

“IT TAKES MORE THAN  
BREAD TO STAY ALIVE. IT  
TAKES A STEADY STREAM OF  
WORDS FROM GOD’S  
MOUTH.”

Matthew 4:4 The Message

# word for the year

A CREATIVE WORKBOOK

by Kristi Johnson and Kaisa Stenberg-Lee



## INTRODUCTION

what is "word for the year"  
and what can it do for you?

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

follow four creative spiritual  
practices that will help you  
to receive your word

## WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR WORD

reflection questions and  
ideas for using your word

by Kristi Johnson

# What is a Word for the Year?

Adapted from One Word exercise  
by Christine Vaulters Paintner

In ancient times, wise men and women fled out into the desert to find a place where they could be fully present to God and to deeply listen to their struggles and longings. One tradition was to **ask for a word** – this word or phrase would be something on which to ponder for many days, weeks, months, sometimes a whole lifetime. This practice is connected to Lectio Divina – a contemplative way of reading Scripture that dates back to the early centuries of the Christian Church and was established as a monastic practice by Benedict in the 6th century. Lectio Divina invites us to listen for a word or phrase as an invitation to commune with God.

We allow this word or phrase to form us in the likeness of Christ, it is about our formation rather than instruction. Similarly, a word for the year is an invitation to receive a word to help nourish, guide and grow us in our life with God.



by Kaisa Stenberg-Lee

# Colors to Delight in

Think of the Word for the Year as an invitation to live into your fullest, truest self, the one who was made to be *delighted in*. Consider how God created colors for his and our delight.

1. Ask God to show you what about you delights him. Perhaps a word or image comes to your mind.
2. Look at a range of colors, and without analyzing or judging, choose a color that best represents the way you believe that you delight God. If you struggle, simply choose a color you feel most drawn to at this very moment.
3. Consider what the color feels like, represents and shows you about yourself.

You will need:

- A wide range of color samples (paint samples can be found at hardware stores), or images of colors, color pallets, water colors etc.
- Optional: paper and pen

Time: 5-10 minutes



by Kaisa Stenberg-Lee

# Imaginative Gift-Giving

Consider the word for the year being like a gift that God wants to give you. The word can be something that will give you clarity, strength, guidance, hope and focus in the year ahead, or something that simply makes you happy.

1. Stand in a circle. Each imagine God coming to you and giving you a gift. Reach out your hands to receive it. With your hands, body and facial expressions mime the way you receive it. What do you want to do with it? Maybe just examine and hold it for a while? Be with your gift now.
2. One person starts gift-giving. You can pass on the same gift that you received, make something with that gift, or store it away and create a brand new gift. If you are the one who starts, choose a person in the circle who you want to give a gift to. Look at him or her with the eyes of God, prayerfully and compassionately.

You will need:

- Space to move
- Ideally a group of 2-6 people, although the first part of the exercise can be done alone
- Optional: paper and pen

Time:

10-20 minutes depending on the size of the group

3. When eye-contact has been made, start to mime with your hands, body and face the gift that you are about to give. Show it to everyone by miming. Walk over to the person you are giving a gift, and hand it to her. Then return to your place in the circle.
4. If you are the gift-receiver show with your body how you receive this gift. Then you become a gift-giver. Go around in a circle until each person has given and received a gift from someone else.



by Kristi Johnson

# One Word Creative Writing Exercise

You will need:  
- Paper and pen  
- Timer

Time:  
5 minutes



Adapted from One Word exercise  
by Samantha Wallen

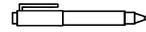
1. Start with taking 4 rounds of deep breaths: INHALE to the count of 6, hold your breath for the count of 6, exhale to the count of 6 and hold your breath again to the count of 6- do this 4 times.
2. Invite ONE SINGLE WORD to arise within you (trust the first word that pops into your mind, even if it doesn't make sense).
3. Now free write for 3 minutes with your ONE WORD. Start the sentence with I AM (insert your word) and this is what I want you to know...

# Journaling Exercise

You will need:  
- Paper and pen

Time:  
10-15 minutes

1. As you think about this year, what has been preoccupying your thoughts lately?
2. How are you feeling about the year ahead? What emotions have been surfacing?
3. Take a moment to check in with your body by putting your hand over your heart and taking a couple deep breaths. Notice what you sense in your body as you think about this year. (ex: Tension in shoulders, excitement, fatigue, relaxed)
4. Who do you long for God to be for you this year? Who do you long to become this year for God, yourself and others?
5. What is your soul longing for the most this year? What are you desiring? What is a secret hope for 2020 you haven't dared note down yet?



Take a moment to go through your answers to these questions and see if you notice any themes or repeating of words. Use this as a guide to notice if there is a word that God is stirring within you as an invitation for 2020.

by Kaisa Stenberg-Lee

# Reflection & Receiving the Word

## Group Reflection

Take a few minutes to prayerfully look over all four practices. Start by taking a deep breath and inviting God to bring light and clarity to what you notice.

After a moment of silence, one person starts and shares with the group in a few sentences about her/his prayer experience, and about the word that is starting to surface.

*Prompts for sharing:*

*What was the process like for you?*

*What connections did you find between the practices and what came up?*

*What was your experience of God and yourself during the various practices?*

*Where did you notice resistance or heaviness?*

*Where did you notice freedom and relief?*

*What do you intend to do with your word?*

*What might your next step be?*

Once one person has shared, the group holds silence for a minute or two and prayerfully considers their responses. Then each might offer an observation, internal response, feeling, question or wondering.

You will need:

- Paper and pen
- Timer
- Ideally 2 - 6 people, although individual reflection is also possible

Time:

20-60 minutes (depending on the size of the group)



The person who shared may or may not choose to respond verbally.

After everyone who wishes to respond has responded, pause for a minute of silence. Then the next person may share about their experience.

Repeat the process until everyone has had a chance to share.

## Receiving the Word

Now, in faith receive the word that God has gifted you. Remember, the word is simply a tool, like any other spiritual practice. Its purpose is to help you to draw closer to God. It is not an end in itself. Receive it with grace and hold onto it lightly.

*My word for 2020 is...*



by Kaisa Stenberg-Lee  
and Kristi Johnson

# I have my word, now what?

Once you have a word that resonates with your soul you might ask, "What do I do with it?" Here are a few questions to reflect on and practical tips that can deepen your exploration of the word.

- What does your word mean to you? What gift could it offer you?
- What spiritual rhythm or practice might help you to live into your word in richer ways?
- What do you want to create or do to remind yourself of your word? Painting, collage, embroidery, hand lettering, computer/ phone home screen wallpaper...?
- Could you form a breath prayer with your word?
- What freedom or permission might God be calling you into through your word?
- Does your word present a challenge?
- What emotional responses do you have to your word? Resistance, fear, excitement, curiosity...?

You will need:

- Journal and pen
- Magazines, glue, scissors, embroidery floss and other activity specific arts and crafts supplies
- Access to different Bible translations and dictionaries

Time:

10-45 minutes

- Create a vision board with your word and select images that will remind you of the meaning of your word.
- Look up the definition of your word in different online dictionaries to see what else you notice in different definitions.
- Say the word in different tones of voice and with different roles (an old woman, a lover whispering it, a child, shout it as a command...) What do you notice?
- Search the word in the Bible. Can you find stories or examples when the word comes up?
- Is there a verse that embodies the essence of your word? What do you notice?
- Is there a song or a poem that your word brings to mind?
- How might you be invited to pray with your word?

## ABOUT THE RESOURCE

This resource was originally created for a monthly Soul Care Saturday workshop that meets in Denver metro area.

We wanted to make it available for a wider community and that's how it ended up in your inbox! We ask you to use this as your personal resource and only to share it with friends and family with whom you intend to walk through the practices presented in the book. Our prayer is that it will deepen your walk with God.

We would love your feedback. It would be helpful to hear if you would be interested in online retreats, and if so in what format.

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*Published in February 2020 by  
Kaisa Stenberg-Lee and Kristi Johnson*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kaisa and Kristi are certified Christian Spiritual Directors. They are passionate about hosting creative, nurturing spaces where God's transforming love can be experienced.

Kristi and Kaisa accompany others in their faith journeys through workshops, retreats and spiritual direction. If you would like to explore further anything that came up while working through this material, feel free to contact either of them for individual spiritual direction appointment. Spiritual direction is a practice of holy listening, where a trained listener (a spiritual director) will accompany you as you make space to listen to your soul and discern God's movements in your life.

You can reach Kaisa either via the contact form at [www.kutsucompanions.com](http://www.kutsucompanions.com) or via email: [kaisastenberg@gmail.com](mailto:kaisastenberg@gmail.com)

Kristi can be reached via email: [kristicjohnson@gmail.com](mailto:kristicjohnson@gmail.com)

To learn more about our monthly Soul Care Saturdays and to register, click [here](#).