



JOURNEY  
WITH  
JESUS



DAILY DEVOTIONALS FOR THE 33 WEEKDAYS OF LENT



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The *Journey with Jesus* Lenten project is the work of literally dozens of people – pastors, writers, editors, readers, audio engineers, graphic designers, administrators, and others – all drawn from among Vineyard Columbus members, including staff, contractors, and volunteers. It is a truly collaborative effort, the Body of Christ working in unison to present this project as a fragrant offering to the One who makes us one. May these *Journey with Jesus* daily Lenten devotionals, along with the accompanying resources, be to the glory of God and the encouragement of his people in the season of Lent and beyond.

The Vineyard Columbus Community, Lent 2021

Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Journey with Jesus* is a gift from us to you intended to encourage the entire Vineyard Columbus community during the 2021 Lenten season. This volume is a digital print companion to the 33 daily audio devotionals available on the Vineyard Columbus app (available for download at [vineyardcolumbus.org/lenten-series](https://vineyardcolumbus.org/lenten-series)), along with a digital companion of seven weekly small group studies. These resources follow along with our *Journey with Jesus* sermon series, which we warmly invite you to attend either in person or online.

The *Journey with Jesus* series and resources trace several chapters and themes in the life and ministry of Jesus, from his baptism to his resurrection. We will walk together in the places that Jesus walked, and map out the spiritual significance of his life and ministry. As we prepare to celebrate Easter together, our hope is that this shared path would allow Jesus to shape our lives to be more and more like his. Our prayer is that this *Journey with Jesus* would make for incredible encounters with the Lord for all of God's people at Vineyard Columbus and beyond during the 40 days of Lent, and that you would find yourself refreshed, renewed, and re-equipped to continue your own journey with Jesus in the year ahead. May God bless us as we set out on this year's Lenten journey together!

Finally, if you decide to engage with these devotionals on your own by reading them apart from the audio recordings, be sure to take your time, and not to rush through the material. Consider reading at least the Scripture portions and prayers aloud, and take time to pause after each of the prompts in the "For Personal Reflection" section, allowing God to speak to you more personally. You may even want to take some time to write out your own prayers and responses to God. However you choose to engage, may God meet you and bless you this Lent as you continue on your own journey with Jesus.

# DAY 1 • FEBRUARY 17

## ASH WEDNESDAY

HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER  
LUKE 18:9-14



We come together before God today to begin a season of more fully opening ourselves to the Lord, and of allowing him to realign our lives to his good plans and purposes in all things. From the early centuries of the Christian church to the present, the forty days of Lent have been observed as a time for slowing down, for self-examination, for confession, for repentance, and for a resetting of our spiritual lives under God's loving direction.

In this first week of Lent, we will spend a few days inviting God to search our hearts and our lives, to reveal places where we have become distant from or disobedient to him, to lead us on paths of his grace, and to turn us from all that leads us away from him. We'll begin our time today, and this season of Lent, in prayer.

### OPENING PRAYER

*We look to you, O merciful God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and we open our hearts and our lives to your loving and transforming gaze. We do not shrink back, for you are always ready to forgive and embrace us whenever we turn from our sin and receive your love. And so, on this first day of Lent, on this Wednesday of Ashes, we remember our own frailties and failures, and we invite you to search us and know us, and over the course of these forty days to restore our lives to you. Only your death and resurrection make this restoration possible, and in you alone are we able to become all you intend for us to be. We love you, O Lord, and we open ourselves to you in humility and in hope on this Ash Wednesday. Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!*

# DAY 1 • FEBRUARY 17

## ASH WEDNESDAY

### SCRIPTURE READING

## LUKE 18

### THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR:

- 9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:
- 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
- 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector.
- 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’
- 13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’
- 14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 1 • FEBRUARY 17

### ASH WEDNESDAY

#### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Place yourself in this scene – at the temple where these men are standing. What do you notice about the temple? What do you notice about the two men? What are they wearing? What are the expressions on their faces? How are they standing? How do they feel? What sounds and smells fill the air? Who else is present?

As you further imagine this scene, remember that the Pharisees were educated, affluent, religious elites and that tax collectors were considered unclean, unrighteous betrayers of both God and their own people.

What did the Pharisee notice about himself and choose to hold before God? What was the focus of his prayer? How would you describe the posture and attitude of the Pharisee's heart?

Now, consider the tax collector. What did he notice about himself and hold before God? What was the focus of his prayer? How would you describe the posture and attitude of the tax collector's heart?

As you read the parable again, consider your own life before God as you begin this season of Lent. Make a decision to let down your defenses, to stand honestly and openly before God, to confess your sins, and to ask for his mercy.

The tax collector's prayer is known as "The Jesus Prayer" in the Orthodox tradition. It's a fitting prayer to recite during Lent, and one you can make your own:

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*

Or perhaps this:

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, your child.*

Take a few moments now to respond to the Lord, even if it is only a wordless turning of your heart toward Jesus.

Let's close in prayer.

#### CLOSING PRAYER

*Merciful God, we turn to you and ask for your mercy. Meet us during this time of Lent and lead us in the ways of truth about ourselves and about you. Give us good courage and tender hearts, that we might respond to your every word and invitation, for you are our Good Shepherd, and the Guardian of our souls. We love you, Lord, and we pray these things in your holy name. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 2 • FEBRUARY 18

## TRUTH IN THE INWARD PARTS PSALM 51



We continue today in a posture of humbly opening ourselves to God, and courageously inviting him to search our hearts and lives to reveal anything opposed to his good plan for us.

### OPENING PRAYER

*We come to you today, O Lord, deeply aware of both our own sin and of your great mercy. Meet us, O God, and help us open ourselves more fully to you. Help us to see and turn away from our sin. And as we do, O Lord, shape our hearts to be like yours, fill us with your Holy Spirit, put your praises on our lips, and make us able to proclaim your love and your salvation to the people you have brought into our lives. We pray this in your holy name, O Lord. Amen.*

*Today's reading is from Psalm 51, written by King David after Nathan the prophet exposed his grievous sins concerning Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. Though our sins may not be on a par with David's sins of murder, adultery, and perhaps even rape, Psalm 51 stands as a wonderful example of how to clearly acknowledge our sin to God, ask for his forgiveness, and realign our lives with his will and purposes. Let's pause for a moment before God as we prepare to listen to this psalm.*



## DAY 2 • FEBRUARY 18

### SCRIPTURE READING

### PSALM 51

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin *is* always before me.
- 4 Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done *this* evil in Your sight—  
That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge.
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.
- 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,  
And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Make me hear joy and gladness,  
*That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.
- 9 Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

## DAY 2 • FEBRUARY 18

- 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
- 13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners shall be converted to You.
- 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
- 16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;  
You do not delight in burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise.
- 18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,  
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

*(New King James Version)*

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 2 • FEBRUARY 18

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Let's now pray through this psalm section by section and allow God to plant his word and his ways more deeply in us...

Meet us, O Lord, as we reflect more deeply on your word...

Re-read verses 1-5.

As God calls them to mind, take some time now to confess your own sins to the Lord in as specific terms as you are able, and ask him in your own words for his mercy and cleansing.

Re-read verses 6-12.

Open yourself to God and seek him for a clean heart. Ask him to plant in you what David calls "truth in the inward parts" and restore you to a place of joy.

Re-read verses 13-17.

What story is God asking you to tell others about the good news of his salvation? As God's Spirit continues to work in you, offer to him now your own words of thanksgiving and praise.

Re-read verses 18-19.

Finally, take some time to consider your own life and to ask God's blessing for your family, your church, and your community. In response, what righteous sacrifices – ones of repentance, humility, and worship – is he inviting you into today?

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, we close our time today with thanksgiving and joy. We thank you for gently searching our hearts, and for your tender mercies. We thank you for your forgiveness, and for using us to both sing your praises and to share your love with others. As we live this day for your sake, O Lord, give us joyful hearts, and lead us into words and ways that please you and express your love to everyone we encounter. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 3 • FEBRUARY 19

HE REMEMBERS THAT WE ARE DUST  
PSALM 103



We continue today by further considering our own weakness and need in light of the expansive and extravagant love of God. In today's psalm, David exhorts himself to praise the Lord and goes on to list the many benefits of knowing him. And David ends his prayer by inviting all of heaven and earth to join him in his praise for God, who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. This is Psalm 103.

## SCRIPTURE READING

### PSALM 103

- 1 Praise the LORD, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- 2 Praise the LORD, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits –
- 3 who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,
- 4 who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,
- 5 who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.



## DAY 3 • FEBRUARY 19

- 6 The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.
- 7 He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- 9 He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- 12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- 13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
- 14 for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.
- 15 The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;
- 16 the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.
- 17 But from everlasting to everlasting  
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children –

## DAY 3 • FEBRUARY 19

- 18 with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.
- 19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.
- 20 Praise the LORD, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.
- 21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.
- 22 Praise the LORD, all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 3 • FEBRUARY 19

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a few moments to allow the words of this psalm to settle in your heart and your mind. Is there anything that particularly catches your attention – anything that you sense God inviting you to notice today?

Let's now pray through this psalm section by section, responding to God after each of the movements in David's prayer.

Re-read verses 1-7.

Call to mind the benefits you have received in your life with God. Don't hesitate to notice even the smallest things that remind you of God's love and compassion toward you.

Re-read verses 8-14.

To fear God is to walk humbly before him, acknowledging both your sin and weakness, as well as your dependence on God's mercy in all things.

As you turn your heart humbly toward God and seek his mercy, his compassion toward you is like a father's compassion toward his own children. How does this feel?

God knows and remembers your weakness and frailty, and recognizes that you are but dust. How does this feel?

Re-read verses 15-18.

Consider that your own life is like that of grass and flowers, which bloom and flourish only briefly and quickly pass. Yet God's love both precedes you and follows you forever, and blesses not only you, but even generations to come. Respond to the Lord.

Re-read verses 19-22.

Let's end with this truth: God has firmly established his throne and the reign of his kingdom over all things. Join both heaven and earth in offering praises of your own to the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 5 • FEBRUARY 22

THE WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST  
JOHN 1:29-34



Today, we join other followers of Jesus around the world as we continue our observance of Lent in preparation for Easter.

This week we turn our focus toward making space for God in the midst of our ordinary lives and to further embrace God's invitation for self-reflection, confession of sin, and a reordering of our spiritual rhythms.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, grant me your peace, for I have sought peace from things that cannot provide it, and I am afraid.*

*I lay before you:*

*My capacity to lie and to hide the truth;  
My preoccupation with image and my blindness to others;  
My lack of faith and my loss of courage;  
My complacency and my numbness of soul;  
My reflex to criticize and my reticence to create;  
My selfish ambition and my silence at injustice;  
My seeking for security and my forsaking of your kingdom.*

*Lord, grant me your peace. Make me wise and give me courage to live again in quiet humility, faith, hope, and love. Amen.*



## DAY 5 • FEBRUARY 22

Today finds us along the Jordan River, where John the Baptist fulfills the mission given him by God. He calls people to repent and return to God as he awaits the arrival of the Son of God in the flesh. Here on the banks of the Jordan, the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – reveals himself in a remarkable encounter between God and human beings, with John participating, and a witness to it all.

### SCRIPTURE READING

## JOHN 1

- 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!
- 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'
- 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."
- 32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.
- 33 And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'
- 34 I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 5 • FEBRUARY 22

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

John the Baptist had been given a mission from God to announce the coming Messiah. Imagine John beside the Jordan River announcing the Lamb of God's arrival, calling people to repentance, and baptizing those who turn away from sin and turn back to God.

Imagine being present as John the Baptist preaches a message of repentance. Where are you in the crowd? Hear John's voice rise and fall as he speaks. How do you respond to his words?

Now imagine Jesus walking through the crowd, making his way toward John. John looks up at Jesus, God's Son, approaching him for baptism. And John lifts his voice: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The messenger has spoken! Jesus, Savior of the world, is announced! John fulfills his mission.

Then, God moves again. The Holy Spirit appears as a dove, alighting on Jesus, a simple man from Galilee, to confirm him as the Messiah.

What is John thinking and feeling as the Spirit reveals that Jesus is the promised one? What are you thinking and feeling?

As the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus, and as the Father speaks from heaven in affirmation, John's assignment comes to an end. How does it feel to know you've accomplished your God-given mission? What might you whisper to God the Father in prayer as you see Jesus begin his ministry?

As you read this scripture again, invite God to show you where you need to turn away from sin and turn toward him.

Finally, consider how God is asking you to announce his kingdom to the world, and to help you see where his kingdom is already breaking in. Open yourself to his Holy Spirit as you seek to bear witness to the people around you and to point them to Jesus.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Empty me, O Lord, of all that turns me away from you. Forgive me for all in me that clutters, distracts, and stifles me, and that harms the people around me. And create in me a clean heart, that I might stand before you again, renewed and whole, and that my life, like John the Baptist's, might point others to you. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 6 • FEBRUARY 23

WE ARE GOD'S DWELLING PLACE  
EPHESIANS 2:11-22



When we come before God, we are showered in his mercy and grace. It is the place where those who seek new life find it and where those who confess their sins receive forgiveness.

In Christ, we find peace and unconditional acceptance.

In Christ, we are folded into God's family.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Eternal God,*

*Lead me now,  
out of the familiar setting of my doubts and fears,  
beyond my pride, prejudice, and need to be secure.*

*Lead me into the mystery and grace of your presence,  
where, with all who confess you as Savior –  
from every tribe and tongue, nation and people  
we join with you in beloved community.*

*Lead us into this dwelling place,  
into this commonwealth of love,  
where we find our true dwelling place in you.*

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen.*

## DAY 6 • FEBRUARY 23

### SCRIPTURE READING

### EPHESIANS 2

- 11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—
- 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.
- 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
- 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,
- 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,
- 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.
- 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.
- 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.
- 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,
- 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.



## DAY 6 • FEBRUARY 23

21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

The Apostle Paul speaks here of a great mystery – the mystery of being “in Christ.” What does it mean for you to be “in Christ?” How does it feel to be united with God through what Jesus has done?

Paul goes on to say that in Christ Jesus we come to be God’s dwelling place through the Holy Spirit, and that he has broken down all the barriers that exist among the members of his household. In all our diversity, God is building in the church the same bond of love that exists between the three persons of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Where do you see this unifying bond of love at work in the church? Where is God inviting you to strengthen this bond of love?

Re-read Paul’s words to the Ephesian church.

Finally, how is God working in your own life? What do the blessings of inclusion, unity, and peace mean to you? In what ways do they feel lacking in your life? Speak out a prayer of your own asking God to open your eyes to his work in your life and to lead you into the blessings found in Paul’s words to the Ephesian church.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, you have touched my life,  
and I now belong to you and to your people.*

*Make me able to welcome those who call you Lord into  
the place where you dwell with us, even as you have  
welcomed me.*

*And make me able by your Spirit to know your heart and  
mind, both in my own life and in the lives of others. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and  
forever. Amen.*

# DAY 7 • FEBRUARY 24

BEARING FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE  
MATTHEW 3:1-9



The Jordan River courses roughly north and south between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. It connects two unlikely bodies of water – one teeming with life and the other where no fish are to be found. It is an in-between place, a place between life and death. It is also a wilderness place. It is in places like this that we are often forced to face ourselves, and it is here that John the Baptist preaches his message of repentance and baptizes those who respond.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Dear God,*

*My days are filled with so many words,  
yet yours is the word that I desperately seek.*

*Speak now in this time that I have set aside for you.*

*Help me to listen for your voice.*

*Make me able to sense your voice from among the thousands of other voices  
that shout for my attention.*

*Help me to listen to words of life and not death.  
Help me to listen.*

*So, as I set aside this time for you,  
may the drone and drum of the world fade away.*

*Let your words touch me;  
let your words quiet my soul;  
let your words fortify my faith;  
and let your words stir in me a sense of wonder and openness to you.*

*Amen. Amen.*

## DAY 7 • FEBRUARY 24

### SCRIPTURE READING

## MATTHEW 3

- 1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea
- 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."
- 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:  
"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the LORD,  
make straight paths for him.'"
- 4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.
- 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.
- 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.
- 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"
- 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.
- 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 7 • FEBRUARY 24

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

In the Bible, the wilderness is a place that is uncultivated and harsh, and often unfit for human habitation. It is also a lonely place, a place of separation. In the wilderness, we recognize our own weakness, limitations, and vulnerabilities. Yet it is also in the wilderness that God often reveals himself to us.

Here in the wilderness, John the Baptist declares the imminent approach of Jesus, the Messiah. John's words are confrontational, even harsh. He calls people to turn back to God – to repent.

Why would anyone seek him out in the wilderness? How would you feel as you heard his words of judgment and coming wrath? How do John's words set the stage for the ministry of Jesus?

Read this text from Matthew again.

Who has been a John the Baptist in your life? How did he or she prepare you to meet Jesus?

John speaks of bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. Where do you see the fruit of repentance in your life? Where do you still see only bare, dry branches?

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Let something true and real change in the wilderness of my soul as I turn to you. Intervene when I wander away from you and turn me back to your will and your ways.*

*Speak to my condition, Lord, and change my behavior, but also transform the deep places of my inner life that I hide so carefully from others and from you.*

*Cleanse me of the attitudes and behaviors, the fantasies and the grudges, and from the intended and unintended sins that stain my life and separate me from you.*

*Bring me to my knees and to tears of repentance.*

*Then, Lord, let something happen to me. Unburden me. Set me free. Open my eyes to you once again, and renew faith, hope, and love in me. I stand before the generous and loving gaze of Jesus, your beloved Son. And it is in his name that I pray. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*



# DAY 8 • FEBRUARY 25

CONFESSING OUR SINS  
PSALM 32, JAMES 5:14-16



John the Baptist prepared the way for the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. His pulpit was the banks of the Jordan River, deep in the wilderness of Judah. From there John announced the coming of Jesus and called people to confess and turn from their sins. He then symbolically enacted their spiritual washing by baptizing them in the waters of the Jordan.

Join John again now at the banks of the Jordan and prepare to confess your own sins. After each section of this prayer, we'll pause briefly and open ourselves to God.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Dear Lord,*

*Awaken in me an awareness of where I have wandered away from you.*

*Awaken in me an awareness of where I have hardened my heart against you and insisted on doing my own will instead of embracing yours.*

*Awaken in me an awareness of where I have recklessly plunged ahead and have ignored your warnings.*

*Awaken in me an awareness of where I have failed to heed your invitation to seek justice, show kindness, and walk humbly before you and others.*

*And awaken in me a heart of repentance that goes far beyond simply saying 'I'm sorry,' but that seeks to walk in your ways.*

*Amen.*

## DAY 8 • FEBRUARY 25

### SCRIPTURE READING

### PSALM 32

- 1 Blessed is the one  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.
- 2 Blessed is the one  
whose sin the LORD does not count against them  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.
- 3 When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night  
your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD."  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.
- 6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you  
while you may be found;  
surely the rising of the mighty waters  
will not reach them.
- 7 You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

## DAY 8 • FEBRUARY 25

- 9 Do not be like the horse or the mule,  
which have no understanding  
but must be controlled by bit and bridle  
or they will not come to you.
- 10 Many are the woes of the wicked,  
but the LORD's unfailing love  
surrounds the one who trusts in him.
- 11 Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;  
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## JAMES 5

- 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church  
to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the  
LORD.
- 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the  
LORD will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.
- 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other  
so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is  
powerful and effective.

**This too is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 8 • FEBRUARY 25

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Nobody likes to say, “I’m sorry, I made a mistake” or “That was my fault.” We like to keep silent, deny responsibility, or minimize the messes we make in our lives. But when sin remains unconfessed, it undermines our connection with God, injures ourselves and others, and works against God’s purposes in the world.

As you re-read Psalm 32 and the words from James 5, take this time to prepare to confess your own sins to the Lord.

Take some time now to confess your sins to the Lord and to seek his forgiveness, remembering that he is always faithful to forgive and restore you to his loving embrace.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, as I confess my sins today, I receive and rejoice in your mercy. Restore to me the joy of salvation, refresh me by your Spirit, and set me once again on the course you have set before me. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 9 • FEBRUARY 26

HERE IS THE FAST THAT I CHOOSE  
ISAIAH 58:4-12



John the Baptist lived a simple and austere life that enabled him to prepare for and receive the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. His home was the silence and solitude of the wilderness, away from the bustle of towns and cities, and removed from Jerusalem's showy religious rituals. Here along the Jordan River, John called for a true fast that echoed words of the Old Testament prophets' call to reflect lives of justice, mercy, and humility before God.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Teach me your way, Lord,  
and fill me with your Holy Spirit.*

*Empower me so that I can recognize where there is injustice in our world,  
and have the courage to confront it.*

*Empower me so that I might love the way of kindness the prophets spoke of,  
and practice it toward those who are poor, hungry, and sick in this world.*

*Enable me to follow the steps of Jesus and learn his humble and healing ways,  
which respond to the earth and all the creatures who dwell in it.*

*Amen.*

## DAY 9 • FEBRUARY 26

### SCRIPTURE READING

## ISAIAH 58

- 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,  
and in striking each other with wicked fists.  
You cannot fast as you do today  
and expect your voice to be heard on high.
- 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,  
only a day for people to humble themselves?  
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed  
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Is that what you call a fast,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?
- 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?
- 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
- 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
- 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
- "If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

## DAY 9 • FEBRUARY 26

10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

11 The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

**This is the word of the Lord.**



## DAY 9 • FEBRUARY 26

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What is your first reaction to news reports about homeless people or those who protest injustice? Do you think they are just being lazy or that they have a victim mentality? Or do feelings of kindness, mercy, and compassion stir within you? Do you want to help break every yoke of oppression?

Isaiah speaks in clear and pointed terms about the spiritual practice of fasting. He contrasts the empty ritual of fasting with a fast that truly connects with God. The person who engages in an empty fasting ritual experiences no clearer understanding of God's justice and no increase in compassion for others. But true fasting embodies humility, seeks to confront injustice, and expresses compassion to those who suffer in this world. And a fast like this fosters a deep sense of God's presence in our lives.

Re-read this passage from Isaiah 58.

Do you find yourself just going through the motions with certain spiritual practices? Attending church? Reading the Bible? Prayer? Communion? Fasting? How should these spiritual practices impact us individually and as a church community? How should they impact the world? How are they affecting you now?

Tell the Lord where you need help in drawing near to him and ask him to breathe new life into the ways you seek to connect with him.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, rescue me from empty religious practices that don't change my heart to look more like the heart of Jesus. Touch me with your Holy Spirit so that I may recognize where you are inviting me to see you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, both in my own life and in my engagement with the world. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 11 • MARCH 1

NEVER ALONE  
PSALM 139



We continue in these weeks leading up to Easter to focus on self-examination, confession, repentance, and resetting our spiritual lives under God's loving direction. In this third week of Lent, we will focus on themes of isolation, temptation, and wilderness experiences in our journey with Jesus.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, come. Lord, we invite you into this time. We ask that you would push away distraction, and speak to us through your word. Search us, O God – teach us to love your thoughts, and to see the world through your eyes. In our places of isolation and loneliness, Lord, we invite you now. Come – speak to us and transform us today.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### PSALM 139

- 1 You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.

## DAY 11 • MARCH 1

- 5 You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.
- 7 Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?
- 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
10 even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,"  
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.
- 13 For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.
- 15 My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.

## DAY 11 • MARCH 1

- 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!
- 18 Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.
- 19 If only you, God, would slay the wicked!  
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- 20 They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.
- 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD,  
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- 22 I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.
- 23 Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- 24 See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 11 • MARCH 1

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

We are never alone. Ever. For some, this is good news. We are lonely and worn out, and we welcome the Lord's presence into every corner of our lives. Some of us are excited today – looking forward to an important milestone, and we invite God to celebrate with us. For others, though, the fact that the Lord is familiar with all of our ways makes us feel vulnerable and exposed. The fact that God knows even the ugliest of our thoughts makes us uneasy and may not feel like good news at all. God sees and knows our anger, our hatred, and our shame. We aren't ever alone – even when we want to be.

God is with you in every moment of every day. What feelings does this stir in you? Take time to tell God what you are experiencing as you consider the words of this psalm.

For the last year, we have faced not only a pandemic, but also an epidemic of loneliness and isolation. Ask God to draw your attention right now to someone experiencing the pain of loneliness, and take a moment to pray for them.

As you read this Psalm again, ask God to draw your attention to a word or phrase that you can continue to reflect on for the rest of the day.

Sit quietly before God and open yourself to his gaze upon you. If God drew your attention to a word or phrase in this psalm, savor it as you sit in his loving presence.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, we remember today that you are always, always with us. Bring us to both a place of repentance and to a place of joy as we live our lives before you. You are with us when we rise up and when we fall down, and we praise you, Lord God, for you are always, always good.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 12 • MARCH 2

A WAY OF ESCAPE  
1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-15



As we continue this week's focus on the themes of isolation, temptation, and wilderness experiences in our journey with Jesus, let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, meet us today. We pray for your sustenance as we listen to your word, and we ask that you speak to the core of who we are. Shape us today, Lord, and transform us more into your likeness. We come to you as sinners who are sick and are asking to be made whole. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### 1 CORINTHIANS 10

- 1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.
- 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
- 3 They all ate the same spiritual food
- 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.
- 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

## DAY 12 • MARCH 2

- 6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.
- 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry."
- 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.
- 9 We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.
- 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.
- 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.
- 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!
- 13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.
- 14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.
- 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

**This is the word of the Lord.**



## DAY 12 • MARCH 2

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Some Scripture passages offer peace of mind; they wrap around our hearts like a down comforter on a frigid day. You may have noticed, though, that this is *not* one of those passages. Here, Paul brings attention to some of humanity's most evident downfalls. In this season of Lent, we practice sitting with harder passages of Scripture. Today, in light of this passage from 1 Corinthians, let's spend time asking the Lord to bring to mind those things that keep us from him.

Paul writes that the Israelites "drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." Even in the midst of a hard truth, Paul reminds the church that Christ is our water – our refreshment in the desert. Where do you need spiritual water today? Ask God right now to quench your thirst with his Holy Spirit and his word.

Paul then reminds the church not to set their hearts on evil things, such as idolatry, sexual immorality, testing Christ, and grumbling. Take a moment to breathe deeply and, if you are able, open your hands. Ask God if you've set your heart on anything that displeases him. Allow your thoughts to settle and pay attention to what comes to mind. Most of us will never hear the audible voice of God, but he often speaks by bringing things to the forefront of our thoughts. Once something comes to mind, offer it to God, and ask him to transform your heart in this area.

Finally, Paul points out that God is faithful, and will provide a way out of temptation. Oftentimes, we pray for God to simply evaporate our temptations, but this isn't always how it works. Even when we do our best to avoid temptation, things still jump out at us from seemingly nowhere. Let's take a moment to ask God to fortify our minds, to fit us with his armor, and to show us the way of escape when temptation comes.

As you read this text again, focus in on one thing to take into the rest of your day.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, as we move into the rest of our day, we ask that you would pour out your Spirit on us. Teach us to flee from temptation, and put your armor on us so that we can stand our ground. Purify our hearts, and provide your gentle correction when we stray from your path. You are our Good Shepherd, Lord, and you love to take care of your sheep. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 13 • MARCH 3

THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE  
ROMANS 5:1-5, 15:1-6



As we continue to meditate on and pray through Scripture that focuses on isolation, temptation, and wilderness experiences in our faith, let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, we welcome your presence right now. We ask your Holy Spirit to speak what we need to hear. We open ourselves to you so that you can do your work in us. Unite our hearts and minds with yours, and unite us as one body as we participate in reading your word together. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### ROMANS 5

- 1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.
- 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
- 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

## DAY 13 • MARCH 3

- 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

### ROMANS 15

- 1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.
- 2 Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.
- 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."
- 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.
- 5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,
- 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**This too is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 13 • MARCH 3

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

So often, we equate hope with optimism. If we could only see the glass as half full, then maybe we could have hope again. Or we look down on the pessimists among us, thinking that their lack of optimism is evidence of weak faith. But when we equate faith with optimism, we hitch ourselves to a faulty understanding of what biblical hope really means. Here in Romans 5 we are confronted with a jarring definition of hope. Hope is born out of suffering, for suffering produces perseverance, which produces character, which, in the end, gives birth to hope. Hope is a glint of heavenly light given to us in the grit and pain of real life. The glass may not be half full at all – in fact, it may feel totally empty – and still, God can produce hope in us.

What comes to mind for you when you think about perseverance? Maybe it's going to the gym every day, or maybe it's practicing an instrument with diligence, even when you don't want to. Perseverance does sometimes involve literal sweat and tears, but often it's a little more mundane than that – it's putting your feet on the floor in the morning and doing the work of faith and service even when you don't feel like it. It's choosing to wrestle with God instead of disengaging with him. It's diving into the Bible and prayer again and again, even when you feel like it's been a dry, lonely season of life.

Can you recall a time where perseverance led to deeper hope and greater faith for you? Spend a few moments right now thanking God for producing hope in you, or to meet you as you persevere through a difficult time with an eye on future hope.

The Apostle Paul also tells us to build one another up in faith and hope. Bring to mind someone who has recently endured great suffering – more than seems necessary. Spend a few moments praying for them and asking God how best to encourage them this week.

Paul says that we “boast in the hope of the glory of God.” When we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to endure our desert places, we are filled to overflowing with hope in God – the kind of hope we can't help but express to others. What would it mean for you to boast in the hope of God today?

Read these passages again, allowing them to wash over you and propel you into the rest of your day.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, we thank you for this time, and we ask you to cultivate endurance, perseverance, and resilience in us during this season of Lent, in order that we might be a people of deep, resounding hope in a world that is so full of despair. Fill us to overflowing, so that we can boast of your glory today. In Jesus' name, amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 14 • MARCH 4

POWER, LOVE, AND DISCIPLINE  
1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27, 2 TIMOTHY 1:6-7



During this third week of Lent, we are focusing on themes of temptation, wilderness experiences, and discipline. Let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, we invite you to move in us today. Would you speak to us through your word, and activate our minds and our hearts to focus on what you have for us. Speak to us, Lord, and gently convict us of anything in our lives that you would have us change. Help us to let go of the need to fix ourselves, and instead allow your Spirit to work in our lives. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### 1 CORINTHIANS 9

- 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.
- 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.
- 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.

## DAY 14 • MARCH 4

27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

### 2 TIMOTHY 1

6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

**This too is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 14 • MARCH 4

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Seeing discipline in action is inspiring. We may not call it discipline when we see it, but that's what was behind Simone Biles and her rise to become the most celebrated women's gymnast in the world. Discipline is the force behind great musicians like Yo-Yo Ma, behind young up-and-comers like Justin Fields, and behind the devoted 2nd grade teacher who won't be remembered in any history book, but whose legacy will reverberate for centuries.

Nonetheless, Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 9 that no matter how much discipline it took to receive it, most crowns won't last. The gold medals and the accolades and the awards will fade away – but there *is* one crown that will last. Ultimately, our discipline should be directed toward that one aim – the goal of loving God, and the goal of making his love known in the world around us.

2 Timothy 1 provides good instruction for this effort. We do not need to muster up this discipline within ourselves. We don't need to motivate ourselves or psych ourselves up. What we need is the Holy Spirit. And when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are also filled with power, love, and self-discipline.

Whenever we discuss self-discipline in the church, it is vital to remember that our discipline is not a self-initiated means to please God. He has already poured out his grace on you, and you can constantly ask for more and more of the Spirit in order to do what you are called to do.

Take a moment to meditate on God's love and grace. What comes to mind? Do you find yourself wanting to prove yourself to God? Open your hands, and ask God to fill you once again with the experience of his love.

Have you ever thought about the finish line of your own life, and what prize it is you're after? Oftentimes, we become so absorbed in the day-to-day activities of our lives, that we forget to take time to look at the big picture and ask the big questions. At the beginning of each Lenten season, we take time to remember that we come from dust, and to dust we shall return. Today, take a moment to zoom out on your life. What is your main goal? What crown are you running after?

It may be good to set aside extended time to pray about this, and ask God to give you a vision for the race you're running. In her twenties, one of our pastors wrote that by the time she was 60 she wanted to have a "sublime relationship with Jesus." How might you express a similar goal?

With a better sense of your chief aim in life, how does it feel to know that the Spirit of God fills you with love, power, and self-discipline in order to walk it out? Are there specific areas of your life where you might need more love, power, or discipline? Ask God for these things now.

As you read this text again, allow the words to soak into you before you press into the rest of your day.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, we offer all these things to you. We declare our need for you and ask again that you would fill us with your Spirit, that we might have more love, more power, and more self-discipline to run the race set before us. Create space this week for us to stand back and see the big picture of our lives. Fix our eyes on the everlasting crown. You are good, O God, and your mercy endures forever. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*



# DAY 15 • MARCH 5

I HAVE TREASURED YOUR WORD IN MY HEART  
PSALM 119:9-24



We continue today by considering one of the ways we can lay hold of strength and direction from God during seasons of isolation and temptation – by treasuring his word in our hearts. Let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Jesus, meet us today through the power of your Spirit. We pray that you would focus our minds and our hearts on you in this moment. Clear the clutter and the worry from our thoughts, and dust out the cobwebs in our souls as you breathe new life into us. Speak to us afresh, sharpen your word to pierce us, and bring us into more intimate relationship with you. Weave your word into our lives, Lord, and teach us to long for and meditate on your Scripture day and night. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### PSALM 119

- 9 How can a young person stay on the path of purity?  
By living according to your word.
- 10 I seek you with all my heart;  
do not let me stray from your commands.
- 11 I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you.
- 12 Praise be to you, LORD;  
teach me your decrees.

## DAY 15 • MARCH 5

- 13 With my lips I recount  
all the laws that come from your mouth.
- 14 I rejoice in following your statutes  
as one rejoices in great riches.
- 15 I meditate on your precepts  
and consider your ways.
- 16 I delight in your decrees;  
I will not neglect your word.
- 17 Be good to your servant while I live,  
that I may obey your word.
- 18 Open my eyes that I may see  
wonderful things in your law.
- 19 I am a stranger on earth;  
do not hide your commands from me.
- 20 My soul is consumed with longing  
for your laws at all times.
- 21 You rebuke the arrogant, who are accursed,  
those who stray from your commands.
- 22 Remove from me their scorn and contempt,  
for I keep your statutes.
- 23 Though rulers sit together and slander me,  
your servant will meditate on your decrees.
- 24 Your statutes are my delight;  
they are my counselors.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 15 • MARCH 5

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Psalm 119 invites us into a rich spiritual truth where even in these few verses we see the tremendous value of treasuring God's word in our hearts. We are to live according to God's word, not stray from his commands, meditate on God's precepts, and rejoice and delight in all that God has said to us. Psalm 119 is a love letter to Scripture, listing the many ways the Bible can heal us, restore us, and keep us on the path that God has set before us.

This week we spent time considering wilderness experiences, self-discipline, and temptation. How does treasuring God's written word relate? Consider the life of Jesus: When he had his own wilderness experience of fasting in the desert for 40 days, he responded to temptation by quoting Scripture. He knew his Father's word so intimately that it enabled him to stand his ground against any and all forces. What comes to mind when you hear the Psalmist speaking about delighting in God's word – rejoicing in and longing for God's law in every area of life? Do you feel this way about Scripture?

It takes effort and self-discipline to change our cravings. A steady diet of pizza and French fries leads to cravings for pizza and French fries. But after a few weeks of introducing something fresh and healthy into your diet, you might begin to notice that you are craving healthier food. It is the same way with any habit, including learning to crave God's word. Spend a moment right now to ask God to rewire your cravings, and to speak to you about how you might change a daily habit to make more room for the word of God in your life.

The psalmist says, "I rejoice in following your statutes, as one rejoices in great riches." Yesterday, we focused on giving up the crowns of this world in order to reach for a more important goal: the crown that comes with setting our eyes on following Jesus whole-heartedly.

Consider things that have long been on your wish list. Perhaps it's an assortment of new stuff, or a new relationship. Take this next moment to ask God to give you a desire for his word that surpasses your desire for items on your wish list. Ask God to rightly order your desires.

The psalmist also says, "Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors." Across Scripture, seeking counsel from wise people is a celebrated virtue. It is good to remember today that Scripture is also our counselor. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, it should be our first source for wisdom and direction. When you are in a bind, who do you go to first for counsel? When you need help, what voices are the loudest? Take a moment right now to invite God to counsel you first and foremost through his word.

As you read this text again, ask God to highlight one word or phrase for you to carry with you and consider for the rest of the day.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, teach us to love your word. Open our eyes so that we may see wonderful things in the Scriptures. May we love you and love your word more than we love anything else – and help us to turn to you first when we need direction and guidance. And remind us today that you point us to your word out of a deep and abundant love for your children. You know what is good for us, God, and we pray for the desire to seek your best plan for us. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 17 • MARCH 8

PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS  
1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-27



This week we turn our focus to Jesus' work of the kingdom. As he journeyed from town to town, most notably throughout his homeland of Galilee, Jesus preached the Good News, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and extended justice, mercy, and compassion to all he encountered. Jesus brought God's kingdom to earth. And people couldn't help but flock to him because of it.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, draw our attention away from ourselves and from the distractions of this world. Turn our gaze toward the many signs of your kingdom around us. Everywhere, you are at work. We want to be part of what you are doing; we want to experience the kingdom in our midst. When your kingdom is at hand – whether it's good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners and the oppressed, recovery of sight for the blind – may we respond in adoration, praise, and repentance. May we invite others into your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### 1 CORINTHIANS 9

- 16 For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!
- 17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

## DAY 17 • MARCH 8

- 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.
- 19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.
- 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.
- 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.
- 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.
- 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.
- 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.
- 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.
- 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.
- 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 17 • MARCH 8

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

The Apostle Paul is compelled to preach the Good News. He had a personal story to tell about God's mercy, power, and goodness. When plotting to harm followers of Jesus and stop them from spreading the Gospel, Christ intervened by audibly calling Paul to himself and even commissioning him to preach the Good News to the Gentiles. Paul's life would never be the same.

What is your own story of Good News, the one that only you can tell the world? What does it convey to others about God's mercy, power, and goodness?

Paul is willing to do anything and give up any rights or freedoms for the sake of the gospel. He wants to "win as many as possible." Is there anyone in your life who God is inviting you to sacrifice for so that they too can hear and respond to the Good News of the gospel? Offer a brief prayer to God for that person, and for yourself as God uses you to touch them with his love.

In sacrificing much for the sake of the gospel, Paul is also confident that as he does so, he will share in its blessings. What do you think he means by this? When you tell others about the Good News of Jesus, how is it a blessing to you? What about when the work of the kingdom really costs you something? Is it still a blessing?

As you read this scripture again, focus on the last section about running to get a prize.

Paul likens the work of the kingdom to not merely competing in a race, but to winning it. How does this make you feel? Perhaps his claim resonates because you enjoy competition or athletics. Perhaps it leaves you feeling tired or inadequate.

While the work of the kingdom requires serious effort and sacrifice, it is not by our own striving. Bolstered by his love, the grace of God and the power of his Holy Spirit supply all that we need. And the prize for winning this race? A crown that will last forever. Earthly endeavors and success will fade away, but the impact of the Good News of Jesus Christ is eternal.

Close by speaking to God in your own words about the work of the kingdom, particularly that of preaching the Good News. Tell him of your hopes and fears.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 18 • MARCH 9

HEALING THE SICK  
ACTS 3:1-16



Jesus is well-known for his miracles; they are hallmarks of the work of his kingdom. When sick or disabled people came to Jesus, he healed them. And nowhere is Jesus' power over disease and death more evident than at his resurrection, the final destination of this Lenten journey.

As we await Jesus' resurrection, death is all around us. Over two million people have lost their lives in a global pandemic. ICUs are full of the sick and dying. COVID-19 poses a much greater risk to Black and Brown people, and they shoulder a disproportionate share of the pandemic's financial and societal burden, as well. Ongoing isolation and loneliness, economic despair, and crumbling mental health ravage every corner of the world.

And yet, we can only come to God exactly as we are right now in the exact situation we are in. Not as we were before the pandemic, not how we think we should be today – almost halfway through Lent – and not how we will be in the future. Right now, in the midst of a global health crisis, we come to God and seek his mercy, guidance, and power to do the work of the kingdom.

## DAY 18 • MARCH 9

### OPENING PRAYER

*Jesus, we are weary. The world is weary. Have mercy on us, O God. Have mercy on all who are suffering. Help us to sense your loving presence in the midst of death and destruction. Call us to repentance – may we turn from callousness and selfishness. May we instead embrace your call to sacrificial love and care for others. Now more than ever, create in us a longing to do the work of your kingdom. May we be faithful workers who are always willing to partner with you to heal the world. In Christ’s name, amen.*

### SCRIPTURE READING

## ACTS 3

- 1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.
- 2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.
- 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.
- 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!”
- 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.
- 6 Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”
- 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong.
- 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.



## DAY 18 • MARCH 9

- 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God,
- 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.
- 11 While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.
- 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"
- 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.
- 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.
- 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.
- 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 18 • MARCH 9

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What sort of attention do you give to people around you? What do you know about their hopes and fears? Are you willing to look into the eyes of someone who is sick or suffering? Or do you avert your gaze? What does God want you to notice in people?

In this story, Peter looks straight at the disabled man and says, "What I do have, I give you." As a follower of Jesus, what do you have to give others, especially the dejected and downtrodden?

Divine healing is a mystery, and often a frustrating one. Peter's one command heals a disabled man. Meanwhile, we may pray for someone many, many times only for them to never be healed. Weathering the "now" and the "not yet" nature of God's kingdom on this side of eternity takes hope, patience, and humility. Trusting that the Lord is good all the time requires a fortitude that only the Holy Spirit can give. Take a moment now to share your feelings on this matter with the Lord. He is listening.

As you read the passage again, engage all your senses and allow the scene to wash over you.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*God, may the glory of your kingdom never fail to produce wonder, amazement, and astonishment in us. May your kingdom come to earth as it is in heaven. Lord, heal! Lord, make a way! Lord, preserve life! In Christ's name, amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 19 • MARCH 10

FEEDING THE HUNGRY  
MATTHEW 15:29-38



The story of the loaves and fishes is among Jesus' most famous miracles. Perhaps you first heard the tale, known by many as "feeding the multitude," as a child. Evidently, this miracle – where Jesus feeds thousands of people a full meal with just a few scraps of food – happened more than once. The "Feeding of the 5,000" is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels, while the "Feeding of the 4,000" appears in two. What must it say about our Lord that this sort of kingdom work – making sure thousands of people do not go hungry – is recounted six times across all four Gospels?

## OPENING PRAYER

*O God, give us fresh ears today. In places we've tuned you out, make your voice clear to us again. Where pride hinders our ability to hear from you, humble us. For every excuse we give to avoid the good kingdom work you call us to, speak a word of correction and reinvigoration. Lord, we are sorry that we do not faithfully follow your example. We turn from our sin and seek your grace and mercy for lasting change. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### MATTHEW 15

- 29 Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down.
- 30 Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.

## DAY 19 • MARCH 10

- 31 The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.
- 32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."
- 33 His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"
- 34 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.  
"Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish."
- 35 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground.
- 36 Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people.
- 37 They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.
- 38 The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 19 • MARCH 10

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Notice the way Jesus begins his conversation with the disciples. He says, “I have compassion for these people.” When do you sense God’s compassion for you? And when you are confronted with a societal problem such as hunger or homelessness, or when you encounter a person in need, do you respond with compassion? Or does some other feeling or thought fuel your response?

Now, notice the disciples’ response. They say, “Where could we get enough...to feed such a crowd?” Do you think they shared Jesus’ compassionate concern? How do you think you would respond to Jesus if he expressed concern about more than 4,000 people going hungry?

The end of this story is when things start to get interesting. Yes, it was a miracle: Jesus multiplied just seven small flatbreads and a few small fish so that over 4,000 people had enough to eat. But it’s not a miracle that happened with a snap of his fingers. Only when he gave the small amount of food to the disciples to distribute did it begin to multiply.

Over the course of our lives, Jesus extends many invitations to partner with him to do the work of the kingdom. These days, amidst the challenges of a deadly pandemic – when suffering is so great – what is he inviting you to do? Feed the hungry? Welcome the stranger? House the homeless? Assist the unemployed? Give voice to the vulnerable? Spend a few moments in silence, seeking to discern what the Lord is speaking to you.

As you read the passage again, picture yourself as one of the characters in the story. Are you Jesus, someone in the crowd, one of the disciples?

When the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, no one will ever go hungry again. Everyone will have what they need, when they need it. We long for that day, but that’s not all we do. We also faithfully do the work of the kingdom on this side of eternity, and rejoice during those times we catch even a glimpse of the kingdom breaking in.

Close by asking God to give you compassion for vulnerable people and energy to do the work of the kingdom. If you sense a roadblock – be it pride, callousness, burnout, fear, misplaced priorities, or anything else – offer it over to the Lord. What he offers in return is something so much better, so much more fulfilling.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 20 • MARCH 11

JUSTICE, MERCY, AND COMPASSION  
ZECHARIAH 7:4-13



We are now at the halfway point of our Lenten journey with Jesus. Today, as we continue our focus on Jesus' work of the kingdom, we look not at his miracles but at the core kingdom values of justice, mercy, and compassion.

The Old Testament prophets inform much of our understanding of what these values look like in God's kingdom. And they never hesitate to indict God's people – both then and now – of their sin of failing to uphold justice, mercy, and compassion.

Centuries later, when Jesus read in the synagogue from the prophet Isaiah about setting the oppressed free, he both reinforced justice, mercy, and compassion's primacy in the kingdom and proclaimed their fulfillment and embodiment in him. As followers of Jesus today, we too are called to continue the work of the kingdom by bringing justice, mercy, and compassion into every sphere of life – into our families, our neighborhoods, our city, our nation, and the world.

## DAY 20 • MARCH 11

### OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, we come to you during a season when the world is in desperate need of justice, mercy, and compassion. We do believe you are at work and that your kingdom is in our midst; help us in our unbelief!*

*God, we repent of all the ways we fail to do the work of justice, mercy, and compassion. We are sorry that we do not always act justly. We are sorry that we do not always extend mercy as you've extended mercy to us. We are sorry that we do not always act with compassion.*

*When injustice strikes, O Lord, move us to action. When we witness cruelty, give us courage to intervene. When people are treated with indifference and heartlessness, empower us to put a stop to it. Make us hungry to do this work.*

*We pray these things in your holy name. Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE READING

## ZECCHARIAH 7

- 4 Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me:
- 5 "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?'
- 6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?'
- 7 Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?'"
- 8 And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah:
- 9 "This is what the LORD Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.'

## DAY 20 • MARCH 11

- 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.'
- 11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears.
- 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.
- 13 "'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the LORD Almighty.

**This is the word of the Lord.**



## DAY 20 • MARCH 11

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

God tells Zechariah to “ask all the people” some challenging questions about their religiosity: What is the point of your fasting? And your feasting?

Take a moment to examine your own religious activities. Why do you do engage in them? Who do they benefit? Do they help advance the kingdom causes of justice, mercy, and compassion?

Instead of fasting and feasting, what the Lord is really asking of his people is this: To administer true justice and to show mercy and compassion. He even gives specific examples: Do not oppress the vulnerable – the widow, the fatherless, the foreigner, and the poor – and do not plot evil against one another.

Who are the vulnerable among us today? How do these groups of people differ from those of Zechariah’s day? Which groups remain the same? Ask the Lord to search your heart, your motives, your actions. In what ways are you complicit in the oppression of the vulnerable?

Zechariah prophesies that God’s anger was aroused to the point of breaking relationship with his people. When they called, he would not listen. How does this make you feel? What does it make you want to do about your commitment to justice, mercy, and compassion?

Let’s read this passage again.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*God, we want to be vessels of your justice, mercy, and compassion. We want to do the work of your kingdom. Lead us, O Lord, in both the discipline and the celebration of joining you in this good work.*

*And Lord, when we are unwilling to do this work, or when outside influences attempt to reroute us toward callousness instead of compassion, arrest our thoughts and call us back to you. Make us able to drink deeply of your love and to look to Jesus as our model. Keep us close to you, O God. Soften our hearts today and always. Amen.*

Now take a moment to ask God for specific direction. Where is he calling you to do meaningful and impactful work of justice, mercy, and compassion? Pay attention to the whispers of God’s Spirit. Do not turn your back. Do not cover your ears. Do not harden your heart. Instead, listen to whatever the Holy Spirit is speaking.

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 21 • MARCH 12

SEEKING FIRST HIS KINGDOM  
MATTHEW 6:24-34



This week we have examined what it means to do the work of the kingdom, an important part of our lifelong journey with Jesus. Jesus invites us to preach the Good News, commissions us to heal the sick and feed the hungry, and calls us to do justice, love mercy, and act with compassion.

But many things stand in the way of our doing the work of the kingdom. We get overwhelmed. We wonder what possible difference just one person can make. We seek satisfaction in other things – in our careers, in money, status, family, power, sex. And sometimes, we're just afraid. Afraid that serving Jesus won't be enough; that it won't bring the satisfaction he promises. Afraid that when we make sacrifices to do the work of the kingdom, Jesus won't meet our needs.

Our Lord was well aware of these fears, and he addressed them in the most famous of his sermons – The Sermon on the Mount.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Jesus, slow us down and quiet our thoughts. Show us where you are at work in this space and in our surroundings. In this moment, point out to us the beauty of your kingdom. Help us, O God, not to overlook your presence, but rather to savor it. We look for you, O Lord; we want to see you. Reveal yourself to us.*

*Overcome our fear that following you with our whole hearts will lead to disappointment. Overcome our fear of investing in your kingdom. Overcome our fear that you will not meet our needs. Overcome our fear that you are not enough. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us. Amen.*

## DAY 21 • MARCH 12

### SCRIPTURE READING

### MATTHEW 6

- 24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.
- 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?
- 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?
- 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?
- 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.
- 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.
- 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?
- 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’
- 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.
- 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
- 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 21 • MARCH 12

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Jesus doesn't tell us it's difficult to serve two masters. No. He says it's *impossible* to serve both God and money. Why do you think this is the case?

When we live to serve money, worry takes hold of our lives. What other pursuits make you susceptible to worry? When you live to serve God, what role does worry play?

Planning and preparation are not the opposite of worry. You set goals at work. You make the grocery list. You plant a garden. You plan a wedding or a family vacation. These activities do not offend God; they are part of life's normal rhythms.

When Jesus tells us not to worry, he's simply inviting us to approach life in a peaceful and trusting manner. He asks, "Can one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" Sit with this question for a moment. What has worry given to you? What has it taken away from you? Is worry God's best for you?

Jesus' exhortation to us is this: Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Speak to the Lord now about what keeps you from seeking his kingdom and righteousness. As you confess these things to God, ask for his grace and mercy to reorient your life toward Jesus and the work of the kingdom.

Before you read the passage again, consider the fact that Jesus himself must have spent significant time watching and admiring birds and flowers for him to choose them as examples for what our lives with God should look like. Imagine for a moment the Lord in some quiet place savoring and reflecting on the natural world as he communes with the Father.

Now take a moment to try painting a vivid picture in your mind of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. What do they look like? How do they posture themselves before the Lord?

Finally, our tendency may be to hear these words of Jesus not to worry as a rebuke – as a sharp word of correction. But as you listen to them this time through, try to hear them as a gentle invitation from God to free ourselves from all that we lose when we make money our aim and worry about our basic needs. Seek to hear the Lord's words as a loving and winsome call to pursue God's kingdom and his righteousness, and to receive the abundance he opens before us as we do.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*O Lord, we lay our hopes and fears before you.*

*Teach us to trust you to meet our needs. In all things, we want to seek first your kingdom. Let it be! May we find joy and deep satisfaction in serving you. As you continually transform us to be more like Jesus, may you be glorified. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 23 • MARCH 15

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY  
ISAIAH 6:1-5



This week, our journey brings us to mountaintop experiences, to places where we encounter the glory and holiness of God.

The Apostles Peter, James, and John had a literal mountaintop experience when they ascended a mountain with Jesus and witnessed his transfiguration. They not only saw Jesus transformed into the full radiance of his glory, but they witnessed him talking to Old Testament heroes Moses and Elijah – like old friends reunited. And then, on that very same mountaintop, they heard the voice of the Father speaking his supreme pleasure in Jesus, his beloved Son.

What do you envision when you hear the phrase “mountaintop experience”? Have you ever had one?

## OPENING PRAYER

*O God, hallowed be your name. You are holy. You are different. You are pure. You are good. You are full of wonder. Father, as we consider the journey up the mountain and into your presence, we are struck once again that through your Son Jesus we have access to your presence. Holy Spirit, you are always willing to welcome us into your presence, and you ever long for us to come. Father, give us grace to approach you with hope, but also with a deep awareness of who you are and who we are not. Lord, we confess today that you are our King, high and lifted up, and you are holy. And we confess today that you have made us – you are God and we are not. Teach us, Lord, how to enter your presence today. Meet us, Lord, with your glory! Amen.*

## DAY 23 • MARCH 15

### SCRIPTURE READING

## ISAIAH 6

- 1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.
- 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.
- 3 And they were calling to one another:  
"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."
- 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.
- 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 23 • MARCH 15

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Let's take some time to reflect on all the ways Isaiah *experienced* the Lord with his senses. What feelings do you have when in God's presence? How might you respond to an experience like Isaiah's?

Isaiah sees the Lord, seated on his throne. What does it mean to you that God is on the throne? Where is he reigning in your life right now?

After glimpsing God high above and lifted up, Isaiah then focuses on the floor. He sees the train of God's robe.

This is a subtle but clear hint of Isaiah's posture when he comes into the presence of the Lord. When you come into God's presence, is your first instinct to bow down before the King? Throughout the Bible, over and over again, when people catch a glimpse of God, they are brought to their knees in humility. When God is lifted up, there is often an inverse response in people; they bow low. As John the Baptist testified, "He must become greater; I must become less."

Our posture clearly communicates something. When was the last time you bowed down before the Lord? If you are able, take a few moments now to kneel before God, to gaze upon him, and allow him to gaze upon you. Consider making bowing before God a regular practice during this season of Lent.

Next, Isaiah looks again and sees seraphim flying around. These mysterious, angelic creatures cover their eyes in the presence of God. Why do you suppose they do this?

Then, Isaiah hears the seraphim praising God with burning passion, an endless hymn of God's praise.

**"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."**

When you hear that God is holy, what comes to your mind? How do you feel? Take a few moments to honestly express these thoughts and feelings to the Lord.

The seraphim also proclaim that God's glory fills the entire earth. The significance and weight of God's presence, and all the good that comes with it, floods the whole world. Can you hear the seraphim crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory?" Take a few moments to join the seraphim in their chorus of praise.

Isaiah then describes something like being in the middle of an earthquake. The song of the seraphim is so thunderous that the temple shakes and fills with smoke. Can you imagine being in an earthquake but feeling completely safe? Can you feel the ground shaking and smell the smoke?

Finally, when Isaiah is in the presence of this holy God, he becomes infinitely aware of his own sinfulness, and that of his own people. He is ruined. He is undone.

On the mountain, we, like Isaiah, catch not only a glimpse of God, but we become incredibly aware that there are places in ourselves that fall far short of God's glory. When has catching a glimpse of God's holiness humbled you and led you to repentance?

Let's read this passage from Isaiah once again.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Merciful God, give us clarity. In this season of repentance and preparation, allow us to see you in all of your unparalleled, incomparable glory and holiness, and give us a right view of our own unholiness. God, we are bold to pray the risky prayer: "Undo us." Help us to see not only our own sins but also where we are complicit in the sins of our community. We ask that we might experience your presence over and over again, that you would become greater in our lives, and that we would become less. May you increase in glory, Lord, and may we grow in humility. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 24 • MARCH 16

WORTHY IS THE LAMB  
REVELATION 5:1-14



We are more than three weeks into our Lenten journey. In many ways, Lent is meant to make us feel helpless and vulnerable.

We begin with Ash Wednesday, when we hear the words: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” In this season, we acknowledge that we are marked by sin and, as a result, death is inevitable. There’s nothing we can do about what awaits us. Lent makes us aware that we are powerless in the face of our own death and devices.

Sit with the idea of your own helplessness. Perhaps you don’t feel helpless at all but instead consider yourself quite capable. Accomplished. Lettered. Qualified. Successful. In a society where we value ambition, self-sufficiency, and competency, vulnerability is hard.

Today, we are going to read Revelation chapter 5. In these verses we will find that as John is confronted with his helplessness, his viewpoint shifts.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Merciful God, remind us that we are utterly dependent on you. No matter how accomplished we are in this life, we are not self-made. You created us from dust. You fashioned us into your image. As your image-bearers, we have so much possibility and potential, and yet we are limited. Help us confront our limitations, admit our weaknesses, and find our strength in you. Amen.*



## DAY 24 • MARCH 16

### SCRIPTURE READING

## REVELATION 5

- 1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.
- 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"
- 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.
- 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.
- 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."
- 6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.
- 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.
- 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.
- 9 And they sang a new song, saying:  
  
"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased for God  
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

## DAY 24 • MARCH 16

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

12 In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!”

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!”

14 The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 24 • MARCH 16

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Re-read verses 1-4.

Consider the scene.

John is in the temple where the one sitting on the throne holds a scroll containing glimpses of God's unfolding plans for the world – his plans for both salvation and judgment. All the promises and purposes of God sealed up, with no one able to open it. John "wept and wept."

Have you ever felt helpless? Have you ever been in a season where you didn't know God's plans for your future and the uncertainty seemed crushing? Take some time to quietly reflect on the experience.

Re-read verses 5-14.

An older leader in the temple interrupted John's weeping by pointing to Jesus, the Lamb who had been slain. This elder didn't placate John's desperation with false encouragement to try harder or to try something different. He pointed him to the one who meets us in our helplessness.

Where do you feel helpless today? Take some time to turn your attention to Jesus, who is on the throne. Let his power, wisdom, and strength interrupt your helplessness. Do you sense the same immense relief John must have felt? As you seek God now, embrace the relief he offers to you.

As you read the passage again, enter into this great spectacle of joyous worship before Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Let's close in prayer. If you are able, kneel before the Lord.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Merciful God, we join the living creatures and elders by proclaiming: You are worthy to take the scroll! You are the worthy Lamb who was slain! You are worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength. Lord, in every area of our lives, we give you all praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 25 • MARCH 17

TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY  
EPHESIANS 1:3-14



Throughout our time today, we will look at a rich passage in the New Testament where praise is the appropriate response to all the ways God gives us access to his presence and shapes us into his people. Let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God – you are eternal, from everlasting to everlasting. As your servant Paul testifies, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. Once again, O Lord, grant us eyes to see and ears to hear you in this time today. Help us to encounter you and to consider the vastness of your work in us and in all creation. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### EPHESIANS 1

- 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
- 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love
- 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—
- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

## DAY 25 • MARCH 17

- 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace
- 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,
- 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,
- 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
- 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,
- 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.
- 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,
- 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 25 • MARCH 17

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

This passage is intentionally arranged to give praise and glory to the three persons of the Trinity. We declare with the church throughout the ages that God is three in one. This mystery will guide our prayers today.

As we journey through Lent, we focus on the particular work of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. But this passage weaves a tapestry of praise toward the unique work of each person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Today we allow this text to shape our thinking about God.

Paul, begins by focusing on the Father. Pay special attention to the various benefits provided by the Father:

**<sup>4</sup>For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.**

In these verses, the Father has:

- Chosen us
- Called us to be holy and blameless, set apart and free from guilt and shame
- Adopted us as sons and daughters
- Poured out his grace

Which of these blessings particularly impacts you today?

- Is it that you have been chosen by God? How does being chosen by God make you feel?
- Maybe you hear the call to be holy and blameless but you feel like your life is anything but. Open yourself again to God's transforming work in your life today and take a moment to talk with God about that.
- Or perhaps you are moved today by your adoption as God's daughter or son. How does it feel to be part of God's family, and for him to be your Heavenly Father?
- Or maybe you are moved to remember and celebrate that God has surrounded you with his freely given grace.

The focus then shifts to Jesus and the benefits that are ours because of his work on our behalf.

**<sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us.**

Here we see:

- Redemption through Jesus' sacrificial death
- Forgiveness of sins
- God's grace lavished on us

Take a moment to thank the Lord for what he has already done for you, and to seek him in those places where you need a fresh outpouring of his freedom, forgiveness, and grace.

Next, we find that unity is a part of Jesus' ministry to us and among us. The diverse Ephesian church was united under Christ. Is God inviting you to be a builder of unity in the church?

Finally, Paul speaks of how the Holy Spirit seals and confirms God's work in our lives:

**<sup>13</sup>When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.**

Take a moment and consider what it means that the Holy Spirit marks your life.

What kind of guarantee has the Holy Spirit spoken over you?

What boldness and confidence does the Holy Spirit offer to you?

Let's close in prayer.

## DAY 25 • MARCH 17

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God.*

*You have chosen me to be your child.*

*You have called me to be holy and blameless.*

*You have forgiven and redeemed me and lavished your grace on me.*

*You have sealed me with your Holy Spirit.*

*You have made a deposit and guaranteed my inheritance in you.*

*You have done all these things so that you might be praised and receive glory, and we sing your praises and give you glory today.*

*Thank you, God, for all these things – give me deep roots in these truths today and make me able to live by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 26 • MARCH 18

SING, SHOUT, AND BOW DOWN!  
PSALM 95



During this unique season in the church calendar, we intentionally interrupt our normal rhythms in order to prepare for and to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus. We fast and abstain from certain things or activities, we reflect on our mortality, we read Scripture that makes us aware of our sinfulness, and we wait in silence.

Today, we will read and reflect on a psalm that will continue to point us toward the themes of Lent, with a special invitation to worship the One who has defeated sin and death in our lives.

Let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Come, Holy Spirit! We are weak, and this season of self-examination and reflection can feel long. Strengthen us and give us grace to never forget that the hard work of acknowledging our own sin begins in your kindness. It is your kindness that leads us to repentance. Sometimes, we notice your kindness all around us, and sometimes we are blind to it. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to see your kindness and to hear your voice in all things today. Soften our hearts, O Lord. Amen.*



## DAY 26 • MARCH 18

### SCRIPTURE READING

## PSALM 95

- 1 Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.
- 3 For the LORD is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.
- 6 Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
- 7 for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care.  
  
Today, if only you would hear his voice,
- 8 “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,  
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,
- 9 where your ancestors tested me;  
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.
- 10 For forty years I was angry with that generation;  
I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray,  
and they have not known my ways.’
- 11 So I declared on oath in my anger,  
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 26 • MARCH 18

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

As we begin Psalm 95, this ancient song opens with an invitation. Consider verses 1-5.

This is an invitation to worship. COME! Sing it out. Shout it out. Join others in song. We are called to be a worshipping people. Worship turns us upward to God in heaven, but also roots us in the world he has created. We are called to come before our Creator, who fills the earth with signs of his greatness, kindness, beauty, majesty, and goodness. As we look up to the mountains, our hearts are filled with wonder. As we look out over the oceans, we pause before their vastness. As we look upon the flowers of the field, we are struck by their splendor and beauty.

When was the last time you were struck by God's creation? When was the last time you looked up into the night sky in wonder at the vastness of all he has made? Or even just walked in a city park and noticed his handiwork?

Has God's goodness in creation ever caused you to sing and shout with wonder?

The psalmist continues with a further invitation. Re-read verses 6-7.

Again, the invitation is clear: COME! Bow down before the creator. Kneel before your Maker. As worshipers, we don't only look up, out, and around, we also look down in humility. Over and over, God's people are invited to bow down in humble adoration.

As we've done several times already this week, if you are able, take a moment to kneel down before God. If you are unable to kneel, place your hands over your chest and bow your head before him. The posture of our physical body really matters. Sometimes, the way we hold ourselves before God communicates something that we cannot say with words alone.

Whatever your posture, continue in a longer moment of quiet. Reflect on this: You are a person in God's pasture, and part of the flock under his care. What does it mean for you to be under the Good Shepherd's care?

Continue to kneel or bow before God as we read the rest of this psalm. Re-read verses 8-11.

Here the psalmist reminds us that worship is more than an exuberant moment or a prayer on our knees. Worship ought to permeate every part of our lives and lead to a posture of humble obedience in every moment of every day.

Hold your life before God. If you've never fully entrusted yourself to Jesus, ask him now to receive you into his rest. Or perhaps, like the people of Israel, you've forgotten God's past mercies toward you and have wandered into a wilderness of your own making. Whatever your situation, open yourself to the Lord, and entrust yourself to his care and direction once again.

Let's read this psalm again, allowing God to meet us as we do.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*We come to you, O God, with hearts full of praise, for you have created all things. We worship you, O God, for we are the people of your pasture, and you care for us so well. We bow before you, O God, for you are our maker, and in you alone do we find rest. We love you, O God, for you have made us able to love, and we again entrust our lives to you. In your name we pray, amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 27 • MARCH 19

PRAISE THE LORD, ALL THE EARTH!  
PSALM 148



Throughout this week of our Lenten journey with Jesus, we have focused on God's glory, in keeping with the glory revealed to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. In today's reading, we find that all of creation is called upon to praise the Lord.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, we come to you in the midst of our ordinary lives and we look to you, the extraordinary King of Glory. We ask, O God, that today you would give us a glimpse of your glory. We turn our hearts to you and lift our voices to praise you, and we join with all creation in reflecting back to you the glory that has its origin in you. And as we glorify you today, O God, we pray that you would renew and refresh us, and shape us more and more into a people who faithfully bring you glory. We pray this in your name. Amen.*

Today, we will read Psalm 148 slowly, even methodically. As you read, notice the words that are repeated and pay attention to the actors being called to participate in this great spectacle of worship.

## SCRIPTURE READING

### PSALM 148

1 Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights above.

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- 2 Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars.
- 4 Praise him, you highest heavens  
and you waters above the skies.
- 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for at his command they were created,
- 6 and he established them for ever and ever—  
he issued a decree that will never pass away.
- 7 Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
- 8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds,  
stormy winds that do his bidding,
- 9 you mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars,
- 10 wild animals and all cattle,  
small creatures and flying birds,
- 11 kings of the earth and all nations,  
you princes and all rulers on earth,
- 12 young men and women,  
old men and children.
- 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
- 14 And he has raised up for his people a horn,  
the praise of all his faithful servants,  
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the LORD.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 27 • MARCH 19

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

This psalmist calls all creation to praise and worship God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the first six verses, all of heaven is called to praise the Lord; then, in the remaining verses, all of earth and its inhabitants are called to the very same thing.

Simply – all of creation is meant to be caught up in the unending worship of the only one who is worthy of all honor, glory, and praise! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

It's worth noting that the first and last line of this song are the same: Praise the Lord! The structure of the psalm itself reflects its message – everything is meant to begin and end with praise.

Take a moment and apply this framework to a typical day. How does your day begin and end? Does it begin with scrolling your social media, reading the overnight news cycle, or maybe catching up on sports? What's the last thought you have as you close your eyes and lay your head on the pillow? How do your days begin and end?

If your day doesn't begin and end with praise, take a moment to consider how your days might be different if you structured them the way this psalm is structured.

What would it change if when you woke up, rather than reaching for your phone and checking your Facebook feed or the news, you made it a point to start by praising God?

How might your sleep patterns change, if instead of going to bed frazzled and frustrated from a long day, you stopped even briefly to praise God?

Perhaps all this talk about praising the Lord makes you a little uneasy. You may wonder, "Must I sing a song when I wake up each morning?" If you like to do that, go for it. But to praise God does not mean you have to sing a song. For you, praise could be as simple as reading a psalm of praise and thanksgiving aloud each morning when you wake up, or offering a simple prayer of your own to the Lord.

Might you commit, perhaps for the rest of Lent, to begin and end each day with praise?

Psalm 148 comes toward the very end of the book of Psalms. There is a movement in this book of hymns, with the last group of psalms acting as a building crescendo of praise. The pace quickens. Excitement grows and there is a sense that everything in this world is joining together before God in praise.

When we praise the Lord, we are never alone. We join in with all of heaven and earth, with all of creation, and with others around the world who honor God, the King of Glory! You are not alone!

Let's read Psalm 148 again, this time with a quicker cadence so that we can experience and participate in the building crescendo of praise. This will serve as our closing prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 29 • MARCH 22

HAVE THIS ATTITUDE IN YOURSELVES...  
PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11



During this fifth week of Lent, we journey with Jesus to the garden of Gethsemane. This is no carefree stroll along beautiful woodland paths. Instead, we join our Lord when he is in deep anguish. At Gethsemane, Jesus is “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” As he agonizes over going to the cross, Jesus begs God to spare him such a fate.

As in all aspects of his perfectly-lived life, Jesus ultimately surrendered his will to his heavenly Father. What motivated Jesus to so faithfully submit to the Father? What instances of wrestling in the face of doing God’s will did Jesus experience along the way? How did he triumph over the very real human weakness that he willingly embraced for our sakes? And what does Jesus’ example mean for us in our own lives? These are the questions we will examine this week.

To begin engaging this chapter of Jesus’ life – one where his humanity and vulnerability is laid bare – let’s pray.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, we are sinful. We are fallible. We are afraid. We are selfish. We are prideful. We are eager to exert our own will. Even when our spirit is willing, our flesh is weak. O Lord, help us!*

*Lord, have mercy! Lord, intervene! Break into our scheming thoughts and pierce our troubled hearts. Keep our eyes fixed on you. No matter how much sacrifice and surrender it requires, help us to do your will.*

*Help us to flee from the tempting yet destructive paths of fear, selfishness, and pride, and turn us instead to your perfect paths and plans. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

## DAY 29 • MARCH 22

### SCRIPTURE READING

## PHILIPPIANS 2

- 1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,
- 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.
- 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
- 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
- 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

## DAY 29 • MARCH 22

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Paul implores the church in Philippi to be like-minded, to have the same love, to be one in spirit, and to be of one mind. God asks the same of us today. In order to faithfully walk this out, we must draw from the love, tenderness, and compassion of Jesus. What are some ways to do this?

Paul also says, "In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Place this command within the context of the current pandemic. What sacrifices have you made in order to highly value others? Whose interests have you looked to – your own, or the most vulnerable among us? Take a moment now to ask God for strength and endurance to keep you on a humble path.

Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." How do you feel about this fact? If Jesus *had* used his equal footing with God to exert his own will, and for his own gain, what might be different about the world today?

Also remember these words of Paul about Jesus: "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!"

This is quite the opposite of exerting one's own will. God desires for all of us to get low and to become obedient to his call – to spend our lives in service to him and to others. What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about this? Spend a few moments in silence, asking God to show you some of the ways he's inviting you into greater humility.

As you read the passage again, pay particular attention to the last few lines that begin with the phrase "that at the name of Jesus..."

We serve a God of power, mystery, and paradox, and he is forever worthy of our adoration and thanksgiving. Jesus' obedience unto death is what conquered it. Our Orthodox brethren put it this way: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death." It is Jesus' humility that has exalted him to the highest place.

Let's close our time in worship. If you are able, bow down. Then, speak praises to God out loud. Proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. Sing a favorite hymn or worship song. Recite a psalm of thanksgiving. Tell him all the ways he's so good to you, to others, and to all of creation.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*



# DAY 30 • MARCH 23

THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME  
JOHN 4:30-34, 5:28-32, 6:35-38



“Not my will, but yours be done.” Mere hours before his unspeakable suffering and gruesome death, these are Jesus’ words of surrender to the Father. These words and posture of heart at such a wrenching time did not spring forth from nowhere. Instead, they were cultivated over a lifetime spent communing with the Father and seeking to please him.

Everything Jesus did, he did because the Father told him to. He is the perfect embodiment of God’s will and the only one who perfectly accomplishes it. Where temptation and sin lead us out of God’s will, this is never the case for Jesus.

Perhaps this is why Jesus often bewildered his disciples and followers, leaving them with more questions than answers. In our own sinfulness and limited understanding, it is sometimes hard to grasp exactly who Jesus is and what he came to do.

In the Gospel of John, which we’ll read from today, Jesus frequently reminds his followers that he’s here to do God’s will. We get to spend our lives discovering more of exactly what that means.

## DAY 30 • MARCH 23

### OPENING PRAYER

*O Lord, we come to you in this moment exactly as we are. We bring any and all confusion, exhaustion, distress, doubt, and distrust. We come with hopes, fears, celebrations, expectations, disappointments, dreams deferred, gratitude, and questions.*

*O Lord, gaze upon us and offer your warm embrace. We melt into your arms. Forgive us our sins. Plant your truth in our hearts and minds. Holy Spirit, reveal more of Jesus Christ's true nature and open us to your will.*

*O Lord, shape our hearts with a desire to please you. We want to be people who follow you and do your will in every area of our lives. Protect us from the evil one and his schemes to take us off the path you put before us.*

*In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Today's readings include three short passages from the Gospel of John. We'll consider each one separately.

### SCRIPTURE READING

## JOHN 4

- 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.
- 31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."
- 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."
- 33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"
- 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 30 • MARCH 23

Here we glimpse the chasm of understanding that exists between Jesus and his followers. The disciples encourage Jesus to do something normal and natural: eat food. Jesus responds by mentioning the supernatural: he is nourished by doing the will of the one who sent him.

In your own life, when has God interrupted the normal and natural with the supernatural?

Consider matters that may once have seemed mysterious to you – the kingdom of God, the will of the Father, and the work of the Spirit. What has God revealed to you about these supernatural things? What nourishment does this knowledge provide to your soul?

### JOHN 5

28 “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice

29 and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

30 By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

31 “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.

32 There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true.

**This too is the word of the Lord.**

“By myself I can do nothing.” What does this statement tell us about Jesus’ connection to the Father?

At Jesus’ baptism, God testified in his favor by saying, “This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well-pleased.” The Father’s love for Jesus preceded any call to action, any fulfillment of God’s grand plan. Yes, Jesus does the will of the one who sent him, but also the will of the one who unconditionally loves him. Receive that same love now; allow the Lord to lavish it upon you.

## DAY 30 • MARCH 23

### JOHN 6

- 35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.
- 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.
- 37 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.
- 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

**And this too is the word of the Lord.**

A few chapters prior to this passage, Jesus offers the woman at the well the water of eternal life. Here, he tells a crowd of followers something similar: I am the bread of life.

What hunger and thirst does Jesus satisfy in you?

The Father gave you to Jesus, and Jesus will never drive you away. Jesus' commitment to do God's will offers to us something precious that can never be taken away: fellowship with the Trinity and a place in God's family.

Rest in this safety now. What is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart?

As you read the passages again, this time read straight through, pay attention to their common thread: Jesus' fierce commitment to doing God's will.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Jesus, give us eyes to see you. Give us faith to believe you are the resurrected Son of God, the One sent to heal us and to heal the whole world.*

*Make us attentive to all the ways your Spirit is still at work today, doing the will of the Father. And when you invite us to partner with you, give us voice to say, "Yes, Lord!"*

*Strengthen us in your love, O God, and keep us close to you. In Christ's name, amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 31 • MARCH 24

THE HUMILITY OF WISDOM  
JAMES 3:13-18



We continue this week's journey with Jesus by considering the humility and obedience he so profoundly expressed at Gethsemane.

These character traits – humility and obedience – point to Jesus' unsurpassed wisdom, which is held up by New Testament authors as a shining standard and example for us all. In his letter to the Colossian church, the Apostle Paul declares that in Jesus "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And in today's text we consider what James calls "the humility of wisdom."

For it is from Jesus alone that we can fully learn the ways of humble wisdom and remain obedient to God in the face of our own Gethsemanes when they come.

Let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*O Lord, we turn to you on this 31st day of Lent and we bow before you in humble worship. Our hearts so often betray us, O God, and as we draw near to you today, we ask that you continue to shape our lives through the example and power of your obedient Son. As we look to you and gaze upon Jesus, would you meet us by your Holy Spirit and impart to us the humility and wisdom that so fully dwells in him. Make us able, O God, to do all that you ask of us with courage and joy, and to become in all our ways more like your beloved Son.*

*We love you, Lord, and we pray in your name. Amen.*

## DAY 31 • MARCH 24

### SCRIPTURE READING

### JAMES 3

- 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.
- 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.
- 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.
- 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.
- 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.
- 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 31 • MARCH 24

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

James, the author of today's text, was Jesus' half-brother and the leader of the Jerusalem church. He wrote this letter during the earliest years of the Christian church, a time when God's people were just learning to walk in the ways of Jesus without Jesus himself there to teach them and show them. James was martyred in A.D. 62.

Consider that James was willing to give his own life for the sake of his faith in Jesus. Imagine what must have been true of James' own faith and internal sense of conviction to have done this.

One of the central themes of James is the inseparable connection between our hearts and our words and deeds. To James, for wisdom to be real it must be lived and not merely believed. And for wisdom to be lived, it must spring from the condition of our heart.

Take a moment to open yourself to God – to unflinchingly allow him to gaze upon you and shine his light on what is inside of your heart today. What do you notice?

James writes of "bitter envy and selfish ambition," and says that such things are ultimately demonic in origin and give birth only to chaos and evil.

Ask God to reveal anyone who you might be bitter toward or jealous of in some way.

Now, ask God to shine his light on your present desires and ambitions. Consider whether they align with the humility and obedience Jesus demonstrates to us.

As God reveals any incidents or patterns of sin to you, simply acknowledge them honestly, and ask him to forgive you and take them from you.

Toward the end of this passage, James speaks of the "wisdom that comes from heaven" – literally, the "wisdom from above." He describes this wisdom using the same word Jesus uses to describe the spiritual rebirth that we must undergo in order to see the kingdom of God – we must be "born from above."

Reflect on your own journey of faith. How did you first come to be "born from above?" If you do not yet consider yourself a follower of Jesus, take a moment to ask him for new life, and commit yourself to pursuing the "wisdom that comes from heaven."

As you read the words of James again, focus especially on the qualities of this "wisdom that comes from heaven" – it is peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, search our hearts, and give us the wisdom that comes from heaven. Deliver us from all hypocrisy and belligerence, and from all selfishness and pride. Make us gentle, merciful, impartial, and sincere. Give us the good seed of your kingdom and help us sow it in ways that bring you glory and honor. Give us courage to be peacemakers who never shrink back from your good work in the world. And by your mercy, Lord, may you bear a rich harvest of righteousness in us and through us, unto ages of ages. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 32 • MARCH 25

FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS  
HEBREWS 12:1-10



We continue today reflecting on the example of Jesus as he journeyed to, and through, the garden of Gethsemane. It is on him that we fix our eyes today.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, have mercy!*

*We remember today the words of Ash Wednesday, that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. We remember our own frailties, our own failures, and our own fickleness – we are so quick to leave you, Lord, and to strike out on our own. Forgive us, Lord!*

*But because of your faithful love, O Father in heaven, we still belong to you. Even in our weakness, you hold us fast. Even in our sin, you guide us with your loving hand, for we are your children. We thank you, Lord, for your love, and for your correction. We are yours!*

*As we come to you, O God, we again boldly ask for your Holy Spirit. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, fill us and empower us to walk in joyful obedience to you, even as he did. Meet us in this time, O Lord – meet us in this time! For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.*

*Amen.*



## DAY 32 • MARCH 25

### SCRIPTURE READING

## HEBREWS 12

- 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,
- 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.
- 4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.
- 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,  
"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
- 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."
- 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?
- 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.
- 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!
- 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 32 • MARCH 25

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

This passage follows immediately after the celebrated “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11, where the author recounts the exploits of dozens of the saints of old as they faithfully pursued God, even when it cost them dearly. Hebrews 12 opens with us surrounded by this “great cloud of witnesses” – those who have gone before us in the life of faith.

Call to mind some past heroes of the faith – both from the Scriptures and from your own life with God – and imagine them surrounding you in a great stadium, cheering you on as you run your own race of faith. How does it feel to not be alone?

Now imagine what you are wearing and carrying. Picture yourself wearing heavy boots, winter clothes, and an overcoat. You carry several full bags of groceries, and you have an overflowing backpack on your back.

Sin and other entanglements are like these heavy clothes and burdens – they get in the way of running the race God sets before us. Ask God to reveal any sin or unnecessary commitments that make it harder for you to live out your life of faith.

Now, ask God to help you “throw off” anything you sense is hindering your life with him. Imagine tossing these sins and unnecessary burdens aside as you name them before God.

The rest of this passage urges two things – to look to Jesus as our example, and to yield ourselves to the loving discipline and training of the Lord. We are told to fix our eyes on Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of faith,” that we might be encouraged by both his joy and his perseverance as we strive against sin and seek to obey God as he did.

Imagine now Jesus before you, perhaps struggling in Gethsemane. What does it mean for him to experience joy as he considers the cross awaiting him? Let this surprising joy surround and strengthen you in this time.

As you read the passage again, invite God to speak into the hardships you face in your own journey with Jesus. What word of encouragement does he have for you? Where do you see God’s loving discipline at work in your life?

Let’s close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Thank you, Lord, that we are not alone. We rejoice that the race we run has been run before, and we savor the gift of past and present companions in our faith. Thank you, Lord, that we are not alone.*

*We look to you, Jesus, who has gone before us, O pioneer and perfecter of faith. We worship you in your glory and imitate you in your obedience. Give us your joy as we strive against sin that so easily entangles. Make us able to resist, even when it hurts. We look to you, Jesus!*

*We receive your love, dear Father in heaven, and we yield to your discipline. Make our hearts tender as a ripe peach and our lives pliable in your loving hands. Let us share in your holiness, O Father of spirits, and give us life! Yes, Lord, we receive your love.*

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 33 • MARCH 26

COMMITTING OURSELVES TO OUR FAITHFUL CREATOR  
1 PETER 4:12-19



Faith is better understood as a verb than a noun. It is more of a process than a possession. We have faith, but daily we are “faithing.” Faith is like a journey without a clear and obvious map. Instead, there’s a good and faithful guide to accompany us.

The Apostle Peter wrote to encourage scattered believers who were experiencing trial and temptation as a result of their faith in Jesus. His words offer encouragement to us as well. Peter says that as we experience difficulty in bearing witness to the Good News of Jesus, we can entrust ourselves to our good and faithful Creator; he alone makes it possible for us to suffer well.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Dear God,*

*These are days when our prayers seem to rise no higher than the ceiling.*

*Uncertainty, disappointment, frustration, and distraction press upon us and seem to fill each hour of the day.*

*Like a road that never bends, waiting stretches before us.*

*People all around us suffer...  
From sickness,  
poverty,  
broken trust,  
loneliness,  
empty promises,  
and hatred.*

## DAY 33 • MARCH 26

*And we often feel more fickle than faithful,  
more discouraged than encouraged,  
and more callous than charitable.*

*So help us to pray, O Lord, in this time of suffering and waiting.  
Help us to pray, O Lord, when our doubts won't go away.  
Help us to pray, O Lord, when our souls sigh in ways too deep for words.*

*And with your help, and in our weakness, we choose again to entrust ourselves,  
our loved ones, our church, and our world to you. For you are our good and  
faithful Father, and we love you.*

*Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE READING

## 1 PETER 4

- 12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.
- 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.
- 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.
- 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.
- 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.
- 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

## DAY 33 • MARCH 26

18 And,

“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

19

So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Peter reminds us not to be surprised when we face challenges – and even suffering – as we live and bear witness for Jesus. This is a normal state of affairs for followers of Christ. Peter instead encourages us to adopt a posture of joy, for God is with us in our trials, and his glory will soon be revealed.

God is mysteriously and miraculously able to meet us in our sufferings and even to make us able to find deep meaning in them. And because Christ went before us and suffered in and for the sake of the world, he is Emmanuel – God with us – even in our sufferings. The Spirit of glory and of God rests on those who participate in the sufferings of Christ.

Peter understood that suffering is part of the Christian journey. In order to experience it as even remotely worth rejoicing in, however, believers must trust in God to renew their strength and to provide wisdom and resilience to endure persecution and to persevere in doing good.

What form does your suffering for Christ take? How has suffering for Christ changed your life for the better?

Take a few moments to share with the Lord what you need from him in order to persevere today.

Peter counsels us to entrust ourselves to God as we navigate suffering for the sake of Christ. This week, how has trusting Jesus brought comfort and assurance to you? What would you like to say to God about any trials you are now experiencing because of your faith in Him?

Let’s close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Dear God,*

*Grant us the grace to entrust ourselves to you as we accept the suffering that comes our way because we follow you. For the tasks and challenges that lie ahead, breathe the power of the Holy Spirit into us. And accept our gratitude for being counted worthy to share with you in suffering for our world, so broken and so lost, and yet so loved by you. May you receive both glory and honor as we follow in your steps. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 35 • MARCH 29

RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF  
2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-21



There are four books in the New Testament that each tell their own version of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. They are known as the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. What is remarkable is that 29 of the 89 chapters, or a third of the Gospels, focus on Jesus' last week of life.

Today we begin what the church historically calls Holy Week. We will focus on the events in Jerusalem during the last week of Jesus' life. What makes this week so important for Christians? It depicts the heart of Jesus' mission: reconciliation. Christ sacrifices his life for our sins on a stark cross, making our reconciliation with God possible.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Dear God,*

*Root in my mind an awareness of your sacrifice for my sin.  
Root in my soul a burden over your sacrifice for my sin.  
Root in my heart true anguish over your sacrifice for my sin.  
And root in my spirit your love through your sacrifice for my sin.*

*Then,*

*Touch me with newness of life  
as I receive your sacrifice for my sin.*

*Touch me with joy  
as I embrace your sacrifice for my sin.*

*Touch me with freedom  
as I am shaped by your sacrifice for my sin.*

## DAY 35 • MARCH 29

*And touch me with gratitude  
as I savor your sacrifice for my sin.*

*Stir in me a sense of wonder that I am a new creation,  
restored as your beloved child.*

*Thank you, Lord. I am yours. Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE READING

## 2 CORINTHIANS 5

- 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.
- 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.
- 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.
- 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
- 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:
- 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.
- 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.
- 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 35 • MARCH 29

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

The phrase “passion of Christ,” derived from the Latin *patior*, meaning “suffer,” refers to those sufferings our Lord endured for us to be reconciled to God – from the agony in the garden of Gethsemane until his death on the cross. How much of your Christian life is spent considering the suffering and work of Christ on the cross for your sins? When was the last time you were moved by the thought that Jesus died to reconcile you to God?

Paul says that the love of Christ compels us – it moves us outward in loving action toward the world. In what ways do you sense God’s compelling love at work in you today?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 again.

The Apostle Paul speaks of your life being remade into a new creation. During this season of Lent, where do you see evidence of this reconciling and transformative work of Jesus Christ?

God’s reconciling work is intended for you but also for the whole of his world. During these days of disruption and uncertainty, people’s anxiety manifests as anger, hatred, conspiracy theories, and even violence. In this world that is so lost, yet so loved by God, we are called to be Christ’s ambassadors. To whom is God asking you to represent his Good News of reconciliation? Take some time to pray for those the Holy Spirit brings to mind.

Let’s close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

O God:

*You have a vision for restoring my life that far exceeds my own vision for my life.*

*I thank you for shaping me by faith into a new creation.*

*You have a vision for restoring your world that far exceeds my own vision for your world.*

*Bless your faithfulness to rescue a world awash in rebellion.*

*Nurture in me newness of life.*

*Set me free from the tyrannies  
of baseless suspicions,  
and of complaining  
and blaming.*

*Release me from the oppression  
of selfishness,  
and pride,  
and vanity.*

*Restore to me your heart of reconciliation for your world,  
that I might feel the heartbeat of your grace,  
and see your vision for a world made new,  
and join with you to bring healing to this world,  
for your honor and your glory. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and  
forever. Amen.*



# DAY 36 • MARCH 30

A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST  
HEBREWS 2:9-18



Jesus is a merciful and faithful high priest who stands as a bridge between people and the Father. He is the way. Today, on this second day of Holy Week, and in these final days leading up to Easter, we consider how Jesus makes that way through his suffering and death.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Merciful and faithful Lord, meet us in this time. As we approach these final days of Lent, capture our hearts once again with the beauty and fullness of Jesus' work on our behalf. Grip us with the great lengths you have gone to so that we can know the Father and rest in his love. And let your Holy Spirit fall on us once again, that we might be filled and nourished by your mercy and faithfulness.*

*In your name we pray, O Lord. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### HEBREWS 2

- 9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
- 10 In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.

## DAY 36 • MARCH 30

11 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

12 He says,

“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”

13 And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again he says,

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.”

14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—

15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants.

17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 36 • MARCH 30

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

This passage begins by celebrating Jesus, who for our sake took a lowly position and even suffered an ignominious death. Meditate on the author's words: Jesus "suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

One of the recurring refrains of Lent is that we are called to remember our own mortality. Death is inevitable and unavoidable for us all. And yet Jesus, the immortal one, willingly "tasted death" for us, that we might be free of its power. Consider what it might have been like for Jesus to *willingly* taste death on our behalf. How does this impact you?

The passage goes on to speak of Jesus as the pioneer of our salvation, and that he went before us so that we too could become children of God. He is even unashamed to call us his "brothers and sisters." Ponder the almost scandalous fact that Jesus considers us his sisters and brothers. How does this feel?

But beyond Jesus standing and suffering in our place, he also broke the "power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil ..." Jesus has disarmed the devil of all power. He is the victorious Christ – Christus Victor – over not only our own individual sin, but over the entire kingdom of darkness. Let that reality sink in for a few moments.

Jesus broke Satan's power not in some abstract way, but that he might "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." It is as though Jesus breached the walls and bars of a prison where we were bound, and that we now stream into the streets, rejoicing. Death and the power of darkness have lost their hold on us! And we are called to join with Jesus, who has pioneered the way before us in this great work of salvation and liberation in the world, freeing captives from all that Satan has bound them with.

Take a moment to savor this freedom – and this calling – that is yours. Perhaps this is a struggle because you don't feel particularly free from the fear of death yourself, especially given the global pandemic. Or perhaps you don't feel particularly equipped or powerful to follow Jesus in the work of salvation and liberation. Ask the Lord to minister to you in this exact moment – offer all of your hopes and fears to him. Notice what he asks you to receive and savor today.

In his death Jesus became "a merciful and faithful high priest" who atones for our sins. Atonement simply means to pay the necessary reparations for an offense. Our sin created a yawning chasm between us and God. Jesus bridges it by paying for the offense. He offers himself on our behalf to make reparations and to reach across that chasm.

Wherever you find yourself today – whether walking across this bridge for the first or the thousandth time – take some time to embrace what Jesus has done for you. Enter God's presence and ask him – our great high priest – to extend his mercy to you.

Read the passage of Hebrews again.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Jesus you are merciful and faithful, not only to forgive us our sins but to bring us into the Father's presence. You took on our humanity, you were tempted as we are, and yet you triumphed over the devil as we could not. You have trampled down the power of darkness by your death, and we praise you today, O Lord!*

*And we rejoice, Lord Jesus, that we no longer need to fear death, and that we can experience deep renewal and rekindled hope because of you. Where we have failed to trust you, Lord, grant us your power to overcome. Where we are afraid, Lord, give us hope. And equip us, Lord, to join you in the work of salvation and liberation in the world, and in bringing your freedom from Satan's power to all people.*

*Come, Holy Spirit! It is by your power, through the work of Jesus, that we bring this prayer before our faithful Father in heaven. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 37 • MARCH 31

THE SUFFERING SERVANT  
ISAIAH 52:13-53:12



As we continue today on our journey through Holy Week, we step into a sacred text that evokes both horror and awe. This depiction of Christ, the suffering servant, was written centuries before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

As we prepare to engage this depiction of Jesus suffering on our behalf, let's pray.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Oh, God, give us fresh eyes to see Jesus as a suffering servant. As we read these words from Isaiah today, allow them to soak into our souls. Give us insight into the great mission of our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Give us grace to remember that when we feel forgotten or rejected, Jesus is acquainted with these feelings. Make us contrite when faced with your suffering and fill us with the wonder of your loving willingness to suffer on our behalf. Amen.*

Today's reading is from Isaiah 52 and 53. As you read, pay attention to the words or phrases that stand out to you, and let God press upon you the weightiness of what the Suffering Servant has done.

## SCRIPTURE READING

### ISAIAH 52

13 See, my servant will act wisely;  
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

## DAY 37 • MARCH 31

14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him—  
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being  
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

15 so he will sprinkle many nations,  
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.  
For what they were not told, they will see,  
and what they have not heard, they will understand.

### ISAIAH 53

1 Who has believed our message  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

## DAY 37 • MARCH 31

- 7 He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.
- 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
Yet who of his generation protested?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was punished.
- 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
- 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.
- 11 After he has suffered,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.
- 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 37 • MARCH 31

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What words or phrases from this passage stand out? Turn them over in your heart and mind.

Do you feel the heaviness of the passage? Can you envision Jesus, the Suffering Servant, “rejected,” in agonizing “pain,” “pierced for our transgression,” and “crushed” for our sins?

Or maybe you are struck by the silence – those moments when the servant didn’t open his mouth?

The scene portrayed here is both shocking and comforting.

Consider the exchanges detailed in the passage:

His wounds, our healing  
His punishment, our peace  
His life a sin offering, ours crowned with righteousness

Which exchange speaks most deeply to your heart?

As you read the passage again, steep in the fullness of the great exchange that was made for our benefit.

When you feel rejection, pain, or an impossibly heavy burden, Jesus empathizes. His ability to empathize with us in every way, yet without sin, is exactly what makes the great exchange possible. This is what we lean toward during Holy Week.

May Jesus Christ meet you with the grace of his great exchange today.

Let’s close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Jesus – you suffered on our behalf. You experience the depth of our rejection, our pain, our sadness, and our affliction. You do not deserve any of it. Yet, you stood on our behalf. You were crushed on our behalf. Because God so loved the world, you stepped into a mission to rescue all people. Increase our understanding of the great exchange that took place through your suffering. Increase the hope that we have as a result! Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 38 • APRIL 1

MAUNDY THURSDAY: A NEW COMMANDMENT  
JOHN 13:1-17, 34-35



During this sixth and final week of Lent, we've focused on Jesus' journey to the cross. Today we specifically recognize the Christian tradition of Maundy Thursday, commemorating the time Jesus spent with his disciples just before his crucifixion.

Let's begin with prayer.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, come. Open our minds and our hearts to hear your word afresh. On this Maundy Thursday, we ask you to renew in us a love for one another and to remind us of your deep love for your people. We pray that, like the disciples, we can continue to grow to love you more and more, and therefore better love those around us. Speak to us, today, Jesus. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

### JOHN 13

- 1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
- 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.
- 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;



## DAY 38 • APRIL 1

- 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.
- 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.
- 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
- 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."
- 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."  
  
Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."
- 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"
- 10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."
- 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.
- 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.
- 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.
- 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.
- 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

## DAY 38 • APRIL 1

16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 38 • APRIL 1

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Jesus spends his last moments before his crucifixion in a small room with his closest friends – one of whom has plotted to betray him – pouring out his heart. He knows that in a matter of hours Peter will deny him not once, but three times, and still, he teaches and demonstrates love, care, and compassion – stooping even to the position of washing his friends' feet, even friends whom he knew would fail him.

The word "maundy" in "Maundy Thursday" is taken from the Latin word meaning "mandate" or "commandment." One of the best parts of Jesus' teaching is that he is always the first to model his mandates. He casts out demons, preaches the Good News, and heals lepers in front of his disciples before he commands them to do the same. And now, he bends low to show them what it means to love someone. We hear all the time that "God is love;" in Jesus we see that God is love. And the love of Jesus is not mere sentimentality, but is humble, gritty, and oriented toward action. It wipes caked dirt from someone's feet. It takes the posture of a servant.

At the beginning of this passage, John says, "Having loved his own who were in the world, [Jesus] loved them to the end." As followers of Jesus, we too are Christ's own who are in the world, and he loves us to the end. He loves us all the way to the cross – into our deepest sin – and out the other side to his victorious resurrection.

Picture yourself as Peter, having your feet washed by Jesus. How would you respond to this kind of love?

When we are washed by Jesus, we experience a radical transformation that empowers us to pour out Christ's love upon others. Jesus spoke to the disciples after washing Peter's feet, saying "wash one another's feet," and then, "a new commandment I give you: *Love one another*. As I have loved you, so you must *love one another*. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you *love one another*." Three times Jesus tells us, his disciples, to love one another.

Ask God to reveal in your heart a circumstance where he is asking you to better love someone. Maybe it's regarding a mere annoyance with someone close to you, or maybe it's a call to surrender a deep wound to God so that he can heal you and help you forgive the one who hurt you. Bring this person to God and ask him to place in you his love for them.

As you read the text again, simply let it settle in your spirit as you prepare to step into the rest of your day.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord, we come to you grateful for your deep and abiding love for us. We ask you to weave this commandment to love one another into our hearts, into our homes, into our local churches, and into the Body of Christ throughout the world. As your church around the world considers this passage today, let us remember and be reinvigorated to love one another well, so that the world may also know your love. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*

# DAY 39 • APRIL 2

## GOOD FRIDAY

IT IS FINISHED  
JOHN 19:17-42



Our Lenten journey with Jesus ends at the cross as we join with the global church in remembering Christ's death. Let's begin with prayer.

### OPENING PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, come. Teach us all that this day means. As we consider your cross, remind us that this is the place where we are forgiven, made whole, and dressed in your righteousness. Because of what you have done for us, Jesus, we can experience the height, the depth, and the breadth of God's everlasting love and grace. Amen.*

### SCRIPTURE READING

## JOHN 19

- 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).
- 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.
- 19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

## DAY 39 • APRIL 2

### GOOD FRIDAY

- 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.
- 21 The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."
- 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."
- 23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.
- 24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."
- This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,
- "They divided my clothes among them  
and cast lots for my garment."
- So this is what the soldiers did.
- 25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.
- 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son,"
- 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.
- 28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

## DAY 39 • APRIL 2

### GOOD FRIDAY

- 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.
- 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
- 31 Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.
- 32 The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.
- 33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.
- 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.
- 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.
- 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken,"
- 37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."
- 38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

## DAY 39 • APRIL 2

### GOOD FRIDAY

- 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.
- 40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.
- 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.
- 42 Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

**This is the word of the Lord.**

## DAY 39 • APRIL 2

# GOOD FRIDAY

### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Jesus' death is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. This day, Good Friday, that tore open the heavens and shook the earth's foundation was planned from the very beginning. Jesus Christ, Son of God, gave up his life for us. He fulfilled every promise of God by taking every blow that we deserved. This includes not only death, but separation from God, which is the ultimate form of loneliness and despair.

Imagine you are one of the three women at the foot of the cross – Jesus' close family and friends. You waited for this man to bring salvation to your people – you gave up everything to follow him. This moment feels like the death of hope. Sit in the grief of this day. Imagine how different the world would be, how different your world would be, if this was the end of the story.

Now, focus on Jesus' own perspective – the One who knew the story from its beginning, who participated in the creation of the world itself. His dying words are, "It is finished." *It is finished.* What do those words stir in you today? Open your hands; ask God to speak as you meditate on those three words.

As you read the passage again, allow John's testimony to press upon you the reality of Jesus' death as we prepare for Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

Let's close in prayer.

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Jesus – thank you for the cross. Thank you for carrying the burden for us, for showing us the capacity of your love, justice, and grace. O Lord, you are holy. On this Good Friday, we join with the church around the world to worship you. Together we await your triumph over the grave. Amen.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.*