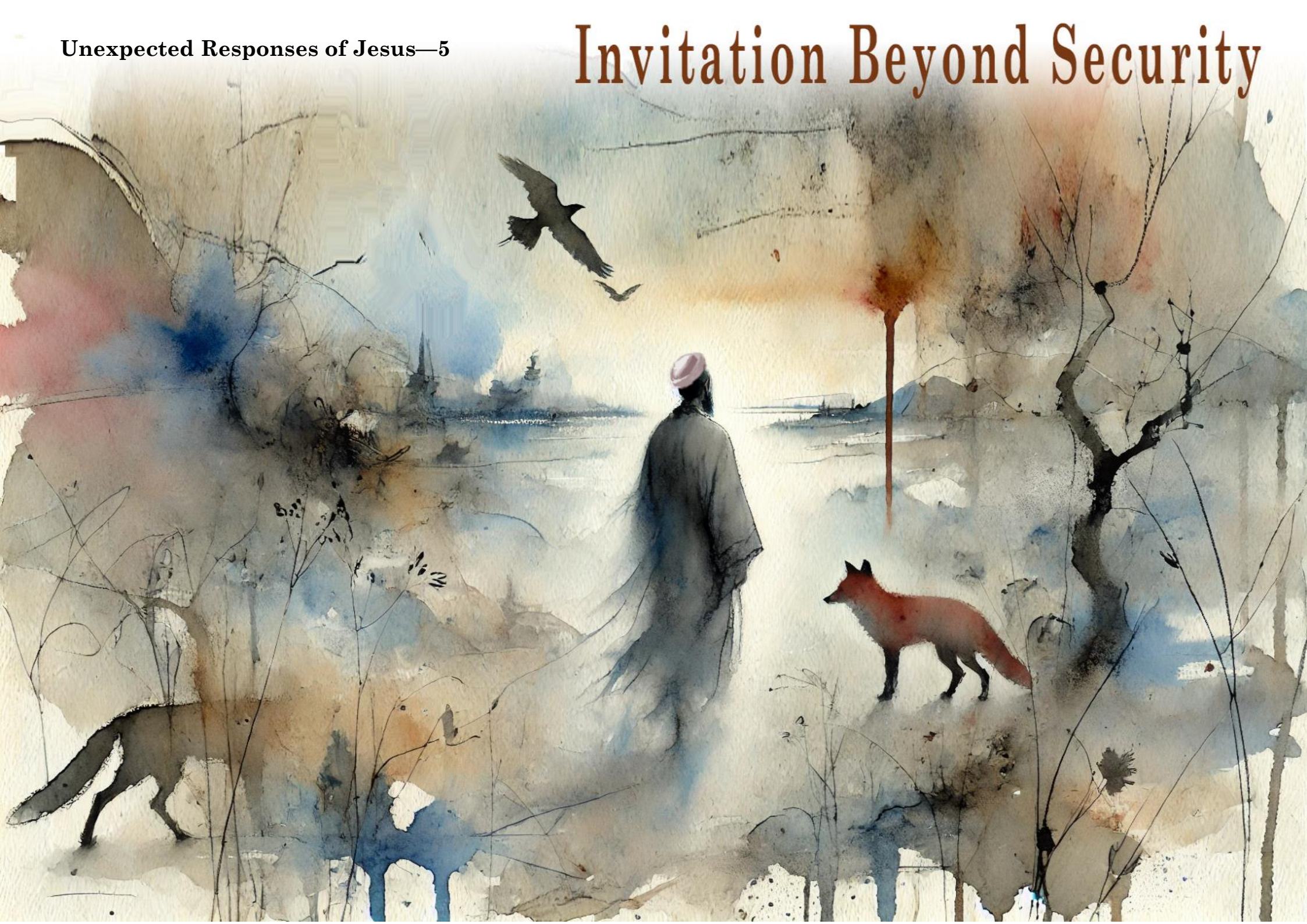


Invitation Beyond Security



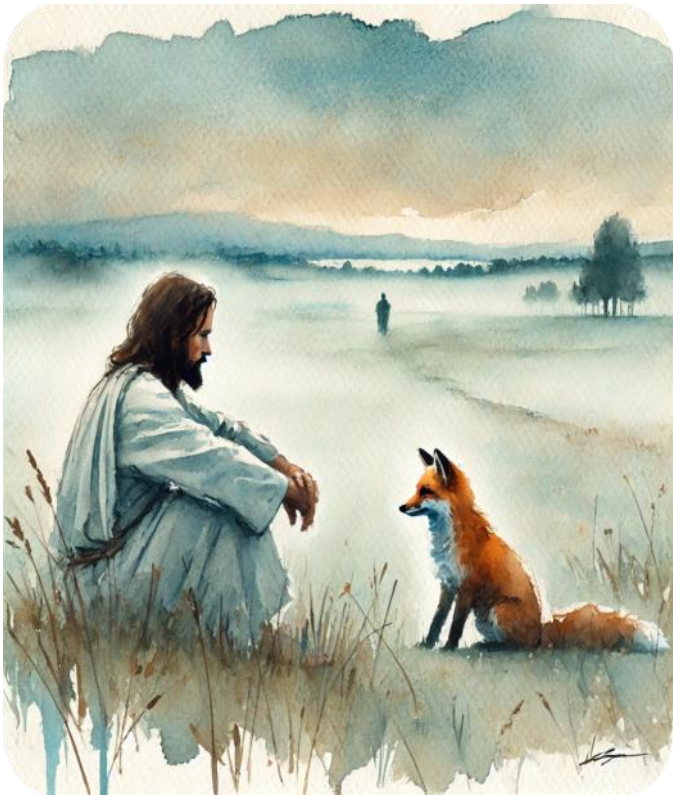
Foxes Have Dens...

Matthew 8:19-20

A teacher of the law expresses a desire to follow Jesus.

Rather than welcoming him with open arms, Jesus tells him,

“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”



The Edge

his voice resounds
beyond the stillness
from deep in canyons
from fresh waterfall mist

but beyond the edge
long ways to fall —
each blind grasp fatal
each heedless thought
of no avail

enjoy ungrasping
the feast with myriads
of bright-eyed clouds,
of trees and beasts and stars
— all mine
joy undeserved,
unfathomable joy!

tony macelli

Invitation Beyond Security

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to do without your usual comforts and familiar environments? In an unexpected response, Jesus invites us to imagine exactly that. Jesus responds to a seeker and teacher of the law with these words: “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Jesus’ response is a notice



about the cost of the spiritual search and of discipleship. It seems to be an invitation to a contemplative journey, that is, a deep and reflective exploration of one's inner life and relationship with the divine. It's a journey that goes beyond our usual need for comfort and security. He calls the seeker into the mystery of God through radical surrender and detachment.

In spiritual terms, surrender and detachment are about letting go of my own desires, letting go of my need to control what happens, relying instead on trusting in the wisdom of God. They mean accepting and embracing the present moment, aligning myself with a greater purpose. This is not the same as giving up or being passive—it's about finding peace through a trusting faith. Action will follow, but it will be action that arises more and more from such an alignment. By surrendering things such as thoughts, comforts, and plans, individuals often experience spiritual growth, clarity, and a deeper connection with the transcendent aspects of existence.

In a way, Jesus' unexpected response to the keen seeker is a bit like the teaching in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. In that

Christian spiritual classic, the author urges the serious seeker to relinquish all worldly desires, thoughts, and securities, placing them in a "cloud of forgetting" to make way for the "cloud of unknowing," where one encounters God beyond concepts and words. Jesus' call suggests a similar path: to truly follow him, the disciple must set aside attachments to home and security, surrendering to the Indescribable.

Various reflections from St. Francis and many Christian and other saints and mystics invite a life of simplicity, service, and radical surrender, drawing us toward a path of divine union where all worldly attachments fall away, revealing the infinite depth of joy in God alone. This is close to what is meant in Christian tradition by poverty of spirit, that is, the outlook of someone who recognizes that our true richness comes from God, not from worldly things.

The Lesson of Letting Go

This poverty of spirit aligns with a universal theme in many spiritual traditions: letting go. For instance, in Buddhism, liberation requires letting go of all attachments while in Sufism, *fana* (self-annihilation) signifies emptying oneself totally in a surrender to

divine unity. By embodying a life with "no place to lay his head," Jesus reflects a freedom rooted not in worldly comforts but in a profound union with God. Thus, his words are both a caution about the cost of discipleship and an invitation to surrender worldly assurances, to dwell deeply within God's mystery.

In this radical call, Jesus leads the disciple to a space of spiritual "unknowing," where a trusting faith itself becomes the only place to rest. It is a path marked by surrender, where true security lies in God's presence alone, drawing the disciple into a profound encounter with the Divine beyond comprehension.

"The path to God is the path of total letting-go," declares Krishnamurti. Letting go of *self* may be the ultimate form of letting go. The idea is this: letting go of self is letting go of limitations, illusions, ownership, and the illusion that one is really in charge; and this serves to realise God. How could I possibly be free of my self? Strange as this might seem, it's what Jesus tells us is necessary: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—*yes, even their own life*—such a person cannot be my disciple." "For whoever wants to save their life will

lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

Even if we know that the word “hate” is used elsewhere in the Bible with the clear sense of “love only secondarily” or loving in a way that respects a higher love, it still seems an incredible thing to ask someone to try and do. Yet we find it in various non-Christian traditions as well, including Sufism, Hinduism and Buddhism. The Bhagavad Gita says, “The final freedom is freedom from the self, from अहंकार **ahamkara** or ego.”

Francis of Assisi advised close companion



Brother Leo to give away oneself to God in a complete and radical fashion. “Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, so that He who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally.” — St. Francis of Assisi, *Letter to Brother Leo*. This instruction to his close companion encapsulates Francis’s call to radical self-giving in discipleship and union with Christ. Another exhortation from Francis, apparently paraphrased from his various writings is: “Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to his beloved is that of overcoming self.”

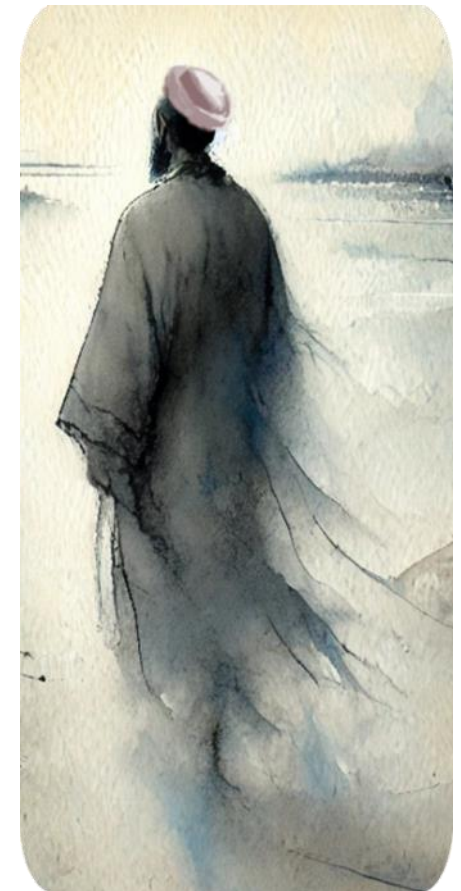
Easy? Nobody said it was easy to go beyond self or to give up self. It is a process, and probably a long one. Mystics and saints have struggled hard along such a path. But the journey starts small. Perhaps for most of us it cannot be completed in this life. Rather than focusing only on the end result, we can celebrate the journey, because as Saint Catherine of Siena said, “All the way to heaven is heaven, because Jesus said, ‘I am the way.’”

Since to go beyond self serves to realise God, it is a path of love, as Christians understand God. Sure enough, Francis of Assisi has been there, and embodies that path, as can be seen in the spirit of his writings, so these words attributed to him though not found in traditional collections of his works show it to us in

a nutshell: “To love God is to follow the inward path, the very hidden path of love. Few are prepared to walk it.”

The Lesson that True Joy Is in God Alone

The spiritual path isn’t without joy. On the contrary, it’s based on joy; indeed, Jesus assures, “My joy I give you.” Yet, this



joy is one that arises from a foundation in God, not from sensory or aesthetic pleasures or the ultimately illusory securities of wealth or familiar comforts. So it is a deeper, more interior joy. Such joy, because it is grounded in God, remains steadfast even amidst suffering—a joy untouched by earthly comforts, enduring because it flows from the Infinite.

The Perfect Joy of St. Francis, *Perfetta Letizia*, is the title of a well-known episode often found in collections of the life and teachings of St Francis of Assisi. In it, Francis describes to Brother Leo how he would maintain perfect joy even if, arriving cold at his own friary, he were to be turned away by his brothers, left without shelter or warmth. True joy, he concludes, doesn't come from acceptance, comfort, or the security of home but in bearing all with love and surrendering fully to God. This account is also found in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, *I Fioretti di San Francesco*, a classic 14th-century collection of stories about Francis and his companions, showing that his joy springs from unity with God, undisturbed by rejection, rooted in a love that goes beyond human need.

This vision mirrors Jesus' words about having "no place to lay his head." For both Je-

sus and Francis, discipleship is a journey of radical detachment, a call to spiritual freedom where love for God transcends all earthly comforts and attachments. Circumstances do matter, of course. But the state that matters is surely the internal state, the way—one might even say the place—where the human spirit abides. Both persons embody and show us a freedom born of surrender—a joy that endures not because of circumstances but because it is rooted in the Divine, where the soul finds its true home.

-0-

References to the quotations in order of appearance in the text:

"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." — Matthew 8:19-20.

"The Cloud of Unknowing." — *The Cloud of Unknowing*, edited by William Johnston, translated by Clifton Wolters, Penguin Books, 1961. This medieval spiritual guide encourages contemplative seekers to place thoughts in a "cloud of forgetting" to encounter God in a "cloud of unknowing."

"The path to God is the path of total letting-go." — Krishnamurti, Jiddu. *Commentaries on Living*. Harper & Row, 1969.

"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." — Matthew 16:25.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple." — Luke 14:26.

"The final freedom is freedom from the self, from अहंकार ahamkara or ego" see Bhagavad Gita 2:71 and 3:27. — Easwaran, Eknath. *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Nilgiri Press, 1975.

"Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, so that He who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally." — St. Francis of Assisi, Letter to Brother Leo, in Francis and Clare: *The Complete Works*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, Paulist Press, 1982, p. 77.

"All the way to heaven is heaven, because Jesus said, 'I am the way.'" — St. Catherine of Siena, *Letters*, Letter T354. This line is often referenced in her *Letters*.

"Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to his beloved is that of overcoming self." — This paraphrased exhortation reflects the spirit of Francis's writings, but no exact original source has been identified in his traditional works.

"To love God is to follow the inward path, the very hidden path of love. Few are prepared to walk it." — Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. While not found in traditional collections, this quote aligns with Francis's spirituality as described in secondary sources.

"My joy I give you." — John 15:11.

"The Perfect Joy of St. Francis, Perfetta Letizia." — Found in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, or *I Fioretti di San Francesco*, a 14th-century collection of stories about Francis and his companions. This episode reflects on maintaining joy amidst suffering, embodying Francis's teaching on spiritual joy.

*Images: edited after DALL-E AI
tony macelli may be reached on
imagine_tony @ gmail.com*

