 Emmanuel United
Methodist Church
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2024

From  A S H. W E D N E S D A Y

To



To



To



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What is Lent and why does it last forty days?*

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Lent comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, meaning "lengthen" and refers to the lengthening days of spring. The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and then became a time of penance by all Christians. Today, Christians focus on relationship with God, growing as disciples and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of ourselves for others.

Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter." This is why you will see the designation "Sunday in Lent" rather than "Sunday of Lent" in the naming of these Sundays. On each Lord's Day in Lent, while Lenten fasts continue, the reverent spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful anticipation of the Resurrection.

**This content was produced by Ask The UMC, ministry of United Methodist Communications.*



Day 1: Wednesday, February 14-Ash Wednesday

Why Ashes

By Ricky Whitecotton

For centuries Christians have practiced the “Imposition of Ashes” on Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday signifies the start of the 40 day season of Lent. Today, this practice is growing in popularity. Many denominations follow the practice. It may feel a bit

awkward, but is not uncommon to see, on just one day a year, a smudge of ashes on a person’s forehead. In medieval times priests would literally dump ashes on the congregant’s head, we have a much milder version of the practice currently.

What does all this mean though? The United Methodist Book of Worship has two statements that may be used interchangeably, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," and "Repent, and believe the gospel." Abraham said this in Genesis 18:27, “I who am but dust and ashes.”

Ash Wednesday is specifically about us, an individual, confronting our sins, it is about mortality and the consequences of sin. It is sober and contemplative. Thank God that he provided a way to pay our sin debt through the work of Jesus Christ!



I who am but dust and ashes.

~Genesis 18:27



Day 2: Thursday, February 15

Jesus Calls Us (UMH 398)*

Hymn submitted by Emmy Lear

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his sweet voice soundeth,
saying, "Christian, follow me!"

As of old the apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for Jesus' sake.

Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, "Christian, love me more!"

In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these!"

Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.



**He said to them,
"Go into all the
world and preach
the gospel to all
creation."**

~Mark 16: 15

*go to <https://bit.ly/UMH398> to listen to this hymn.

"What is God's calling for your life?"

For many people of faith, that question is alternately a source of mystery, frustration, confusion, and hope. Does God have a fine-tuned plan for each of us, or is God's call more general, with the details left up to us?

But there is work that God calls all of us to do, and it's laid out for us in the Bible. God makes it clear again and again that we're to love others, care for the poor, and live our lives in such a way that we point to the power of the gospel. When we contemplate what God's calling is for our lives, those universal commands are a great place to start.

Day 3: Friday, February 16

The Christian Discipline

By Theologian E. Stanley Jones



Art By Beverly Urick

The Way has been called “The Christian discipline.” “The aim of the Christian discipline is the love that springs from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith.” (I Tim. 1:5, Moffatt) Strange that the end of discipline is defined as spontaneity – “love that springs.” And that is the end of discipline, to make you free.

There is a false idea of freedom prevalent in modern civilization: “You are free to do as you like.” The Christian answer is, “You are free to do as you ought.” Said a high-school boy to his principal: “Sir, they say that this is a free country. But where’s my freedom? They tell me to go to school, and I have to do it; to study or to go home and I have to do it. Where’s my freedom?” He was serious – and in serious trouble with himself. A returned soldier, rebuked for something he said, replied, “I have fought over there to say and do exactly as I please.” In both cases, life did not approve; both these persons were in trouble with themselves and others. Liberty comes through obedience to law. A man who had lived a defeated life told how he became victorious: “It is silly for a poor mortal to buck the stream of

life. I have always sought out its currents and sought to flow with it.”

Love can “spring,” be spontaneous and free, only if it comes “from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith.” In other words, from a disciplined life. Any supposed freedom that leaves you with an impure heart, a bad conscience, and an insincere faith ends not in springing and singing, but in sighing and dying.

Another passage puts discipline as the result (the first passage puts it as “the aim”): “God has not given us a timid spirit but a spirit of power and love and discipline.” (II Tim. 1:7, Moffatt.) The aim of discipline is to produce discipline. The first result of that discipline is courage – “not a timid spirit.” A disciplined person has a sense of courage. He is afraid of nothing for he knows that the sum total of reality is behind him. He has a sense of “power” for he knows he is working with God, and God is working with him, and he has a “love” that springs and sings.

O Thou singing Christ, teach me Thy way, the way of discipline. For I too would sing. I too would be free. For Thy will is freedom; my will is bondage. When I take my way I end in a mess. When I take Thy way I end in courage, power, and love. Amen

Day 4: Saturday, February 17

He Delights In Us

© By M.S.Lowndes



The Lord your God is in your midst, A Warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with joy; He will be quiet in His love [making no mention of your past sins], He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy - Zephaniah 3:17 (AMP)

God is always in our midst; He is never distant or far off—out of our reach. He is there with us every moment of every day; He is attentive to our cries for help. He listens to us when we unburden our concerns, and He delights in us when we share our day with Him—when we include Him in our everyday moments. God actually rejoices over us with singing—He shouts for joy over us. I truly believe this but have to admit that I find it hard to comprehend it pertaining to me—especially when I mess up. I remember one morning praying with tears about this, feeling as though God wasn't pleased with me. But when I read this very scripture in my devotional reading for that day, I was greatly encouraged and had a glimpse of God's love in that moment. Through this verse, I believe God spoke to me, showing me that He truly does delight in us.

In His love for us, He makes no mention of past sins—He no longer recalls them. They are forgiven and washed away. He doesn't drag up the past, nor does He pinpoint our mistakes with an accusing finger. God forgives and moves on. He wants us to move on with Him as well, but to do this, we need to forgive ourselves. We need to move on from our sins of the past, all our failings and mistakes. And it's because of His love for us that we are able to move on. It is He who enables us to put it all behind us, and in so doing, we have a closer walk with God and our relationship with Him is truly enriched. God assures us of His grace, mercy and compassion expressed in His songs of love and His shouts of joy, all the while knowing full well what our 'past' looks like, how our 'present' has unfolded and where our 'future' will take us.

This is who our God is, our mighty God who saves, in whom we can feel safe and secure. He loves each of us with an everlasting love, and because of this, He is always willing to forgive us and chooses to rejoice over us. And the beautiful thing about this is that He still delights in us even when He knows our shortcomings and our mess-ups! What love is that!

FEBRUARY 18

1ST SUNDAY

OF LENT



Then the devil took Jesus up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."

- Mt 4:8-9



Day 5: Monday, February 19

P.R.A.I.S.E

Christian Encouragement on How God Sees Us

By © Christine Poharama, All Rights Reserved



Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament!
Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord! - Psalm 150 (NKJV)
But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. - Psalm 22:3 (NKJV)

P. R. A. I. S. E.

When we PRAISE GOD and give Him all we are, He gives us this in return:

He sees us as a PRINCESS

— When we praise God and understand He is the king of kings, and He is our Father, we learn to see ourselves as we really are.

He sees us in a ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

— When we praise God and accept the price Jesus paid, He gives us a new 'wardrobe' of purity.

He sees us with ACCEPTANCE

— God loves us more than we can possibly grasp, and accepts us for who we are.

He sees us as INVALUABLE

— We are worth more than rubies. We are unique and irreplaceable.

He sees us with STRENGTH

— As we praise Him, His Holy Spirit gives us strength to face the day.

He sees us with EXCELLENCE

— As we look to Him with love, He gives us the reason to do our best. PRAISE is the beginning of breakthrough. Let it always be on your lips and in your heart.

Part of Praising is often music. Here is a playlist composed by Emmanuel's Sonia Kassambara. It is composed of "Music that takes us through the range of emotions and reflections of our Lenten experience. Two dozen videos and several hours of meditation, joy, and atonement from many genres, languages and centuries."

https://bit.ly/lenten_playlist



Day 6: Tuesday, February 20

Making Excuses

By Truthforkids.com

Exodus 4: 10-16 Making excuses

After the Lord told Moses that He must free His people from slavery, Moses said, “O Lord, I do not speak well. I have never been able to speak well and nothing has changed since You started speaking to me.”

The Lord became angry with Moses. “What about your brother Aaron? He can speak well. He is on his way to meet you and will be glad when he sees you. You can tell him what to say, and I will help you both.

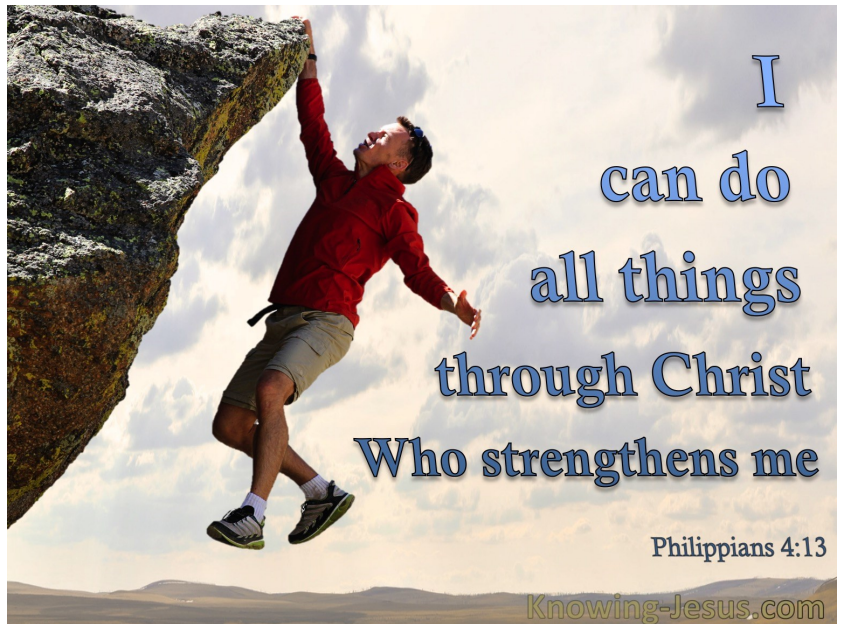
Take this stick with you, for with it you will do miracles.”

How can I serve God with my weakness?

Moses was no longer as sure of himself as he had been when he lived in Pharaoh’s palace. For the past forty years he had just been a shepherd looking after sheep and goats in the desert. By this time he probably felt rather unimportant and of little use. He told God that he wouldn’t be able to speak to Pharaoh because he wasn’t good at speaking.

Are you afraid that God may ask you to do something big like He asked Moses to do? Maybe you have felt the Lord telling you to speak to someone who is older than you about His forgiveness and love. God doesn’t expect you to do it in your own strength. In fact, He prefers using people who are unsure of their own ability because they rely on Him for everything: for strength, for wisdom, and for courage.

The Lord shows His power best through those who are weak! Right now, you have all you need to be useful to God. You don’t have to be perfect! All God wants is that you listen to His voice in your heart and obey.



Day 7: Wednesday, February 21

Our Servant Jesus By John Piper Devotionals

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” ([Mark 10:45](#))



Not only was he the servant of his people while he lived on earth, but he will also be our servant when he comes again. “Truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them” ([Luke 12:37](#)).

Not only that, he is our servant now. “I will never fail you nor forsake you.’ Hence we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?’”

Does this belittle the risen Christ — to say that he was and is and will ever be the *servant* of his people? It would, if “servant” meant “one who takes orders,” or if we thought we were his masters. Yes, that would dishonor him. *But* it does *not* dishonor him to

say that we are weak and needy.

It does not dishonor him to say that he is the only one who can service us with what we need most.

It does not dishonor him to say that he is an inexhaustible spring of love, and that the more he helps us and the more we depend on his service the more amazing his resources appear. Therefore, we can confidently say, “*Jesus Christ is alive to serve!*”

He is alive to save. He is alive to give. And he is thrilled to be this way.

He is not burdened down with your cares. He thrives on burden-bearing. He loves to “work for those who wait for him” ([Isaiah 64:4](#)). He “takes pleasure in those who hope in his steadfast love” ([Psalm 147:11](#)). His “eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show his might on behalf of those whose heart is whole toward him” ([2 Chronicles 16:9](#)).

Jesus Christ is exuberant with omnipotent service for the sake of all who trust him.

Day 8: Thursday, February 22

Lent Prayer for Strength and Guidance

By King Alfred the Great, 9th Century King of Wessex (England)

Submitted By Ricky Whitecotton



Sculpture of King Alfred
the Great, 9th Century
King of Wessex
(England)

Lord God Almighty, shaper and ruler of all creatures, we pray for your great mercy, that you guide us towards you, for we cannot find our way.

And guide us to your will, to the need of our soul, for we cannot do it ourselves. And make our mind steadfast in your will and aware of our soul's need.

Strengthen us against the temptations of the devil, and remove from us all lust and every unrighteousness, and shield us against our foes,

seen and unseen.

Teach us to do your will, that we may inwardly love you before all things with a pure mind. For you are our maker and our redeemer, our help, our comfort, our trust, our hope; praise and glory be to you now and forever. trust him.



Art By Beverly Urick

Day 9: Friday, February 23

The Poor In Spirit From Tabletalk Devotions with R.C. Sproul



Matthew 5:1–3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3).

Throughout history, the church has treasured Matthew’s gospel as a primary teaching tool, mainly due to his incorporation of large blocks of Jesus’ instruction including the Sermon on the Mount. Today begins our study of this famous sermon.

Some preachers try to separate the Sermon on the Mount from the person who preached it. They then try to apply it to all men — non-believers as much as believers. But it is not a treatise on social ethics. Certainly, the sermon has bearing on our relationship to society,

but it cannot be divorced from allegiance to Christ (Matt. 5:11). Above all, the sermon describes life in God’s kingdom, that place where God’s people embrace His rule. It is given to Jesus’ disciples (v. 1), making it a guide for life in the believing community — the church. John Calvin alludes to this truth, commenting that the Sermon on the Mount collects “the leading points of the doctrine of Christ” relating “to a devout and holy life.”

Jesus does not present the material in this sermon only on this one occasion, for as an itinerant preacher He repeats the same basic content in many different situations. Christ may also take several days to deliver this instruction, since He sometimes teaches a crowd over a long span of time (15:32). In any case, He preaches at least part of the Sermon on the Mount from a seated position (5:1), following the custom of the rabbis in His day.

The sermon opens with the Beatitudes, the first of which tells us “the poor in spirit” are blessed, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (5:3). In this context, Jesus is basically saying that only those who do not rely on their own goodness will be granted entrance into God’s kingdom. It is not an appeal to deny our worth as human beings, but to recognize our sin and desperate need for salvation. Matthew Henry comments that “to be poor in spirit, is to have humble thoughts of ourselves, of what we are, and have, and do. ...[It is] to shun all confidence in our own righteousness and strength, that we may depend only on the merit of Christ and the spirit and grace of Christ. ...The kingdom of grace is composed of such, the kingdom of glory is prepared for them.”

CORAM DEO: LIVING BEFORE THE FACE OF GOD

Elsewhere, Jesus speaks these same words to the poor (Luke 6:20), because those who have nothing are often able to see their need for salvation most clearly. Still, one does not need to lack possessions to see the kingdom of God. John Calvin writes that “he only who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God, is poor in spirit.” Rich or poor, if we fail to see our need for salvation, we will fail to enter the kingdom.

Day 10: Saturday, February 24

The Bible In 50 Words

**God made.
Adam bit.
Noah arked.
Abraham split.
Jacob fooled.
Joseph ruled.
Bush talked.
Moses balked.
Pharaoh plagued.
People walked.
Sea divided.
Tablets guided.
Promise landed.
Saul freaked.
David peeked.
Prophets warned.
Jesus born.
God walked.
Love talked.
Anger crucified.
Hope died.
Love rose.
Spirit flamed.
Word spread.
God remained.**



FEBRUARY 25

2ND SUNDAY

OF LENT

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." - Mt 17:5b



Day 11: Monday, February 26

Pancakes

God in His unconditional love is merciful and gracious! ~Psalm 86: 15



Six-year-old Dan decided one Saturday morning to fix his parents pancakes. He found a big bowl and spoon, pulled a chair to the counter, opened the cupboard and pulled out the heavy flour canister, spilling it on the floor.

He scooped some of the flour into the bowl with his hands, mixed in most of a cup of milk and added some sugar, leaving a floury trail on the floor which by now had a few tracks left by his kitten.

Dan was covered with flour and getting frustrated. He wanted this to be something very good for Mom and Dad, but it was getting very bad.

He didn't know what to do next, whether to put it all into the oven or

on the stove, and he didn't know how the stove worked! Suddenly, he saw his kitten licking from the bowl of mix and reached to push her away, knocking the egg carton to the floor. Frantically, he tried to clean up this monumental mess but slipped on the eggs, getting his pajamas white and sticky.

Just then he saw Dad standing at the door. Big crocodile tears welled up in Dan's eyes. All he'd wanted to do was something good, but he'd made a terrible mess. He was sure a scolding was coming, maybe even a spanking. But his father just watched him.

Then, walking through the mess, he picked up his crying son, hugged him and loved him, getting his own pajamas white and sticky in the process. That's how God deals with us. We try to do something good in life, but it turns into a mess. Our marriage gets all sticky, we insult a friend, we can't stand our job, or our health goes sour.

Sometimes, we just stand there in tears because we can't think of anything else to do. That's when God picks us up and loves us and forgives us, even though some of our mess gets all over Him.

But just because we might mess up, we can't stop trying for God or for others. Sooner or later, we'll get it right, and then they'll be glad we tried.

Day 12: Tuesday, February 27

Your Letter From God

My child,

You may not know me, but I know everything about you (Psalm 139:1). I know when you sit down and when you rise up (Psalm 139:2). I am familiar with your ways (Psalm 139:3). Even the very hairs on your head are numbered (Matt 10:29-31) for you were made in my image (Genesis 1:27). In me, you live and move and have your being (Acts 17:28) for you are my offspring (Acts 17:28).

I knew you even before you were conceived (Jeremiah 1:4-5). I chose you even before I planned creation (Ephesians 1:11-12). You were not a mistake; all your days are written in my book (Psalm 139:15-16). I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live (Acts 17:26). You were fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). I knit you together in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13) and brought you forth on the day you were born (Psalm 71:6).

I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me (John 8:41-44). I am not distant and angry, but I am the complete expression of love (1 John 4:16), and it is my desire to lavish my love on you (1 John 3:1). I offer you more than your earthly father ever could (Matthew 7:11) for I am the perfect father (Matthew 5:48). Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand (James 1:17) for I am your provider, and I meet all your needs (Matthew 6:31-33).

My plan for your future has always been filled with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11) Because I love you with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3), my thoughts toward you are as countless as the sand on the seashore (Psalm 139:17-18) and I rejoice over you with singing (Zephaniah 3:17). I will never stop doing good to you (Jeremiah 32:40) for you are my treasured possession (Exodus 19:5). I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul (Jeremiah 32:41).

I want to show you great and marvelous things (Jeremiah 33:3). If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me (Deuteronomy 4:29). Delight in me, and I will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4) for it is I who gave you those desires (Philippians 2:13).

I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine (Ephesians 3:20) for I am your greatest encourager (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). I am also the father who comforts you in all your troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you (Psalm 34:18). As a Shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart (Isaiah 40:11).

One day, I will wipe away every tear from your eyes (Revelation 21:3-4) and I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth (Revelation 21:3-4). I am your father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus (John 17:26). He is the exact representation of my being (Hebrews 1:3). He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you (Romans 8:31) and to tell you that I am not counting your sins (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Jesus died so that you could be reconciled (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you (1 John 4:10). I gave up everything I loved so that I might gain your love (Romans 8:31-32). If you receive the gift of my son, Jesus, you receive me (1 John 2:23), and nothing will ever separate you from my love again (Romans 8:38-39).

Come home, and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen (Luke 15:7). I have always been your father and will always be your father (Ephesians 3:14-15). My question is, will you be my child (John 1:1-13)? I am waiting for you (Luke 15:11-32).

Love,
Your Dad, Almighty God

Day 13: Wednesday, February 28

Finally and Totally Justified

By John Piper Devotionals

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (Romans 8:33)

Paul could have said here, “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?” and then answered, “No one! We are justified.” That’s true. But that is not what he said. His answer instead is, “God is the one who justifies.”

The emphasis is not on the act but on the Actor.

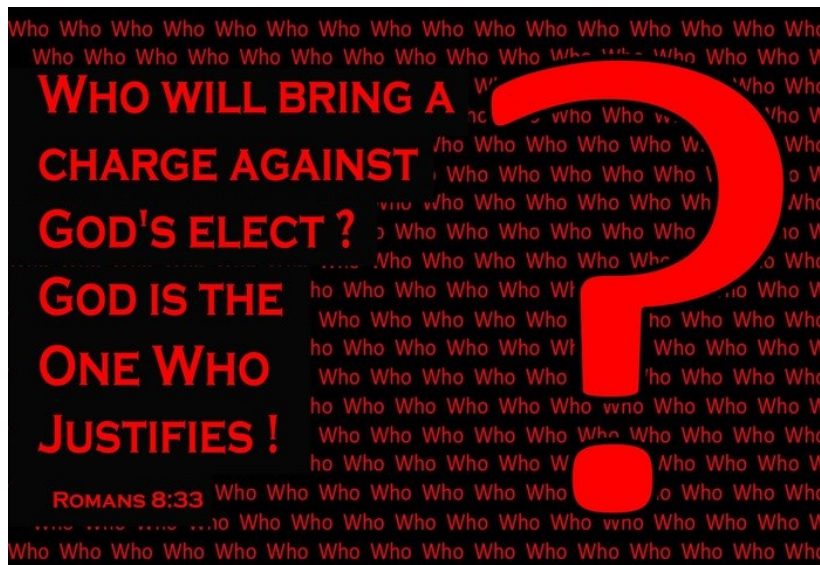
Why? Because in the world of courts and laws where this language comes from, the acquittal of our judge might be overturned by a higher one.

So what if a local judge acquits you when you are guilty, if a governor has the right to bring a charge against you? So what if a governor acquits you when you are guilty, if the emperor can bring a charge against you?

So here’s the point: above God, there are no higher courts. If God is the one who acquits you – declares you righteous in his sight – no one can appeal, no one can call for a mistrial, no one can look for other counts against you. God’s sentence is final and total.

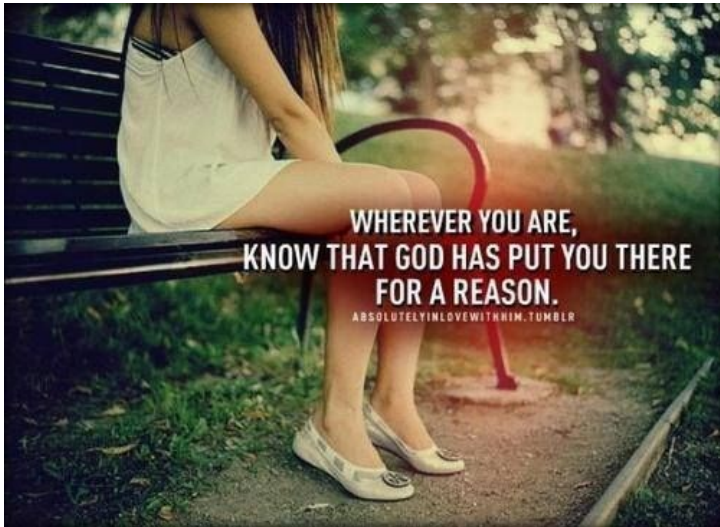
So hear this, all who will believe on Jesus, and become united to Christ, and show yourself among the elect: God is the one who justifies you. Not a human judge. Not a great prophet. Not an archangel from heaven. But God, the Creator of the world and Owner of all things and Ruler of the universe and every molecule and person in it, God is the one who justifies you.

The point: unshakable security in the face of tremendous suffering. If God is for us, no one can successfully be against us. If God gave his Son for us, he will give us everything that is good for us. If God is the one who justifies us, no charge against us can stand.



Day 14: Thursday, February 29

Highway Angel



I was driving home from a work when my car started to choke and sputter and died.

I barely managed to coast, cruising, into a gas station, glad only that I would not be blocking traffic on the highway and would have a somewhat warm spot to wait for the tow truck. It wouldn't even turn over. Before I could make the call, I saw a woman walking out of the "quickie mart" building, and it looked like she slipped on some ice and fell into a gas pump! So I got out to see if she was okay. When I got there, it looked more like she had been overcome by sobs than that she had fallen. She was a young woman who looked really haggard with dark circles under

her eyes. She dropped something as I helped her up, and I picked it up to give it to her. It was a nickel.

At that moment, everything came into focus for me: the crying woman, the ancient Suburban crammed full of stuff with 3 kids in the back (1 in a car seat), and the gas pump reading \$4.95. I asked her if she was okay and if she needed help, and she just kept saying "I don't want my kids to see me crying," so we stood on the other side of the pump from her car. She said she was driving to California and that things were very hard for her right now.

So, I asked, "And you were praying?" That made her back away from me a little, but I assured her I was not a crazy person and said, "He heard you, and He sent me."

I took out my card and swiped it through the card reader on the pump so she could fill up her car completely, and while it was fueling, walked to the next door McDonald's and bought 2 big bags of food, some gift certificates for more, and a big cup of coffee. She gave the food to the kids in the car who attacked it like wolves, and we stood by the pump eating fries and talking a little.

She told me her name and that she lived nearby. Her boyfriend left 2 months ago, and she had not been able to make ends meet. She knew she wouldn't have money to pay the rent January 1st, and finally, in desperation, had called her parents, with whom she had not spoken in about 5 years. They lived in California and said she could come live with them and try to get on her feet there.

So she packed up everything she owned in the car. She told the kids they were going to California for Christmas but not that they were going to live there.

I gave her my gloves and a little hug and said a quick prayer with her for safety on the road. As I was walking over to my car, she said, "So, are you like an angel or something?"

This definitely made me cry. I said, "Sweetie, at this time of year, angels are really busy, so sometimes God uses regular people."

It was so incredible to be a part of someone else's miracle. And of course, when I got in my car, it started right away and got me home with no problem. I'll put it in the shop tomorrow for a check, but I suspect the mechanic won't find anything wrong.

Day 15: Friday, March 1

The Prayer Chair



A man's daughter had asked the local minister to come and pray with her father. When the minister arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows. An empty chair sat beside his bed.

The minister assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said. "No, who are you?" said the father. "I'm the new minister at your church," he replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up." "Oh yeah, the chair," said the bed-ridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?"

Puzzled, the minister shut the door. "I have never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man. "But all of my life

I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it went right over my head. I abandoned any attempt at prayer," the old man continued, "until one day, about four years ago, my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus.

Here is what I suggest. Sit down in a chair; place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because He promised, "I'll be with you always." Then, just speak to Him in the same way you're doing with me right now.'

So, I tried it, and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

The minister was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old man to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, anointed him with oil, and returned to the church. Two nights later the daughter called to tell the minister that her daddy had died that afternoon.

"Did he die in peace?" he asked. "Yes, when I left the house about two o' clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me he loved me and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange about his death. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on the chair beside the bed. What do you make of that?"

The minister wiped a tear from his eye and said, "I wish we could all go like that."



Day 16: Saturday, March 2

A Five Point Summary of the Gospel

By John Piper Devotionals

Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. (1 Peter 3:18)



Here's a summary of the gospel to help you understand it and enjoy it!

1) God created us for his glory.

“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory” (Isaiah 43:6–7). God made all of us in his own image so that we would image-forth, or reflect, his character and moral beauty.

2) Every human should live for God's glory.

“Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The way to live for the glory of God is to love him (Matthew 22:37), trust him (Romans 4:20), be thankful to him (Psalm 50:3) and obey him (Matthew 5:16). When we do these things we image-forth God's glory.

3) We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “Although they knew God they did not glorify him as God or give thanks to him . . . but exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images” (Romans 1:21–23). None of us has loved or trusted or thanked or obeyed God as we ought.

4) We all deserve eternal punishment.

“The wages of sin is (eternal) death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Those who did not obey the Lord Jesus “shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). “They shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

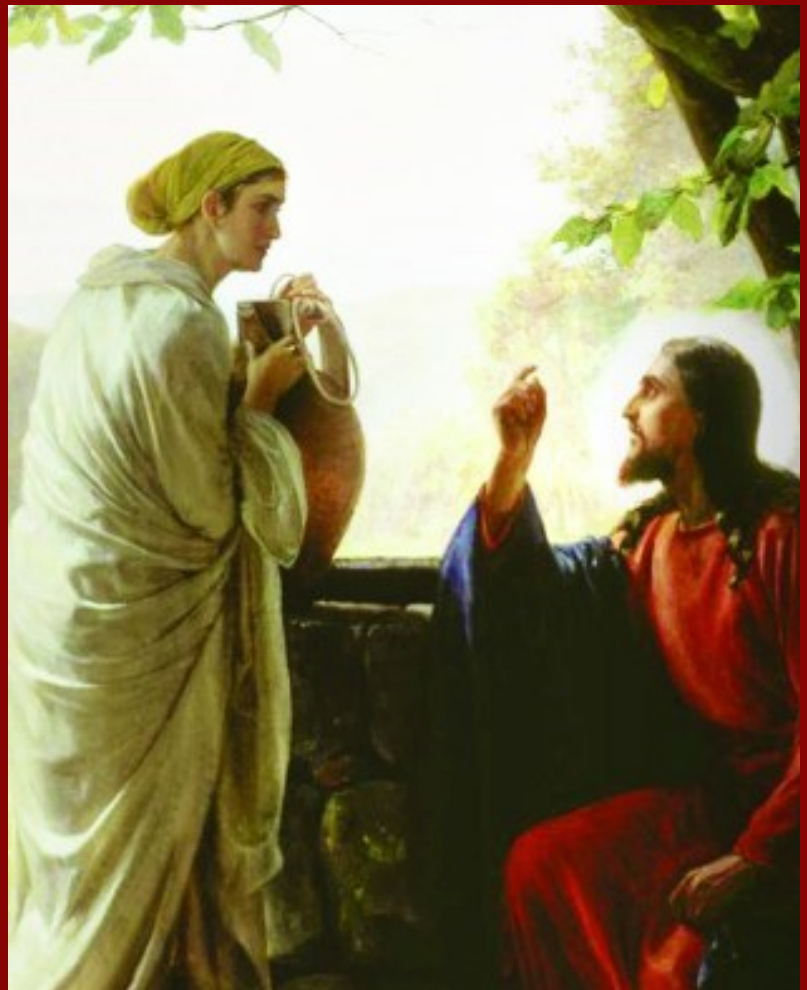
5) In his great mercy, God sent forth his only Son Jesus Christ to provide for sinners the way of eternal life.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). “Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

MARCH 3

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

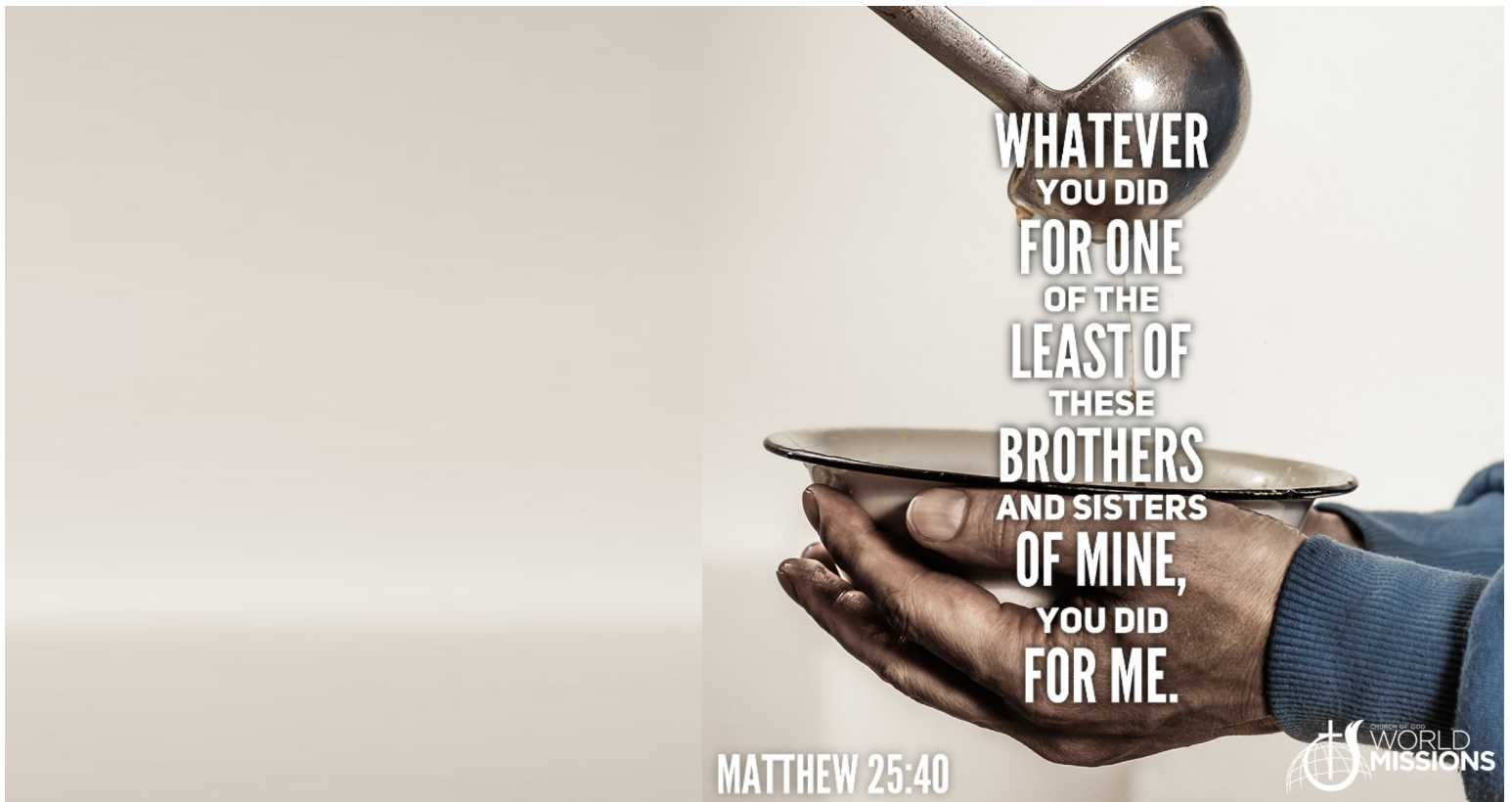
Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." - Jn 4:10



Day 17: Monday, March 4

Things God Won't Ask

- God won't ask what kind of car you drove; He'll ask how many people you drove who didn't have transportation.
- God won't ask the square footage of your house; He'll ask how many people you welcomed into your home.
- God won't ask about the clothes you had in your closet; He'll ask how many you helped to clothe.
- God won't ask what your highest salary was; He'll ask if you compromised your character to obtain it.
- God won't ask what your job title was; He'll ask if you performed your job to the best of our ability.
- God won't ask how many friends you had; He'll ask how many people to whom you were a friend.
- God won't ask in what neighborhood you lived; He'll ask how you treated your neighbors.
- God won't ask about the color of your skin; He'll ask about the content of your character.
- God won't ask why it took you so long to seek Salvation; He'll lovingly take you to your mansion in heaven and not to the gates of Hell.



Day 18: Tuesday, March 5

The Disciples' Prayer

From Tabletalk Devotions with R.C. Sproul

Matthew 6:9–15 “If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (v. 14).



After Jesus tells us not to pray like the hypocrites, He teaches us how to commune with God properly. Today's passage contains what is traditionally called the Lord's Prayer, though this title is bit of a misnomer. Properly speaking, our Savior cannot pray this prayer in the same way we can because He has no need of forgiveness (Matt. 6:12; 1 Peter 2:22). The Disciples' Prayer is probably a more accurate title, commentators note, since Christ's followers pray it. In any case, these words from our Lord are among the most beloved sections

of Scripture, and our study can offer only the barest glimpse of their meaning.

First, it is significant that Jesus teaches us to pray our Father, not my Father (v. 9). This prayer is meant to be prayed corporately; Christian piety is not an individualistic affair. If God is our Father, then all followers of Christ are our siblings. We come together as a family, especially on the Lord's Day, to call on His name, learn His will, and offer thanks for His salvation. The privilege of addressing God as Father is available only to those who serve Jesus (John 1:12–13) and helps us understand our Creator's loving care for us. This love is a holy love that is willing to discipline us for our own purity (Heb. 12:3–11).

Second, as we pray for God's will to be done and His name to be hallowed (Matt. 6:9–10), we know that we are to be agents through whom He accomplishes this request. His will includes forgiveness, and only those who forgive can pray this prayer sincerely. Only an arrogant person asks God to do for him that which he refuses to do for others, and our Father will not pardon the unforgiving person (vv. 14–15). By no means, however, do we merit God's forgiveness. He who forgives knows his own wickedness and sees that he is no better than anyone else. He cannot hold a grudge against other sinners since the holy Creator has forgiven him, a sinner. An unforgiving person has not really seen himself as a transgressor undeserving of God's love and in need of forgiveness. Not having truly repented, he does not really know the Lord's pardon and is unable to forgive other sinners. Matthew Henry comments, "He who relents toward his brother thus shows that he repents toward his God."

CORAM DEO: LIVING BEFORE THE FACE OF GOD

Lack of forgiveness, we learn in today's passage, may prove a lack of faith. No matter how hard it may be to forgive others, we simply cannot call ourselves followers of Christ if we do not forgive those who have offended us. Few of us find it easy to pardon those who have hurt us, but pardon them we must. Are you nursing a grudge or thoughts of revenge against another person this day? If so, you have not forgiven him. Go and forgive him today.

Day 19: Wednesday, March 6

Ice Cream



Ice Cream
is good for
the soul

Last week, I took my children to a restaurant. My six-year-old son asked if he could say grace. As we bowed our heads, he said, "God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!"

Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, I heard a woman remark, "That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream! Why, I never!"

Hearing this, my son burst into tears and asked me, "Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?" As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table.

He winked at my son and said, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer."

"Really?" my son asked.

"Cross my heart." Then, in a theatrical whisper he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), "Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."

Naturally, I bought my kids ice cream at the end of the meal. My son stared at his for a moment and then did something I will remember the rest of my life. He picked up his sundae and, without a word, walked over and placed it in front of the woman.

With a big smile, he told her, "Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."

**Let any one of you
who is without sin
be the first
to throw a stone at her.**

John 8:7b NIV

SeekGrowLove.com

Day 20: Thursday, March 7

Meeting God



A little boy wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and he started his journey.

When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old man. He was sitting in the park just staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to him and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old man looked hungry, so he offered him a Twinkie. He gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. His smile was so pleasant that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered him a root beer.

Again, he smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old man, and gave him a hug. He gave him his biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? He's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old man, also radiant with joy, returned to his home. His son was stunned by the look of peace on his face and he asked, "Dad, what did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." However, before his son responded, he added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

Too often we underestimate the power of a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring.

A white sign with a green background and a white chair. The sign has the text "DO NOT NEGLECT TO DO GOOD AND TO SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE, FOR SUCH SACRIFICES ARE PLEASING TO GOD." and "-HEBREWS 13:16" below it.

DO NOT NEGLECT
TO DO GOOD AND
TO SHARE WHAT
YOU HAVE, FOR
SUCH SACRIFICES
ARE PLEASING
TO GOD.

-HEBREWS 13:16

Day 21: Friday, March 8

Backside of the Desert

By Ricky Whitecotton



One concept of the Lenten season is finding a personal link to Jesus time in the desert. Now a desert is not necessarily a sandy environment. We have a concept of the desert as being the Sahara or Gobi deserts or any vast sandy wasteland. The word is descriptive, but perhaps we have a poor perception of it. Think of it in this fashion, that biome is rather devoid of life, thus it is “deserted”. This may be a broader use of the term. It fits with another common use the term, a “Food Desert” meaning a locale which does not have a store with fresh food in it. So we can take it a step further, creating a space devoid of let’s say, “Distraction”

Jesus notably went to the desert for 40 days following his baptism, but before the start of his ministry. This is noted in the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Lent is a time for believers to focus on our soul, to measure how we are doing on our following of Christianity, how is our sanctification (spiritual growth) progressing? There are many aspects to consider in this season, this is just one. This is far beyond giving up chocolate though.

How can you find a place of solace, a place of quiet to pursue a solo spiritual journey to seek growth and enlightenment. Perhaps it is setting aside a period of alone time each day, maybe it is associated with a location, a quiet park or corner to stop and listen for God’s voice. Only you can take this journey. Blessings unto you that set out on a such a journey.

Day 22: Saturday, March 9

S.T.O.P

Submitted By Emmy Lear

At times we feel we have a corner on all of our off days, mixed emotions, and concerns in our lives. The wonderful part is how much God understands how we feel. After all, He made us.

He knows us through and through. He cares about every area of our lives and is willing to help and guide when we ask.

Our lives aren't too minute for him to care, because he loves us more than anyone in this world possibly could. He's all knowing, just, and Understanding. He sees what is best for us even when we don't recognize the answers ourselves. The next time an off day hits, remember to

S.T.O.P:

Stop and pray.

Tell him how you feel, then listen to him.

Open your heart to his presence.

Praise him for his help and understanding.



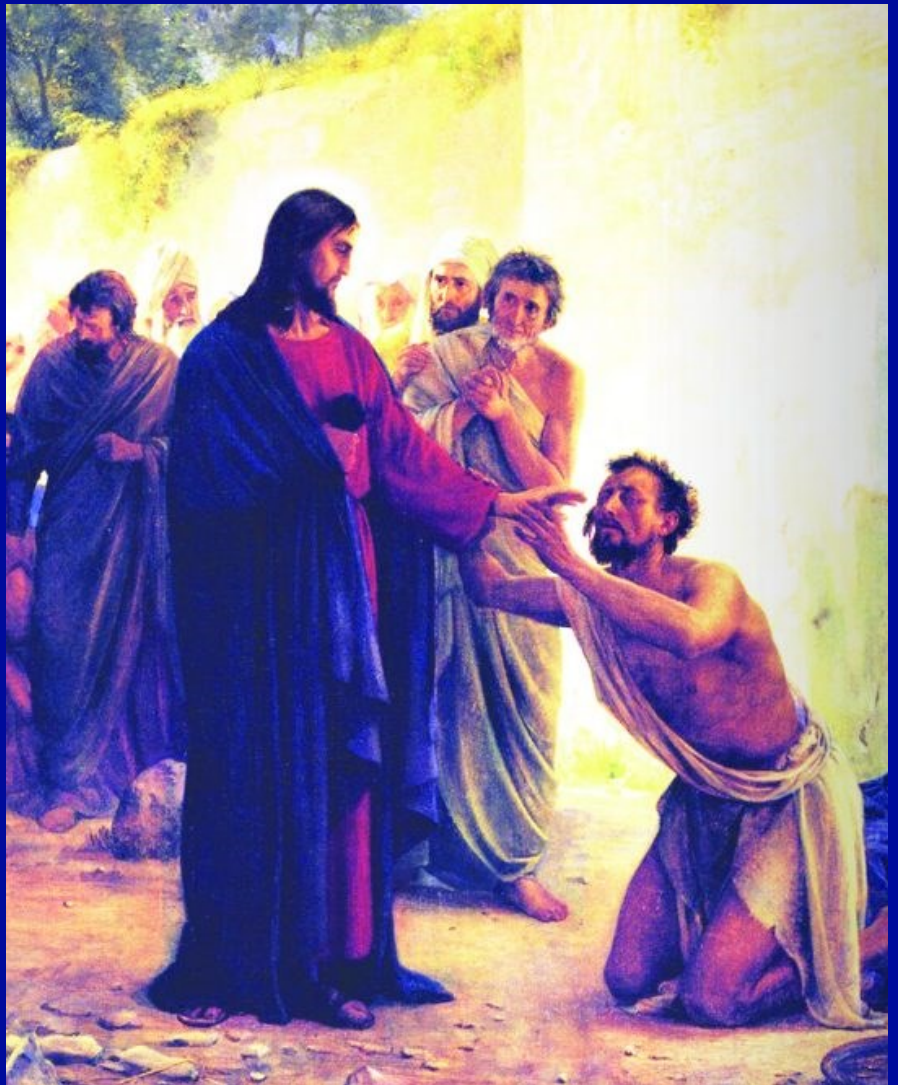
MARCH 10

4TH SUNDAY

OF LENT

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

- Jn 9:35



Day 23: Monday, March 11

Asking, Seeking, Knocking

From Tabletalk Devotions with R.C. Sproul

Matthew 7:7–11 “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (v. 11).



Dr. Sinclair Ferguson says, “Knowing God as judge has a sanctifying and restraining effect on our lives” (The Sermon on the Mount, p. 150). In other words, reflecting on God’s perfect holiness drives us to recognize our own sin and deal with it before we judge others (Matt. 7:1–5). We begin to see who we are — depraved men and women who cannot merit the Lord’s forgiveness. This helps us to be merciful. If our Father in His infinite goodness can pardon us, surely we sinners can forgive others.

However, we still often find it hard to show mercy even when we know the Lord’s character. We still need wisdom to distinguish between those who will mock the Gospel and those who will not trample upon the good news (v. 6). Moreover, we are in desperate need of God’s help in order that we might live up to the high calling throughout the Sermon on the Mount to be salt and light (5:13–16), obey the law of Christ in heart and deed (vv. 21–48), abstain from hypocrisy (6:1–18), and serve the Lord wholeheartedly (vv. 19–34).

This need is the reason why our Savior returns to the subject of prayer in today’s passage. Living in conformity to His way is impossible if we attempt to do it in our own power. But if we persevere in prayer, seeking to be empowered by the Spirit to obey Christ with gladness, God will enable us to be faithful to His call (7:7–8). Our Father is generous and kind. He will not trick us and give us a stone that looks like bread when it is bread that we need, and He will not give us a snake if we need fish (vv. 9–10, some Galilean fish look like serpents). Our Creator will give us all the spiritual and physical resources we need to serve Him if we ask Him in faith (Mark 11:22–24).

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:7–11 does not assure us that we will get everything we want, only whatever we need. We are often unable to tell the differences between these things, but God does not have this problem. If we do not get what we ask for, let us therefore not think He has forgotten us. As John Calvin writes: “We must not think that he takes no notice of us, when he does not answer our wishes: for he has a right to distinguish what we actually need.”

Day 24: Tuesday, March 12

God's Cake

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

~Jeremiah 29: 11



A daughter is telling her Mother how everything is going wrong. She's failing algebra, her boyfriend broke up with her, and her best friend is moving away.

Meanwhile, her Mother is baking a cake and asks her daughter if she would like a snack. The daughter says, "Absolutely Mom, I love your cake."

"Here, have some cooking oil," her

Mother offers.

"Yuck" says her daughter.

"How about a couple raw eggs?"

"Gross, Mom!"

"Would you like some flour then? Or maybe baking soda?"

"Mom, those are all yucky!"

To which the mother replies, "Yes, all those things seem bad all by themselves, but when they are put together in the right way, they make a wonderfully delicious cake!"

God works the same way. Many times, we wonder why He would let us go through such bad and difficult times, but God knows that when He puts these things all in His order, they always work for good! We just have to trust Him and, eventually, they will all make something wonderful!

Hope your day is a "piece of cake!"

Day 25: Wednesday, March 13

The Lord's Homerun



Freddy and the Lord stood by to observe a baseball game. The Lord's team was playing Satan's team.

The Lord's team was at bat, the score was tied zero to zero, and it was the bottom of the 9th inning with two outs. They continued to watch as a batter stepped up to the plate named "Love."

Love swung at the first pitch and hit a single, because "Love never fails."

The next batter was named Faith, who also got a single because Faith works with Love.

The next batter up was named Godly Wisdom. Satan wound up and threw the first pitch.

Godly Wisdom looked it over and let it pass: ball one. Three more pitches and Godly Wisdom walked because he never swings at what Satan throws.

The bases were now loaded. The Lord then turned to Freddy and told him He was now going to bring in His starplayer. Up to the plate stepped Grace. Freddy said, "He sure doesn't look like much!"

Satan's whole team relaxed when they saw Grace. Thinking he there was no way he could lose, Satan wound up and fired his first pitch. To the shock of everyone, Grace hit the ball harder than anyone had ever seen! However, Satan was not worried; his center fielder let very few get by.

He went up for the ball, but it went right through his glove, hit him on the head and sent him crashing on the ground; the roaring crowds went wild as the ball continued over the fence for a home run!

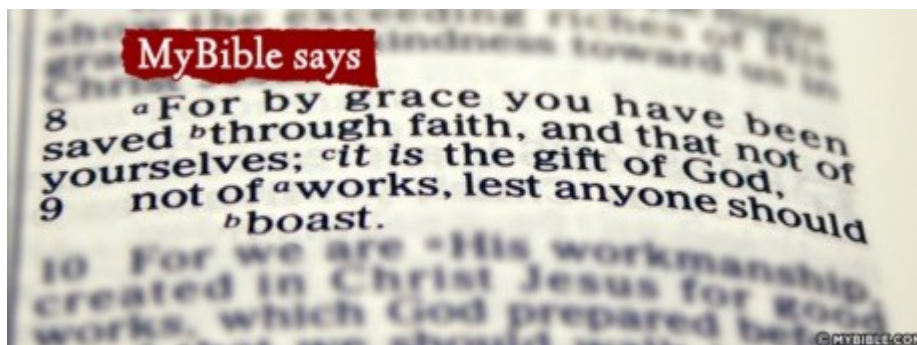
The Lord's team won!

The Lord then asked Freddy if he knew why Love, Faith, and Godly Wisdom could get on base but couldn't win the game. Freddy answered that he didn't know why.

The Lord explained, "If your love, faith, and wisdom had won the game, you would think you had done it by yourself. Love, Faith, and Wisdom will get you on base, but only My Grace can get you Home.

"For by Grace are you saved, it is a gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." Psalm 84:11



Day 26: Thursday, March 14

The Struggle of The Butterfly

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day, a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole.

Then, it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and it could go no further.

So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon.

The butterfly then emerged easily, but it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings.

The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time.

Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

What the man, in his kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives too. If God allowed us to go through our lives without any obstacles, we would not be as strong as what we could have been.

I asked for strength, and God gave me difficulties to make me strong.

I asked for wisdom, and God gave me problems to solve.

I asked for prosperity, and God gave me a brain and brawn to work.

I asked for courage, and God gave me danger to overcome.

I asked for love, and God gave me troubled people to help.

I asked for favors, and God gave me opportunities.

I received nothing I asked for but everything I needed!



Day 27: Friday, March 15

Who God Used

The next time you feel like God can't use you, just remember...

- Noah was a drunk.
- Abraham was too old.
- Isaac was a daydreamer.
- Jacob was a liar.
- Leah was ugly.
- Joseph was abused.
- Moses had a stuttering problem.
- Gideon was afraid.
- Samson had long hair and was a womanizer.
- Rahab was a prostitute.
- Jeremiah and Timothy were too young.
- David had an affair and was a murderer.
- Elijah was suicidal.
- Isaiah preached naked.
- Jonah ran from God.
- Naomi was a widow.
- Job went bankrupt.
- John the Baptist ate bugs.
- Peter denied Christ.
- The Disciples fell asleep while praying.
- Martha worried about everything.
- The Samaritan woman was divorced, more than once.
- Zaccheus was too small.
- Paul was too religious.
- Timothy had an ulcer. AND...
- Lazarus was dead!

No more excuses now. God can use you to your full potential. Besides, you aren't the message; you are just the messenger.



Day 28: Saturday, March 16

The Man On The Fence



There was a large group of people gathered. On one side of the group stood a man, Jesus. On the other side stood another, Satan. Separating them was a fence running through the group. The scene set, both Jesus and Satan began calling to people in the group. One by one, each having made up his or her own mind, went to either Jesus or Satan. This kept going for a time. Soon enough, Jesus had gathered around him a group of people from the larger crowd, as did Satan.

One man joined neither group. He climbed the fence that was there and sat on it. Jesus and his people left and disappeared, and so too did Satan and his people. The man on the fence sat alone. As this man sat, Satan came back, looking for something which he appeared to have lost. The man said, "Have you lost something?" Satan looked straight at him and replied, "No, there you are. Come with me." The man said, "But I sat on the fence. I chose neither you nor him." Satan said, "That's okay; I own the fence."

"Whoever is not with me is against me." - Jesus in Matthew 12:30

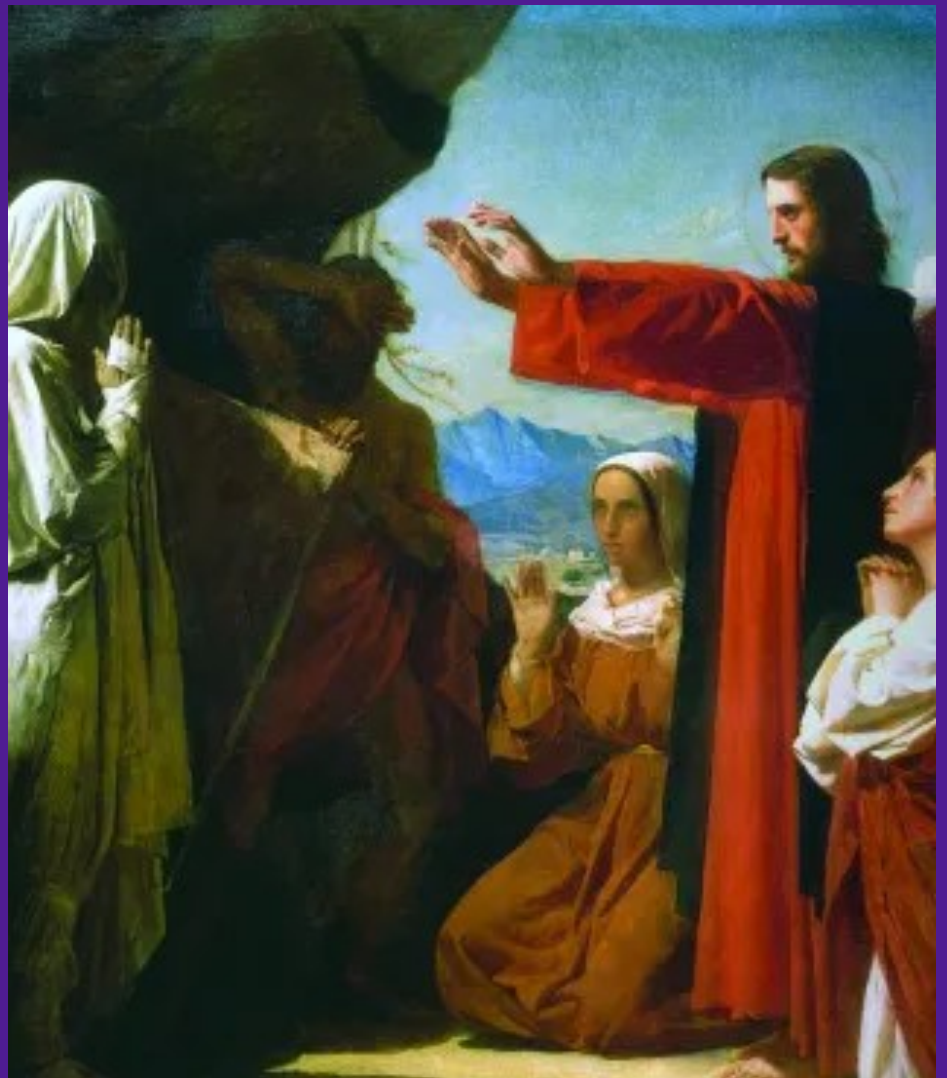
MARCH 17

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT



Jesus told her, "I am
the resurrection and
the life; whoever
believes in me, even
if he dies, will live."

- Jn 11:2



Day 29: Monday, March 18

What Is It Like To Be A Christian?



**What is it like to be a Christian?
It is like being a pumpkin that is carved into a jack-o-lantern. God picks us from the pumpkin patch and brings us in from the field. The Bible says He selects us out of the world. We are in the world but no longer of the world. Jesus said, "As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the**

world." (John 15:19)

God washes all the "dirt" off the outside that we received from being around all the other pumpkins. All the outside influences of our former life must be cleaned up.

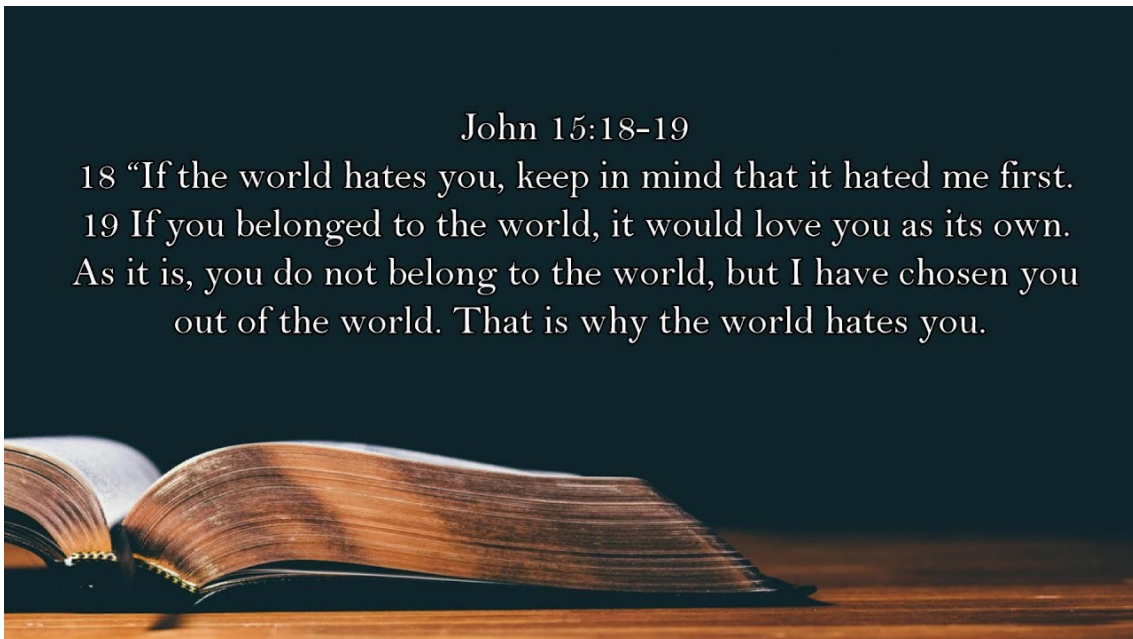
God carefully removes all the "yucky stuff" called "sin" from the inside. He then changes us from the inside out by the Power of His Word. That's why it is important to meet with the church and learn God's Word.

He carves a new smiling face. Our countenance is changed by the power of His presence in our life. We then become so grateful. It can even show on our face!

Finally, God puts His light inside of us to shine for all the world to see.

John 15:18-19

18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.
19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.



Day 30: Tuesday, March 19

A FAITHFUL LIFE From the NIV Daily Devotional

We all want our lives to count for something significant. Like a runner, we want to find a trophy at the finish line—something that leaves a mark on this world and gives our life meaning.

The apostle Paul was in a Roman prison facing death when he gave Timothy this honest appraisal of his own life and ministry. Like a prizefighter, he had made it to the last round. Like a distance runner, he was right at the tape and still in full stride. He expressed great joy in knowing that he had lived his life without compromising his faith in God.

One thing God wants from each of us is our faithfulness. He wants us to remain true to him. If you're a spiritual explorer, such a life begins by taking the first step: Ask Christ to forgive you and give you direction. Once you do that, Christ will come to live in you. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will enable you to faithfully complete your life's race.

A life marked by faithfully walking with God is a life that truly counts. At the end of your life, whatever else you think you'll look back on — interests, accomplishments, acquisitions — nothing will compare with the satisfaction of knowing that you invested your life in spiritual things that really last. Better to face God confident that you did it his way than any other way.

Because of the LORD's great love
we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23



Day 31: Wednesday, March 20

A MEMO FROM GOD



| | |
|---------|--------------------|
| FROM | GOD |
| TO | All God's Children |
| Bcc | |
| Subject | |

I am God.

Today, I will be handling all of your problems. Please remember that I do not need your help.

If life happens to deliver a situation to you that you cannot handle, do not attempt to resolve it. Kindly put it in the SFGTD (something for God to do) box. All situations will be resolved in My time, not yours.

Once the matter is placed into the box, do not hold onto it by worrying about it. Instead, focus on all the wonderful things that are present in your life now.

If you find yourself stuck in traffic, don't despair. There are people in this world for whom driving is an unheard of privilege.

Should you have a bad day at work, think of the man who has been out of work for years.

Should you despair over a relationship gone bad, think of the person who has never known what it's like to love and be loved in return.

Should you grieve the passing of another weekend, think of the woman in dire straits, working twelve hours a day, seven days a week to feed her children.

Should your car break down, leaving you miles away from assistance; think of the paraplegic who would love the opportunity to take that walk.

Should you notice a new gray hair in the mirror, think of the cancer patient in chemo who wishes she had hair to examine.

Should you find yourself at a loss and pondering what is life all about, asking what is my purpose? Be thankful. There are those who didn't live long enough to get the opportunity.

Should you find yourself the victim of other people's bitterness, ignorance, smallness or insecurities; remember, things could be worse. You could be one of them!

Should you decide to send this to a friend, thank you. You may have touched a life in ways you will never know!

Day 32: Thursday, March 21

The Bird



I once watched a most incredible thing. I watched a small bird trying to gather string, which I presumed would have gone into the building of a nest. It is amazing that this little creature acting on instinct alone would gather this kind of material for building. You see, a bird cannot reason, "A piece of string would be nice to use for building my nest, so I'll take it." God has given this little bird the natural instinct to function.

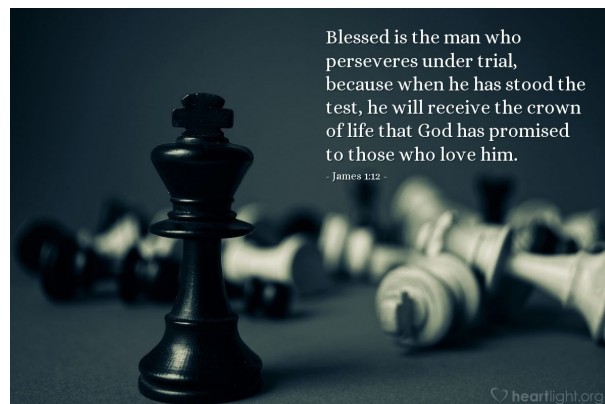
You probably are thinking, "What's so incredible about watching a bird do what it naturally does?" I watched as the bird made several attempts to gather the string. She would pick up one end of the string in her beak and fly upward, but the string would fall, and she would try again. This activity went on for several minutes. What made this so incredible to me was that the other end of the string was attached to a boat sitting on a boat trailer.

I thought of the bird's **PERSISTENCE** in her efforts. No matter how many times she failed, the bird kept on trying. How often do you and I show this kind of persistence in our endeavors? Even though the odds of getting that particular piece of string were greatly against the bird, I found myself hoping that she would succeed.

I thought of the bird's **FOCUS** on the string. She was oblivious to the fact that the string was attached to an immovable object. All she saw was the string, and she went after it. How often do we keep a singular focus on a particular goal? Too often we allow our focus to scatter to several objectives, and then we wonder why we don't succeed in achieving any of them.

I thought the bird had great **CONFIDENCE**. Her intention was to get that string. The bird was not deterred by the fact that a large boat was in her way. Watching the scene unfold as time and again the bird would try to fly away with that string, I almost expected to see the boat lift off the ground.

We need to be **PERSISTENT, FOCUSED, and CONFIDENT** in our efforts as we serve the Lord. I am sure we will find more success in our endeavors.



Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

- James 1:12 -

Day 33: Friday, March 22

Prayer



Should we pray for things we want to happen?

Won't God do what He's going to do and not change His mind anyway? (Num. 23:19, 1 Sam. 15:29)

We should pray.

God already knows what He will do. (Matt. 6:8)

He also knows how much and how earnestly you will pray. (1 John 3:20)

God may do something you like whether you pray for it or not. (Ex. 33:19)

He may not do it no matter how much you pray. (Jam. 4:3)

However, He may sometimes do something if you pray and not do it if you don't. (Jam. 4:2)

You can't make Him do it.

Rather, He has chosen certain things to happen if you pray. (1 John 5:14)

God knows which things He will do if you pray and which things He will not do no matter how much you pray.

You don't.

So pray.

Day 34: Saturday, March 23

Smile

A little girl walked to and from school daily. Though the weather that morning was questionable and clouds were forming, she made her daily trek to the elementary school. As the afternoon progressed, the winds whipped up along with thunder and lightning. The mother of the little girl felt concerned that her daughter would be frightened as she walked home from school, and she herself feared that the electrical storm might harm her child.

Following the roar of thunder, lightning, like a flaming sword, would cut through the sky. Full of concern, the mother quickly got into her car and drove along the route to her child's school. As she did so, she saw her little girl walking along, but at each flash of lightning, the child would stop, look up and smile. Another and another were to follow quickly, and with each, the little girl would look at the streak of light and smile.

When the mother's car drove up beside the child, she lowered the window and called to her.

"What are you doing? Why do you keep stopping?"

The child answered, "I am trying to look pretty; God keeps taking my picture."

May God bless you today as you face the storms that come your way.

May the LORD smile
on you and be
gracious to you.

-Numbers 6:25

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HOLY WEEK DAY 1 MARCH 24 PALM SUNDAY

Holy Week An Original Poem By Pastor King

Holy Sunday Christ's arrival in Jerusalem, where the people lay palm branches on the path for him.

Holy Monday at the Temple, Jesus overwrought, flips the tables of the vendors where animals are bought.

Holy Tuesday, scheming Judas negotiates the terms with Sanhedrin gladly hearing what he'd like to earn.

Holy Wednesday, they seal the bargain. Yet, Jesus still proclaims: Love of God and love of neighbor (the commandment which remains).

Holy Thursday, Jesus gathers them around to sup, sharing from the common table bread dipped in the cup.

Holy Friday (blackest Friday) most often known as "Good," where Jesus sacrificed his life: The cross made of dogwood.

Holy Saturday (time of resting) stayed the women who, waited for the sun to rise to cross the morning dew.



"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Day 35: HOLY WEEK DAY 2 March 25

Openness

By Pastor VJ Cruz-Báez

They came into Jerusalem. After entering the temple, he threw out those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He didn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He taught them, "Hasn't it been written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you've turned it into a hideout for crooks." The chief priests and legal experts heard this and tried to find a way to destroy him. They regarded him as dangerous because the whole crowd was enthralled at his teaching. When it was evening, Jesus and his disciples went outside the city. ~Mark 11: 15-19 CEB

Frequently, Jesus intentionally went out of his way to truly see those who were often invisible to the establishment. He saw people, like the Samaritan woman and the little child he invited us to be like. Christ made a point of welcoming those whose presence in the community was forbidden. The bleeding woman and the leper were among those he allowed to touch his divine essence.

In the Temple that day, Jesus again saw exclusion. A place of worship, holiness, and community-building, had become "a hideout for crooks," because only some were welcomed while others were kept out, penalized for being foreigners, in transit, and poor.

Jesus reminds them, and us, that God calls us to include not exclude. He quotes scripture that says God's house is to be a house of prayer for all.

Jesus's intervention disrupted their order. His good news exposed the wickedness of their hearts and the sin hidden in their practices that kept people out.

Baptismal grace welcomes all to the waters. It demands that we examine our values and stop any action that kills the soul. We are not the ones with authority to determine who is ritually clean and worthy; that is defined by the eternal Love, the same One who turned over the tables. The One who sees all of us and declares: "It is very good!"

One has to wonder if the Church is still being a prophetic voice.

Are we watching and claiming the Church as a house of prayer for all people? Because God certainly is!

Prayer:

Loving Creator, as I welcome you into my life, I invite the presence of the Holy Spirit to reveal those spaces in my life where I need to be in solidarity with those who have been oppressed and marginalized. As you call me to repent, give me strength and humility to genuinely examine where, in the depths of my soul, my words and actions remain far from you. Show me your mercy, so I can stand before you and be safe. Grant me the courage, so I won't feel weak when you invite me to be a prophetic voice that denounces the wickedness of the powers to be but announce your Shalom and the hopes of a new and just system for all. In the name of the One who taught us how to love, Jesus the Christ... So be it!



Day 36: HOLY WEEK DAY 3 March 26

Living On Purpose

By The Rev. Rod Miller

The next day, after leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. From far away, he noticed a fig tree in leaf, so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing except leaves, since it wasn't the season for figs. So he said to it, "No one will ever again eat your fruit!" His disciples heard this... ~Mark 11:12-14; 20-25 CEB

Jesus' cursing the fig tree is a strange event which elicits questions about what Jesus intended to communicate after he entered Jerusalem. Mark likes to write using a sandwich approach to convey the passage of time, changing locations and overall meaning. Jesus saw the fig tree and cursed it for not bearing fruit. Then he went to the Temple and drove out the money changers. The following morning, Peter pointed to the fig tree again and noticed it had withered.

The barren and withered fig tree and the commerce-oriented Temple are meant to inform each other. In each instance, they were not living their purpose. Despite displaying lots of leaves, this fig tree bore no fruit. And despite all the activity going on in the Temple courts, worship and prayer were not the primary focus. Jesus used both instances to teach how important it is to live on purpose.

When the pandemic caused churches to suspend in-person worship and leaders to minister differently, churches found they needed to re-examine the question of purpose. Discerning and living one's calling will help guide churches and individuals through stress and uncertainty.

Living on purpose strengthens faith and gives power to our words because they are linked to God's purpose for us.

The lesson of the fig tree raises the question for us: What does it mean to live on purpose today?

Prayer:

Purposeful God, we seek to be true to your calling for us today. We want to be about what matters in the world. Guide us and give us courage to be the people you call us to be, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Day 37: HOLY WEEK DAY 4 March 27

Reckless Extravagance

By The Rev. Dr. Donna Fowler-Marchant

Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. During dinner, a woman came in with a vase made of alabaster and containing very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke open the vase and poured the perfume on his head. Some grew angry. They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume? This perfume could have been sold for almost a year's pay and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. You always have the poor with you; and whenever you want, you can do something good for them. But you won't always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body ahead of time for burial. I tell you the truth that, wherever in the whole world the good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her." ~Mark 14:3-9 CEB

All four gospels speak of a woman anointing Jesus. Mark simply calls her "a woman" who owned a jar filled with costly perfume while Luke calls her a "sinner," implying sexual immorality.

Was she someone of means who could easily afford to waste such a valuable substance with one extravagant gesture, or was she a woman whose financial situation was precarious but who nevertheless prodigally anointed Jesus?

Either way, when the disciples scolded her, Jesus proclaimed that her act of generosity would be remembered whenever the gospel was proclaimed.

Sarah Ryan and Mary Bosanquet were early Methodist preachers who were very different from one another. Sarah was an uneducated servant who was "married" three times without being divorced; Mary was well-read and belonged to a well-to-do family. From the Methodists, Sarah discovered that Christ's grace was freely offered to her, too, and recognizing God at work in her, John Wesley appointed her housekeeper of the New Room.

Later she mentored the younger Mary Bosanquet, and they formed a household with other Methodist women to nurture and educate the poorest children of their area. Similar to the disciples, Mary's family felt her inheritance wasn't being used wisely, but with Sarah's help, Mary continued to pour out her resources freely on others, reflecting in her journal:

I would be given up, both soul and body, to serve the members of Christ. My firm resolution was to be wholly given up to the church, in any way that he pleased.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, you freely poured out your precious life for us after first joyfully accepting the extravagant offering of the woman who anointed you with expensive nard. Fill us with your Holy Spirit of generosity so that we, too, may follow the example set by her and by Mary Bosanquet and Sarah Ryan, giving without counting the cost, being motivated by nothing but love of you and of neighbor. May it be so! Amen.



Day 38: HOLY WEEK DAY 5 March 28

Denial and Forgiveness

By The Rev. Jonathan Tullos

Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. A woman, one of the high priest's servants, approached and saw Peter warming himself by the fire. She stared at him and said, "You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus."

But he denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand what you're saying." And he went outside into the outer courtyard. A rooster crowed.

The female servant saw him and began a second time to say to those standing around, "This man is one of them." But he denied it again.

A short time later, those standing around again said to Peter, "You must be one of them, because you are also a Galilean."

But he cursed and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about." At that very moment, a rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered what Jesus told him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down, sobbing. ~Mark 14:66-72

When we talk about Peter's denial of Jesus, the question that often comes up is "Why did Peter deny Jesus?" The simplest answer always seems to be that Peter was merely fulfilling the prediction that Jesus had pronounced over him at the last supper. Or, to say that Peter lacked faith. Though Peter was an apostle, we must remember that he was human and had human emotions such as fear. Let's also remember that Peter was dealing with the impending death of his friend and mentor, so he was also dealing with anger and grief. It might be easy to be dismissive of Peter's denial but we must remember that we might well react in the same way if we are honest with ourselves.

And what about Jesus? Would He be angry at Peter's denial? Think about this: When Jesus made this prediction, Peter was sitting at the table for the Passover meal and He fed Peter anyway. Perhaps it was this example of grace and mercy that kept Peter going, allowing him to continue the work he had been tasked with even after Jesus died on the cross. Peter's story does not end at the denial. Peter went on to be forgiven and to be the very foundation of the church. Likewise, our stories do not have to end when we deny Christ through our living. What joy, this wondrous mercy and grace brought! Thanks be to God.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for stories like Peter's that remind us so much of ourselves. Jesus, give us strength when doing the bold thing takes a back seat to our fear. Holy Spirit, help us to follow the examples of both Peter and Jesus, in staying the course and in showing others the grace that we want shown to us. Amen.



Day 39: HOLY WEEK DAY 6 March 29

Endings and Beginnings

By The Rev. Dr. Hannah Ka

From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani," which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?" After hearing him, some standing there said, "Look! He's calling Elijah!" Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, "Let's see if Elijah will come to take him down." But Jesus let out a loud cry and died.

The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "This man was certainly God's Son."

Some women were watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James (the younger one) and Joses, and Salome. When Jesus was in Galilee, these women had followed and supported him, along with many other women who had come to Jerusalem with him. ~Mark 15:33-41

A dimmed light in theater cues the ending of a scene. The darkness signals the curtain to close. A part of the story has ended. If the protagonist is dead at this end, then we know it is a tragedy. Jesus' death is a disappointment for those who hoped that he would rise as a new political leader to overthrow the oppressive colonial power of Rome and rebuild the nation that would protect them. For those who executed his death sentence, it is a clear victory against a rebel. This seemingly failed attempt closes the curtain on the story, at least for many human eyes.

From the wider viewpoint of faith, however, it is not. It signals something totally otherwise. At the moment of Jesus' loud cry and his last breath, there the curtain in the temple is torn in two. This is the curtain that the God-fearing and Law-abiding Jewish people had put up to keep some out. It is torn "from top to bottom" (v. 38) because God breaks the division between the holy and the ordinary and erases the line between what is acceptable and unacceptable.

The death of Jesus is an opening. God opens the closed curtains that we so often put up and walks into our lives. God is not only within our reach, but also reaches out to all humanity with the redeeming grace of the cross. God treasures our ordinary life as a part of eternity. God turns the ends of human tragedy into new beginnings because God's redemptive story always eradicates any human-made divisive binaries we put up on earth. God follows neither the Roman Empire nor the Jewish Law. God builds a new kin-dom on earth according to God's all-embracing love. God is... and God does.

Prayer:

O God, help us feel your presence in our daily lives, in our pain and our despair. Open our eyes to see your new beginnings in our endings. Guide us to live as a part of your redemptive story. Amen.



Day 40: HOLY WEEK DAY 7 March 30

Tarrying Together

By The Rev. Tori C. Butler

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where he was buried.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" ~Mark 15:47-16:3 CEB

There is a tradition in African American communities called tarrying. It is when friends, family, and church family gather around the body of someone who is sick and sometimes near death—and the community begins to sing and sometimes pray with the hopes that the one who is infirmed might be restored or received with open arms by a loving and redeeming God. Can you imagine Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome watching from afar as Jesus died on the cross and not really knowing what to do, not knowing if they could cry out, not knowing what song to sing to bring him comfort at his most painful hour?

Tarrying is not simply about bringing comfort to the one who is sick or dying; it is a willingness to enter into the pain of the community. These women dealt with their grief together. They probably wiped each other's tears and held each other's hands. They knew they could not change the fact that their Lord had died but, they could commit to not suffering alone. You see, many of us are suffering in silence because we are too afraid to be vulnerable, too afraid to let our images slip. But maybe in the sharing of our pain, we might find others who are grieving too, others who are singing our songs, and praying our prayers. And maybe as we find our collective voice of pain, we can discover our collective hope of resurrection.

Prayer:

God in Heaven, tarry with us as we sing songs of lament, cry tears of grief and pain, and pray with expectation that weeping may endure for a night, but joy does come in the morning. Remind us, O God that Sunday is coming. Amen.



EASTER MORNING!!!! HE IS RISEN!!! March 31

Hallelujah!
HE IS RISEN!

