



***A TIME  
TO RETURN***

Lent Devotional Readings

A Time to Return: Lent Devotional Readings

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO LENT

## Why Celebrate Lent?

Today is Mardi Gras! For some that means nothing. For those of us in New Orleans, it means the end of Festival season, a time to eat King Cake, enjoy parades, and spend time with friends and family. If you are familiar with the liturgical or church calendar, you also know that tomorrow begins the season of Lent. While some consider Lent to be something only Roman Catholics participate in, Lent is actually a season that the Christian church has been practicing for some time. In the early church, pastors called their people to seasons of fasting, prayer, and giving to mature them in their faith. This call often coincided with catechism, or a period of training newly converted individuals would go through prior to their baptism. The church was also known to pray and fast prior to Easter. These traditions culminated into the season of Lent which became an official season of the church during the reign of Emperor Constantine who made Christianity a legal religion and later the religion of the Roman Empire.

1700 years later Christians still participate in Lent. For many Protestant Christians, however, Lent is looked upon with suspicion because of its ties to Roman Catholicism. When properly understood, Lent can be a very practical and spiritually nourishing period.

So, why celebrate Lent? Perhaps you've grown up participating in Lent or maybe this is the first you've heard of it. I want to encourage you to celebrate Lent this year. Why? Because the season of Lent is an opportunity to turn toward the Lord, humble ourselves, and pursue him. Will you celebrate Lent this year?

## How Will You Celebrate Lent?

I want to encourage you to celebrate Lent in four ways:

1. **FAST** The Lent season is often known for fasting. Fasting is defined as "a Christians' voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes."<sup>1</sup> Many also fast not only from food but other items they rely on and enjoy, like technology. We fast for several reasons, including: to strengthen prayer (Ezra 8:23), to seek God's guidance (Acts 14:23), to express grief (2 Samuel 1:11–12), to seek deliverance and protection (Ezra 8:21–23), to express repentance and return to God (Jonah 3:5–8), to humble oneself before God (Psalm 35:13), to express concern for the work of God (Daniel 9:3), to minister to the needs of others (Isaiah 58:6–7), to overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God (Matthew 4:1–11), and to express love and worship to God (Luke 2:37).<sup>2</sup>

Not only are there different reasons to fast, there are also different ways to fast. First, there is the partial fast—cutting out part of your diet such as sugar, desserts, alcohol, meat, caffeine, or dairy products. Here you can also cut out the things that distract you like social media, movies, texting, etc. With the partial fast, you will remove whatever element you choose from your life for 6 days. On Sunday, because it is the Lord's Day, you can choose to break from your fast and thank the Lord for his provision. There is also the *whole fast*—skipping entire meals for a short period of time. Here you might choose to fast on certain days of the week during Lent. Instead of fasting for an entire day, you might skip a meal once a week. For the whole fast, you might want to consider fasting on Good Friday.

Above all, remember why you are fasting. Think back to the reasons just mentioned for fasting. During Lent, we should fast to humble ourselves before God, express repentance over our sin, and place our trust in the Lord alone.

2. **PRAY** One of the greatest means of communication the Lord has given us is prayer. We should never get over the incredible blessing we have in prayer. The season of Lent should be an intentional time focused on prayer. If you pray often, I would encourage you to increase your prayers during Lent. If you don't pray, begin to pray. The focus should not be on whether you have prayed but on communing with the Lord. Carve out time during Lent to put yourself in a setting where you can experience silence and solitude. As you get alone, simply be with the Lord.
3. **BE GENEROUS** One element of Lent the church has continued to practice is almsgiving. In our modern world, this means simply to be generous. During Lent find ways to be generous with everything you have. Open your home to more guests, practicing generous hospitality. Make "Blessing Bags" and regularly distribute them to the homeless. Designate an extra financial gift to your church. During Lent remember that the Lord has been incredibly generous to you through the gift of his Son. Fight to be generous with your resources as an act of worship.
4. **MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE** During Lent it is important to mediate on Scripture—particularly Scripture's teaching on sin, God's goodness, Jesus our response to God and our sin, and the need for the church. The purpose of this devotional is to drive you to Scripture, to mediate on Scripture, and apply it to your life.



Remember why we celebrate Lent. This is not a religious holiday for us to simply go through the motions. This is a 40-day period set aside to abide with Christ. It's a time for us to immerse ourselves in the love of God. Let's experience the presence of Christ like never before this Lent season.

<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 160.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 164–178



Week 1

# ASH WEDNESDAY

*Matthew 4:1–11*

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.... And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

Throughout the history of Israel, fasting was an integral part of religious life. Israelites would fast on several occasions. In Matthew 4:1–11, Jesus is led into wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the Devil. In the midst of all of this, Matthew tells us Jesus had been fasting for forty days and forty nights. This moment is so important for Jesus. His ministry has just begun with his baptism in Matthew 3. Rather than run off to begin teaching, healing, and performing miracles, he fasts. He prays. He experiences the wilderness. Notice two very important truths. First, it is the Spirit of God who leads Jesus out into the wilderness. Second, notice that in the face of great temptation, the very thing Jesus does is fast.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of our 40-Day Lent season. While there is nothing particularly special about this season, Lent is a time when Christians all over the world focus their attention on Jesus and his journey to the cross. As we look to Jesus, we turn from our sin and turn toward our glorious savior who defeated sin, death, and hell. As we begin Lent, perhaps God is calling you into a season in the wilderness where your only strength will come from the Lord. What will you give up during this season to look more intently on Jesus. Will you allow God to use this Lent season to transform you more and more into the image of his Son, Jesus? As Jesus entered the wilderness fasting, let's enter into this season of Lent, fasting from those things that distract us, and look to Jesus our Lord and Savior.

## **Reflection**

1. What is the Lord calling you to give up this Lent season so that you might focus on Jesus more?
2. How are you hoping the Lord will use Lent to grow you in your faith?
3. How might these next forty days be like a wilderness for you?

# REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

Thursday

Genesis 1:26–31

*Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*

When looking at the context and verses prior to Genesis 1:26–31, we see God creating the heavens, land, water, vegetation, evening, morning, the sun, moon and stars, sea creatures, birds, and other various animals. Although these are all great things, only one element was missing: humanity. God saved the creation of humanity as the last element of his glorious design. When looking through Genesis 1, we do not see God referring to any other element of his creation as being made in “our image, after our likeness.” You also do not see God giving dominion to the animals or anything else, but to humanity only. This is not just a coincidence, but it has great purpose and intention for us today.

As Lent season has begun, there are many things to consider and reflect on. Today, let's consider God's special, unique purpose for creating humanity in his image. The God of the universe created me and you with great purpose and significance. In the midst of life, it can be difficult to remember this truth. Clinging to the promises of God, and the truths of His Word is easier said than done. Take a moment to think about some things in your life that bring distractions and discouragements your way which may pull you away from the promise that you are “made in the image of God.” Once you identify those triggers, begin to identify ways to remind yourself of the truths of Genesis 1:26–31. In order to truly reflect on God in his fullness throughout this season, we must first recognize who we are in him. This truth is a foundation to everything else!

## **Reflection**

1. What are some things in your life that pull you away from these truths?
2. What are some steps you can take in your life to regularly remind yourself of God's significant purpose for you?
3. Close in prayer, asking God to help give you this perspective moving forward through the Lent season.

# THE BEGINNING OF OUR BROKENNESS

Friday

Genesis 3:1–24

*Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'*

Yesterday we saw how God's creation was very good. We saw how we are the pinnacle of creation, being the only thing on the face of the earth created in the image of God. If only the story ended there. Unfortunately we come to Genesis 3 and the beginning of our brokenness. God created each one of us to live in relationship with him; however, that relationship came with boundaries. Think about any relationship you have. You have "rules" that govern and manage that relationship. Surely a relationship with the God and Creator of the universe also has these boundaries. God simply asked the first humans, Adam and Eve, to obey him and not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In Genesis 3, we meet our adversary, the Devil. The Devil came and tempted Adam and Eve, causing doubt to creep into their minds. The Devil caused them to doubt one of the most significant truths—God's goodness.

Adam and Eve were tempted to believe that perhaps God didn't have their best in mind. Perhaps God had lied about the tree and its fruit. Perhaps God didn't want their best. Perhaps he didn't love them like he said he did. What sad and terrible lies. Unfortunately Adam and Eve believed the lies of the Enemy and disobeyed God. Sin entered the universe. We became broken people. During this Lent season, we remember our brokenness. We remember that we are sinners separated from God. We remember that we are desperately lost without our God. How hopeless would we be if the story ended with Genesis 3? But we know the end of the story. In fact, God promised victory over this brokenness in Genesis 3. The first glimpse of the gospel we see is in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." Thousands of years later, Eve's son would be born. His name is Jesus, and through his death and resurrection, he would bruise the head and defeat the Devil.

Yes, we are broken people. But Jesus is victorious. Live in his victory today!

## **Reflection**

1. Where do you find your identity—In your sin and brokenness or in Jesus?
2. How incredible is it to know that thousands of years before Jesus came, God had planned to save his people! Take a moment to thank God for sending Jesus.
3. Who in your life is stuck in their brokenness? Who in your life needs hope? Go today and tell them of the hope they can have in Jesus.



# ENCOURAGEMENT IN CHRIST

Saturday

Philippians 2:1–11

*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Today is Saturday. Tomorrow is Sunday. Sunday is an important day. It's the Lord's Day, the day each week the church has gathered to worship Jesus for almost 2,000 years. Two things are very important. First, during this season of Lent we cannot take our eyes off of Jesus. Scriptures like Philippians 2:1–11 are such great reminders of the person and work of Jesus. Paul tells us so much about Jesus. He tells us of Jesus's divinity ("he was in the form of God"). He shares that, despite his divinity, Jesus chose to humble himself, become human, and come to earth. Jesus humbled himself in the most profound way—execution by means of crucifixion, a death penalty reserved for the worst of criminals. Remember, Jesus was innocent; yet he chose to humbly die for you and I. During this season, let us not forget the sacrifice of Christ, and its glorious result of freeing us from sin.

For Paul, Jesus also serves as an example. In the beginning of Philippians 2, Paul encourages them to have love, affection, and sympathy for one another. Why? Because Jesus himself exhibited this kind of behavior for others. Tomorrow is Sunday, the Lord's Day. Don't neglect meeting with the brothers and sisters of Christ. As you meet with other believers, strive to be like Jesus: "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). This Lent season, may the world look to us, the church, and only see Jesus and his love for the world.

## **Reflection**

1. Why did Jesus humble himself and come to earth?
2. How did Jesus live a humble life?
3. As you think about Jesus's life, how can you become more humble and loving of others?

SUNDAY

Welcome

**REST & WORSHIP**  
*with the church*





Week **2**

# ONCE DEAD

Monday

Ephesians 2:1–3

*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.*

One of the purposes of Lent is to remind us of our sin and brokenness. While we should not be morbidly obsessed with our sin, especially when we are now in Christ, we should have a healthy understanding of who we were when we were lost in our sin. Ephesians 2:1–3 paints a rather grim picture for us. Prior to Jesus, we were dead in our sin. Dead—meaning no life. What a sad reality. We walked around following the world and pursuing the passions of our flesh. We wanted what we wanted regardless of what God thought about it. Not only were we dead in sin, but we were also “children of wrath.” While God loved us, his wrath burned hot against our sin. You see, God is pure and holy. Sin is the opposite of who God is. The two cannot mix. Therefore when we were dead in sin, we were literally enemies of God.

What a grim reality. Thankfully, in Jesus we are no longer dead to sin. We are no longer children of wrath. We are now children of the king and heirs to his kingdom. When we remember our sin and how far God has brought us, we remember how incredible his love and mercy is. We realize how great a gift Jesus is to us. We are led to a place of honor and worship, thanking God for not leaving us dead in our sin but bringing us to life in his Son. We were once dead, but now we are alive. During this season of Lent, let's remember our sin, not to obsess over it but to obsess over the God who loves us and sent his Son, Jesus, to bring us back to life.

## **Reflection**

1. Who were you in your sin without Jesus?
2. Who are you now in Christ?
3. When was the last time you confessed your sin to God? Take some time to confess your sin to God, asking for his forgiveness from unconfessed sin you have committed.

# TOO GOOD FOR US

Tuesday

Psalm 86

*But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

Lent is a perfect time to be reminded of God's love. During Lent we anticipate God's greatest demonstration of his love—the death and resurrection of Jesus. No other two events have more clearly shown the love of God. We cannot forget that God himself is the source of love. Love is not just an action or feeling of God. Love is actually his nature (1 John 4:8). In Psalm 86 we read of God's love for us. The psalmist describes God in so many ways: good, gracious, abounding in steadfast love, one who answers, great, doer of wondrous deeds, merciful, faithful, helper, and comforter. No doubt, God is good to us.

One particular phrase, however, sticks out: "abounding in steadfast love." Steadfast love is a translation of the Hebrew word, *hesed*, which is God's covenant love. In the *Jesus Storybook Bible*, Sally Lloyd-Jones defines this covenant love as "a Never Stopping, Never Giving up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love." What a definition! Simply put, we cannot out run God's love. The moment you think you are too sinful for God to love you is the moment he reminds you of how much he loves you through Jesus. As we prepare for Good Friday and Easter, remember that God abounds in steadfast love. He will never stop loving you. He will never give up on you. He will love you always and forever.

## **Reflection**

1. Think back over your life. What have been signs of God's unending love for you?
2. How can you daily remember God's steadfast love for you? Think of some practical ways to be reminded of his love.
3. Close your time by praying, thanking God for his steadfast love.



# RECONCILED

Wednesday

Colossians 1:15–23

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.*

We participate in this season of Lent for one reason only: Jesus. What better time than now to focus on who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Paul gives us a taste of the person and work of Jesus in Colossians 1:15–23. Paul provides us with a grand picture of Jesus, reminding all of us Jesus is preeminent over all things. Paul upholds the deity of Christ, teaching us that Jesus is the image of God. Paul writes that all things were created through Jesus. Jesus is “before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). Jesus is even the firstborn from the dead.

The point, however, for Paul is not just that Jesus is preeminent but that he has reconciled all things himself. All things. Think about that for a second. Sin's effect on our world was immense. When sin entered the world it affected everything, especially our relationship with God. Nevertheless, because God came to earth and put on flesh in the person of Jesus and died and rose from the grave, we can be reconciled to God. Paul almost repeats himself in this passage. First, he says that Jesus made peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). Paul then goes on to reiterate that Jesus “has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death” (Colossians 1:22). While Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, it was his sacrificial death upon the cross that brought reconciled humanity with God and brought peace between the two. While our sin created an uncrossable chasm between God and us, Jesus bridged that gap. Through Christ, we can now be reconciled to God and have peace with God.

## **Reflection**

1. Why did Jesus have to be God for him to reconcile us to God?
2. Why did Jesus have to be human for him to reconcile us to God?
3. Think about the peace that Jesus has brought you? What has that peace meant for you? Take time to thank Jesus for the peace that he has provided.

# RETURNING

Thursday

Hosea 6:1–3

*Come, let us return to the LORD.*

Lent is a season of returning. During this 40-day season, we are supposed to return to the Lord. For some of us, this means that for too long, we've been running away from the Lord. For others, it means we intentionally pause to look to the Lord. Rather than remain focused on everything that is happening around us, we slow down, reflect on our sin and our Savior. But how can we reflect on our sin and Savior without returning to the Lord. The Christian life is a life of continual repentance. During this season, we should be broken over our sin and overjoyed to be found in a loving savior.

Hosea is a painful yet hopeful book of the Bible. God calls Hosea to some radical actions, yet all with the purpose of powerfully displaying God's love. In Hosea, the people of God are urged to return to the Lord. They have sinned and fallen away from the Lord. Hosea writes that while God has punished the people, God will "heal us" and "bind us up." Hosea goes on to say, "After two days, he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hosea 6:2). Interestingly, in the midst of Hosea prophesying that God will restore his people, he is also foretelling Jesus's resurrection, that on the third day he will "raise" us up. The point is this: God wants to heal, bind up, and revive us. But to experience God's healing touch, we must act. As Hosea declared, "Come, let us return to the LORD." While repentance should never be confined to a particular period of time, Lent is that season where we can focus our hearts, repent, and return to the Lord. So, will you return to the Lord?

## **Reflection**

1. Do an inventory of your life. Where do you need to repent and return to the Lord?
2. Take some time today to repent of the things the Lord has shown you you need to repent of.
3. Thank God that he offers to revive us and that he has revived us.

# THE POSITION OF PRAYER

Friday

Matthew 6:5–15

*And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.... But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.*

These passages of Scripture take place during Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. He stands on a mountain, and begins to teach people the truths of his gospel, explaining the Beatitudes, how to be salt and light in a dark world, fulfilling the law, dealing with anger, fighting against lust, resisting divorce, loving your enemies, and giving to the needy. Jesus covers some very difficult and relevant topics that hit the issues of that time period, and even today. He already knows what we struggle with, and what we WILL struggle with. Pride is one of these things. Jesus refers to the discipline of prayer, and how Christians are to approach prayer. In this section of Scripture, Jesus models and teaches how we are to pray, and calls it "The Lord's Prayer." He teaches against approaching prayer in a prideful way, as the hypocrites and Gentiles do, but rather approaching prayer in a humble and desperate way.

If you think about it, the whole purpose of prayer is to humble ourselves under and before God (see 1 Peter 5:6). The act of prayer itself is a prime example of our inability to handle life on our own strength. The reason we should be praying is because we need God, and we desire to hear from Him. Any act of 'ministry' can be demonstrated in a selfish, prideful way, in order to receive attention from others but that actually defeats the entire purpose of ministry itself. Ministry is about others. We do ministry as an overflow of what Christ has done for us. Let's strive to be humble in our prayer life, and position ourselves under the sovereign hand of God.

## **Reflection**

1. What are some difficulties you face in order to maintain a humble prayer life?
2. How have you seen prayer impact your life? How do you think it can impact your life more?
3. Spend some time praying, asking that God would teach you humility and strengthen your desire to seek him in prayer this Lent season.

# GATHERING FOR PURPOSE

*Saturday*

*Hebrews 10:24–25*

*Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

We were created for community. Our sin draws us into isolation. In our busy day-to-day lives it's rather easy to get so consumed with everything we have to do that we fail to remember our need for community. When we are struggling, the moment we need community most, we often push those closest away from us. In Hebrews 10:24–25, we are told to consider how we might encourage one another to love and good works. How are we to do this when we begin to neglect to meet together? Hebrews 10:24–25 reminds us of the truth that we need one another to survive. We need the daily, weekly, and monthly encouragement.

For nearly 2,000 years, Christians have been gathering on a weekly basis to worship the Lord, hear the Word preached, and encourage one another. If they needed it then, what makes us think we don't need it today? For many, the Sunday worship gathering has become optional; however, the writer of Hebrews compels us to not neglect meeting together. We often think, "What will it hurt if I miss just one day?" Unfortunately, we fail to see two important truths. First, we miss the cumulative effect. It's not that we've attended one gathering but that we've attended several gatherings consecutively. Meeting together regularly has a way of transforming us over the long term. Second, we fail to see how easy it is to begin missing week after week. The point is not to go to church to say we've gone to church. The point is to make attending worship a regular rhythm in our lives because we need one another and we need the Lord. Tomorrow is Sunday. Don't miss the opportunity tomorrow to be encouraged and be an encouragement. Don't neglect to meet together.

## **Reflection**

1. How has the Lord used community to encourage you?
2. How have you been an encouragement to others within the church?
3. Be honest with yourself. Have you fought to not neglect meeting with other believers for Sunday worship gatherings? If you have neglected regularly attending worship gatherings, how can you begin to prioritize Sunday worship gatherings?





SUNDAY

**REST &  
WORSHIP**

*with the church*





Week

3

# WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR SIN

Monday

Psalm 51

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

Psalm 51 is a response of David, after he committed adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. David knew that he intentionally sinned against God. He then had to go through the process of repentance, healing, and reconciliation. Although David attempted to cover his sin one time by killing Bathsheba's husband, he knew that he could not continue those types of actions and get away with it. After all, David was "a man after God's own heart," yet he still sinned against him. Through Nathan's confrontation, David begins to repent of his sins and past mistakes, which results in a desperate cry to God for forgiveness toward the process of healing.

Can't we all relate to David? We may not have committed literal adultery, or literal murder, but in Matthew 5:27–30, Jesus tells us that if we even look at someone in a lustful way, we have committed adultery in our hearts. If anything, it should simply remind us that we are sinners, yet, Jesus looks at his children and he sees no sin in us, but we are also called to repent daily, and lay our sins before him. Sin cannot define us as Christians, but it can wreck us if we allow it to. We **MUST** resist the temptations of the flesh, and when we do fall short of God's holy standards, we **MUST** repent and work through the process of letting God redeem and heal us. Thankfully, God gives his children grace, but this grace came with a cost. God sent his only son Jesus Christ to die for us, which calls for our response in obedience. This Lent season, remember that you are a sinner in need of God. But God always provides a way out of sin and brings victory and healing. In our weakness, he is made strong!

## **Reflection**

1. What are some current sins that you need to recognize and repent of?
2. Who in your life is serving as a 'Nathan' to help you recognize your sin? If you currently have no one, how can you take a step in this direction?
3. Spend a few minutes in prayer, thanking and asking God for his help in your fight against sin.

# BUT GOD

Tuesday

Ephesians 2:4–10

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*

The love of God is something that is absolutely impossible to wrap our minds around. Yesterday, we reflected on the reality of sin that we face as people in this world. It's not until we fully recognize our sinful nature that we begin to see God's love in a greater scale. The Apostle Paul writes to the church of Ephesus who were a group of Christians struggling with unity. Paul is actually in prison during the time of this writing, which makes the book even more powerful and significant, knowing that Paul is in chains, while encouraging Christians to strive for and maintain unity. In the beginning of this chapter, he reminds the church that they were once "dead" in their sins, and they literally had no hope in their current state. The key phrase begins in verse four, as Paul reminds them, "But God..." This is a remarkable miracle, that God came to us, in our current state of sin and depravity, and made a way for us to have life in him. Paul knew that the church needed to hear this truth because it creates the foundation that all Christians need established in their lives in order to be unified.

Every single Christian struggles with the concept and practice of unity. As we are stepping into an anticipation of the Easter season, we must yearn and long for unity. The important thing to consider about unity is that we are unable to maintain it on our own strength. Paul clearly reminds us, that God alone is our unity, and God alone is our salvation. **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."** Today, as you pray for and anticipate the cross of Christ, remind yourself that unity is actually an overflow of that cross of Christ. Because Jesus died for us, we can find our unity in that, knowing that we are all "dead in our trespasses and sins," but God made a way for all of us. Find your unity in him today, and allow his unity in you to be your unity with others!

## **Reflection**

1. What are some areas in your life that are allowing you to not be unified with others?
2. How do you think that reflecting on the significance of the cross and God's love can personally help you in your effort to be unified with others?
3. Spend some time in prayer, asking the Lord to speak to you in the area of his love creating unity in your life.

# LIFE AND LIGHT

Wednesday

John 1:1–14

*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Prior to the coming of Jesus, the world was lost and in darkness. The Jews were anticipating the coming of their Messiah but were beginning to think that nothing would ever change. Then out of no where, Jesus entered the scene. In John 1:1–14, the apostle John shares some powerful truth about Jesus. John tells his readers that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Later he goes on to say, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). What an incredible reality. John uses the Greek word, *logos* (i.e., the Word), to identify Jesus. He says incredible things like the Word was in the beginning before anything existed, and the Word was with God, and even more shocking, the Word was God. All of this is to point to the unbelievable reality that Jesus is God. But it becomes even more incredible in verse 14—the Word “became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus, though he was God, humbled himself, became a human, and lived on earth. For many of us, this is not new news; however, it still should shock us. It should still amaze us. God came to us!

But why? Why would God choose to come to us? John offers one primary reason: for those lost in darkness to become children of God (John 1:12). When Jesus came to earth, he brought light and life. He shined into the darkness and brought those dead in sin to life in God. There is no greater blessing than to become a child of God. Jesus came reversing sin's curse and removing the alienation that stood between us and God. While orphans, Jesus bought us back by his blood and adopted us into his family. As we approach Good Friday and Easter, may we be reminded of what Jesus endured for us to be brought back into the family of God.

## **Reflection**

1. How did Jesus coming to earth more fully reveal God?
2. How was Jesus light and life?
3. What does it mean for you personally to be a child of God?



# SEEING GOD FOR WHO HE IS

Thursday

Job 42:1–6

*I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*

The story of Job is no doubt complicated. Job is a righteous man yet God allows Satan to take everything but his own life. Job's friends assume that Job has sinned. Why else would all of these bad things happen to him? Yet Job maintains his righteousness. By the end of the story, Job is fed up, and he questions God. Then God answers Job: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me" (Job 38:2–3). Strong words from the God of the universe! For the next several chapters, God questions Job. When God finishes, Job is utterly broken. He says, "I uttered what I did not understand" and "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:3–4). For the first time, Job had truly experienced God.

Upon meeting God, Job realizes he was wrong. He was wrong to question God and his ways. In response, Job repents in dust and ashes. In the ancient world, people would put dust and ashes on themselves as a physical representation of their repentance. When was the last time you repented? Here Job meets the Lord and his first reaction is to repent. Repentance is a humbling act; however, when we see our sinful selves in light of our holy God, we should be driven to repentance. What does it mean to repent? Repentance is a humble acknowledgement of our state before God. Repentance is a confession of our sin. Repentance is a commitment to turn away from our sin and toward Christ in faith and obedience. While we enter the kingdom of God through faith and repentance, God's holiness and Christ's cross should draw us to a perpetual humility and repentance before God. When we encounter God like Job did, may we humbly repent before him.

## **Reflection**

1. When you come into the presence of God, what is your attitude before God?
2. How can you maintain a heart of repentance before God always?
3. Take time now to humbly submit yourself before God, repenting of your sin.

# THE PREPARATION OF FASTING

Friday

Jonah 3

*And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.*

In the beginning of the book of Jonah, God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, and to call the people to repent from their evil ways. Because of Jonah's fear of the city, he goes the opposite direction, which resulted in God getting Jonah's attention. There were great consequences for Jonah's actions, and Jonah eventually got back on track with the calling that God gave him. The preaching that Jonah delivered to the Ninevites resulted in their preparation through fasting. This time of fasting and preparation pleased God greatly, as the king of Nineveh commanded the people in Jonah 3:7–8, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call our mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." The Ninevites feared God, and did not want to experience his wrath, so they submitted to Jonah's warning, and believed in God.

This example in Jonah 3 shows us what truly pleases the heart of God. Just as God was pleased with the humility of the Ninevites, he is also pleased with us when we humble ourselves under him through the preparation of fasting. The whole purpose of fasting is humility before the Lord and to hear from the Lord, replacing food with more of God. Just as the Ninevites experienced, this time can also serve as a time of preparation. We hear the most clearly from God when we are still before him and cling to Him alone. Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:16–18 about how fasting is meant to be before God alone and not man. We do not fast to be impressed by others but to demonstrate to God our desperate need for him. What do you need to lay aside this lent season in order to better hear from God and draw close to him?

## **Reflection**

1. What is something in your life that you need to potentially fast from in order to hear from the Lord?
2. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to speak to you about stepping into a season of preparation and fasting.
3. Vintage has some previous resources on the topic of prayer and fasting that can be seen online at <http://www.vintagechurchnola.com/prayer-fasting>.

# CLOSE ENOUGH TO CONFESS

*Saturday*

*James 5:16*

*Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.*

Tomorrow is Sunday, the day when the church gathers to worship Jesus, be equipped for ministry, and encourages one another. While we need to make Sundays a priority every week, during Lent Sundays are a day of celebration in the midst of repentance and reflection. In the midst of all of this, however, confession is one of the crucial elements of the Christian life we have lost. I think most Christians recognize the importance of regular confession to God, but we fail to heed what James tells us: "confess your sins to one another."

For those of us who grew up Catholic, confession might have been a normal part of the Christian life. We were encouraged to confess our sins to a priest regularly. For those of us who grew up in the Protestant church, we maybe have had an aversion to confess to another person. We recognize Scripture's teaching that Christ is our only true mediator. Therefore we do not need to confess our sins to another person for forgiveness. We have forgiveness through Christ alone. While all of this is true, James still says confess your sins to one another. There is power in communal confession. The point is not that we experience some special form of forgiveness in confessing our sin to another person. The point is that when we confess our sins publicly we are often freed from the power of secrecy and given the power of accountability. When we let our private sins out into the public, we no longer feel like we have to carry those sins alone. We also give power to other believers in our life to hold us accountable. Consequently, when we confess our sins to one another, we are more capable of fighting our sin, defeating our sin, and becoming more like Jesus. During this Lent season, let's not fight sin alone. Let's come together and confess our sin.

## **Reflection**

1. Think of two to three people you have in your life you know you could confess your sin to. Who are they?
2. Do some heart work today. Do you have sins in your life right now that you need to confess to someone? If so, do it today.
3. At Vintage Church, we believe in Life Groups, gender-based groups of 3–4 who meet regularly for prayer, accountability, and community. If you are not in a Life Group, find 2 or 3 others and form a Life Group.



**SUNDAY**

**REST &  
WORSHIP**  
*with the church*





Week 4



# WE'RE ALL LOST

Monday

Romans 3:9–20

*None is righteous, no, not one.*

If you were to survey 100 people, asking them, “do you consider yourself a good person?”, the majority would probably say yes. In our culture, we have a way of separating really bad people with everyone else. And so, if you haven't committed serious crimes you are overall a good person. In Romans 3:9–20, however, Paul provides us with a very different view of humanity. Quoting from the Psalms, Paul says, “None is righteous, no not one.” He then goes on to describe how humanity is not righteous—no one has done good, their tongues are deceptive, they are full of curses and bitterness, they are quick to shed blood, they do not fear God. Quite a rap sheet. The point is this: when compared to God, no one measures up. We are all sinful. There is not an ounce of our selves not contaminated by sin. While we are probably not as sinful as we could be, we are sinful enough to separate us from God.

Depressing news, right? If no one is righteous is there any hope? If we only look at our sin, there is no hope. But we have to see our sin. We have to see that we all have a problem. We have to see our sin in light of God and his character. When we see God and his holiness, we quickly realize that there are no good people, only sinful people. However, if we pan out a bit, we can begin to see the whole picture. We see a loving God who did not want to leave his people in their sin. We see a merciful God who provided a savior in Jesus Christ. We see a gracious God who forgives sin. When we know how sinful we truly are, we come to know how truly good God is. Reflect on your sin, not so that you wallow in your sin, but so that you will reflect on God's love, grace, and mercy, and worship him.

## **Reflection**

1. How did you view yourself before Jesus?
2. How has your sin helped you see God's love, mercy, and grace more?
3. Thank God for his love, grace, and mercy.

# RESTING IN GOD'S SECURITY

Tuesday

Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

Psalm 121 is entitled, "My Help Comes from the Lord," which is very significant. Many believe that David wrote this Psalm as he was in the midst of traveling, and staying out of harms way from the battle around him. Although this could refer to physical protection, more importantly, it refers to spiritual protection. This Psalm refers to the security and protection that God gives to those who cry out to him and those who look upon him. When one's posture is positioned toward God rather than themselves, there is a promise of security and protection. This promise, as the Psalm says, is that "the Lord will keep us." "He will not let our feet be moved." There is something special and significant about knowing that our life is secure and stable, regardless of the circumstances and trials that we face. This may not mean that things will always go our way and that trials will not come, but it does mean that we are not defined by those things and God can work through them.

Everyone wants to have the security of a stable and secure life. The truth is if we are in Christ Jesus, we do have a stable and secure life! This is a constant reminder that we must tap into always. It is far too easy to become distracted in our daily rhythms and routines. Circumstances and busyness easily pull us away from the truth that God is our "keeper." This lent season, discipline and remind yourself often of the great treasure and security that you have in Christ Jesus. Although difficulties may come, there truly is nothing that can tear us away from the eternal security in God if we have surrendered to a relationship with him.

## **Reflection**

1. What are some things that you can do to regularly remind yourself that God is your helper?
2. How should understanding that we are eternally secure in Christ change the way that we live our lives?
3. Spend some time in prayer asking the Lord to grow you in this area and to put someone on your heart that could be encouraged through the truth of Psalm 121 today.

# **BROKEN FOR US**

*Wednesday*

*Isaiah 52:13–53:12*

*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.*

Written some 700 years prior to Jesus's life, Isaiah spoke of Israel's coming salvation. According to Isaiah, the Lord's servant would suffer great pain for the people of God. In Isaiah 52:13–53:12, the prophet describes what will happen to Jesus: he will be despised, rejected, stricken, afflicted, wounded, crushed, and oppressed to name just a few. What great suffering, especially for someone who was innocent. Yet Jesus's suffering was not for nothing. He was "crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus suffered and died for our sins. He bore the weight of our sin, the sin that separated us from God. Through his suffering, we have been reconciled with God. We have been given peace between God and ourselves.

During this Lent season, we must constantly come back to Jesus. As we approach the hope of Easter, we must also remember the despair of Good Friday. On that Friday, the sinless One was beaten, ridiculed, and ultimately crucified for the sins of humanity. Despite his willing obedience to go to the cross, Jesus suffered immensely, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In the midst of death, all but a few of his closest friends had deserted him. By the time he got to the cross, Jesus was already in excruciating pain. When he was crucified, it wasn't just the pain of nails piercing his wrists and feet. The pain and ultimate cause of death from crucifixion was asphyxiation. Jesus would have had to push up on the nails in his feet to breathe, causing great pain to surge through his body. When he came down to rest from the pain, he would have barely been able to breathe. Finally, while hanging on the cross, Jesus no doubt felt the weight of the world's sin and, more so, the wrath of God against our sin. Yet he bore all of this for us, for our sin, for our peace with God.

## **Reflection**

1. Take some time to contemplate the suffering and death of Jesus. Ponder his crucifixion and the suffering he experienced.
2. Isaiah says by Jesus's suffering we were healed. How has Jesus healed you?
3. When you think about what Jesus experienced because our sin, how does it make you think about sinning in the future?

# A TEARFUL TURNING AWAY

Thursday

Luke 7:36–50

*I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loves much.*

Sometimes when we read stories in Scripture, they come to life. This story is one of those stories. Just picture the scene. Jesus is eating with some of the most respected religious leaders of his day. Remember, Jesus has been invited to this person's house. In the ancient world, they ate reclining rather than sitting. So, here they are amongst distinguished company, and a woman enters the room. Luke says this woman was "a woman of the city, who was a sinner" (Luke 7:37). Chances are she was a prostitute. You typically shouldn't see prostitutes with religious leaders. But she doesn't just come into the room and sit quietly. She comes up to Jesus's feet, begins to weep, and then washes his feet with her tears and the anointment she brought. What seems to not concern Jesus, immediately alarms and angers the religious leaders. How could Jesus allow a woman like this to touch him.

Jesus, however, knows what's going on in their hearts and minds. If we keep reading, Jesus calls them out for their judgment. Everything the woman did for Jesus, the religious leaders should have done. Because of her humble repentance, Jesus even forgives the woman of her sin. Why? Jesus says her sins are forgiven because she loves much. How did she love much? First, she understood who Jesus was. Second, she understood who she was. She knew that Jesus was the messiah who could save her from her sin. She understood that she was a sinner in need of forgiveness. Her love manifested in humbly bowing before Jesus and worshipping him by washing his feet. We've mentioned repentance several times over the past few weeks. While repentance is ultimately about the heart, it often manifests itself in humble actions. For this woman, washing Jesus's feet with her tears and hair was a humble act. Her tears and foot washing were physical manifestations of the repentance she felt in her heart. Are you like the woman? Are you repentant? How are you demonstrating your repentance?

## **Reflection**

1. Search your heart. Are you broken over your sin like this woman was?
2. Jesus forgives sin. Ponder this truth. What does it mean for you that Jesus forgives sin?
3. How are you physically demonstrating your repentance during Lent?



# WHEN YOU GIVE

Friday

Matthew 6:1–4

*When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.*

Giving is always one of those sensitive subjects; however, giving has always been a significant element of Lent. Why? There's something about giving. Giving is a humbling, sacrificial act. Giving is also a way in which we can manifest the love of God in a tangible way. Jesus understood this when he spoke of giving in Matthew 6. Often when we do something "religious," we want other people to see us so we can be praised for our accomplishments. Jesus, however, reminds his followers of how we should give. Rather than make a scene when we give, Jesus says that we should not "let your hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matthew 6:3). Giving should be done so secretly that our own hand doesn't even know what the other hand has done. Obviously Jesus was speaking figuratively, but the point still stands. Jesus's point gets to the heart of why we give. What are our motives? Are we giving to be seen by others or to honor God and serve others?

When was the last time you gave? When was the last time you gave sacrificially? When was the last time you gave secretly? During this season of Lent, one of our primary ways to respond to the sacrificial gift of Jesus is through giving. Whether it's opening our home up to guests, giving gifts, giving to those in need, or giving to the church, we as Christians should be focused on giving back. As we give, we humbly submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ, reminding ourselves that what we have is not our own but a gift from God. When we give to others, we extend the love of Christ and honor God by giving. Christians should be the most generous people on earth. Perhaps during this Lent season, we can become more like Jesus, giving without end.

## **Reflection**

1. Have you ever given sacrificially before? If so, how did the Lord use it to grow you?
2. In what ways can you give sacrificially of your financial resources? Think creatively.
3. In what ways can you give sacrificially of your personal resources (i.e., time, talents, possessions)? Think creatively?

# GATHERING FOR GLADNESS

*Saturday*

*Psalm 122*

*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'*

Tomorrow is Sunday, a day each week where we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church has set aside Sunday for worship and rest for nearly 2,000 years. As we approach Sunday, can we declare with the psalmist, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'" Psalm 122 is a unique psalm in that it is a Psalm of Ascent. These psalms were sung mostly during pilgrimage festivals when the people of Israel would go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. They are called Psalms of Ascent because regardless of where you are coming from, you have to ascend to Jerusalem as the city sits on a hill. The Temple in Jerusalem was the most important building in Israel. It was important because in the Temple the presence of God resided. Thus to go to the house of Lord was a big deal. There the people of Israel would be closest to God.

Today, you and I no longer go to a temple to worship God. As Jesus said, we worship God in Spirit and truth (John 4:24). After Jesus died, resurrected, and ascended to heaven, the Spirit of God indwelt his people's hearts. Now, we are the Temple of God. While we do not have to go to a physical location to worship God, there is great value in gathering with the church to worship the Lord together in Spirit and truth. When we come together weekly, we are equipped, challenged, and encouraged. Tomorrow is Sunday! Don't miss an opportunity to gather with other believers and worship Jesus. May we all say, "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

## **Reflection**

1. How do you view Sunday worship gatherings? Are they an encouragement to you or a burden?
2. What can you do today to prepare you for Sunday worship tomorrow?
3. Pray to God now asking him to do some incredible work tomorrow.



**SUNDAY**

**REST &  
WORSHIP** *with the church*





Week

5

# FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Monday

Mark 7:14–23

*For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.*

Often when we think about sin we think about externals. We consider sin to be when we actually do something. Many in Jesus's day thought the same way. In particular, the religious leaders were known for this. Jesus's harshest words were saved for the religious leaders of his day because while they were righteous in how they appeared and what they did, they were evil in their hearts. This is exactly what Jesus attacks in Mark 7:14–23. In Mark 7:20, Jesus says, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him." Jesus then goes on to list a litany of sins that proceed from the heart. What is Jesus's point? Sin is not just what we do. Sin is also about the attitude of our heart. For those who sin outwardly, their sin flows from their heart. For those who mask their sin by looking good and doing right, sin can still reside in their heart.

How is your heart? Perhaps you are living in outright sin, doing things you shouldn't do. Or perhaps you are living the "right" way, but your heart is in a dangerous place. Your motives are impure. Your thoughts are sinful. Your attitude is ugly. When was the last time you honestly searched and assessed the health of your heart? Many of us refuse to go to that potentially dark place because it's painful and messy. Nevertheless when you and I choose to journey to the dark section of our heart, we become aware of our sin. From this awareness and by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we can repent of that sin and run to Jesus. How's your heart?

## **Reflection**

1. How is your heart? Is their sin buried deep down that needs to be confessed and repented of?
2. Are there sins you are committing outwardly that need to be repented of?
3. Thank Jesus that he always offers forgiveness of our sin!



# GIVING LOVE

Tuesday

John 3:16–17

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Over the past several weeks we have regularly been reminded of the ugliness and depth of our sin. However, we have also been reminded of God's unsurpassable and unending love. Today we remind ourselves of an oft quoted verse: John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." Think about those words. Read it again. "For God so loved the world..." God is not a distant God who created everything and then left. He is a God who is so near that he loves his creation like a father. God's love is also not all talk. He did something to demonstrate his love: "he gave his only Son." The love that God has for the world is an agape love. The Greek word agape has the meaning of sacrificial love. God loved the world so much that he gave up something. He didn't just give up anything; he gave up his Son. The Father knew how deep and dark our sin was and refused to leave us in that place. He sent his Son, Jesus, because he loved us.

Whether our sin or life's circumstances, sometimes we have a tendency to forget that God loves us. We forget that he loved us so much, he gave up his Son for us. What a sacrifice. What a gift. What great love. Surely we serve an incredibly gracious God. When you don't feel loved, remember that you are loved. When you feel as though your sin is too great, remember that God sent his Son for you. God loves you. Rest in that truth.

## **Reflection**

1. When you think about your sin and God, do you believe God truly loves you? Why or why not?
2. Why is true love manifested in sacrifice?
3. Who is someone in your life who needs to know about the love of God? Think of that person and tell them today!

# BEARING THE WEIGHT

Wednesday

1 Peter 2:22–24

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

Have you ever thought about the justice of the cross? Jesus was completely sinless and thereby innocent. Yet he died the death of a criminal. Crucifixion was brutal. While painful, crucifixion was also publicly humiliating. A person would hang there on a cross, normally naked, while others passed by. When people saw people crucified, they knew they were criminals. Yet Jesus “bore our sins in his body on the tree.” Despite his innocence, Jesus willingly went to the cross. He knew his death was not just about him but about finishing the mission God had sent him to accomplish. He became sin so that we might become righteousness.

What an incredible truth! Jesus bore our sin; he took it all. When we think about the cross, we often think about the physical pain that Jesus must have endured. We fail to see the spiritual pain he suffered. A sinless, righteous person took upon himself the world's sin. Despite experiencing perfect communion with the Father, that communion was broken by the sin Jesus bore. Jesus felt God's wrath against sin. Yet Jesus still bore our sin. He felt the weight of our sin. What a savior! How blessed are we that Jesus chose to exchange our sin for his righteousness, that we might “die to sin and live to righteousness.” Let's remember that truth today. Christ bore our sin that we might have his righteousness.

## **Reflection**

1. Think about the weight of your sin. Reflect on how Jesus has changed your life. By Jesus bearing your sin, how has he transformed your life?
2. Because Jesus bore our sin, we have died to sin and live to righteousness. How are you practically killing sin and living in Jesus's righteousness?
3. Thank Jesus. Thank Jesus that he bore your sin and experienced the penalty of sin. Praise him for his loving sacrifice.

# THE FREEDOM IN CONFESSION

Thursday

Psalm 32

*I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

A hallmark of Lent is confession. In fact, a hallmark of Christianity is confession. Throughout the Old and New Testaments and throughout church history, Christians have confessed their sin. Confession can hurt. Confession can be painful. Yet confession is freeing. Confession is liberating. The psalmist writes, "I acknowledged my sins to you, and I did not cover my iniquity." Regardless of who you are or what you've done, our natural reaction is most often to hide our sin. Sin makes us feel guilty, shameful, and fearful. If we hide it, people won't know about it. But we fail to recognize that our Father in Heaven sees all things. Nothing is hidden from God. And God doesn't desire our confession to prove himself right. Rather, he longs that our relationship with him might be whole. Despite our belief that we know best, God knows that when we confess our sin to him, our relationship is made whole.

Do you see confession the same way? Do you see it as liberating? Are you trusting that God desires to forgive you of your sin? He doesn't want to hold your sin over your head. The lie of the Enemy is that you can and should hide your sin. When was the last time you confessed sin to God? He loves us and longs for us to confess our sin and experience what true forgiveness looks like. "When we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). What's holding you back? Confess today.

## **Reflection**

1. Do you regularly confess your sins to God? If not, why do think you don't confess your sins regularly?
2. What needs to change in your life to make confession of sin a regular part of your life?
3. Start today! Spend some time confessing your sin to the Father.

# JESUS CAN RELATE

Friday

Hebrews 4:14–16

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Prayer is one of the most foundational disciplines and principles of the Christian life. Although we know that we should pray and need to pray, we can often be intimidated and insecure in our prayers. Thoughts come across our mind that God is distant from us or that God is too big and busy to listen to our personal prayers. Does God really pay attention and take note of our needs? Can he really relate to our situation? In this text, the author of Hebrews shares some great encouragement and insight—God is not far from us, but he is very near. Jesus was fully God, yet fully man. Because of this truth, we can be assured that Jesus had experiences, struggles, and situations in life, just like we do. In fact, in Matthew 26:36–46, Jesus earnestly prays to God the Father as he was approaching his death: “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Jesus did not necessarily like his circumstances, or even want to walk through it, but he knew that it had to be done, and he sought out God to be his refuge in time of need.

Throughout the Easter season, we regularly reflect and focus on the risen Savior, the one who conquered sin, death, and hell. We SHOULD and we MUST focus on this truth. Jesus is alive and not dead, which gives us hope for the present and the future, but let’s not forget the journey that Jesus took in order to get to the point of resurrection. Jesus walked through trials and suffered, just like we do, but to an even greater degree. He kept his eye on the prize, but in order to do so, he had to pray and depend on his Father, and his Father understood. Jesus understands too, and he desires for us to honestly, and transparently cry out to him! Do not buy the lie of the Enemy that God is too distant. He longs to hear from his children and comfort them in time of need.

## **Reflection**

1. What lies do you need to destroy in your life in order to cling to the truth that Jesus can relate to you?
2. What is something in your life right now that you need to give to the Lord but have had difficulty doing so?
3. Spend some time prayer journaling, writing down some of these misconceptions and barriers between you and the Lord in your prayer life, allowing him to draw near to you and help.



# ONE ANOTHER

*Saturday*

*Acts 2:42–47*

*And all who believed were together and had all things in common.*

Christianity has always been a communal religion. In our Western American culture, we celebrate independence. The more isolated the better. Needing help is a sign of weakness. This independence is foreign to the Bible. From the beginning the church gathered together regularly, loving and caring for one another. The church in Acts worshipped together, ate together, and shared their things together. They knew that they needed one another.

Despite what our culture tells us, we need one another. Community is essential not only to Christianity but to life in general. While many see Lent as an individualistic exercise, Lent has always been a communal exercise. We need one another. We are prone to wander off course. We are prone to cut corners. We are prone to sin. A community of believers provides care, encouragement, and accountability. The church in Acts was together because they knew they needed one another. They couldn't do life without other believers. Don't abandon the church. Don't abandon other believers. Fight isolation. Instead build closer relationships with people in the church. Open up and share. Do life with one another. This Lent season pursue God with others.

## **Reflection**

1. How connected are you to the local church? Why are you more or less connected to the church?
2. What can you do now to build greater community with the local church?
3. How can the church strengthen how the Lord uses your Lent season?

SUNDAY

# REST & WORSHIP

*with the church*

Holy, Holy, Holy  
Is the Lord God Almighty  
Who was, and is, and is to come

(504)302-







Week **6**

# WORSHIPPING THE CREATOR OVER THE CREATED

Monday

1 John 2:15–17

*Do not love the world or the things in the world*

From the moment sin pervaded our world, every human has fought the seemingly instinctive pull toward idolatry. Yes, we may not build wooden images or metal statues and bow down and offer homage to them. Yet we still long for idols. Because of sin we are allured to worship the created rather than the Creator. This is exactly what John means when he writes, “Do not love the world or the things in the world.” He goes on to say, “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:16). The desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and the pride of life are all elements that lead us to idolatry. Ultimately the sin of idolatry lies at the root of almost every sin. We simply are not satisfied with God himself; we want to worship everything he has created. Again, the problem is not with what God has created. God desires for us to use and steward his creation. The problem is with sin. Our sin propels us to worship the created rather than the Creator.

Lent is a time when we recognize our sin and turn away from it. Do you love the world and the things in the world more than you love God? Have you turned toward worshipping the created over the Creator? For many of us, this is not an easy question to answer. On the surface, we would say, “Of course I don’t worship stuff.” But check your heart. Where is your joy found? When do you feel most fulfilled? Is it when you’re focused on the Lord or focused on your possessions, relationships, career, etc? Remember, idolatry can be subtle. It is only when we thoroughly search our hearts that we find the sin that is deep within. It is only then that we can begin to tear down the idols we have built in our hearts.

## **Reflection**

1. Think about your actions. Do you have any actions in your life right now that are sinful or out of the ordinary for you? What are they trying to tell you?
2. Now search your heart? What might be some idols you have in your life that you need to destroy?
3. How can Jesus satisfy the needs you have that your idols were trying to satisfy?

# BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE

Tuesday

Deuteronomy 7:6–9

*It is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

Why did God deliver the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt? Because he loved his people. Simple enough, right? God's love is immeasurable and unfathomable. He chose the Israelites hundreds of years prior, heard the cry of his people, and remembered his covenant. A love like this is rarely experienced by humans. We let one another down. We hurt each other. We fail. Our love becomes broken. That's why God's love is so unbelievable. His love never fails. Just when we think he's forgotten us or we've done something to lose his love, God reminds us once again of his love.

If God's deliverance of his people from Egypt was a display of his great love, what was the sending of his Son, Jesus? Earlier in this Lent season we were reminded of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son." There is no clearer picture of God's love than the sending of his son, Jesus. When we feel forgotten, broken, lost, or unloved, remember God demonstrated his love for you over 2000 years ago by sending his son, Jesus, to defeat sin, death, and hell. God remembers his people and regardless of what has happened continues to love them.

## **Reflection**

1. What does it mean to you that God loves you?
2. What are ways God has demonstrated his love for you throughout your life?
3. How does God's unfailing love for you free you to love and serve him?



# NEW LIFE IN JESUS

Wednesday

2 Corinthians 5:17–21

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The implications of knowing Christ are extremely significant! The Apostle Paul writes this letter to the Church of Corinth, reminding them of who they are in Christ Jesus and what that means for them in their present circumstances and situations. Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." This is a phrase that we hear quite often in the church today, but do we really live like this? Second Corinthians is a book of reminders. The Church of Corinth was in a place where they desperately needed to be reminded of the truths of God, in order to resist temptation and stand against the enemy. Paul also reminds the Corinthians that because Christ has reconciled us to himself, we can also demonstrate reconciliation to others. This is an act that we are simply unable to do apart from Christ Jesus.

Because of the reconciliation that we have experienced in Christ, we are made NEW! In John 3:3, Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God." We obviously cannot be born again physically, but we can be born again spiritually. This being born into God's kingdom is an act of God but also requires action on our end. The sacrifices are great, but the prize and reward is beyond worth it. As we look to the cross during this lent season, let us never forget that we have been made new through the reconciliation of Christ. This gives us hope not only in the risen Savior but also in our life today and forevermore. We are identified as a new creation, alive in Christ!

## **Reflection**

1. How does understanding that you are reconciled to God through Christ change the way you view your relationship with God?
2. What in your life do you need to identify as a hinderance to your identity as a new creation in Christ?
3. Ask the Lord to help you remove this hinderance and to excite you in being identified as a new creation in him.

# **CRIES FROM THE HEART**

*Thursday*

*Psalm 130*

*Out of the depths I cry to you*

Have you ever felt broken over sin? Have you ever been so broken you wept aloud? Have you ever been so broken you cried out to the Lord for his forgiveness? Our sin should break us. We should hurt over our sin. Why? Because we worship a holy, sinless God who is grieved over sin. God is grieved over sin so much so that he sent Christ to take away sin. The psalmist writes in Psalm 130, "Out of the depths I cry to you... Let your ear be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy" (Psalm 130:1–2). He goes on to say, "my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning" (Psalm 130:6). In the ancient world, watchmen would sit on the city gate and protect the city. They longed for the morning because only then was their work complete. Why should we wait for the Lord with such enthusiasm as a city watchman? Because we know that God is merciful and gracious to forgive us.

While we can be confident that God will forgive sin, we must not forget that forgiveness of sin requires a response: repentance. While repentance is more than remorse and sorrow, it must begin there. When we recognize our sin, we should be broken over it. This brokenness should lead not to a temporary turning away from sin but a permanent life change away from sin and toward the Lord. While our sin should break us, we should still be hopeful. We wait on the Lord because we are confident he is faithful to forgive sin. May we be people characterized and known by our repentance before the Lord.

## **Reflection**

1. Are you broken over your sin? Why or why not?
2. We wait on the Lord because he forgives sin. How does God's faithfulness to his word affect how you worship him?
3. Where in your life do you need to fully repent of your sin, not just being remorseful but walking away from this sin or sinful habit?

# THE MOTIVE OF FASTING

Friday

Matthew 6:16–18

*But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret.*

It is so easy to do the right thing for the wrong reason. This is especially true when it comes to religious action. For many of us, we are pharisees deep down. We know that we should be serving God, but we really want others to see us do things for God. This can especially be true for seasons like Lent. We pray more, fast, or give during Lent so people will make sure they know we are religious. Jesus is adamantly against this. In Matthew 6, Jesus's focus is not whether people fast or how they fast but why they fast. Jesus tells us we should keep our fasting private. In fact, we should act as though we're not fasting. We're fasting not to be seen by others but to be seen by God. We're fasting to grow closer to the Lord, not to earn religious accolades.

When was the last time you fasted? Perhaps you've never fasted. Now would be a great time to begin. When was the last time you fasted with few to none knowing about it? It can be a good thing to let a select few in on your fasting so they can hold you accountable and encourage you. But fight to tell as few people as possible. Fast for the Lord and the Lord alone. Lent is a season dedicated to fasting. If you aren't fasting yet, start soon. Maybe you need to begin with something simple, like fasting from television or social media. Maybe you can fast from one meal a few days a week. Good Friday is approaching. Consider fasting from Good Friday to Easter. Why? Not to be seen by others but to focus on the Lord!

## **Reflection**

1. If you've never fasted before, what's holding you back from trying?
2. Do you struggle to fast for all the wrong reasons?
3. How can you fast and fight the temptation to be grumpy, angry, or frustrated because of fasting?

# THE JOY OF GIVING BACK

Saturday

Acts 4:32–37

*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.... There was not a needy person among them.*

The launch of the early church was an incredible time! When Jesus ascended to heaven after his death and resurrection, he sent his Holy Spirit to stir the hearts of his followers and spread the movement of the gospel. When we search through the Bible looking for examples of the unity within the church, the early church in the book of Acts stands out. The early church understood what it took to be on the same page. It doesn't mean that they were perfect, but it does mean that they strived for unity through the Spirit of God. One way that the early church was unified was in their giving. The verses above represent a collection of believers coming together, equally and obediently sacrificing to the work of God and the needs of others. The text says that things were "distributed to each as any had need." This is a difficult concept to grasp for us today because there seems to be so many needs around us.

What if Christians across the world were giving and sacrificing equally just like the early church? When we look at this text, we immediately notice in verse 33 that when the church gave, there was "great power and grace" among them. Grateful hearts produce giving actions. We give back to the work of God not to boast or take pride in our efforts but to humble ourselves under the work of Jesus and pour ourselves to him in worship. When we do this, needs are met, lives are changed, and the presence of God is manifested in and through us. The phrase, "It is true that it is better to give than receive" is actually true. Let's give back to the Lord during this Lent season, just as he has given to us.

## **Reflection**

1. What is one way in your life that you are currently giving to the Lord? If you're not giving to the Lord, how can you begin?
2. What has the Lord gifts you with and how can you begin to bless others with those gifts?
3. Spend some time in prayer asking the Lord to direct your worship to him through giving back.



SUNDAY

A photograph of a church service. In the foreground, the back of a woman's head with her hair in a ponytail is visible, and her right arm is raised high in the air. Other people in the congregation are also seen with their hands raised. In the background, a man in a brown jacket stands at a podium, gesturing with his right hand towards a large, bright screen. The scene is dimly lit, with the screen providing the main source of light.

**REST & WORSHIP**  
*with the church*



Week **7**

# WOE TO YOU

Monday

Matthew 23:1–12

*The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do.*

Jesus always had a disdain for the religious. It wasn't because they believed the wrong things. The religious often believed the right things. However, their beliefs failed to transform the way they lived. Matthew 23 provides a snapshot into one moment in the final week of Jesus's life. He was nearing the cross, but while in Jerusalem Jesus had a run-in with the religious leaders. In Matthew 23, Jesus vehemently attacks the Pharisees and religious leaders. He tells the people, "practice and observe what they tell you—but do not do what they do" (Matthew 23:3). But why? Jesus clearly explains: "For they preach, but do not practice" (Matthew 23:3). The pharisees were known for treating people poorly. They were also known to practice their piety purposefully in front of people so that other people would see them and honor them for their work. For the rest of Matthew 23, Jesus condemns the pharisees, calling them hypocrites.

We might not be religious leaders of our day (or maybe we are), but we can all fall into the sin of the pharisees: hypocrisy. It is so easy to believe rightly and yet never change how we live. Jesus commanded us to love God and love people with all of our being (Mark 12:30–31). If we think about spiritual growth and maturity from that angle, what we believe matters a whole lot less than how we live. Perhaps our maturity should be measured by how what we believe has impacted our hearts and changed the way we live our lives? Why do you worship God? Why do you serve people? To be seen by others? Fight the sin of hypocrisy in your life. Not only believe the right thing but also live the right way.

## **Reflection**

1. Reflect on your own life? Is there any hypocrisy in your life that you need the Lord to remove from your life?
2. How can you grow spiritually mature today, focusing not only on what you know but how you live?
3. Ask the Lord to forgive you of any hypocrisy in your life.

# LOVE

Tuesday

John 13:34–35

*Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

Even in his last few days, Jesus reminded his disciples how much he loved them. Jesus's love for his disciples was different than any love they had ever experienced before. The disciples might not have caught that prior to Jesus's death; however, they quickly realized it upon Jesus's resurrection. For many of us, we know God loves us, yet sometimes we have doubts. It seems as though God's love isn't tangible. We can't demonstrate our love for God like we do with those we love most. Think about how you show love and affection to those closest to you. You hug and kiss them. You look them in the face and talk. While we know God loves us and he demonstrates his love to us, we've never been face-to-face with God. We've never hugged or kissed God. The disciples, however, tangibly experienced the love of God through Jesus. Jesus was God-in-flesh. He walked with them, talked with them, and demonstrated his love for them. Ultimately Jesus demonstrated his love for his disciples in the most profound way—by dying on the cross.

The point for Jesus, however, was not just that he loved his disciples. Because Jesus loved his disciples, the disciples were to love another. In fact, Jesus even said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The disciples would not be known to be Jesus's disciples by how much they knew or even by how much time they spent with Jesus. They would be known by how they love one another. What about you? God has demonstrated his love to you through his Son Jesus. Do people know you follow Jesus by the love you have for other Christians? As Lent is coming to an end and we approach Easter, are you loving one another? Yes, we must love those far from Christ, but why would anyone far from Christ want Jesus when his followers can't stand one another? When we love one another, we demonstrate the love of God to our world, and perhaps God will use our love for one another as the means for others to come to know him.

## **Reflection**

1. What does it mean for Jesus to love you?
2. What does it mean for you to love others?
3. Who is someone in your life right now, particularly a Christian, who you are having a hard time loving? Pray for them and ask the Lord to strengthen your love for them.



# SERVING AS WORSHIP

Wednesday

John 13:1–17

*Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.... 'For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.'*

Christians often become so consumed with the act of serving that they forget the core reason for doing so. Anyone who is engaged in and involved in the local church has probably served their local church in some capacity. Yes, the church is busy and a lot of things happen on a weekly and even daily basis, but is that the only reason we should serve? Jesus gives us the importance of serving in John 13. The King of Kings humbled himself prior to his journey on the cross by washing the feet of his disciples. Simon Peter wanted no part in this, thinking that he should wash the feet of Jesus instead. Jesus knew though that in order for someone to have relationship with him, they must give of themselves fully to him. This washing of feet is an example of what it takes to truly know and walk with Jesus, which is service and humility. The fact that we even have new life in Jesus is a demonstration of service itself. Jesus serves us so that we can in return serve others.

Why is the act of serving often regarded as work instead of worship? One reason may be that we can become so “works” driven. In our culture today, we constantly stay busy and struggle to rest in God. Jesus calls us to serve not for the sake of being tired and weary, but rather to worship and experience joy. Just as he took joy in washing his disciples feet and demonstrating his love for them, we must do so as well. When we lose sight of the purpose of our service, we can go to God, and allow him to refresh and renew us. John 13 is a powerful passage for us to reflect on in our service. May we serve one another as a demonstration of an act of worship to God!

## **Reflection**

1. Do you frequently find yourself being distracted from worshipping God through serving others?
2. How can you refresh your purpose and motivation behind serving?
3. Ask the Lord to fuel your service to him as an act of worship.



# POURED OUT

Thursday

Matthew 26:26–29

*Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

The Passover was a special meal for all Jews, especially for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus gathered his disciples together for what would be their last Passover together. The meal begins as it normally does, but then Jesus does something rather odd. He picks up the bread and breaks it as was custom and says, “Take, eat; this is my body.” He continues, picking up the wine, a drink all Jews would have at their Passover meal. But it’s not just wine. Jesus says, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” No one had done this before. Jesus had just redefined the Passover meal, a meal Jews had been participating in for over 1,000 years. But Jesus also knew what he was about to do would change history forever.

Over and over again during Lent we’ve focused on the suffering of Christ. As he shared with his disciples, his broken body and spilled blood brought forgiveness of sin for many. Tomorrow is Good Friday, the day of Christ’s crucifixion and death. As we approach Good Friday, let us meditate on the cross of Christ. Let us look to him and remember what our sin cost him. Let us remember his sacrifice and obedience brought us forgiveness of sin and life. The next time we take communion, let us remember the cost of his sacrifice. Jesus was broken for us. His blood was poured out for us.

## **Reflection**

1. The last time you took communion, how did you reflect on Jesus and his sacrifice for us? Did you nonchalantly take the elements or did you reflect on Jesus?
2. Reflect on the death of Jesus. Spend some time visually thinking about his humiliation, scourging, crucifixion, and death. As you do so, try to imagine what Jesus experienced.
3. Thank God for the sacrifice of Jesus. Think specifically about what Christ's death has done for you.

# IT'S NOT TOO LATE

Friday

Luke 23:32–43

*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*

Today is Good Friday, the day our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified and died. When we read the Gospel accounts of his crucifixion and death, we see many similar elements of the story. Luke, however, tells an interesting story about the two criminals crucified next to Jesus. One of the criminals derides Jesus, like the rest of the crowd. The other criminal, however, has a different reaction. Turning to the criminal deriding Jesus, the other criminal asks, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due regard of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40–41). This criminal clearly understood something about Jesus. Despite Jesus’s mangled appearance, the criminal knew Jesus was the Messiah, the one who was to come and save the people. Because of who he knew Jesus to be, he called out, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:43). Then Jesus replies, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Did you catch that? Moments prior to death, the criminal reached out for grace and mercy. He knew he was undeserving of mercy, but he also knew that Jesus was full of mercy. In faith, the criminal cried out to Jesus. The criminal had come to the realization of who Jesus was and knew his only hope of salvation was in Jesus. Yes, he would experience the penalty for his crimes upon the cross, but because of faith, he would experience salvation in Christ. It’s not too late. For some, the criminal was out of time. He was about to die. For Jesus, even at the point of death, he was ready to extend mercy. Jesus’s death on the cross was painful and gruesome but it was an extension of grace and mercy. Today, may we be like the criminal who turned to Jesus. Whether we’ve experienced the grace and mercy of Jesus before or we’re crying out for the first time, may we turn to our crucified Lord and say, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

## **Reflection**

1. Have you trusted in Jesus as the criminal did? If not, what is stopping you from turning to Jesus now and in faith asking for him to save you?
2. Who in your life needs the message of Jesus? Share the gospel with them today?
3. Is there someone in your life that is like the criminal and seems far from God? Pray for that person, asking the Lord to soften their heart and for them to trust in Jesus for salvation.

# WON'T BE HELD DOWN

*Saturday*

*Acts 2:22–24*

*God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it*

For Jesus's disciples and his followers, the Saturday after his death was a dark day. Their hope, Jesus, had died, and now his corpse laid in a tomb. But they had no idea of what would await them the next morning. They had no idea that on Sunday morning, Jesus would not be there. In the power of God, Jesus had resurrected from the grave, defeating sin, death, and hell. Looking back, Peter says this on the day of Pentecost: "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:23–24). Death was not able to hold him! Unbelievable.

Tomorrow is Easter, a day that has been celebrated for nearly 2000 years. The day death was defeated. The day Jesus resurrected from the grave. The day sin was defeated. The day when Satan lost the war waging since the Fall in the garden. What a glorious day! Death could not hold Jesus down. We have so much to celebrate and be thankful for. Had Jesus never come, had he stayed dead, we would have no hope. But because Jesus rose from the grave, we have the greatest hope. Our God is not dead. He is alive. And because is alive, we too shall be alive. The sin we struggle with has been defeated. The physical death we will experience one day will be reversed. And we will live with our God forever. Tomorrow is Easter. Don't forget that. Prepare your heart for tomorrow. Tomorrow is a day to thank the Lord for his goodness. While he died, he is now alive. While we were dead, we are alive. While we will die, we will rise from the grave. Amen and amen.

## **Reflection**

1. Why is the resurrection such a hopeful event for us?
2. What do you need to do today to prepare your heart for tomorrow? Think about ways you can prepare your heart to say thank you to Jesus for his resurrection.
3. Who in your life needs to be at the church gathering tomorrow? Don't wait. Call, text, or message them and invite them to Easter.

**EASTER SUNDAY**



**HE IS  
RISEN**