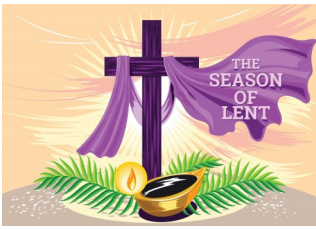


GOOD SHEPHERD  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL  
2024





# 2024 GSPC Lenten Devotional

Hello all,

Thank you to all who participated in creating this GSPC Lenten Devotional. You are a blessing to many. Also, thank you to all who put it to use, studying these devotionals. I pray that you find these devotionals meaningful this Lenten Season. Something to remember as you go through the devotional, Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of Lent in most Christian traditions. This is because each Sunday is a "mini-Easter," celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The significance of Sundays as days of celebration and joy contrasts with the penitent and reflective nature of Lent.

## **Here are a few key points to understand this tradition:**

### Historical Basis:

From the earliest days of the Church, Sunday has been set aside as the Lord's Day, commemorating Jesus' resurrection, which occurred on a Sunday. Therefore, each Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection.

### Lenten Observance:

Lent is a season of penitence, fasting, and reflection beginning on Ash Wednesday and leading up to Easter. The 40 days of Lent symbolize the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing for his ministry.

### Counting the Days:

If you exclude the Sundays, there are exactly 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday. Including the Sundays would extend the Lenten season beyond 40 days.

### Symbolic and Theological Significance:

This practice reflects the balance in Christian theology between penance and celebration, sorrow for sin and joy in the resurrection. It's a reminder of the hope and redemption that Easter brings, even in the midst of the Lenten journey.

Blessings,  
-Pastor Jeff

## FEB. 14TH - 1ST DAY OF LENT (ASH WEDNESDAY)

**Joel 2:12** -- *"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."*

### Time Capsule



Have you ever found an old treasure, perhaps a box in the attic containing great old “treasures?” When I was a first grader at Lincoln Elementary in Clarinda, Iowa, our teacher announced that our class was going to bury a time capsule! We brought in something small to put in the time capsule before the school officials buried it. I brought in a 1975 coin. The capsule was to be unearthed and opened in 50 years, in 2025.

I was looking forward to opening that up in 2025, but the school district sold that old school and the buyer demolished it to put up a housing development. I wonder what happened to the time capsule? Maybe construction workers found it and collected the “loot?” Maybe the school opened the time capsule before the demolition, and I never heard about it. Maybe the capsule is still buried in what is now someone’s backyard!

Well, the idea of a time capsule is that you return to it and open it. Opening a time capsule is a momentous, nostalgic, and joyful event. Returning to God should also be a momentous event bringing a deep joy. That is what Lent is about returning wholeheartedly to the Lord. The context of this verse from the prophet Joel is a people suffering greatly due to the consequences of leaving the Lord. This verse is a plea from God, turn back to Me!

Following the call to repentance, the book of Joel also contains promises of restoration and hope. God promises to restore their fortunes and pour out His Spirit upon them. The latter part of Chapter 2 emphasizes God's mercy and willingness to forgive and restore. Like my time capsule it is a mystery what happened in Joel’s day. Did the people of Joel’s time respond. In any event Joel’s prophetic words still speak to us today and we can control our response to God’s call to return fully to Him.

Lent is a time to come clean with God, have we honestly loved God with our whole heart, soul, and mind and loved our neighbor as ourselves? Jesus said the whole Law of God and everything the prophets teach hangs on these commands. Lent is a period for believers to reflect on the meaning and significance of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Lent is also a period for Christians to deepen their faith and grow closer to God, culminating in the joyful celebration of Easter. I hope your Lent, is a time of finding and growing closer to God.

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**Let us pray:** *Heavenly Father, as we enter this season of Lent, guide our hearts to reflection and renewal. Help us to embrace this as a time to draw closer to Your love and grace. Amen.*

by Pastor Jeff Warrick



### **FEB. 15TH - 2ND DAY OF LENT**

**Matthew 4:4** But he answered, it is written, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

Fasting - is the refrain from eating and sometimes drinking. It can also mean giving something up or doing without for long periods of time.

The people of God are often called to go without the ordinary means of life. Fasting is a brief, voluntary experience of this deprivation to prove our hearts. When we experience this "going without", the Lord reveals what is in our hearts. What are we controlled by? Facebook or other social media? Food? TV? Anger? Pride? Fasting is God's testing ground - and healing ground. Will we murmur as the Israelites murmured when they had no bread? Will we leave the path of obedience and turn stores into bread? Or will we "live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God? Giving things up is a way of revealing to ourselves and confessing to God what is in our hearts. I invite you to let God heal your heart with fasting during Lent. See if he does not reveal some deep things to you.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, Thank you for revealing the importance of Your word for our spiritual well being. Help us to hunger and thirst for Your truth above all else. Open our hearts to receive Your word and grant us understanding as we study and mediate on it. May Your word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Amen*

by Beth Languis

### **FEB. 16TH - 3RD DAY OF LENT**

**Romans 5:8** *But God demonstrates His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

One of my favorite lines from the old sitcom M\*A\*S\*H was when Major Frank Burns said "it's nice to be nice, to the nice." It was a nonsense line uttered by a wonderful actor stumbling to be nice to someone who seemed nice but having nothing else to say. I chuckle every time I've seen that scene over the years on reruns. It is indeed nice for us to be nice to those who themselves are nice... but if we act only in this way what do we gain?



If every personal interaction is a zero net sum equation what is gained by anyone? If I am only giving of myself to those whom I deem worthy of my gifts have I really given anything or only cashed their check of deemed worthiness? Where's the sacrifice if it costs us nothing? If there is no sacrifice or cost then what's it really worth? Speaking only for myself I can say that too often I only "do" when I can "get" and can measure cost.

This is not at all what Paul tells us in Romans 5:8 when he refers to what Christ's sacrificial death meant for us and what we did to earn it. Many times we aren't nice. We many times aren't just. We many times aren't truthful. Many times we don't give the benefit of the doubt. Many times we aren't righteous. We many times aren't what God calls us to be... that is, Christ-like. Sinless... or one striving our best to be without sin. And yet, despite our shortcomings, God showed us how much we are loved by Him by giving everything... the death of his Son to pay the debt for our sins even while were still sinning! He gave all, we gave nothing. What a gift!

This Lent I am not going to be sinless, but through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit I am going to be better, nicer, truer, more righteous and try to live the example of Christ and sin-less. I won't be sinless but I want to sin less... and in doing so show my love for God.

**Prayer:** *Father God, despite my imperfection and sin filled life You showed that You love me when you gave your Son up on the cross on my behalf. I pray for Your louder presence in my life. I pray for You to deepen my understanding of Your sacrifice for me. I ask You to encourage me to be more Christ-like and not be a zero net sum person. Amen*

by Tim Calkins



## **FEB. 17TH - 4TH DAY OF LENT**

**Psalm 51:10** *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."*

God is so amazing!

As humans living in a fallen world, we make mistakes and choices that don't honor God. And yet, God still sent Jesus to die on the cross to take away all, yes, all our sins. We must confess our sins and turn away from sinful ways.

I love it when my house is all clean and tidy at once. I also love it when my car has been washed, dried, and vacuumed. I love a well-tended garden when all the weeds have been pulled and fresh mulch has been put down.

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There is something about neat, clean, and orderly that brings me a sense of calm and peace.

Our hearts can also be filled with God's peace when we confess our sins and turn away from sinful ways. Our spirit can be made right, and our hearts made clean when we live righteously as the Holy Bible tells us to live. Let God's Word be your life guide, confess your sins, and live to honor God.

*God,*

*Help us to live to honor you. Let Your Word guide us in this day, and all days. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for us so that we can have clean hearts and renewed spirits that have been made right.*

*In Your Holy Name,*

*Amen*

by Dee Hughes



### **FEB. 19TH - 5TH DAY OF LENT**

**James 4:8** *"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."*

The parable of the prodigal son is a poignant reminder of the grace of God's forgiveness and the injustice of sin.

When the younger son leaves, the father allows him to go, even though the son would have been better off at home. When the son returns home, the father is waiting, and rushes out to meet him. Just as God will draw nearer to us when we draw near to him.

The younger son returns home because he has finally come to the realization that he wrecked his own life and has no hope of fixing things. Sadly, he did *not* return home because he loved the father and missed his family, but he is still a changed person. He approached his father with remorse, and the father in turn gave him a feast and a restored place in the home. Humbly reaching out to the father was enough to be blessed with love and abundant restoration. James 4 contains some strong words about the danger of sin. The author condemns worldliness, pronounces heavy-handed judgement on arrogant pride, and calls for grieving and mourning... it gets pretty fiery. Yet in the middle of the chapter is this simple and lovely phrase:

*Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.*

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The humble person can come to God flawed and all, just as the broken son shambled home in defeat and regret, hoping he could at least work to have food and shelter, and for both, the father is there with open arms, ready to embrace and restore.

*Father, please have mercy on us and let us approach you in humility. We come to you empty-handed, so often oblivious to the way we throw aside your love like the younger son, and we can only ask for grace and thank you for being ready to meet us.*

by Bethany Goossen



### **FEB 20TH - 6TH DAY OF LENT**

**Isaiah 55:6** “*Seek the Lord while he may be found: call on Him while He is near.*”

So, what does this scripture mean? That God might be lost to me and that there are times when he won't be near? But then there's Romans 8:38, which says: “His love will never be taken away. He will never forsake you. There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God.”

As I pondered these two scriptures a thought struck me. It's not God, it's me. I'm the one who runs away and hides. I'm the one who pushes God away. When I'm ashamed of myself. When I've gone after the things of the world. When I've been selfish and mean and gossipy, I'm the one who creates an environment that is toxic to the spirit and to the Lord, my God.

And then, at Christmas, it occurred to me that I've never put God on my gift list. Never consciously, thoughtfully given God a gift from my heart. It's easy to push the thought of it aside because what can I give God that he doesn't already have? True. But let's look at that from another perspective. As parents we are overjoyed by the gifts our children create. When they gift us something they hope will give us joy. A painted rock. A cat we really didn't want but have come to love. The times they let us hug them when it's not them who needed a hug, but us.

So, I challenge us this Lenten season to give God a gift. Perhaps a prayer journal that collects your wonderings of who God is and what He means to you. A memory journal of times that you feel he has been there for you, speaking to you in your circumstances that you can revisit when you feel lost. Will it be like Johann Sebastian Bach who signed his works with his initials and then SDG—for soli Deo gloria—

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For God’s glory alone. Maybe you will create a poem, (even a bad one—that’s totally okay), only you and God will see. Perhaps a painting. Or a collection of photos that you took because God created that landscape, person, event, and He was there with you.

I would suggest that when you decide, when you do, you will be seeking the Lord and calling on Him while he is near.

*Dear Lord, may this day and every day be one where I am seeking You. Where I can feel your spirit swell within me in song or prayer or meaningful activity. Forgive my trespasses, they are so many, and lead me in the way everlasting. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

by Luan Pitsch

**FEB. 21ST - 7TH DAY OF LENT**



**Matthew 6:21** *“For where your treasurer is, there will your heart be also.”*

I always felt I was a child of God and He was my treasurer. He was always with me in my life journey.

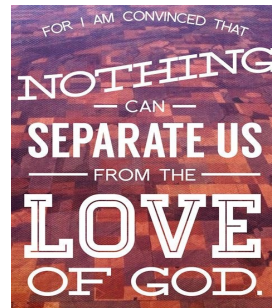
Of course I was truly blessed with parents who lived their faith. God gave me a faithful husband, a daughter who loves the Lord, a gifted son who felt we were good parents, four special granddaughters and a new grandson, plenty to eat, a home and good health.

*Thank you, my Savior for forgiving me my sins and guiding me daily.*

by Betty Bartlett

**FEB. 22ND - 8TH DAY OF LENT**

**Romans 8:38 & 39** *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*



We are not prepared for the twists and turns of life, for the ups and downs of daily living. Yet, this verse reminds us that no matter how high or how low we are, God is always with us. When we experience exuberant joy, God is there. When we are in the depths of despair, God is with us.

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I have often pondered the strength, courage and love that Jesus had when he came to earth from heaven as a babe through the support and love he had for humankind while on earth and then the harrowing experience he went through at Gethsemane, before Pilot, and the crucifixion. Surely, there is no greater love for us than this.

When trials come, we can be assured we have the love of God through Christ Jesus. When life seems challenging or confusing, we have the love of God to support us through Christ Jesus. When we celebrate the wedding of loved ones, we can be certain that God is with us and will bless that marriage through the love of Jesus. When we experience the joy of the baptism of a family member, we are experiencing the love of God through his son, Jesus our Lord and Savior.

On cloudy days, we should let the love of Jesus shine through to bring us strength and comfort. On sunny days, we should be thankful and appreciative of the endless love of God through Christ Jesus. We can always be assured there is no greater love than what God provides.


**Prayer:** *Our heavenly Father, we can never thank you enough for the gift of your son, Jesus. We humbly thank you for loving us so much that you gave your son that we might have everlasting life by believing in him. Amen*

by Ivette Bender

## FEB 23RD - 9TH DAY OF LENT

### THE SHEPHERD KEEPS WATCH

**Psalm 23.1** *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”*



My first grade Sunday School classroom had a large poster of “The Good Shepherd” by Warner Sallman, much like our Good Shepherd-stained glass window. Jesus is holding a little lamb in one arm and a carrying a staff in the other, as he is leading the flock of sheep along a path. In the background a valley of lush green grass and a pool of water. In thinking about the painting, I saw Jesus looking compassionately down upon the tiny little lamb in his arm, perhaps too weak to keep up with the flock. Another sheep is looking up at Jesus, as if listening or looking for direction. The rest of the flock appears content calmly following Jesus. At six years of age, I am sure I did not understand meaning of “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” Psalm 23.1, but the image provided my first concept of the Lord as my shepherd and continues to relate to me today.

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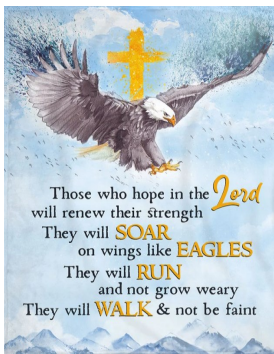
Psalm 23 is associated with King David. David knew the shepherd’s job well, having tended his father’s flock as a boy until he was anointed as king of Israel. David compares the relationship of a shepherd to his sheep to God’s relationship with us. A shepherd provides for his sheep, guiding the flock to food and water as well as providing shelter from storms and protection from predators. A shepherd spends day and night with his flock. He comes to know each one as an individual, their look and their personality. In turn the sheep come to know the shepherd as well. “My sheep listen to my voice: I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27. The sheep trust the shepherd to care for their essential needs, day and night.

I have come to know I can trust the Lord who is always with me. I know with God as my protector, I can always depend on him. He knows when I am happy and when I am sad. He is with me at 2 a.m. in the morning when worries creep into my thoughts, keeping me from falling asleep. It is a comfort to know the Lord hears my concerns for loved ones. I am calmed by his presence and listen for his guidance. I trust the Lord will look out for my loved ones, just as the shepherd would go in search of a sheep that has gone astray.

*Dear Lord, thank you for being my shepherd. You care for me and provide me with what I need along the path of life. Help me to know your voice, listen for your guidance and follow your directions. Thank you for being my good shepherd.*

Know your shepherd is always standing watch.

by Peg Moeller



**FEB. 24TH - 10TH DAY OF LENT**

**Isaiah 40:31** “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah was a prophet who spoke God’s words to His people, the Israelites.

Isaiah reminded the people that God was with them. That God knew their struggles. That he

heard their prayers.

He was there, and He was listening.

Have you ever been tired? Worn down by life? Swimming upstream? Slogging through mud?

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Those are the days that we must ‘hope in the Lord’. Laying our worries at God’s feet will lighten our load. Without the heavy burden we can continue on with the rat-race of life.

My days of running are behind me. Truth be told, I have never been much of a runner. However, I love walking. Walking my dog on a lovely spring or fall day brings me much joy.

Imagine soaring through the sky like an eagle. They appear so carefree! They hardly need to flap their wings to keep aloft. I long for days like that! To feel the warm sun on my back and the soft breeze in my hair. To know that my worries are gone.

On days when I am down in the dumps or feel I have too much “on my plate”, this verse reminds me that I can put my ‘hope in the Lord’ and ‘renew my strength’. I can’t soar like the eagle, but I can walk on a beautiful sunny day.

*Dear Heavenly Father, You are our comforter and salvation. You provide us with challenges and the strength to rise to them. Thank you for your abundant reminders of your constant love. Amen*

by Joni Calkins



## **FEB. 26TH - 11TH DAY OF LENT**

**Romans 12-2** *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

As I studied this verse, I looked at several bible versions and an on-line bible verse explanation. One reference was to Psalm 34:8 which reads “O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” As a child, my parents were not active in church. I found my early religion in different ways.

I have always loved animals, nature and the beauty of the sky, oceans and earth. Starting as a young girl, I had horses. I rode only for pleasure with many ponies. Then came my favorite mare, Goldie who was magnificent! She had two foals that I broke, one easily, one not so much. She was my sounding board and helped me see goodness and how to work through some adversity. She was the conduit to visiting with God.

Then onto the beauty of nature and the world. I spoke with God many times over the years when I was surrounded by the beauty around us. A few examples, my brother and I on a very small ship on the equator at midnight with no lights on the ship, the sunrises and sunsets on the ocean, the care my mother took of her rose garden, and the beautiful sunsets in Lincoln.

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There are many troubles in our world. There seems to be no explanation for it, but greed, the need for power and control seems to be part of it. A final version of Romans 12-2 says “And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is good, and acceptable and perfect will of God.” It is a beautiful verse.

**My prayer for the day:** *Dear Lord, thank you for the beautiful world we live in. There is beauty, kindness, friendship, love and joy that exemplifies you and your heavenly kingdom. Each day help us to live in your world and to live our lives trusting in you. Amen*

by Janet Latimer



## **FEB. 27TH - 12TH DAY OF LENT**

**Galatians 2:20** *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set*

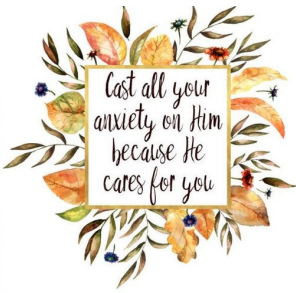
*righteousness could be gained through The Law, Christ died for nothing!”*

I work as a hairdresser which gives me many opportunities to both experience and hear about the many sinful aspects of human nature. For sure many of us are competitive, bitter over perceived slights and unkind to others. We all dip our toes in one or another of the deadly sins and quite frankly, crafting a person's outward image can feed into a couple of those; largely pride and envy. Reminding folks that they are beautiful in their own way and worthy of love has been my counterpoint to getting caught up in the comparison tendencies of the beauty industry. How often do you find yourself comparing yourself to others? Even your fellow Christians? Paul's letter to the Galatians is admonishing the church in Galatia for similar comparisons! The Jewish members of the church that had always adhered strictly to Mosaic law were over-emphasizing the importance of following the letter of the law, putting grace in the backseat. Paul reminded the church in Galatia that nothing we do here on earth can make us redeemed to God except the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and our acceptance of his grace. How does this grace, freely given to you allow you to extend grace to others?

*Dear God -*

*Please keep me mindful of the holy Spirit you have given me through the sacrifice of Christ. Let this spirit give breath to my witness for you through every word and deed in my life.*

*Amen* by Kitty Fynbu



## FEB. 28TH - 13TH DAY OF LENT

**1st Peter 5:7** “*Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you*”

Are you worried, anxious, troubled, can't sleep at night? Get yourself a worry chair, pick a day of the week to worry, write them all down, sit in the chair with a timer on and go over your list. Now doesn't that sound easy?

Or take all your worries to God in prayer. He is up all night anyway. Jesus is our shepherd. A shepherd is one who cares for his flocks. The keeping of was and is a principle means of livelihood in Palestine. The shepherd primary duties are to see that his flocks find plenty to eat and drink, to care for any that are ill or injured, and to find any that are lost. The Bible contains numerous references to the pastoral life in figurative sense. The term “Pastor” is still in use in the Christian church, and signifies those who have the spiritual oversight flocks or congregation. Read the rest of Peter 5 to see what else he has to say about shepherds.

I'm glad Jesus is our Good Shepherd He came to care for and to lead lost sheep, and lost men and women. His sheep know His voice and no one can take them from His hands.

**Prayer:** *God, thank you for being our Shepherd. Thank you for caring so much for us and paying the penalty fo our mistakes. Thank you for showing us what it means to be loved by You. Amen*

by Sally Docter

## FEB. 29TH - 14TH DAY OF LENT

Life is busy. There is always so much to do - meetings and projects for work, meal planning, grocery shopping, cleaning house, yard work, seeing friends and family, daycare and school pick ups and drop offs, bedtime routines, and trying to keep up with the never ending laundry! Sometimes, much like my toddler, I believe “I do it” is the best way to get all of these things done, leaving me overwhelmed and worrying if I'm doing enough and doing it “right.”

When I am feeling this way, I find great comfort and encouragement from this Bible verse:

**Matthew 11:28** “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*”

**COME**  
to Me, all  
YOU WHO LABOR <sup>and are</sup>  
heavy laden,  
AND I WILL GIVE YOU  
**REST**

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This verse tells me that Jesus knows when I am tired and overwhelmed, and is offering me help. Instead of acting like a spiritual toddler, insisting on doing everything myself, I can share my burden with my Heavenly Father and find the peace only He offers. For me, this often looks like taking a minute in an overwhelming moment to not only step away or count to 10 but to pray, sharing what is weighing on my heart, and then trusting that He will bear that for me and guide me through. Or instead of laying awake worrying about something, taking it to Jesus in prayer and trusting that He will help, which often results in not only the spiritual rest He provides, but also a good night of physical rest!

*Dear God, thank you for always watching over me. You understand my struggles, even when I don't realize them myself. Help me recognize the areas of my life I need to surrender to You. I trust You, and I seek the rest that can only be found in Your care. Amen.*

by Lauren Doggett



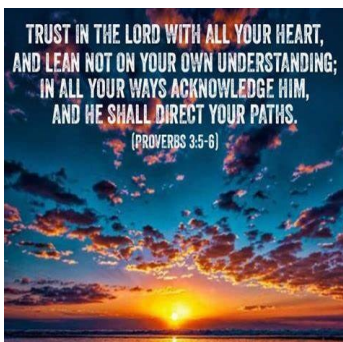
### MAR. 1ST - 15TH DAY OF LENT

**Philippians 4:13** *“I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me.”*

Each of us can do things through salvation from Christ that we could not do before. This certainly pushes us to focus on God and not on Earthly items and temptations. By following Christ, we can exert self-control and avoid sinfulness. Our tendency to sin can be redirected to a new life away from those sins and toward a focus of living as God wants. Our life on Earth becomes our first step to eternal life that is possible by Christ’s strength in us. Winning and losing in Earthly matters become inconsequential as the greatest abilities and victories are through Jesus.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord God; please help me to know always, that through Christ you strengthen me, for everything. Help me to keep your son always in my thoughts and let my actions be guided by your grace and power. In Christ name I pray, Amen*

by Jerry & Sheryl Hudgins



## MAR. 2ND - 16TH DAY OF LENT

**Proverbs 3:5-6** *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”*

I say to myself, “Okay, got it. This will be easy. I have tried to do things by myself so many times. I just have to pick one, talk about how it didn’t turn out right and

ask God for help. But which one should I use? Which one will have the most impact? I got this Lord.” I then look at the first part of verse 7 which says, *“Don’t be impressed with your own wisdom,”* and I realize I’m doing it again; trying to depend on myself to complete a task without seeking God’s guidance and trusting Him to show me the way.

Granted, from the day we were born, we’re constantly learning and growing. Absorbing life’s experiences to hopefully make better decisions in the future which will then lead us down a path of prosperity and good fortune. When they work we can be quick to praise ourselves for making it all happen just like we planned. This also reminds me of a saying an old flight instructor once told me, “Don’t break your arm patting yourself on the back.”

In reflection, we can probably see that even when things were going well, our path was starting to drift from the path God wanted us to take. This trajectory eventually leads us to disappointment and heartache. We ask ourselves, “How did I get to this point? My life seems to be spiraling out of control.” Usually, this is because WE thought we had it all figured out; the world is our oyster. Then things started to go sideways. We were humbled again. Luke 14: 11 says, “For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” We need to realize when we stay humble before the Lord, our decision making is more aligned with God’s will. Then if we stray from His path, it is much easier to get back on track. Even when we think our decision is aligned with God’s plan for us, we need to pray about it and ask for His guidance. It also helps to remember that all our wisdom comes from God. 2 Corinthians 3:5 says, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

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We are human so we will continue to make mistakes. However, when we trust in the Lord to guide us and seek His will then it is easier for us to see the path God has laid out before us.

**Prayer:** *“We are reminded Lord to trust in You with all our hearts and not to lean on our own understanding. Help us to remember that You will make our paths straight. Grant us the grace to rely on Your guidance, surrendering our plans to Your divine will, so that in every step we take, it is with faith in Your unfailing direction.” - Amen*

by Doug Obermeier



## MAR. 4TH - 17TH DAYS OF LENT

**John 3:16** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Sacrifice

During Lent it is a common practice to give up something in order to remind ourselves of what God, through Christ, gave up for us. God gave up something? Yes, He gave up a part of his eternal self, allowing it to become mortal and die a horrible death (we are talking about Jesus) for people He loved, but did not always love Him.

All we need to do is believe that Jesus died for our sins and gave his life for us, asking Him to be our personal savior, and we can have eternal life. By Jesus becoming mortal he made us immortal and a part of God, if we believe and put our trust in Him.

This Lenten season put yourself in God’s place and try to imagine giving up a part of you so a person who does not like you could be with you forever. Could you do it? I know that I would have a hard time. . . let us all strive to be more like Christ every day. Remember that the person that just cut you off while driving needs Christ just as much as you do.

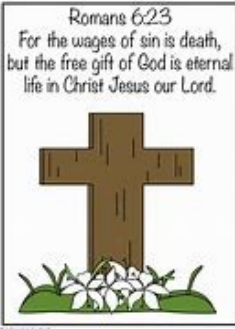
However, we need not fret as we can ask for God’s forgiveness and pray for help to do better next time. God paved the way for us to live with Him forever by sending his son, Jesus, to die for our sins. It is by His grace that we are saved and not by anything that we can do on our own.

(cont’d on next pg.)



**Prayer:** *"We give thanks for the profound love You have shown us, embodied in Your only Son, Jesus Christ. As we reflect on the promise of John 3:16, we are humbled and grateful for the eternal life given to us through faith. Even when life throws a curve or other treat us rudely, may we live in a way that honors this ultimate sacrifice and may Your Spirit guide us."* - Amen.

by John Bailey



### **MAR. 5TH - 18TH DAY OF LENT**

**Romans 6:23** *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Do you ever do something you know you shouldn't do or act in a way that you know is not right? If you are human, your answer is yes! I know I have said or done things I shouldn't and I feel bad afterwards.

My pastor growing up taught us the following acronym to help us understand the definition of grace. Grace=God's Riches At Christ's Expense. This definition really helped me to understand the meaning of God's grace. We cannot do it on our own, it is His gift to us. I know that I can never be perfect, but by Jesus's sacrifice for us, He makes us perfect in God's sight. Isn't that good news and news that needs to be shared?

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for your grace and for sending your son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Give us wisdom and knowledge to walk in your ways and to share the good news with others.*

*- Amen*

by Jen Bailey



But he was  
wounded for our  
transgressions,  
he was bruised  
for our iniquities:  
the chastisement  
of our peace was  
upon him; and  
with his stripes  
we are healed.  
Isaiah 53:5

## MAR. 6TH - 19TH DAY OF LENT

*Isaiah 53:5--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.*

In the Garden of Gethsemane, under a black sky, the Lamb of God prepared for his worst nightmare. He prayed and pleaded with God for another way, while also surrendering to God's will. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. -

### **John 3:17**

It was Jesus who was betrayed, arrested, mocked, falsely accused and rejected.

It was Jesus whose hands and feet were pierced with nails on the cross, whose head was pierced by a crown of thorns and whose side was pierced by a Roman spear.

It was Jesus who was beaten and bruised, shed tears of blood and crushed under the great weight of our sins.

I do not like to think about the images of Christ suffering, it makes me uncomfortable, but through those images we can see the power of sacrificial love. God had a plan. In the second part of Isaiah's verse, we find the purpose of that plan, "by His wounds we are healed".

Jesus took the punishment that we deserve, crucified to pay the penalty for our sins. On that cross Jesus carried the burdens of all and atoned for the sins of all humanity.

The wounds of Christ symbolize the source of our restoration with God. Eternal life in heaven is made possible through Christ. It is through His wounds that we find the remedy for the brokenness of our soul. Through Him everyone who believes is set free from sin. In His suffering we can find forgiveness, healing and a peace beyond our understanding.

Look to the cross and the wounds of Christ for your salvation. Trust in the healing power of God through Jesus Christ. He is our redeemer, and our redeemer lives.

(cont'd on next pg.)

**Prayer:** *Lord, We approach Your throne with grateful hearts, remembering the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:5. By His wounds, we are healed. We acknowledge the sacrifice of Your Son, Jesus, who was pierced for our transgressions. May this profound gift of love and redemption inspire us to live in the wholeness of the peace You have provided, and may we extend that healing grace to others in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Amen.*

by Heidi Schmal



### **MAR. 7TH - 20TH DAY OF LENT**

**Romans 8:28** *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”*

What is God’s purpose for you?

There is a saying, “God blesses us so that we may be a blessing to others.” And I have always associated that with an action step. A serving step—be it teaching, cooking, visiting, giving. Those are purposes you can sink your teeth into. And I do believe we are called to do these things, but what if it isn’t just the doing but ***our inner being*** (our faith, hope, and love), that comes along with that service that really counts?

**1 Cor. 13:13** *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

Going forward, can we commit that even if we stumble and fall at the doing—we’ll shine with the three things that last forever. Faith. Hope. Love. Do you have faith? Do you have hope? Do you have love? Let this prayer be on your lips:

(cont’d on next pg.)

**Prayer:** “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace  
 Where there is hatred,  
 Let me sow love;  
 Where there is injury, pardon;  
 Where there is error, truth;  
 Where there is doubt, faith;  
 Where there is despair, hope;  
 Where there is darkness, light;  
 And where there is sadness, Joy.  
 O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled  
 As to console;  
 To be understood, as to understand;  
 To be loved, as to love.  
 For it is in giving that we receive,  
 It is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
 And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

by Luan Pitsch



### MAR. 8TH - 21ST DAY OF LENT

**1 Corinthians 10:13** “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.”

Ahhhh... temptation. Giving in to weakness is a circumstance ready to pounce at every turn. I am tempted by all sorts of things. Do I eat or drink to excess and fail to care for the earthly body God has granted me? Do I participate in a gossip fest and steal someone’s reputation? Do I doom scroll social media minute after minute until a bunch of unproductive and potentially harmful minutes have passed? Do I try to sneak a seemingly “harmless” number or two past the IRS to make my bottom line a little better? Do I tell a “white lie” to get out of a duty, or to make myself look better? Do I let anger rule moments of my life? Do I act and react in the best, most Christ like way... or do I fall victim to temptation and fail in those regards?

For me, personally... I think I do “fairly” well at avoiding a lot of life’s temptations... but truth be told I’m actually pretty lame at resisting temptation... but I am constantly trying! I don’t do this on my own of course... I have accountability partners that help me with almost every aspect of my life. I have a wife and family that support me in all I do and help me to make life’s decisions.

(cont’d on next pg.)

I have trusted and honest advisors that help me with aspects of business life that are riddled with temptation. I have wonderful friends who guide me socially to avoid pitfalls. I have a church family who helps to feed my soul. Most of all I have a God who has promised that I will have the tools to get through even the most appealing of temptations! Do I fail? Yes... yes I do. And when I fail, it is always because I didn't lean on the supports that God has given me to endure even the most alluring of enticements to sin... my wife and family, my advisors, my friends... but mostly when I have not listened to the Holy Spirit speaking directly to me. God's promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is not that we won't be tempted, but that we will have everything we need to beat the temptation to commit whatever sin faces us. When I "just can't take it anymore", God promises that He will help me endure. Alone, I am not strong enough. With God I can and will be led away from temptation and sin if only I believe, listen and follow Him.

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father, I give you thanks for equipping me to withstand the storm of temptation. I ask forgiveness for the times I fail myself and You, and let temptation lead me to sin. Thank you for the support system you've given me. Most of all I thank you for the saving sacrifice of your Son and my Savior through whom my sins are forgiven. Amen*

by Tim Calkins



### **MAR. 9TH - 22ND DAY OF LENT**

**Philippians 4:6** *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

A new year always brings new worries, busy schedules, and commitments that need to be addressed. During this busy time, don't forget to praise God for another good year. Spring is around the corner when the snow melts. Opportunities, learning experiences, and blessings also come with the beginning of a year.

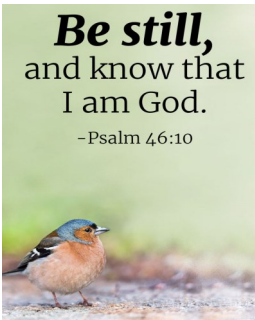
When the new school semester starts, when the spring cleaning needs to be done, and when tax day seems to be right around the corner, we need to express our concerns to God and trust that he will give us the strength and energy to get through it.

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In Philippians, Paul tells us to shift our worries into opportunities. We should turn to God in prayer instead of dwelling on our anxieties. God wants to know our concerns, but more importantly He wants us to understand that He has them under control.

**Prayer:** *Dear God, Thank you for all of the blessings that you have given me this year and in the years past. Help me to go to you when I have worries and anxieties. You are my stable rock where I can rest in knowing that you always protect me. Amen.*

by Mia Rikli



**Be still,**  
and know that  
I am God.

-Psalm 46:10

### MAR. 11TH - 23RD DAY OF LENT

**Psalm 46:10** *“Be still, and know that I am God.”*

Psalm 46 tells of a time where people are in crisis, a time of turmoil and uncertainty. It reminds us that our God is Immanuel, God with us, at all times. What a comfort to remember and feel His presence. In times of our own personal crisis we are to “be still, and know that I am God.” And who is our God? Our God is the one and only,

true living God, the great I AM! He is all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, just, redeemer, light of the world, living water, creator, victorious, comforter, etc. And though He has always been, His sovereignty and power are not diminished in any way. He is not tired or weary. He is still in charge and in control. He is our shelter, strength and provider.

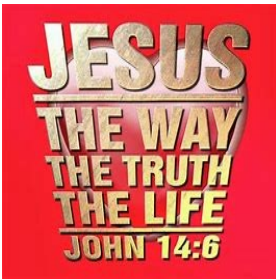
The verse “Be still, and know that I am God” was the inspiration for the hymn “Be Still, My Soul” and the stanza “Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side”.\* That means He is on your side! If God is for you, who can be against you? Who better to be by your side? No one and no thing is better. I have found great comfort and increased confidence and hope in this. When facing your own challenge, take the time to be still in His presence and let all that He is wash over you and be at peace.

**Prayer:** *Dearest Heavenly Father, help us to always look to you first in times of trouble. May we be assured and find comfort that as we “turn our eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, the things of earth will go strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”\* In Jesus name, Amen*

by Dianne Mota

\*Hymn-“Be Still, My Soul”, Katharina von Schlegel

\*Hymn-“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”, Helen H. Lemmel



## MAR. 12TH - 24TH DAY OF LENT

**John 14:6** “ *I am the way, the truth and life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*”

THE WAY” There is but one way to heaven and fellowship with God the Father, that is through Faith, believing that Christ died for your sins.

While in Thailand during the Vietnam war, a few of the guys from our station’s chapel group use to go into Udorn to the CMA mission for their Friday night activities. One which was watching films of Billy Graham revival meetings. Films, rather than TV, 50 years ago, there was extremely limited tv broadcasts in most of the rural parts of Thailand. At the close of his revivals meets, Billy Graham would give his call to receive Christ into your life. Which I did following the films each week.

While the Chaplain was home on leave, at one of our evening bible studies, we were studying about having faith to believe, that is when the Holly Sprit drove the point home to me. Like a ton of bricks hit me, and in a very audible voice, I heard, “Get that point, you must have faith to believe.” “I have come into you, now you must have the faith to believe.” That has changed my life. I grew up listening to Back to the Bible while going to sleep, so had the knowledge of Jesus. But was missing my part, that I must accept Jesus into my life,

Revelation 3:20 “Behold I stand at the door, and knock, if any man hears my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him, and he with me.”

Jesus was there, but I had to open the door.

**Matthew 21:22** “*And all things, whatever ye shall ask in prayer, believing ye shall receive.*”

You must have the faith to believe.

This is your part; you must have Faith. If you do not believe is what you ask in Prayer why would Christ grant it to you.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, I ask that you Bless my unbelief, that I would have the Faith to believe that your Holly Sprit is still available to us today, if only we have the Faith and believe. Amen.*

by Ed Schnabel



## MAR. 13TH - 25TH DAY OF LENT

**Romans 15:13** *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him."*

I received a beautiful Christmas gift from a dear friend. She gave me a plaque with this message on it: "When we give our worries to God, He puts His peace in our hearts." I found the just right place to put this gift so

that I could be constantly reminded that God wants to know what my worries are, and He wants me to give them to Him. Through prayer and by fully trusting His infinite power we gain His peace.

God's peace is a peace that truly surpasses all understanding. His peace fills us with joy even when facing life's battles and challenges.

How can we feel peace and joy when we are afraid, hurting, or feeling lost? It is possible if we practice giving our worries to Him. Even when the women learned of Jesus' empty tomb, they felt both fear and joy.

We naturally want to take on tomorrow's worries, but God tells us He will give us what we need for today. He will supply all our needs forever; however, we only need to take on today's challenges and face today's struggles. Through God, tomorrow will take care of itself.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, Giver of Peace, Help us to give our worries to you so that we may be filled with Your hope, joy, and peace. We need Your indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us as we learn to trust You fully with our lives.*  
*Amen*

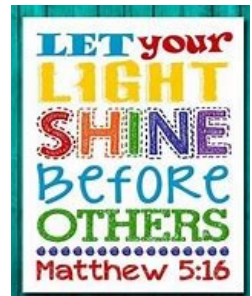
by Dee Hughes

## MAR. 14TH - 26TH DAY OF LENT

**Matthew 5:16** *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

"In the same way" refers to verses 13-15 of Matthew chapter 5 where Jesus explains to believers that they are salt and light in the world. We are to share the good news of the gospel with others that they too may receive the gift of salvation and have new life in Christ.

So what is this light we shine? It is the light of Christ Jesus that our lives reflect to those around us. As believers we have the power of the indwelt Holy Spirit which enables and equips us to live Christ-like lives in a troubled and rudderless society. This verse challenges us to risk being different than many around us.



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The values believers have are not meant to be lived out only in our churches and homes, but out in the world: in our work places, social groups and in our daily interactions with others. This is the challenge, that despite push back and negativity we continue to live out “loving our neighbor as ourselves” (Matthew 22:39b). We are to be strong and confident in the Lord and what we know to be true about God and what Scripture teaches.

Believers living out Christ-like lives stand out. They are those who respond differently during struggles, offer encouragement differently, and interact with others differently. Believers may be subjected to anger, rejection or ridicule for their faith and life choices by some, but others will be drawn to the light you reflect because Christ lives in you. This glorifies our Father in heaven. So shine brightly, dear friends, for the glory of God.

**Prayer:** *Help us this day Lord to shine brightly for you. Give us what we need each day to live faithful, Christ-like lives so others would be encouraged to seek you. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen*

by Dianne Mota



### MAR. 15TH - 27TH DAY OF LENT

**2 Timothy 1:7** *“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”*

There are lots of reasons to fear in our world today. News updates about the COVID-19 pandemic continue years

after we were so scared most of us stayed at home for months or longer. There are political divisions, and social upheaval worries us, compounding the more mundane pressures we face in our personal relationships, work, finances, and health. We may feel a bit like Charlie Brown, plagued by *pantophobia*—the fear of everything! Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 1:7 offer encouragement for fearful humans praying that we become saints: “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

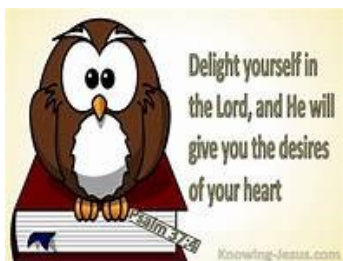
Paul is asking Timothy to follow his example of fearlessness in suffering and faithfulness in ministry. This is the apostle’s final New Testament letter, and he reflects on the real challenges he faces—abandoned by his friends, assaulted by his foes, alone in a Roman prison. He exhorts his protégé, Timothy, to be unashamed and “share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

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To persevere in painful, puzzling times, we as Christ's disciples need more than a pep talk; we need *strength* that only God can provide. That's why Paul reminds his spiritual son "to fan into flame the gift of God" (**2 Tim. 1:6**). We kindle the divine gift by prayerfully and persistently pursuing joyful communion with the divine, serving others with love in the strength that God supplies and using self-control to live as God's holy people. Verse 7 explains why Timothy must kindle and not neglect this gift: "*For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*"

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, help me to walk in love, power and the sound mind that You have given me. I rebuke the spirit of fear that it brings against me to cause defeat. Your word says that Jesus has overcome which means that I have overcome. The victory that is Yours is also mine. Thank you Lord. Amen*

by Gary & Karen Heusel



### **MAR. 16TH - 28TH DAY OF LENT**

**Psalm 37:4** "*Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.*"

I can't help feeling that the truth in this verse can be a bit of a corollary to James 4, where believers are told to ask God for the things they need (James 4:2) and then

further told that when they ask and don't receive, it's because of where their request is coming from... (James 4:3)

**Psalm 37:4** sounds lavish in its promise, when considered in tandem with the wording in James. I find the two passages very interesting, taken together:

*"You're not asking, but then when you do ask, you're not getting what you ask because you ask for such bad reasons!"*

*"Take delight in God, and he will give you your heart's desires!"*

James gives a hard truth about being neglectful or flippant with the way we ask God for things, but the Psalmist doesn't even mention asking!

Elsewhere in this devotional, I wanted to talk about the verse in James 4 that says *Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you*, as I think it ties these two seemingly opposite truths about the giving nature of God together.

When I was a little girl, I found Psalm 34:7 a bit confusing. Was this passage actually telling me that if I just summoned the right emotional feelings about God that I could get a trip to Disneyworld or something?

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I heard some leaders in a youth service interpret the passage to say that if you take delight in God, he will give you the *right desires*. The desires themselves would be the gift. I liked that application (and I still think it's fine), but if someone really loves the Lord, is their heart going to desire ungodly things?

James tells us to go to God; draw near to him, and he will draw near to us. Psalms 37 says that when we delight in God, our hearts' desires will be met, and therein lies the beautiful connection. The Lord is both giver and gift.

**Prayer:** *“Father God, please give us hearts that seek you. Have mercy on us and give us the desire to know and delight in you. Amen.”*

by Bethany Goossen



### MAR. 18TH - 29TH DAY OF LENT

**Micah 6:8** *“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

There is a quote in CS Lewis', "The Problem of Pain," where he references George MacDonald's posits a passage of God saying to man, *'You must be strong with my strength and blessed with my blessedness, for I have no other to give you.'*

God gives us His Strength. God gives us His blessedness. So as you are searching for your path this Lenten season and wondering how you will go about difficult days and good days - remember **Micah 6:8**.

Act justly.

Love mercy.

Walk humbly with God.

And also remember:

*God is good. All the time.*

*God gives you His strength.*

*God blesses you with His blessedness.*

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In life, there is no ends that justify the means, life is just a long line of ends and means bundled together. Everyday a new beginning and its own end. Every day a new chance to choose justice, to choose mercy, and in so doing to be blessed with a soul-expanding, spirit-swelling, humble walk with God.

**Let this be our prayer this day and always:** *“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad (and good) in it. In Jesus name we pray, Amen and Amen.”*

by Luan Pitsch



### **MAR. 19TH - 30TH DAY OF LENT**

**Romans 5:1** *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

#### A Peace Maker

When you were a little kid or if you are still a kid have you ever had a disagreement with an older brother/sister, teacher or adult? When these disagreements happen you go to a parent or a trusted adult to help you out. The trusted adult then helps the two of you discover the problems and help you fix them so things can get better.

Our sin causes us to war against God. If we believe that Jesus died for our sins Jesus will heal the wounds that our sin causes, helping us to make up with God and give us peace with God so we can spend eternity with Him in heaven.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, In the grace of Your love, we have found peace with You through the great peace maker, the Prince of Peace, Your Son, Jesus Christ. We thank You for the state of grace in which we stand because of our faith in Jesus. May we rejoice in the hope of Your healing glory, never forgetting the love You have poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

by John Bailey

## MAR. 20TH - 31ST DAY OF LENT



**1 Corinthians 16:14** “Do everything in love.”

Love, just a four letter word but oh the power of those four letters! It’s so easy to love, isn’t it” Parents, husband/wife, children, friends, we have so many we love. What about others? In **Matthew 5:44** Jesus says: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Can we really do this?

When I was a young child I attended Vacation Bible School every summer. One of the first verses I learned was **1 John 4:19** “We love because He first loved us.” This is how we can love others because God showed us what love is by sending His Son and then sacrificing Him on the cross for you and me. Paul challenges us to do this very thing in his letter to the **Ephesians chapter 5 verses 1 & 2** tell us to “be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” I really want to be an imitator of God, how about you? It is not always easy.

Pastor Jeff preached a message last year entitled, “The National Debt” and it really stuck in my mind. The verse that struck a chord in my head was **Romans 13:8** “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” We need to stand strong in love for everyone. I’m reminded here of a special hymn that says it all, “And they’ll know we Christians by our love. Yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

**Prayer:** God, because of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection, we have constant access to Your perfect love. Forgive us for all the times we take Your Son’s sacrifice for granted. Draw us closer to you in love so we can be imitators of that love. Help us to remember that we love because You first loved us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

by Sally Docter



## MAR. 21ST - 32ND DAY OF LENT

**Psalm 90:12** “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom”

Life on Earth is a journey that is a privilege given to us, by God. At some point, I’m sure most of us have heard about the meaning of “The Dash”, which rest between the dates on our final epitaphs. That single line represents our life on Earth: our Alpha and Omega in the physical body. A lot happens within that small horizontal blip, and I believe God has given us direction as we navigate from the date of our birth until our last breath.

The days with our physical bodies are finite, with limitations. Many of us have differing views on how to live this life on Earth. Some of us are planners, visionaries, trying to anticipate what will happen next: the future. These are God’s children trying to plan for events that might be out of their control. I know God appreciates those of us that are meticulous and prepared, but not everything goes as planned. Some of us are spontaneous, instantly inspired: carpe diem! These are God’s children trying to live and enjoy what is happening right now: the present. I know God appreciates those of us that are free-spirits and living in the present, but those of us that don’t have the foresight past the dusk will be disappointed with what lies in tomorrow’s light.

I believe this passage inspires us to be a bit of both. We must be planners. We must anticipate for both good and bad. Life is full of ups and downs, and those of us that place our faith in God know that we must take part in our Earthly planning. We must also seize the day! We live in the present... we are alive in the present. You were given a gift of free-choice through the sacrifice of God’s son: Don’t take this lightly. Bring joy and happiness into this moment. Learn from your past, plan for your future, and live for today! We are stewards of God’s resources, which time is the greatest of all. Use your dash wisely, for eternity lies beyond.

**Prayer:** *“Dear Heavenly Father, Please help us appreciate the time that you’ve given us in our humanly form. We don’t always take time to thank you for these moments, but as we anticipate your son’s sacrifice and resurrection, let us give praise for the things we often take for granted. We know that our time is limited in this space and moment, but we look forward to being with you in your divine heavenly kingdom when you call us. Let us learn from our transgressions and mistakes, to make our time on Earth more at peace, and to give honor unto you. Amen.”*

by Shawn Mousel

## MAR. 22 - 33RD DAY OF LENT



For by grace are ye saved  
through faith: and that  
not of yourselves: it is the  
gift of God: Not of works,  
lest any man should  
boast. ~ Ephesians 2:8-9  
(KJV) -

**Ephesians 2:8-9** *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”*

What a relief this verse is to me! I am so glad that I didn't have to count on myself to be good enough to gain my salvation. I know there is no way that would be possible. Christ died for me and you because there is

simply no other way for sinners to be saved. All we have to do to receive this gift of grace is to humbly, in faith, accept it. We have no basis on which to claim we deserve it or have earned it. It is entirely God's doing, out of love for us.

Now that we have received this most precious gift, what will we do with it? I know if I've given someone a gift of, say clothing, I am most pleased if that person wears it often. Or if the gift was a tool of some sort that it proved to be useful and was in fact put to good use.

Ephesians 2:10 gives us some guidance as to how this new life is to be used. “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” These good works are the fruit of our salvation, done because we have been saved. In general I think these works are done out of love and care for our neighbors. The Holy Spirit prompts us in how, as we go about our day, to be Jesus' hands and feet in our community. We partner with Him to accomplish this. The gift of salvation is to be used by us to glorify God. It is not a gift to be tucked away safely never to be seen.

**Prayer:** *We thank you Lord for this most marvelous gift of salvation. May we put it to good use in our lives in order to honor you, the Giver, and bring you glory. Amen*

by Dianne Mota



## MAR. 23RD - 34TH DAY OF LENT

**Matthew 26:14-15** *“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, “What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?” And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.”*

This is a statement of betrayal but points to a remarkable contrast: steadfast loyalty. A trusted friend of Jesus betrays Him. But as we know, Jesus is always faithful to us.

We both know a bit of that feeling, due to workplace incidents many decades ago, at different times in our separate careers through experiences of betrayal in the workplace. Colleagues acted to hurtfully protect their own interests at the expense of ours. As we reflected on our hurt feelings from these past events in our lives, we both came to the realization that maybe we could have been more supportive or helpful to others around us and concentrate on what we control in terms of our relationships. So instead of pointing an accusatory finger, maybe we need to work on us (glass houses and all) with the always faithful Jesus as our support.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord God, please keep my heart from betraying your Son, in my words, actions and thoughts. Help me to be loyal only to Jesus and know always that in your precious Son lies my loyalty and my salvation. Help me to share love with all I encounter, so that we may all meet in God’s glory. Thank-you Lord, Amen*

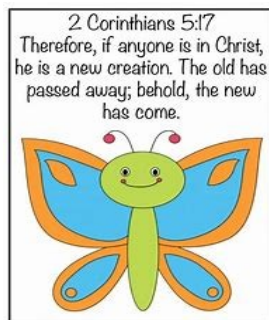
By Jerry & Sheryl Hudgins

## MAR. 25TH - 35TH DAY OF LENT

**2 Corinthians 5:17** *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here.”*

This verse is written by Paul to the church in Corinth. I don’t know about this particular letter, but I know that Paul wrote many of his letters from a prison cell. He definitely knew pain and suffering.

I don’t think of myself as old, but I can certainly feel the effects of the aging process. Tim and I have termed this stage in life “the age of random aches and pains”. One day my right knee will hurt. The next week my left hip aches. Who knows what will be bothering me next week?



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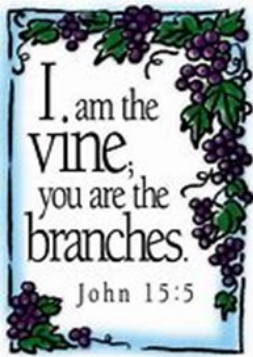


I'm also watching the aging process strike my parents. Once upon a time, they were the strongest, smartest, bravest people I knew. They carried me. They solved all of my problems. They knew every answer to any question I could think to ask. Now I am watching them slow down. They are experiencing deteriorating health. They don't exhibit the clear thinking and confidence they once had.

Paul tells us that we Christians can take comfort in knowing that this body we inhabit here in this world is only a temporary dwelling for us. There is no need to fear aging, or even dying. We live confident that when we leave this life, we will be in God's presence. We will trade in our aching earthly body for a glorious heavenly body.

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the body and earthly life you have provided for me. Help me through my earthly aches and pains. Thank you also for sending Jesus Christ to be my savior. In Christ, I have the knowledge that one day I will live in Heaven with you. Amen*

by Joni Calkins



### MAR. 26TH - 36TH DAY OF LENT

**John 15:5** *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Whoever lives in Christ and invites His spirit to live in them will bear abundant fruit. However, apart from Him, there is nothing. This is why it is vital to that our sacred union with Him is never cut off or abandoned. Just as sap and nutrients flow from a vine through its branches, so does

God's life flow through you and empower you.

Just as the branches from trees bear various fruits, so do we bear fruit when we are closely connected and intimate in our relationship with God. When we consistently strive to draw closer to God, our intimacy with Him becomes richer.

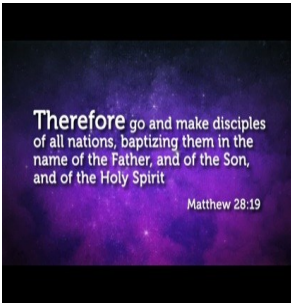
God knows all our weaknesses and needs, and since we are connected to Him, He stands by, ready to infuse us with His strength and cover us with His grace. The branch of the Lord is now Christ living in and through His people. You personally are a dwelling place for the Spirit of the Lord. Even with His infinite and perfect nature, He still chooses to make a home in you!

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## MAR. 27TH - 37TH DAY OF LENT

### A Command and a Promise

**Matthew 28: 19-20** *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you to the very end of the age.”*



A person's last words are very important and loved ones want to hear them and try to then do what the person is asking. When Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives and uttered the words in **Matthew 28:19-20** his disciples felt the same way. He was leaving them physically and gave them all a command or commission followed by a wonderful promise. Those words are just as true and meaningful for us today if we are also disciples of Jesus.

What did Jesus command or commission the disciples to do? First He commanded them to Go! Where were they supposed to go? Jesus told them to go to ALL nations. This was in the days before modern air travel and yet Jesus commanded them to go to ALL nations. These were mostly Jewish followers and probably did not yet truly understand Jesus's coming for the whole world. But Jesus, who knew the future, said to go to ALL nations, Jews and Gentiles. (All the rest of us!) What a broad all-encompassing vision Jesus gave to His followers!

After sharing the message of forgiveness and love through Jesus Christ, we are to baptize those who also believe in Jesus. We are to baptize them in the name of the trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Wherever we go there will be those who hear and respond to the gospel message. We are to baptize them and start new churches! But Jesus does not stop there. He commands us to go, to tell the good news of the gospel, and to baptize them in His name. But that even is not the end of His command. Jesus went on to emphasize following through with these new believers! He told the disciples to “Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Wow! These disciples had been with Jesus for about 3 years and Jesus had told them a lot. Commanded a lot. Modeled a lot of what a Christian is supposed to be. Taught them in large and small groups. Given them parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. Healed them. Comforted them. Reprimanded them. Challenged them. Opened their eyes to the WHOLE world around them. This kind of depth of teaching or DISCIPLING cannot occur in one lesson, or one day or even by one person. Jesus is giving the disciples and us the commission to go, tell, baptize and to teach or disciple each new believer.

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This takes time. Commitment. Investment of energy. Follow through. This is how the new Christian church would be formed and spread to the ends of the earth.

This is a huge command and commission for Jesus's followers who were gathered to hear His last words to them. They were yet unaware of the cost their following Jesus would entail. But Jesus left them with His very last words of promise." And surely I am with you always, to the end of time." I like the King James version of these verses which is the version I memorized as a small child. "And LO I am with you ALWAYS, even to the END of the age." Jesus is with us ALWAYS until the end of time." No one else has the power to make and keep such a promise!

I was commissioned as a Baptist Missionary to Japan in 1985 just after my husband and I graduated from seminary. We went to Japan for almost 14 years, living in both Tokyo and Sendai. This scripture was read at our commissioning ceremony. I memorized this verse as a child and it has guided me my whole life. Even after coming home to the states and serving as Associate Pastor in two churches for 8 years in Nebraska I felt this was my command as a pastor. After leaving full-time ministry, I felt God's command continued through me wherever I worked in various jobs to be a messenger of God's love. Sometimes my ministry was to small children as a teacher. Sometimes my ministry has been to the elderly or disabled as a Caregiver. But just because I left full-time ministry, Jesus's words did not leave my heart. Each of us, wherever we live, work, worship and travel are on a mission to carry out Jesus's last words. That's why this passage is often called "The Great Commission."

**Prayer:** *Lord, As we heed the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, guide us to spread Your teachings leading to baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, remembering always that You walk with us, even to the very end of the age. - Amen.*

by Renae Odell

**MAUNDY  
THURSDAY**

**MAR. 28TH (MAUNDY THURSDAY)**  
**38TH DAY OF LENT**



**John 13:34** *“A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another”*

Is it possible to love one another as much as God loves us? This question seems to perplex me, as it should you. God loved you and me so much that he sacrificed his only son to save us! Isn't that truly amazing, and yet maybe, even bad parenting?! What would you be willing to sacrifice in order to show your love for someone you've never met before, or for someone that doesn't acknowledge your existence? This seems like an awkward question, but isn't that what is being asked of us in God's new commandment?

We live in times of turmoil and trouble, but that has been part of human history since the beginning of time. However, it seems to be amplified with the news, social media, and instant reports of global injustices on an hourly basis. It's so challenging to see the goodness being shared when we are surrounded by clouds of anger, aggression, spite, rage, righteousness, and vanity. I often feel that we are currently living in a society that promotes our own self-image and status, over the need to sacrifice and support others. We are to love one another, which could be as simple, yet challenging, as showing respect and kindness during difficult times.

The greatest love I've ever experienced is through my own children. I would do anything for them, as would most parents. Even before I met them, I loved them more than my own self: It does seem somewhat possible to love others as intensely as God loves us! We must apply that love and compassion towards others on a regular basis. But the troubling part is the sacrifice. How could God sacrifice his only child for those of us that look away from him and focus on ideologies that go against his word? Would any of us be able to make such a decision as this? Perhaps this is why God is almighty! He knew that there was much more at stake than this worldly decision. Eternal life with him, in heaven, is the true commitment! What we do in this lifetime is nothing more than a “blip” on our eternal heartbeat, for God wants us to be with him in his eternal home.

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As we move towards this most holy of days, take time to think of those in need, those that could heal and benefit from your kind words and actions. Reach out with compassion and thoughtfulness to those that you've disregarded for much too long. But don't forget to think of those that you are unaware of: What can you do to help others, showing your love, on a daily basis? The homebound, the meek, the homeless, the ill, the lonely: perhaps all? When you think that you are helpless in helping others, don't forget this: you can lift up prayers to God, asking for strength and guidance in your pursuit of sharing your love, and his, with others.

**Prayer:** *Dear Your love cannot be matched! It is truly divine and almighty! It was woven into us through your parental love, and completed with the sacrifice of your only son, Jesus Christ! As we go forward today, and every day, please give us the guidance and courage we need to share your love with others. We are stewards of your love and compassion and are entrusted to share it with all. May God bestow peace and love with you as we continue this journey towards the Easter celebration. Amen*

by Shawn Mousel



### **MAR. 29TH (GOOD FRIDAY) - 39TH DAY OF LENT**

**Isaiah 53:3** *“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*

This verse is a statement of humans rejecting God incarnate. We know of the world's rejection of Jesus though He always reached out to all. His followers deserted Him during His ministry and particularly when He was under control of the authorities. The ultimate statement of that steadfast loyalty and love was on the cross when Jesus asked for God to forgive us despite what we humans had done to God's Son.

Through these grievous times for Jesus, He stayed firm in his devotion to God and to His mission on Earth to save us. Standing your ground against the crowd for righteousness isn't easy but Jesus understands your struggle and stands with you.

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Often these topics remind of a song, so I share with you some excerpts from “I am a Man of Constant Sorrow,” first recorded by Dick Burnett in 1913 (and possibly written by him):

“I am a man of constant sorrow  
I've seen trouble all my days  
“For six long years I've been in trouble  
No pleasure here on Earth I've found  
For in this world I'm bound to ramble  
I have no friends to help me now.....  
But there is one promise that is given  
I'll meet you on God's golden shore.”

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, please help me to love like Christ. Help me to not despise or reject any person. By Your grace, power and love help me to always choose Jesus over everything else so that we may all meet again on Your golden shore. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen*  
by Jerry & Sheryl Hudgins



### **MAR. 30TH (HOLY SATURDAY) - 40TH DAY OF LENT**

**Lamentations 3:25-26** *"The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."*

Franklin Half Dollar

How could I so easily lose something I valued greatly? When I was six years old,

I received a bright red fire truck as a Christmas gift. This was no ordinary fire truck. It had a nozzle onto which you could attach a garden hose, so that it would then shoot real water from its hoses. The truck also had a ladder that would spring up when released. I used to launch things from the ladder. I thought that was the coolest toy of all time.

One day I decided to see how far it could launch a prized Franklin half dollar I owned. I reeled in the ladder, put the coin on it and launched it. Wow did it fly! But then I couldn't find it, it was lost! I returned to that area from time to time to look for it with zero success.

About twenty years later I got a phone call from my dad, he had purchased a metal detector. I told dad the story about the coin and where I thought it was in the yard.

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He said he would reserve that spot for me to look in the next time I came home. When I returned home for a visit, I took the metal detector and searched for lost the coin. I was skeptical about being able to find it. For about the first half hour of searching all I found was wire, a couple of pennies, and match box cars. Then eureka; it was down about four inches deep in the ground. I was glad to have the coin back.

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him. We must seek the Lord with persistence and passion. I really pursued that coin; I wonder sometimes do I pursue the Lord with such determination? The Lord, of course, is far more valuable than a silver coin. The Lord is worth pursuing more than our most prized possession. In fact, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is worth everything you have. Ironically, even if you lose everything and give everything away and gain the Kingdom of God, you have now gained everything. You have gained the salvation of the Lord.

On Holy Saturday, Jesus was in the tomb, the world thought he was lost. It is true that he was dead, but He had not been lost for good. The next day he would rise from the grave proving that He is indeed our salvation. Jesus is worth seeking and you don't need a metal detector, just love of the Lord in your heart to lead you to Him.

**Let us pray:** *O Holy Lord, on this Holy Saturday, we pause in remembrance of Your Son's entombment. Grant us the grace to reflect deeply on the mystery of the cross, and the hope it brings for resurrection. May our hearts be stilled in the anticipation of Easter's joy. Lastly may we always pursue Jesus who is of inestimable value. Amen.*

by Pastor Jeff Warrick

