money, fewer hours, or more flexibility? Identify what your next step needs to be in order to meet what you want.

Know What You Want to Do

PONDER

Often, job losses leave us feeling disappointed and—even worse—desperate. When we find people who can help us, one of the first things they ask is, “What do you want to do?” Sometimes, we haven’t thought through an answer, or we answer vaguely because we believe it makes us appear “open to whatever.” In reality, answers like these make us appear indecisive and put the responsibility on the listener to tell *us* what *we* want.

PRAY

God, I’m afraid that if I am honest about what I want, I’ll get laughed at or limit myself at a time when I really can’t afford to be picky. Bless me with the clarity to express what I want to do, what I am good at doing, and what will bring me joy.

PRACTICE

Think about the kind of job you want, and compose a few sentences that describe it. Use action words. Practice them on people you trust. Ask those people if your answer is clear. Have it ready, because as you look for a new job, a lot of people are going to ask you, “What do you want to do?” And the only one who knows the answer is you.

You Will Land... And Then What?

PONDER

Whether you find searching for jobs to be draining and stressful or think it can be fun and exhilarating, your search has really only one goal: to end. And then what? Have you landed your dream job? If so, what now? Have you settled for something that pays the bills? Same question.

PRAY

God, this job search has taken up so much of my time and energy that I can't see past it. Please allow me some calm so that I might look beyond the search and into its outcome. Help me to judge for myself what comes next.

PRACTICE

When you begin a new job, you've probably done a lot to get there. Don't wait to "settle in" to figure out that there is more to do. If this is a placeholder job, what steps do you need to take to find something more appealing or permanent? If you've developed new networking skills, keep them current; they'll be valuable even if this new role carries you to retirement.

You Are Not a Number

PONDER

Unemployed does not mean unimportant, but it sure can feel that way. Headlines remind us that there are millions just like us. A single job receives hundreds of applications. When we're on hold, in line, or online, it's easy to feel less like a valuable person searching for our livelihood and more like a task to be crossed off of someone else's to-do list.

PRAY

God, how can I possibly stand out when there are dozens, hundreds, millions just like me? Help me to remember that I am not just a figure. Remind me that you have blessed me in countless ways that are unique to me. Show me how to demonstrate my singular talents in a way that tells the world that I am special and that what I have to offer has value.

PRACTICE

When your job search feels cold and impersonal, refocus on your own humanity. When you interact with potential employers, speak with unemployment agencies, or network with others, be yourself. Your authenticity will come through. And the next job you get is more likely to be a good fit if you've earned it by being the "real you."

Let Go of the Anger

PONDER

Being let go is infuriating. It's understandable and expected and perfectly normal. Even when we understand the reasons behind our unemployment, we can still feel angry. The trick is to not stay too long in that anger. Most of us will not go to court over our dismissal, and it's probably best if the devastating speeches to our former bosses stay confined to our heads. Letting go of the hurt of the past is critical to moving on to a better future.

PRAY

God, I'm so, so angry. At my employer for letting me go. At my colleagues who get to stay. At myself for feeling ashamed. Please grant me peace so that I can—in time—put the anger aside and move meaningfully toward something new.

PRACTICE

If you feel angry at having been let go (and we all do), get it out constructively. Write a letter or talk to a friend or family member or a counselor about your anger. Vent it. But don't let your anger spill over into anything that endangers your ability to find your next thing. The old adage about not "burning bridges" in our work isn't just good advice for our careers. Not only do forgiveness and acceptance make us stronger, they help us approach our next job in a healthier, more positive way instead of giving endless energy to past hurts and frustrations. As another saying goes, "Living well is the best revenge."

Loyalty

PONDER

Many of us have probably said, “But I gave so much to my employer, and this is how they repay me?” Because there are people at both ends of a working relationship—employer and employee—it’s easy to confuse jobs and companies with friends and family. Even the smallest and most artistic or philanthropic organizations are still mostly economic pursuits with goals and boards and human resource departments. If it is done with humanity and given dignity, work can *feel* as though it is personal. But in the end it is not.

PRAY

God, help me to separate, in this experience, the people I have left behind from the work I was hired to do. Help me mourn the loss of those things that are genuinely personal—the friends I made and the people I will no longer see—from those that are simply business. Help me to preserve the places for each of those things so that they do not become confused.

PRACTICE

In your job search, guard your heart. Recognize that employers have jobs they need done and people they need to do them. Having close colleagues, friends, even family at work can mean a great deal to job satisfaction. But when companies are making decisions, they often do so without regard to loyalty or tenure. You may choose to give your loyalty to another company, but make sure that loyalty is earned and well placed before you do.

Everything Will Go Silent

PONDER

At a certain point in your job search, everything may go mad-denyingly silent. No one will be getting back to you. All of your applications will be in various states of “in process.” It will feel as though the world has moved on and no longer cares about you, if it ever did. It will feel tempting in these moments to panic, to push. Resist that urge. Instead, wait. Recognize that job searches take time. Even those opportunities that tell you they want to “move fast” and have “immediate” openings may take longer than you anticipated.

PRAY

God, no one is getting back to me. It felt for a time that there was great energy behind my job search, and now it seems like no one cares but me. Please grant me patience as the process plays out. Help me to stay calm and to know that my efforts will pay off in the end.

PRACTICE

When your search seems stalled, don't panic. Instead, use the time to do constructive things. Follow up with opportunities if the expected timeline has passed. For opportunities you feel good about, practice answers to interview questions you might be asked. Research and apply for other jobs you might want, including the companies and individuals with whom you might be meeting. Keep networking.

Persist

PONDER

Job hunting isn't something any of us necessarily *want* to do. So when we feel like we're on the verge of a breakthrough—like that one opportunity is going to pan out—we may have a tendency to pull back, to stop. However, the true key to success in job hunting is to give yourself as great an opportunity for success as possible. That often means applying for roles well past the point where you *think* you have to. Many times, the gigs we think are going to work out never do, and it's better to be well along the way on other opportunities than to have to start from scratch with no good prospects.

PRAY

God, I feel really good about some of the places that I've applied, and I'm hoping one (or more!) of them works out. Bless me with the grit to persist if they don't, and the foresight to cultivate more opportunities to take their place.

PRACTICE

Job searches are nearly never as simple as “one application equals one job offer.” It's often necessary to break your search into batches. Apply—strongly and completely—for the first batch of two to five jobs you *most* want. When those are underway, apply just as strongly for the next batch. Remember the law of averages. Keep going until you're working again.

Don't Assume You're Unqualified

PONDER

Most of us underestimate ourselves. We see specific job requirements (“3-5 years experience,” or “MBA preferred”), and we elect not to apply to roles for which we might be great. A hiring manager’s ability to put on paper their idea of the “ideal candidate” is often just a composite or a best guess. Although it may end up that you’re not qualified for the role, taking yourself out of consideration isn’t in your best interest. Your task in a job search is to find the job you want.

PRAY

God, please help me to remember that there are people on the other end of my job search too. Help me to convey to those people my authentic self. And help us to recognize each other if we are meant to be a fit.

PRACTICE

Practice reading job descriptions for roles you would like. Is the requirement that’s bothering you in the very first sentence? Or is it buried in the “other” or “preferred” section? If it’s the latter, apply unapologetically. If you’ve networked with others who can tell you (or ask on your behalf) about the importance of a single requirement, seek their guidance. You may find that the element holding you back isn’t that critical at all.

Fault and Blame

PONDER

It's almost certain that your job loss wasn't your fault. Sure, there are exceptions. But you were, in all likelihood, let go because your employer cut back due to money. Public or private, big or small, from family owned restaurants to Fortune 500 companies, most decisions to let employees go boil down to economics. It is a harsh reality, but as much love as we pour into our employers (and they may pour back), you as an individual have little to do with the market forces that dictate whether your company thrives or fails.

PRAY

God, I feel like it's my own fault that I lost my job. If only I had worked harder or done something different or been someone different, I would still be working. In this instance, please grant me the serenity to accept these things that I cannot change and the peace of mind to know that this was out of my control.

PRACTICE

Very simply, recognize that your job loss wasn't your fault. Regardless of the state of the national or global economy, companies add and cut jobs each and every day. Your role is not to dwell on what you and your former employer could have done differently, but to focus on where your next steps will take you.

Send the Ladder Back Down

PONDER

When you land, don't forget the experience. Whether you found something perfect quickly or something that will do "for now" after months of searching, recall all of the feelings you had and the things you did. Remember the dread, the exhilaration, the need, the work, and the relief. Others are going through their own versions of those stages even as you begin a new role. What can you share that you have learned? How can you help them as others helped you?

PRAY

Thank you, God, for my new role. It is a relief to have it after the shock and sadness of losing my last job. Grant me empathy for those who have not yet found their next thing, and give me the ability and opportunity to help wherever I can.

PRACTICE

Follow up with those people with whom you networked and let them know you've found something. Whether or not they were responsible for your new role, thank them and offer to return the favor if needed. Contact job seeker groups in your community and offer to be a resource for people who are looking for jobs. Be open to others who seek you out for informational interviews and networking coffees. Don't forget where you came from.



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