

Is it Finished?

Our Journey to the Cross

40-DAY LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

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WELCOME TO A 40-DAY LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Lent is a sacred season in the Christian calendar. Lent invites us to journey with Christ through a period of reflection, scripture, repentance, decisions, and spiritual renewal. Spanning forty days, this time mirrors the forty days Jesus spent battling the devil in the wilderness, where He fasted, preparing his heart and mind for the ministry and sacrifice that lay ahead.

For centuries, Christians have used Lent to draw closer to God, relinquish distractions, and deepen their faith through prayer, fasting, scripture readings, and intentional acts of kindness. This is practiced in order to decide to continue towards the Cross of Calvary. Jesus said that if you want to follow him, you must deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me (Matthew 16:24).

This 40-day devotional calls us to the mandate Jesus put forth. We must have the heart posture to continue to grow in the ways of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Through each day of Lent with scripture, reflection, and practical application, we will journey together to learn what these key stories offer us. How do we answer the question, “Is it finished?”

Through the act of Jesus allowing the crucifixion to happen and sacrifice for sin, it is definitely finished. Jesus cried out on the Cross, “It is finished.” But when we come to a place of decision, we must ask ourselves, has He

finished with us? God is still at work with us, in us, and through us. Lent is designed to assist us in answering that question and help us in a time of growth. We must decide to do the spiritual disciplines of scripture: reading, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and service, as we journey to the Cross and celebrate the Resurrection.

Whether you are new to Lent or have observed it for years, these readings offer an opportunity to pause and consider the ways God is calling us into service. Why do we need to grow? Because God is not finished molding us. Each entry is crafted to encourage honest self-examination, foster hope, and inspire you to walk in the footsteps of Christ.

As you embark on this journey to the Cross, remember that Lent is not merely about giving something up, making a sacrifice, or entering into a promise. We just don't give up eating candy, meat, sweets, or promise to sacrifice drinking coffee or chocolate, etc., but it is about intentionally deciding to make space for God to work in your life. It is a chance to let go of what hinders your relationship with Him and to open your heart to the transformative power of grace. Through daily devotion, gleaning from the stories of scripture, you will discover new dimensions of God's love and faithfulness, even in the midst of uncertainty.

We pray that these forty days become a meaningful chapter in your spiritual story. That at the end of the day we chose to do as the Garo tribal Indian, Nok seng in Assam, India, who was martyred for his faith in the late 1800's, when he wrote, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, the cross before me, the world behind me."

We pray that you approach each day with openness and humility, knowing the Cross is before you and that God

meets you wherever you are. As you reflect, pray, and act, may you be renewed in spirit and strengthened for the journey ahead. Let us walk together, anticipating the hope and joy that Resurrection morning brings.

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PURSUIT OF GOD

Jeremiah 29:13

“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

This Lenten series asks the question, “Is it finished?” Knowing God will help answer this question. Life’s greatest pursuit is knowing God. A.W. Tozer writes, “How tragic that we in this dark day have our seeking done for us by teachers. Everything is made to center upon the initial act of ‘accepting’ Christ ... and we are not expected thereafter to crave any further revelation of God to our souls. We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him, we need no more seek Him.”

Tozer reminds the reader that it is God who places the urge, the desire, the hunger to pursue Him. Moses prayed, “Show me Your Glory” (Exodus 33:18), and Paul’s desire to see and know God more, “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God” (Romans 11:33). God wants us to pursue Him. He wants us to get to know Him!

In this cancel culture, many pursue riches, many pursue happiness, many pursue good health, but I repeat, the greatest pursuit in life is the pursuit of God. Some people just flat out don’t know God. Some people know God casually, some know Him informationally, some know

Him religiously by feelings and emotions, and others know God programmatically. Yet others don't want to know God. The people of God need to pursue God and get to know Him. My question is, how well do you know God?

We should pursue God to get to know Him better. He knows us! Psalms 139 reminds us how much God knows us. God knows our "lying down and our rising up." In other words, God knows the rhythm of our lives. Every waking and sleeping moment we live, God knows. Pursuing God creates intimacy. The Hebrew word for "to know" is *yada* or, in Greek, *gnosis*. Paul says in Philippians 3, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection." He is talking about knowing God intimately.

Pursuing God demonstrates our need for God. The hymn writer penned, "I need thee, Lord, I need thee, every hour Lord, I need thee, O bless me now my Savior I come to thee". Church let us pursue God continuously and intentionally. Every waking moment should be an intentional pursuit of God.

Selected Scriptures: Exodus 33:1-19; Psalm 139;

Romans 11:25-36; John 14:1-14.

Song: "Pursue All I Need Is You" by Hillsong Worship, Hillsong Young & Free.

Jot it down!

JOT IT DOWN!

Isaiah 30:8

“And now, go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever.”

God told Moses to write in a book and recite it for Joshua to hear. God told Isaiah to write on a tablet and in a book, so it is a witness forever. The Lord told Habakkuk to write the vision so it may be shared. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the Gospels. Paul wrote a lot, including letters to Timothy. He shared as much as possible to encourage his young protégé as he neared the end of his own life.

The spoken word is powerful. God spoke the world into existence. God’s written word is also powerful. While reading the Bible, God can speak to us. He can give us correction and guidance. God’s Word equips us for His plans and purposes for our lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It can even save your life! What a gift! God’s Word can do so much!

In the quiet moments of reading and studying God’s Word, He speaks. Jot it down. When the Holy Spirit nudges you or compels you to act, be obedient, then jot it down. When you have been praying and praying and praying, and the prayer is answered? Jot it down. All these instances of answered prayer, being obedient to His Word,

hearing His still small voice... all of it strengthens us and builds our faith. I think of an example, George Müller, an evangelist and missionary in England, who meticulously documented over 50,000 answers to prayer!

Recently, I have been thumbing through some of my journals. Now, I am not saying I have done it perfectly or consistently. In fact, some entries brought memories of other times I failed to jot them down. I tend to recall the sweeping big picture of answered prayers, of God speaking and directing me. The reward is great when I take time to record the details, because when I go back to read them later, I find additional hidden morsels and layers of God's sovereignty, faithfulness, and love for me, his daughter, and for all His creation in those journal entries. God is in the details now and forever!

Yes, the Bible is complete. If God told others to write it down, I think I should make the effort too. Yes, God still speaks. Jot it down. Keep a record of God's faithfulness to you! Our testimonies do not end at the Cross of Calvary and salvation. God is not finished with us yet!

Selected Scriptures: Exodus 17:14; Isaiah 30:8; Habakkuk 2:2; Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:19; Revelation 21:5.

Song: "I've Witnessed it!" by Passion, Melanie Malone, Jenn Johnson.

Jot it down!

PRAYER DURING LENT WORKS

John 14:13-14

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Some acronyms help in directing our prayers. Intentional and directional prayer is important. Most of us tend to pray in what I call the machine-gun approach to prayer. Like when you shoot off a machine gun, a bunch of bullets come out, hoping to hit the target. Sometimes when we pray, we pray like the person who shoots the machine gun. We pray a long list of prayers and hope we hit the bull’s eye.

Acronyms like **A.C.T.S.** help us focus our prayers and set the target to where the need is most. A.C.T.S. is an acronym for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication, which will help you focus when you pray.

Pray, adding an element of **A**doration. Begin prayers by worshipping God for who He is. Worship and adore God for all He has done in your life, is doing in your life, and will do in your life. Adore God for who He is. **C**onfess your sins: intentional sins and unintentional sins. You can also include the sins of your children (Job 1:5). **T**hank God for His grace, mercy, and love. Thank God for all His provisions and acts of kindness. Finally, **S**upplication:

present your request to God. In your supplication, remember to intercede for others.

God hears us when we pray, “Call to me and I will answer you, and tell you great and hidden things you have not known” (Jeremiah 33:3). For instance, a person testified that her mom had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. When she arrived at the hospital, she sent out a text to members of the church to pray for her mom. She testifies that when the request was received, prayer for the enzymes in her mom began to stabilize, and now her mom is at home. Prayer works!

Lent is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts. Then it became a time of penance for all Christians. Today, we Christians focus on our relationship with God, growing as disciples, and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something or volunteer and give ourselves to others. During the 40 Days of Lent, the Spirit also invites us to pray. During Lent, prayer as a corporate body is powerful. Remember, when a church prays together, it stays together. Oh, and before I forget, one more acronym to help you in your prayer, **P.U.S.H.**

Pray Until Something Happens (Luke 18:1-8)!

Selected Scriptures: John 14:13-17; Jeremiah 33:1-7;
Luke 18:1-8.

Song: “Don’t Stop Praying” by Matthew West.

Jot it down!

FASTING FOR LENT

Matthew 4:1-2

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

During Lent, we are called not only to pray, but also to fast. Scripture teaches us that Jesus, our Lord and Savior, fasted. We are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Therefore, we need to practice the discipline of fasting.

What is fasting? Biblically, fasting is the practice of abstaining from food, drink, sleep, or fleshly pleasures to focus on spiritual growth. Specifically, we humbly deny something of the flesh to glorify God, enhance our spirit, and go deeper in our prayer life. Christian fasting is an invitation to focus deeper on God.

Reasons for fasting? During fasting, we express sorrow for sin. It is a sign of penitence for the sin. Fasting assists in prayer, creating more time for prayer, as we substitute meal preparation and eating with prayer.

What does fasting do? Fasting enhances our spiritual relationship with God. It provides a posture of strengthening our prayer life. Fasting assists us in making important decisions (Acts 13:4, Acts 14:23). Fasting aligns our lives with God and corrects our priorities (Isaiah 58:6-8). Fasting develops a lifestyle of prayer, worship, and

service. Fasting allows us believers to hear God more clearly as we remove the distractions that surround us. Fasting develops patience and endurance as we journey to the Cross.

Christian fasting is not "works righteousness" that is commanded by Scripture. However, that doesn't mean that fasting isn't recommended as a part of our spiritual growth. The Book of Acts records believers fasting (Acts 13:4; 14:23). Fasting and prayer are often linked together (Luke 2:37; 5:33). Too often, the focus of fasting is on the lack of food. However, the purpose of fasting is to take our eyes off the things of this world and to focus on God. Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God and to us that we are serious about our relationship with Jesus.

During the season of Lent, we are called to enter into a season of fasting. This fast will focus on spiritual growth, physical health, and the finished work of the Cross, while helping us discern God's plan for our lives as we journey to the Cross. At the crossroads, we align our hearts with God fully to understand the reality of the spiritual gifts God has given us as followers of Jesus. I invite you to fast during Lent, so that you can strengthen relationships, foster a discipline of worship, and grow in your understanding of what it meant when Jesus said, "It is finished."

Selected Scriptures: Matthew 4:1-11; Acts 13:4; Acts 14:23; Luke 2:37; Luke 5:33; Isaiah 58.

Song: "Wait on You" by Elevation Worship, Maverick City Music.

Jot it down!

ALMS: AN INVESTMENT IN ETERNITY

Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Lent has three pillars of core spiritual practices. They are prayer, fasting, and alms giving. Alms giving consists of acts of charity, generosity, and giving. Alms giving is an investment in the kingdom of Jesus. What are you investing in? If it is to acquire worldly possessions, I challenge you to invest in the kingdom of God. We must build a heavenly portfolio by investing in the things of God.

In a world where material possessions often define success, pausing to reflect on the act of giving alms can reshape our priorities and deepen our spiritual journey. Giving alms—sharing with those in need—goes beyond a simple transaction; it touches the heart, uplifts the soul, and models the love that God shows toward us.

The Bible repeatedly encourages us to care for the poor and the needy. Proverbs 19:17 says, “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his

deed.” Here, giving alms is not only an act of kindness but also an investment in God’s kingdom. Jesus Himself teaches in Matthew 6:3-4, “But 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. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” These passages remind us that our motive in giving should be pure—not for recognition, but out of compassion and love.

Giving alms is a reflection of God’s love. When we give, this mirrors God’s unending love towards us. We build a community of faith by sharing our resources with our neighbors. We experience the joy and fulfillment that material possessions cannot provide. We bring hope to those who are struggling by restoring dignity to them.

Let us take a moment to reflect on: Who can I bless with my time, resources, or attention? How can my investment impact the kingdom of God? Am I building an eternal portfolio? Remember, giving alms is not about the size of your gift, but the love with which you give it. Let generosity flow from your heart, knowing that when we give, God takes notice and our investment in the kingdom will have eternal consequences.

Selected Scriptures: Proverbs 19:17; Matthew 6:3-4, 19-21; Luke 6:27-36.

Song: “Lord, I Give You My Heart” by Michael W. Smith.
Jot it down!

READING SCRIPTURE TRANSFORMS YOU

Romans 12:1-2

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

During this Lenten season, you need to ask yourself, “Do you want to be made new? Do you want to grow in your relationship with Jesus and allow the finished work of the Cross to consume you?” Ask yourself, “What in me needs to change? What do I need to let go and let God?” Many of us realize that our own story is still being written by God. But we often take the pen out of God’s hand and try to write the conclusion to our own story. During Lent, I am challenging you to allow the Word of God to write your story and bring the change you need in your life.

All around the world, humans long for change. We long to throw off the old habits, our old ways of doing things, our old ways of thinking, especially if they have stopped serving us. Thousands of self-help videos, books, podcasts, articles, websites, and different kinds of media

exist for the purpose of helping us. We desire change. We don't want to continue to do things in our old manner, but yet, change seems impossible. The apostle Paul shares with us a powerful truth in Romans 12:2. He says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

What does it mean to be transformed by the renewing of your mind? Transformation is a total change. Transformation is complete when it brings about a massive outcome. Transformation happens from the inside out. It begins with our mind. Our constant battles start in our minds, so we need the truth to begin to change us. Where do we access truth? God's Word is truth!

God's Word guides us when we are lost, strengthens us when we are weary, challenges us when we are compromising, and encourages us when we are overwhelmed. God's Word transforms every part of our being. Through God's Word, transformation is in your grasp. Read the Bible, live the Bible, dig into the Bible, wrestle with teachings, and discover the treasures in the Word.

During Lent, remember this tip I always taught: when we read our Bibles, we read for information, revelation, and transformation. As you read your Bible, ask God for the information: what are you teaching me? Ask for revelation: what do you want me to see in this passage? And ask God for transformation: God, take whatever does not please you and change me.

Selected Scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 4:4; Romans 12:1-3.

Song: "Change My Heart Oh God" by Maranatha! Music
Jot it down!

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

John 14:9 (NIV)

“Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”

On His journey to the cross, Jesus has an interesting conversation with one of the disciples. Philip, like the rest of the twelve, had walked and talked with the creator of the universe for three years. Philip had witnessed His perfect character, healing powers, words of wisdom, and miraculous love for others. Yet the truth that Jesus was divine had not penetrated his heart.

Many, like Philip, have impersonal knowledge of Jesus but don’t know who He really is. There is a major difference between impersonal knowledge and personal knowledge. Impersonal knowledge refers to objective facts and data that lack personal feelings, experiences, and relationships. Like when you get on Facebook, and you gather information about a person, but you don’t really know them. A social psychologist will say that you do not know this person, although you know about this person. This is referred to as impersonal knowledge or an impersonal relationship.

A survey conducted by Waters World some time ago indicated that 90% of the people surveyed believed in

God. Out of those 90%, only one-third believed that Jesus is God. Most believers say that Jesus was the first created being by God. The majority of Christian believers believe that Jesus was a great teacher, a good person, a prophet sent from God. Not many knew who Jesus was, which caused me to think, do we know who Jesus is? Do we have an impersonal knowledge of Jesus?

Jesus is the embodiment of the Father. Jesus was truly human and truly divine. Jesus is the true representation of God in spirit and truth. Jesus is the omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is God incarnate. Jesus is God, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”. Jesus is at the center of it all.

Truly knowing Jesus goes far beyond facts and historical accounts—it requires a personal encounter, a relationship with Him. As we seek to understand who He is through scripture and spiritual practice, we are invited not only to learn about Jesus but to experience His presence firsthand. Let this journey be one that transforms our knowledge into a living faith, deepening our connection with the One who reveals the heart of the Father. We can discover who Jesus is through the tapestry of scripture, meditating on it as we fast, during our worship, and connecting with Him as He leads us to serve.

Selected Scriptures: Colossians 1:15-23; John 8:14-59; Revelation 22:12-21.

Song: “Jesus at the Center” by Israel Houghton.

Jot it down!

HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

John 12:16

“His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.”

Hindsight is 20/20. Boom. Mic drop. As born-again believers, we have an unfair advantage over the first disciples in the early days of following Jesus. We read the scriptures, the parables, the prophesies, and might think, *How did the disciples not get it?* We get a little puffed up and think it’s so obvious what this parable is about and teaches us. We celebrate Palm Sunday during Lent and know that Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was about a spiritual kingdom. Yet so many missed it. We have the advantage of seeing the thread of the gospel woven into and throughout the Old and New Testaments.

If you think about it, they were looking at the surface of the parables and the surface of Jesus’ leadership. They understood the stories of the kingdom as applicable to the physical earthly things. They thought that Jesus would overthrow the Roman rule and extend political freedom to the Jewish people. Even though they had knowledge of the Old Testament scripture and prophecy about the Messiah riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. I submit that

they had preconceived ideas of who Jesus was and how he would lead, even ideas of their own regarding their own positions as followers.

Jesus' teachings were often confusing and unclear to them. The disciples could understand deeper things about God after Jesus was glorified. So, after the Resurrection, Pentecost, and even the Ascension, they gained the advantage of hindsight 20/20 with time and space. God has revealed hidden things. They gained clarity as well as the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

They, like many of us, want our way, and we can also miss the heavenly plans and purposes that outweigh our earthly fleshly wants and desires. We think we know, but we don't know! Sometimes, it takes a little distance from the situation, or a gap in time, to grasp the deeper context of what we read, saw, or heard. Are we acting like the two men on the road to Emmaus, talking about the things that are happening, caught up in the details of the circumstances around us, and not realizing Jesus is walking along the journey with us, calling to us, wanting us to see Him, know Him, and follow Him?

Today, let's sit in quiet reflection during prayer, without our preconceived notions about what God is doing, and really listen to the deeper meanings of what He is speaking to our hearts. *Holy Spirit move in us and through us, revealing and clarifying to us the things we've missed. We need you!*

Selected Scriptures: Luke 24:1-35, 50-51; Zechariah 9:9; Mark 11:1-11; John 12:12-17; Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Psalm 31:5; Luke 23:46; Acts 2:1-4.

Song: "Rest on Us" by Maverick City and UPPERROOM, Feat. Brandon Lake, Enolia Abioye.

Jot it down!

[illegible]

THAT WONDROUS CROSS

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV)

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

As the Holy week approaches, I can't help but wonder about the Cross of Calvary. I can't help but begin to praise and worship my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, every time I ponder the cross. The hymn writer Isaac Watts composed and published the hymn, “When I Survey The Wondrous Cross”. The lyrics of one of the stanzas are, “When I survey the wond'rous Cross On which the Prince of Glory dy'd, My richest Gain I count but Loss, And pour Contempt on all my Pride.”

Yet to many, the cross has a different meaning and creates a sense of foreboding. To many, the cross only means a wasteful death of a good person. To others, the cross is a joke. I remember reading the newspaper and seeing a humorist portray a cartoon about the cross. In his cartoon, he depicted two Martians visiting Earth. As they opened the hatch to the spaceship, the first thing they saw was a cross with a figure of Jesus hanging from it, and a sign that read, “The King of Kings.” One Martian looked at the other and said, “If they treat the King like this, imagine how they are going to treat us”! They closed the hatch and flew away.

History records that Helena, the mother of Constantine, embarked on a trip to find the original cross upon which Jesus been crucified. Helena, later known as Flavia Julia Helena Augusta, was credited after her death with having discovered the fragments of the original cross and the tomb in which Jesus was buried at Golgotha. It is said that Helena took fragments of the cross and sent them to believers and churches around the world. When the believers received what they believed to be the fragments of the original cross, they meditated on the true Christian meaning of the cross. This caused them to worship the Savior.

My question for us is, how do we survey the wondrous cross? Is it simply a symbol of suffering and pain? A joke? Is it an amulet, a small piece of jewelry worn around our neck for protection and luck? Or does it symbolize victory? For Jesus, the cross represents victory over sin and death. The cross represents joy and hope of resurrection. Do we see the cross's victory? Do we look at the gruesome events of Good Friday as torment (it was), or do we see our Champion taking on the forces of evil for us, conquering the powers of the devil?

I challenge you during this week in Lent to rediscover the Cross of Jesus. I challenge you to see His torment and torture as His way of displaying His victory over death.

Selected Scriptures: Luke 23:21-32; Isaiah 53:1-10;
1 Peter 2:22-25.

Song: "At the Cross" by Chris Tomlin.
Jot it down!

THE UNIVERSAL BLOOD TYPE

Romans 5:6-8

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

For somebody like me and for somebody like you, blood is a lifeline in a medical crisis. Blood can be the lifeline we need to determine life or death. Donating blood is a precious gift and a sacrifice. We research, experiment, and try; there is no bioidentical replacement for human blood. Do you want synthetic blood? Not me. No, we need real, authentic blood. It's valuable! Our blood even contains trace amounts of gold! Say, what? I know!

Here's a truth: people need blood to live, and people need people to choose to sacrifice themselves and give blood. It isn't convenient, but one blood donation can save up to three lives. There isn't just one type of human blood. Type O negative is called universal, and it's rare. Blood carries both nourishment and oxygen; our bodies need to live. It removes carbon dioxide and waste.

It gets better. Our blood's plasma is like a river, suspending and transporting the other three basic kinds of blood cells: red, white, and platelets. Each has a role:

carrying oxygen, fighting infection, simultaneously building immunity, and last but not least, clotting. It's an important and delicate balance.

Here's THE TRUTH: People need the blood of Jesus in a spiritual crisis. If he isn't your Lord, Savior, and Master, then you are in a spiritual crisis. We need the rarest type of blood. It is the rarest of them all, and only comes from one source, once and for all. It is the blood from the pure and spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It's for somebody like me and somebody like you. This blood source has three components, Father, Son, and Spirit, all working together remove waste and provide nourishment for life.

The sacrifice of Jesus' blood on the cross is more valuable than gold. The blood of Jesus isn't kind of, sort of, universal. It is the universal blood type for ALL of mankind. Somebody like me and somebody like you falls short of God's glory. Not one of us is without sin. We need THE universal answer to clean away all the junk and waste in our lives and simultaneously be nourished for new life. Don't waste another minute trying to find synthetic substitutes, seeking what may seem like bio-identical answers. Jesus is the authentic answer. All we need to do is authentically repent and ask.

Selected Scriptures: Leviticus 17:11; Isaiah 1:18;
Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 51; Matthew 26:28; John 1:29;
Romans 5:5-9; Hebrews 9; Ephesians 1:7; Titus 3:5;
1 John 1:7-9; Revelation 1:5.

Songs: "Nothing But The Blood" Carrie Underwood and
"Somebody Like Me" Caleb and John.

Jot it down!

HUNGER FOR THE LORD

Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

This verse is part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and highlights the blessedness of those who deeply desire righteousness. In the first few beatitudes, Jesus speaks about a pouring out. A way of emptying ourselves for the kingdom of God. In the fourth beatitude, Jesus speaks to us about hunger.

Hunger is a universal experience. Most people know what it feels like to be physically hungry, experiencing sensations such as a growling stomach, pain, headaches, low energy, dizziness, and emotional responses like irritability, difficulty concentrating, and even sleeplessness or stress. Hunger can weaken a person and make even minimal tasks difficult, leaving them depleted and vulnerable.

When someone is spiritually hungry, they become vulnerable to attack. In Matthew 4, Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness. The Bible records that when He was hungry, the devil came to tempt Him. Similarly, when people experience hunger, they may be tempted to satisfy it with whatever is immediately available, even if it is unhealthy.

There is a hunger that is more vital for believers than physical hunger—the hunger for the Lord. Spiritual hunger is the greatest evidence of love for God. When we hunger for the Lord, our spirits are nourished, and we experience spiritual growth.

In Matthew 5:6, Jesus teaches that wanting righteousness, justice, and a relationship with God leads to true satisfaction. Righteous living means seeking God first and His righteousness, as stated in Matthew 6:33. The goal is to walk in righteousness, as scripture reminds us that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

So, I ask you, what are you hungry for? Do you hunger for the best meal ever served? Do you hunger to walk in a right relationship with God and others? Do you hunger for the spiritual manna that can only satisfy our souls? As we continue to the cross and ask, “Is it finished?” Let us hunger for more of the presence of the Lord in our lives.

Selected Scriptures: Matthew 5:1-11; Matthew 6:25-34; Revelation 2:12-17; Exodus 16.

Song: “Hunger and Thirst” by The Belonging co., Henry Seele.

Jot it down!

*BREAD OF AFFLICTION TO
BREAD OF LIFE*

John 6:31-33

“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Are you in a desert place? In a place of struggle and affliction? The Israelites were in such a place, and in this place for 40 years, wandering the desert in search of the Promised Land. It wasn't easy; they grumbled, complained, even wavered in their faith, and at times, they were totally disobedient. BUT God. God provided their needs to sustain them; He gave them food to eat. He rained bread from heaven and doubled the amount needed to sustain each person in the morning, and meat of pigeons in the evening. God was testing their faith and obedience to Him before He brought them into the land he promised.

God called Elijah, and again, God sustained him. In a period of severe drought and famine, God provided him bread and meat twice a day, along the river Cherith. The brook provided water, and when the provisions dried up,

God called Elijah to go to Zarephath. Again, God provided bread not only for Elijah, but for a widow and her son. He provided enough for them to last until the drought ended. God can provide excess and abundance to sustain us for long durations, as we walk in faith!

God certainly provided bread and nourishment during periods of affliction. He is faithful, and not only can he provide food during affliction, but also graciously and mercifully provides true bread from heaven, Jesus, the bread of life. He is our spiritual food, giving nourishment greater than food for our physical hunger, but this bread satiates our very souls.

Jesus demonstrates a great miracle in provision to feed the crowd of 5,000 with loaves and fish in abundance! That very next day, the crowd still doesn't understand, and Jesus graciously explains that he is the bread of life. They witnessed a physical miracle of an abundance of food, the bread of affliction, and I say affliction because that bread will not be sustenance for their soul. Jesus is the only bread that can satisfy the hunger of your soul, and this bread is the only bread that gives salvation and eternal life.

When God calls, accept the call and know he will sustain you. I recently heard this: "God didn't forget the recipe for manna." The God of the Universe, time after time, sustained humanity physically so that we can recognize and experience the hidden manna, the true bread of Heaven, in our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. No, he didn't forget the recipe. There are lessons and a purpose. As you struggle in the desert season, a season of affliction, open your Bible and consume the very words of God, a life-sustaining bread that satisfies your soul and can draw you into the promised land with Him.

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal blue lines across the entire page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The background is white, and there are no margins or additional markings.

THE NAIL

Song Of Solomon 2:15

“Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards for our vineyards are in blossom.”

There is a popular folk tale, a story, about a man who was going broke and needed some money desperately. This story is attributed to Juha, who lived in the Middle East. The story goes like this: Juha owned a home; this was his beloved home. In this home, he had many memories and reminiscent of family times. Juha needed money, so he reluctantly decided to sell his home. In the contract, he stipulates a strange condition: he will retain ownership of a single nail in the wall. The buyer, who was happy to get the house at such an amazing price, agrees to the contract and allows the seller, Juha, to keep just one nail in the house.

Soon after moving out of the house, Juha begins to visit unannounced. On his first unannounced visit, he enters the house without knocking and hangs his hat. He stays for a while, then retrieves his hat and leaves. During his second visit, Juha hangs his coat and leaves. Soon, Juha is visiting and staying for meals and becomes a constant irritating presence to the new owners. The visits escalate, and the new owner becomes irritated with the constant intrusion.

Juha then comes one last time, and this time he hangs the carcass of a dead dog on his nail. Of course, this made the house unlivable, forcing the new owner to abandon the house. Juha’s unwanted visits eventually force the new family to leave and flee; overwhelmed, they leave the keys and abandon the house.

The little “foxes spoil the vine” is a metaphor for small, insignificant things (sin, bad habits, issues, evil thoughts) that can become a nuisance. Just like that small nail, these small, insignificant things, left in our lives, can cause us to destroy our relationship with Christ. Remember that where evil abides like a stinking carcass, Jesus will no longer abide.

What small sin are we allowing the enemy to keep in our hearts? What nail have we not removed? Can it be the nail of bitterness, hate, prejudice, pride, racism, pornography, hoarding, greed, etc.? What nail does the enemy still have hanging in your life? Think about it.

Selected Scriptures: Ezekiel 13:1-15; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8; Psalm 19; 1 John.

Song: “I Surrender All” by CeCe Winans.

Jot it down!

SHUT THE DOOR

2 Kings 4:4

“Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.”

This passage is from the story in the Bible found in 2 Kings, where Elisha meets the prophet's widow. She was in debt, and the debtors threatened to take her children into slavery to work off the debt. In Israel during this period, it was lawful to take the children and put them to work to pay off the debt. It is interesting to note that she was a widow, and any man could come into her house and take what they wanted. She was vulnerable to the debtors, creditors, and thieves.

Elisha then performs a miracle and tells her to go borrow some vessels. He tells her to close the door behind her and begin filling the vessels with oil. She then could take the vessels filled with oil, sell them, and pay her debtors. The story goes that the oil continued to pour into the vessels while the door was closed.

Have you ever wondered why Elisha told the woman to shut the door behind her? Why, Elisha instructed her to close the door? I think it was because the creditors could come in and steal her blessings.

I remember a time when we used to keep the back door open. A woman tells a story about keeping her back door

open for her children when they came home from school. One day, the children came home, and someone had been in the house; they ransacked the house, stealing the TV and other items.

Spiritually, we need to close some doors. John 10:10 reminds us that, “The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they may have life...”

Prayer helps us ask, “Have I kept any door open? Is my blessing being robbed because I kept a door open? Have I stopped growing spiritually?” Reflect on your life and see what doors are left open. We cannot give the enemy a foothold (Ephesians 4:27-29). Close the door!

When we close a door, we establish boundaries, and we block out negative influences. God then will redirect us to something new and better (Isaiah 43:19). God doesn’t want to take something from you, but He wants to fill you with the oil of the Holy Spirit so that you can live an abundant life in Jesus.

Selected Scriptures: Isaiah 43:14-21; Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; John 10:1-10; Ephesians 4:27-29.

Song: “Open Door” by Maverick City Music, Feat. Nate Moore, Maryanne J. George.

Jot it down!

*YOU CANNOT MAKE DONE
THINGS UNDONE.*

Psalm 103:11-12

“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

S*elah.* Pause and think on this: You cannot make done things, undone.

The idea that every action has a consequence, or reaction to the action, is based on Newton’s Third Law of Motion. Simply put, it is where every action has an equal and opposite reaction. For example, a swimmer moves their arms backward, and their body propels forward through the water. This can be applied to decision-making in life. One decision can lead to another, and another, and with every decision, there is a consequence, good or bad.

We can make decisions when thoughts enter our minds to take them captive and choose not to sin. We can make decisions to keep on sinning, and those decisions have natural consequences that can quickly spiral out of our control. You, yourself, cannot undo them. For example, King David saw with his eyes a beautiful woman, Bathsheba. This turned into lust, which turned into adultery, and King David impregnated her, which led to

more deception and the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband.

Indulging in sin means you continue to separate yourself from God – hardening of hearts. One dangerous consequence of sin is more sin. The insatiable lust for more dulls our sensitivity to God speaking and guiding us; it dulls our response to the Holy Spirit and creates blindness to spiritual truth, and we fall into more and more traps of deception set by Satan. Although King David couldn't undo the choices and decisions he made regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, he did repent of them. God forgave David.

Sin is sin, and it separates us from God, whether it is lying, gluttony, or murder. God doesn't ignore our sins (Numbers 32:23). You may be sure that your sin will find you out. Nothing is hidden from God. What is done in the dark will be exposed by the light. Secret sins aren't secret! The prophet Nathan exposed David's sin. Just like David, we can be forgiven. We cannot undo the things we have done. We need to address the natural consequences that have been set in motion. Because of the finished work on the cross, we can be made new and live free and forgiven from sin and shame! We can be restored, redeemed, and fully forgiven.

God, search our hearts today, and reveal to us what we need to change to live a life worth living through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior!

Selected Scriptures: Numbers 32:23; 2 Samuel 11-12; Psalm 103; Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 6:23; Galatians 6:6-8; Matthew 1:20-21; Acts 4:10-12; John 19:28-30; Ephesians 4:1-7; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

[illegible]

TEMPTED: WHAT SHALL I DO?

1 Corinthians 10:13

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

How many of us face temptation? I believe the answer to that question is all of us. Everyone faces temptation. It's said that a lack of temptation in your life may indicate you're not challenging evil or disrupting its plans, or that you are on the wrong side. If you walk with Jesus, you will face temptations.

Paul notes that temptation affects everyone in various forms. Paul states that we are “overtaken by temptation.” In the Bible, temptation is an alluring presence, a pressure, or an enticement to get us to do wrong. Temptation entices us to be disobedient to God and fulfill our sinful desires. Temptation is presented as a test of faith from Satan or our own fleshly desires. Temptations happen to everyone; they are a universal part of life. Temptations are both external (Satan/world) and internal (our desires). But know that God does not tempt nor can He be tempted (James 1:13).

Remember, temptations are not a sin. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan (Matthew 4:1-12). He

was tempted to fulfill the lust of the flesh when the enemy told Him to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. He was tempted with the pride of life when the enemy told Jesus to jump from the temple in order to test God's protection. And Jesus was tempted with the lust of the eyes when Satan told Jesus to worship him, and he would give Jesus power, all this after fasting for forty days. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* writes, "Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. Jesus was the only man who never yielded to temptation." Knowing that Jesus understands temptation gives us encouragement as followers of Him.

When we are tempted, we must turn towards God, who is the true source of abundant life. As you journey towards the cross and the triumph of the resurrection, know that the enemy is not finished; we will be tempted again. In Luke's narrative of the temptation, the pericope ends with, "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). Be encouraged knowing that Jesus overcame temptation. Jesus provides the victory, assisting us in moving forward towards the cross and the victorious moment of resurrection. God will provide an escape from our temptations, just hold onto Jesus and don't let go.

Selected Scriptures: Matthew 4:1-12; Luke 4:1-13;
1 Corinthians 10:1-13; James 1.

Song: "I Will Overcome" by Abundant Praise, Scripture Harmonics.

Jot it down!

WASHED BY THE WORD

John 1:1; John 1:14

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“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.”

God’s word is powerful. He spoke the world into existence.

Jesus, the son of God, didn’t lose his divinity but took on humanity to become the final atoning sacrifice for us! Jesus was with God from the beginning. Jesus is the Word of God. As scripture long ago stated before Jesus’ birth: God’s Word would never become void but will accomplish what the Word is sent to do (Isaiah 55:11)! Jesus did accomplish what God, the Father, sent him to do, that we may receive salvation if we choose to repent and believe. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the Life!

Historically speaking, foot washing was a common cultural custom, stemming from the reality of living in the desert and wearing sandals. One’s feet became dirty from daily life. It is a physical cleansing. Throughout the Bible, there are instances of foot washing, and perhaps one of the most well-known scriptures about foot washing is at the Last Supper, when Jesus took the role of a servant and washed his disciples’ feet.

What an image scripture has given us, seeing the Word, Jesus washing the disciples’ feet! Yet Jesus wasn’t done. Yes, he demonstrated a physical cleansing the night of the last Supper, to be symbolic of believers’ need to reflect and

take stock of their daily words and actions and repent of any wrongdoing.

But the greater cleansing, a spiritual cleansing, came by Jesus, washing our sins away with the blood sacrifice of his death on the cross.

We need to be washed by the Word.

Have you decided to follow Jesus? There is no time like the present to ask Jesus, the Word incarnate (the divine, taking human form), to cleanse your heart and receive the gift of salvation.

As believers, our Christian walk isn't perfect. We need to wash our minds, renew them daily by reading God's written word, the Bible. We need to perform a type of foot cleansing, washing the day's dust of sin away by asking for forgiveness when we fail and stumble as we walk out our salvation. Create in us a clean heart!

Selected Scriptures: Genesis 1; Isaiah 55:1; Psalm 51;
John 1:1-18; John 13:1-26; John 14:6; Romans 12:2;
2 Corinthians 4:4-5; Ephesians 4: 20-24; Ephesians 5:26.
Song: "Clean Heart" by Bryan and Katie Torwalt.
Jot it down!

REDISCOVER HOLINESS

1 Samuel 2:2

“There is none holy like the Lord: for there is none beside you; there is no rock like our God.”

Hannah proclaimed God’s holiness by declaring that no one is holy like the Lord, thereby affirming God’s unique nature. The Hebrew *qados*, and Greek *hagios* terms for “holiness” both convey the idea of separateness and uniqueness. God’s holiness refers to His distinct and unparalleled character. It has been observed that God’s holiness represents the perfection of all His attributes.

Holiness exalts God, affirming that there is none holy like Him. God is not simply a holy God—God is holiness itself. Yahweh is the Holy God, unmatched in purity and perfection, standing apart from all others. Proclaiming God’s holiness acknowledges His oneness and that He is God all by Himself. God is Holy!!!

God is not the big guy in the sky, or my main dude, or your home boy. Lent has a way of reminding us of God’s holiness. As we practice the pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting, and alms, they tend to draw us closer to God.

The loss of reverence and awe of God is listed as one of the negative issues impacting churches in the United States today. Many theologians have agreed that the modern church is losing its sense of God’s awe and the sense of His reverence. Infiltration of liberal doctrine and

the reconstructionist theory has attempted to redefine the reverence/awe of the Holiness of God.

The importance of rediscovering God’s Holiness during Lent informs us of our worship posture. Remember, the Bible states that God is omnipotent. Yet He is not worshipped as powerful, powerful, powerful. Neither does the Bible teach worshipping God with any of His other attributes. Yet time and time again in scripture God is worshipped with the emphatic trisagion “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty, heaven and earth are filled with your glory, hosannah in the highest” (Isaiah 6:1).

If we have lost the awe of God’s Holiness, then a good place to rediscover the Holiness of God is during the Lenten season while fasting and praying. Fasting strips you of all distractions when coupled with prayer. You begin to rediscover the Holiness of God in your life as you journey towards the cross this season.

Selected Scriptures: Isaiah 6:1-11; Exodus 15:1-11;
Revelation 4:1-8.

Song: “Holy Is The Lord” by Chris Tomlin.

Jot it down!

ARE YOU WILLING?

Luke 22:42

*“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.
Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”*

AS Jesus continued to journey to the cross, understanding that His mission was not finished, He went to the Mount of Olives to pray. Jesus’s agony while He prayed was so intense that His sweat turned into drops of blood. Jesus cried out to the Father and asked if it was possible to remove the cup. The cup is a biblical metaphor for judgment and the wrath of a divine God.

Jesus in His humanity wanted to be spared from the intense suffering, agony, and spiritual separation He was about to experience on the cross. The cross symbolized God’s wrath towards humanity’s sins, and Jesus knew that His mission (salvation) was to take on the sins of the world, nailing them to Calvary for redemption.

Yet Jesus ended the prayer not my will, but your will be done. Jesus was ultimately submitting His will to the Father’s will. Jesus’ natural human desire was to avoid the profound torment He was about to experience. Yet He did the will of the Father.

We live in a world where everyone wants to do their own thing. How many times have I not heard, “Do you?” In Western society, we see a push for individualism, self-expression, and personal autonomy. We have coined the

phrase “Me time.” I’m not against self-care and moments of alone for the sake of devotion, but I’m encouraging us to prioritize the will of God.

Jesus said, recorded in Luke 9:23, “Deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.” He was calling us to discipleship. Discipleship is not smooth sailing. Following Jesus, you must be willing to leave father, mother, sister, brother, in order to do the will of the Father. Are we willing to put aside personal desire, ambition, and self-centeredness so that we prioritize the will of God?

During this Lenten season, I challenge all believers to ask this simple question: “Am I willing to do the will of the Father?” Are we willing to endure temptation, suffer criticism, betrayal, loss, agony, persecution? Are we willing to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus? Let us reflect: what does it look like for us as believers to do the will of God?

Selected Scriptures: Matthew 16:1-25; Psalm 40:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22; Luke 22:39-46.

Song: “Who Am I” by Casting Crowns.

Jot it down!

WHAT IS YOUR WHY?

John 12:3

“Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair...”

Simon Sinek wrote a book titled *Start With Why*. The book teaches that influential leaders succeed because they start with their why. Most leaders start with the how and what, but Sinek proposes to start with why.

Your why is your purpose; it is what motivates you to do what you do. One of Sinek’s favorite quotes is “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.” Your why is your core belief and the purpose that inspires you.

Mary, in this passage, was criticized for wasting (what most commentators say) a year’s wages on expensive oil. Judas thought that they could have sold the oil and helped the poor. Why did Mary pour the oil on Jesus’ feet, breaking all cultural norms when she touched His feet, loosened her hair, and wiped Jesus’s feet? You see, during the time of this event, washing the feet of a visitor was only for the lowest of servants. When she loosened her hair, this broke all propriety norms, because a woman only loosens her hair in front of her husband.

Why did Mary risk it all to wash and anoint Jesus’s feet? Bible scholars propose that she did it out of gratitude because Jesus raised her brother from the dead. Others

state that this was a fulfillment of prophecy in preparation for Jesus’s death and burial.

These reasons for why Mary did what she did are great motivations, but I wish to propose another reason why she did what she did. How about if Mary anointed Jesus’s feet with this expensive perfume out of the love she had for the Savior? How about if her motivation was love? Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, reminds us that there is faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.

How about us? What motivates us to do what we do? Do we do things expecting something in return? How about if we do things for others, because we are motivated by the love we have for Jesus? Mary did what she did because she loved the Lord. What is our why? I pray that our why is motivated by the love we have for Jesus, who loved us even when we were sinners. Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Jesus was motivated by love. Let love be our WHY!

Selected Scriptures: John 12:1-7; Luke 7:36-50;
1 Corinthians 13; Romans 5:1-8.

Song: “I Love You Lord” by Elevation Worship.
Jot it down!

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Philippians 2:8-11

“...Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

What's in a name? In the Bible, names are super important. Names represent a person's essence, their character, and their relationship with God. The names the parents gave the children revealed their purpose in life and their destiny. In some instances, God changed the names of some. God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "father of many." Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, the rock. The name Jesus signifies Jehovah is Salvation, pointing to Jesus' mission. Names were far more than simply labels.

There is a story that brings home the importance of a name. A businessman became sick, and a nurse cared for him for the last years of his life. The businessman was so appreciative that he gave her a bat signed by George "Babe" Ruth just before he died. This bat was one of the seven bats that Babe Ruth signed when playing baseball. Ruth signed many balls but only signed seven bats. Out of the seven bats, one went missing.

After the businessman died, she wanted to start a small business but didn't have any start-up money. She looked at the bat and wondered if it was worth anything. She took it to a collectible artifacts store, and the man looked at the bat and thought, *Wow, is this the missing bat?* He tested it for its authenticity; sure enough, it was the missing bat. She later auctioned the bat off, and it sold for over a million dollars. She used some of the money to start her business, and the rest she gave to Babe Ruth's favorite children's orphanage.

What made the bat worth anything was the name on the bat. What makes you special is the name of Jesus. You are the apple of God's eye; you are God's special possession not because of who you are but because of whose you are. Jesus went to the cross, and He purchased us with His blood. We carry the name of Jesus on our hearts.

During Lent, reflect on the significance of names and the power found in the name of Jesus. Let us remember that our true value is rooted in belonging to Him. No matter what the world may say, we are cherished and set apart because we bear His name. May we walk confidently, knowing we are loved, we are redeemed, and we are called for a purpose, all to the glory of God the Father.

Selected Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:1-33; Psalm 100;
2 Corinthians 3:1-6; Matthew 16:13-20.

Song: "There's Something About That Name" by Tauren Wells.

Jot it down!

WHAT ARE YOU BOASTING ABOUT?

Galatians 6:14

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Paul’s closing remarks at the end of the letter to the Galatians point the church to the cross of Jesus. He tells his readers that he has something to boast about; he boasts in the cross.

People are turned off by folks who go around boasting. With social media, we see people boasting all the time. They show only the good things about their story. Social media has provided a platform for people to boast about their lifestyle (travel, events) or their professional and personal achievements (trophies, titles, skills).

No one likes a person who is always boasting about their success. No one likes a person who thinks they are all that and a bag of chips, and the last Coca-Cola in the desert. Many are turned off by these types of people, who go around displaying who they are and what they have achieved. Jesus taught a lesson about two men who went to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee who prayed a boastful prayer and the other a tax collector who prayed for

forgiveness. Jesus ended the lesson teaching that the tax collector went home justified (Luke 18).

Paul didn't like boasters either. He rebuked the Pharisees, who were always boasting because of who they were. Paul says that his only boasting is in the cross of Jesus Christ. Why would Paul boast in this horrible emblem of death? Why would Paul boast in a terrible, disgusting, torturous death? Paul could boast in the cross because the Cross of Jesus represented victory. Victory over sin and death. It represented the agape love that God demonstrated when He gave His Son to die for the world.

Lent reminds us that we can boast. Boast in the Cross. Boast in the salvation given to us because Jesus went to the cross, eradicating sin. Boast in knowing that because of this horrible death, we are forgiven. So, as we continue our journey to the Cross, let us remember to boast as Paul did, boast unless it's in the cross. Paul's message to the Galatians reminds us to shift our focus from worldly achievements and social status to the cross. As we journey through Lent, let us find that our victory is found only in the cross.

Selected Scriptures: Luke 18:10-14; Philippians 3:1-11; Psalm 18:1-3; John 3:16.
Song: "That's Who I Praise" by Brandon Lake.
Jot it down!

LAYOVERS ON A WAYLAID JOURNEY

Acts 27: 23-26

“For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.”

How many times during your travels have you experienced a layover trying to get from point A to point B? Then you have added delays from mechanical issues, weather issues, a late crew, and so on. Sometimes, you are completely waylaid, and a new “adventure” ensues, all while still trying to get to your point B destination!

Many years ago, on a family road trip, vacation became a waylaid journey, but really, God was in it all. Let’s just say, we met some interesting characters, such as our tow truck driver named Chester, with the thickest southern accent I ever heard! Don’t get me started on the Uber driver and the locations where we were stranded to get to our desired destination!

After Saul’s conversion, he became a powerhouse for the Gospel message, sharing with both Jews and Gentiles,

and went by both names, Saul and Paul. He gave us much of the New Testament while imprisoned, and in Acts, we find the dilemma of what to do with Paul. The Roman rulers were bound by their laws; he couldn't be turned over to the Jews since he was appealing to Caesar in Rome as a Roman citizen.

God used all of Paul's experiences for the good of the Gospel message so far, and so it makes sense that God would continue to do so! Paul, other prisoners, and a Roman centurion named Julius boarded a ship in Adramyttium to go to Rome. The journey was difficult, the winds were too strong, blowing in the wrong direction, then lost time, then more changes in the wind, and the journey became increasingly dangerous, and some wanted to abandon the ship. All along, God was guiding Paul, and Paul was telling them what God had promised.

Eventually, they became shipwrecked and found their way to the island of Malta. God protected Paul from a viper's bite because God had a greater purpose in Paul being shipwrecked before getting to Rome. God empowered Paul to pray for the sick, and many were healed.

After three months, he left Malta and would finally make it to Rome. In Rome, Paul lived alone under guard by a Roman soldier, and he was able to share with large numbers of people what occurred with the Jews, also that salvation came to the Gentiles! He stayed for two years speaking boldly and without hindrances about the Kingdom of God!

Sometimes in life, no. Oftentimes in life... no. Too many times, in life, we end up on a road we didn't think we would be traveling, meeting and talking to people we otherwise may never have met, and having interesting

Don't lose hope. Keep the faith. There is a plan and purpose for all of it!

Deuteronomy 31:8; Proverbs 19:21; Psalm 139:16;

Matthew 6:25-34; Romans 8:28; Acts 27-28.

Song: "Raise a Hallelujah" by Bethel Music, Jonathan David Helser, Melissa Helser /Victory

Jot it down!

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery.

QUITTING IS NOT AN OPTION

Luke 9:51

“When the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem.”

As we journey with Jesus to the cross, we learn many life principles, such as sacrifice for others, love above all things, putting others first, and many more. Yet looking at the triumphal entry found in the Gospels, the life principle I come away with is “quitting is not an option.”

I wonder, what was Jesus thinking when he said I need to go to Jerusalem? They wanted to kill Him in Jerusalem! But Jesus, throughout the gospel, was always focused on getting to Jerusalem. Why was Jesus looking forward to getting to Jerusalem? Why would Jesus fix his face or set his face to get to Jerusalem? Because quitting was not an option. In Greek, the statement “set his face” is one-word *sterizo*, which means decision, determined, and directed. Jesus decided and was determined to go in the direction that He knew would cost Him His life. Yet Jesus knew that quitting was not an option.

There were many times Jesus could’ve quit. The walk to Jerusalem is uphill, which can wear us out physically and cause us to quit. Jesus knew that His ministry would be completed at the cross, and He could’ve given up, but for you and for me, He didn’t quit. He could’ve quit at the Garden of Gethsemane when arrested. Jesus had to pass

through Bethany on His way to Jerusalem. Bethany means the place of affliction, the place of torment. In other words, Jesus had to pass through affliction. He had to go through torment to get to Jerusalem. Jesus knew He was going to be tortured, but He did not quit! He did not quit on us. If he had quit, we would be damned forever.

In the United States, we look forward to our retirement. The word retirement in the dictionary means secluded, withdraw, stop working, or quit. Retirement from a job is a good thing, but as a Christian, we can never retire; we can never quit. Quitting is not an option. What causes us to want to quit? When things don't go our way, criticism, discouragement, disillusionment, failure, a sense of loss, and changes, etc. When we are in a fight, quitting becomes an option. We don't want to fight anymore. We all have the urge to quit when faced with difficulties, but quitting church is not an option. We have too much work to do. Are you willing to go through stuff and not quit? Are we willing to go through the difficult issues of life to reach people for Jesus? We cannot quit; people's lives depend on us. While we are on earth, our work is not finished, don't quit! Don't give up! Keep sharing the Good News! Is it finished?

Selected Scriptures: Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53:1-8.

Song: "Don't You Give Up On Me" by Brandon Lake.
Jot it down!

STAY CONNECTED

John 15:4

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

In this passage, Jesus is in the upper room preparing the disciples for His departure. He reminded them that He was going to the Father. He promised to prepare a place for them. Jesus also promised the paraclete, the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit will guide, teach, and comfort them. Jesus instructs the disciples on how they can overcome the world. He states that they need to remain in Him. Abide in Him, do not get disconnected. Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches. A very familiar illustration for His audience. He uses this real-life illustration to convey spiritual truths.

Have you ever been to a vineyard? If you have, you will realize the beauty and the fascinating images of rows and rows of grape-bearing branches, rooted in the vine. Jesus uses this real-life illustration to teach the disciples the importance of remaining connected to Him. He tells them that He is the True Vine and that His people are the branches. Jesus also teaches them that God the Father is the gardener pruning and caring for the branches to produce fruit. If we stay connected to the True Vine, we

will produce much fruit, but if we disconnect, we will shrivel up and die.

Connection is important because it gives you power. Think of your electrical appliances, such as the TV; if it is not connected to the power source, it will not function. You won't be able to turn it on. The images that you expect will not be visible. You need the TV to be connected to the power source, the outlet, for the thing to work.

In contrast, a vine that is cut off from the source cannot give fruit. The vine will not be able to produce fruit because it has been cut off from that which gives it life. If we desire that our lives continue to give glory to God and magnify His holy name, we must remain connected.

How do we remain connected to the True Vine? We remain connected by honoring God in keeping His commandments. Jesus says in John 15:9-10 that all who keep the commandments remain in the Father's love. To remain connected, we need a consistent, active relationship built on Bible study and prayer. Worship, fellowship, and walking alongside other believers. Serving helps us to abide in Christ, the True Vine. Just as a branch that stays connected to the vine lives, so we must stay connected to Jesus in order to have life and life abundantly.

This is not about legalism, following certain rules; this is about trusting Jesus, who is our greatest connection. When faced with hardship, abide! When diagnosed with an illness, abide! When life seems chaotic, abide! If we want to continue to glorify Jesus, we must stay connected to Him.

Selected Scriptures: John 15: 1-11; Hebrews 13:1-5; James 4:8.

[illegible]

KEEP FOCUSED

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (NIV)

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”

How many of us know that when we are under pressure, this causes us to lose focus? Pressure has a way of gaining all of your attention. Then, placing that attention on the crisis caused by pressure.

Let's face it, we all face pressure. Pressure comes at us in different ways and through different sources. The kind of pressure people face when they are having to run around, cook dinner, be a taxi, a teacher, and a disciplinarian. Pressure to meet deadlines, complete obligations, pie charts, PowerPoint presentations, etc., can

rob us of our intimate time with God, especially when we set our posture to fast and pray.

Much of our pressure comes from what is known as “Outcome-Oriented Thinking.” This is the type of thinking that says I can control the outcome in my life. How many of us know or realize that we have minimal power in controlling our outcome? God is the One who controls the outcome. So, “Outcome-Oriented” thinking adds pressure and robs us of our ability to focus on prayer, fasting, and giving alms.

There is pressure from the enemy to give up on the pillars of Lent. Pressure that wants to rob us of what God has purposed in our hearts to do. The enemy wants us to keep our battle secret. He whispers, “Don’t tell anyone you are going through this.” He doesn’t want us to trust in God. This is why he throws temptation at us and causes these pressured situations.

As you journey towards Resurrection Sunday, use this Lenten season to confess your pressure. Don’t keep it hidden, bring it out in the open. Confide in God and know that our total dependence is on God. Finally, claim your pressure knowing that you’ve been here before.

Selected Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Psalm 50:15; Philippians 1:6; 1 Samuel 17:37.

Song: “Trust In God” by Elevation Worship, Feat. Chris Brown.

Jot it down!

IT MATTERS WHO...

Matthew 12:35-37

“The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Ouch. Let that scripture sink in. Have you ever been the topic of gossip? Said a few careless things? One thing leads to another, and gossip can turn into slander, even offense, resulting in broken trust, damaged reputations, and a great deal of hurt. It is safe to say that none of us is perfect, and at one time or another, we let careless words slip out of our mouths and have also listened to careless words.

Norman Rockwell, a renowned painter and illustrator, was known for his depiction of everyday small-town American Life. He was a pictorial storyteller and addressed serious cultural issues and relatable, heartwarming, and humorous situations. Rockwell's images were published in the Saturday Evening Post for 50 years! I came across one of those covers in an old antique shop, many years ago. On this particular cover, Rockwell included himself in the gossip sequence as the

subject of the character's conversation, and in the end, Rockwell is depicted confronting the woman who started the gossip. The image, aptly titled *The Gossips*, was published in March 1948.

It reminded me of a childhood game called telephone. This game highlighted how easily and quickly the process of hearing and repeating a message can end far from the original words and meaning. Both examples are oversimplifications, and talking behind one's back, whether the information is true or not, results in a tangled web of miscommunication. It stems from the condition of your heart.

We can opt out of the conversation when we are not part of the problem or the solution. We've heard it, we cannot unhear it, but we can choose not to repeat it. I heard this said, "Before you run to the phone, run to the throne." How about this: "Before you post and publish, ask, is it rubbish?"

God is the only one who will never betray a trust and repeat the words of complaint and frustration you speak. It matters who you complain to. There is only one who can help you sort through frustrations, complaints, and examine the motivation of your heart to know if your words and thoughts are worthy of speaking and repeating. God's advice surpasses all others. It matters who you listen to.

This Lent, let's examine our hearts and our words. Seek forgiveness. Forgive others. Let's do the much-needed hard work of restoring broken trust and relationships.

Selected Scriptures: Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 41;
Proverbs 17:4; Proverbs 19:11; Proverbs 20:5;

Song: “O Come to the Altar” by Elevation Worship.
Jot it down!

[illegible]

CREATED FOR AUTHENTICITY

1 Corinthians 15:41

“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.”

Today’s culture is inundated with what I call fakeness. We have fake paintings, fake watches, fake diamond rings, and fake gold chains. Fake paintings have been sold for the real deal. Counterfeit money is often used to purchase things. You could change your look with fake hair, fake nails, fake eyelashes, and fake body parts. There is a commercial of this dude who comes in looking like a bodybuilder, and when he takes off the body armor, underneath his clothing, he has a frail and real skinny-looking body.

Social media has provided a platform for inauthentic people to tell fake stories using fake identities. People create stories about things they do, like a vacation spot, and show pictures as if they are traveling abroad. They post pictures of the Eiffel Tower in the background or walking down a street in Italy, yet they haven’t left their living room.

Paul is reminding the Church in Corinth to be authentic. Paul says, “stars differ from stars in glory.” He emphasized the diversity and the distinctiveness of our heavenly bodies. What does this mean for us today as we

journey to the cross? We need to walk according to our own ability, using our gifts and using what God has gifted us to do. We don't need to imitate anyone but Christ, nor desire what others have. We were created to be original.

It is tough to find authenticity or see the authentic. People even say, "Fake it until you make it". That might work in other places, but in our Christian walk, we need to be about the truth. Authentic faith is walking, or better yet, running with the truth.

In a world full of imitation and fake stuff, striving for authenticity sets us apart and aligns us with the heart of God. He will assist us in living out our true purpose. Each of us has a unique role to play in the kingdom of God, and our genuine faith will strengthen our walk and fulfill our testimony. Let us embrace what we have been created for. Let us honor the gifts we have been given and live out the Bible mandate, posturing our hearts to walk in honesty and integrity. Let us be authentic not only in our actions, but also in our hearts.

Selected Scriptures: Genesis 1; Proverbs 12:22; Matthew 5; Psalm 15.

Song: "Cages" by We The Kingdom.

Jot it down!

*FIGHT AS IF YOUR LIFE
DEPENDS ON IT!*

1 Corinthians 15:57

*“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through
our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

As I was driving through Pennsylvania, we came to a section of the highway where the lanes were separated by a little green patch of grass, with gentle inclines and declines, and curves. I began to see small roadkill on our road trip: the typical types in this area of the country, such as skunks, woodchucks, and multiple raccoons. As I was rounding a curve in the left-hand lane, passing a car, I audibly gasped in surprise at what I saw next... a bear! It was to my left, on the roadside, crouched down, facing me, looking as if it was ready to pounce and attack!

In bear country, you should arm yourself with knowledge and carry bear spray. The common aphorism (a memorable phrase expressing a general truth, principle) or “Bear Rule” states: “If it’s brown, lie down; if it’s black, fight back; if it’s white, goodnight!” So, depending on the situation, you can pretend you are dead, fight, or give up because you’re a goner!

Some experts say that is an oversimplification. You should ask: Is the bear defensive or aggressive? I am no expert on bears, but I did read that sometimes bears bluff

when they charge at you! I don't know that I want to be that close, let alone try to determine if a bear charging me is bluffing! Knowing the type of bear and its aggression level helps you understand the kind you are contending with and how to respond. In my reading, should the black bear attack, you should fight for your life! Kick. Punch. Hit the bear with any weapon at your disposal, concentrating on the face, eyes, and nose.

Oh, and if you are wondering about that bear on the side of the road? It's another example of an animal succumbing to traffic, and even in its death, it still appeared as if ready to attack.

Does our spiritual enemy ever bluff? Bears might bluff, but our spiritual enemy always means to take us out. We should not be ignorant of who we are contending with and utilize every available resource, putting our complete trust in the Lord.

There was a shepherd boy who used only simple tools to protect his sheep: a staff, a sling, stones, and whatever was at his disposal out in the field to kill a lion and a bear. That same boy, David, had courage and the confidence that the Lord was with him, and refused to wear the King's tunic and soldier's armor to defeat Goliath, who had an entire army quaking in their knees! David didn't play dead. He didn't give up, but he fought as if his life and others' depended on it. He defeated the enemy with the Lord and a stone.

What kind of enemy is crouching down and ready to pounce? The Lord fights our battles. He equips us. He is with us in struggles, battles, and managing tragedy. God has already won. He has the victory, and we can too. Trust in God. Fast. Pray. Put on the full armor of God every day.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

LET IT GO

Romans 8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

I remember when I first read this scripture found in Romans. I didn’t really understand it. I couldn’t wrap my mind around it. It is one of those scriptures that truly challenge our 21st-century mindset.

What did Paul mean by “there is now no condemnation”? Everything we did in the past means we should be condemned. We have done things that we feel there is no forgiveness, no forgetting, no putting it behind us.

I read a story that helped me fully understand what Paul was saying to the Roman believers. You see, the church in Rome was full of past sins, and Paul begins the letter calling them out. Condemnation begins with the letter, redemption ends it.

The story is about a man who carried an invisible backpack. This backpack was full of regrets, past mistakes, bad decisions, missed calls, missed visits, arguments, if I should’ve, would’ve, could’ve, so on and so on. At first, he was able to manage with the backpack full of guilt, but slowly he began to be hunched over, until he could go no further.

Many of us walk like this man, carrying our own invisible backpack. We must empty our invisible backpacks by accepting what Jesus did for us on the cross. The Bible reminds us that Jesus took all of our sins, past, present, and future, crucifying them.

Reliving the past is not healthy and will not erase your past regrets. Living while carrying your past won't change anything. Yes, we made mistakes, and some of them are big mistakes, but we need to empty the bag of regrets that we tend to carry.

Paul reminds us in the letter to the Philippians, "Forgetting the past and looking forward to what's ahead" (Philippians 3:13). Learn to live your life in what Christ did for you on Calvary's Cross and not be stuck in the past. Find the freedom from your past mistakes through God's forgiveness found in Jesus. Sure, regrets are part of the human journey, but our journey in Jesus gives us the power to overcome.

We are no longer bound by the weight of guilt or shame. You are Forgiven if you repented and gave your life to Jesus. When we embrace the forgiveness and the new life offered through Christ, we can let go of our burdens and walk this journey trusting that our past no longer defines us; we are defined by the love of God.

Selected Scriptures: Isaiah 43:25-26; 1 John 1; Psalm 51; John 3:1-17.

Song: "He Has Done Great Things" by Bethel Music, John Wilds.

Jot it down!

KEEPING PROMISES

1 Samuel 1:11

“And she vowed a vow and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.’”

We find Hannah in Shiloh at the doorpost of the Temple of the Lord. For years, she desired to conceive and have a child. She was distressed and wept bitterly, and amid that pain, she prayed before the Lord and vowed a vow; she made a promise to God that if he would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life. That is a big promise!

God blessed Hannah. She kept her promise to God, the Promise Keeper, and brought her son, Samuel, to the temple to be dedicated to service to the Lord, and in the care of Eli the priest. She gave the Lord the very thing she desired most in her life! Scripture records her prayer, exalting God and praising Him for His mighty power! She was praising God for who He is and not the gift, prophetically pointing to the Messiah to come!

Mary was in Nazareth when approached by the angel Gabriel, and he shared with her that she found favor with God, and she would conceive and give birth to a son through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. The angel

even told her about her relative, Elizabeth, in old age, who was barren, had conceived, demonstrating the power of God. “For nothing is impossible with God!” (Luke 2: 37). Mary was blessed by God, and she was obedient to him, and became the mother of the Son of God, keeping her promise.

God had a plan and purpose for both Hannah and her son, Samuel. He had a plan for His Son Jesus, and that included Mary! Hannah’s promise to God would bring about a great prophet who would anoint a young shepherd boy, David, to be King. The promised Messiah, the Savior of the world, Jesus, would come from the root and offspring of David through Mary and Joseph’s obedience and keeping their promise. God gave His one and only Son to serve all the days of his life to the point of death! Pause and ponder our awesome God.

Perhaps you have made secret promises to God in your quiet morning prayers that weren’t as intense and dramatic? Have you kept those promises? When God grants you the little blessings, are you as quick to give the glory, honor, and praise to God as much as the bigger blessings? If we could only keep what we thank God for each day...what would be on that list?

Selected Scriptures: 1 Samuel 1:1-28; 1 Samuel 2:1-11; Luke 1:26-38, 46-55; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5; Numbers 30:2; Psalm 119; Colossians 2:6-7; Matthew 5:33; John 3:16; Rev 22:16-17.

Song: “Monday Morning Faith” by Chelsea Plank and SEU Worship.

Jot it down!

OPEN MY EYES

John 9:25

“...One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

When Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, they encountered a man who was blind since birth. The disciples asked Jesus who sinned so that this man was born blind? Was it his parents who sinned, or was it he who sinned? Jesus answered them, “It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Because of Adam’s sin, we were all born spiritually blind. Spiritual blindness, according to the Bible, is a universal human condition that causes us to not see the truth about Jesus and who He is. Spiritual blindness leads to confusion about spiritual matters and a lack of revelation of Godly things. In the passage of John 9, the blind man recognizes Jesus as a prophet, as Savior, and as the Son of God.

This realization came to the man after Jesus healed him of his infirmity. The man confessed Jesus as Lord and affirmed his belief in Jesus (John 9:38). The man said, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

What about you? Have your eyes been opened by Jesus? Can you say with the formerly blind man, “One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see!” Do you give

testimony to how Jesus has opened your spiritual eyes and taken you out of darkness?

The enemy wants to keep us in darkness; he doesn't want you to see the glory of the Lord and the miracles that Jesus has performed in you. How Jesus has saved you from one situation to another. The enemy wants to keep you blind. Open your spiritual eyes and proclaim the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. In Jesus, we have the power to command all spiritual darkness to leave. Command every form of darkness to leave right now. Proclaim it over your life.

Jesus calls us the light of the world. In Matthew 5:14, He says, "You are the light of the world." This light isn't something we possess on our own; it comes from Jesus Himself, as stated in John 8:12. When Jesus opens our eyes and gives us this light, we're called to share it wherever we go—reflecting Christ's light through our actions and helping to drive away darkness and spiritual blindness in the lives of others.

Selected Scriptures: Matthew 5:13-16; John 9; Isaiah 60:1-10.

Song: “Open the Eyes of My Heart” by Michael W. Smith.
Jot it down!

I SAW THE LIGHT

Acts 26:15-18

“And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”

One can lose physical eyesight and experience darkness, or one can experience loss of sight through light. A year and a half ago, I temporarily lost my sight due to a torn retina. I could see only a wave of darkness. It was quick, unexpected, and painless. I also experienced a shorter period of temporary eyesight loss with laser surgery, called light blindness. “The intensity, purity, and monochromatic nature of the light converted into heat are utilized for precise applications under specific conditions to restore physical sight.” During the procedure and for a short time thereafter, I could only see light. The blindness with the light, even with numbing drops, was a pinpointed

deep pain. With that light and pain came healing. It was an experience, alright!

This got me thinking about the apostle Paul, also known as Saul, who was traveling on the road to Damascus to conduct his work as a Pharisee and a Roman citizen, working by persecuting early Christians. He was struck blind along that road by a light from heaven. Jesus appeared and spoke to Saul in Acts 9, and yet again in Acts 26, Paul testifies about how the Lord called and commissioned him to share the Gospel message—bringing spiritual sight, transforming darkness into light so that people may receive forgiveness of sins and be sanctified.

Saul lost sight for 3 days and had to be led by the hand to Damascus. The light from heaven was so pure and so intense that it lasted for three days, interestingly, the same amount of time that Jesus spent in the tomb before the resurrection. Saul didn't eat or drink for that time, and his sight was only restored by God through a disciple named Ananias. Ananias placed his hands on Saul and asked the Lord to give him sight and receive the Holy Spirit. Scales fell from Saul's eyes, and his physical sight was restored. Not only did he gain physical sight, but spiritual sight, and could see deeper things of God because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He was baptized, gained his strength, spent time with the disciples, and launched into ministry, preaching that Jesus is the Son of God.

Can you relate to Saul? Has the light of the Gospel started a healing process in you? You might feel a little pain, but it's worth it to experience the healing! The Lord can take us by the hand even while we cannot see, and bring us to a place of decision, a place of healing and restoration. Seek him.

Songs: “I Saw the Light” by David Crowder Band and “The Lord is My Salvation” by Keith & Kristyn Getty.

Jot it down!

[illegible]

THINK OF THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

This story is not original with me; it is a story whose author is anonymous. It is the story of the toolbox. The tools in the toolbox called a meeting one day and decided to get rid of some of the tools. They wanted to get rid of the tools because the gift of each tool had become a burden. The toolbox, once a place of peace where they all worked together, became a place of division and strife.

They started by discussing the hammer. The hammer must go because it made too much noise, and all it did was bang things. This caused the hammer to attack the screwdriver, saying that it was inflexible. Pointing out that he just went round and round, bringing the rest of the team in circles, making them dizzy. The sandpaper didn't get away from the scrutiny; the screwdriver stated that the sandpaper was abrasive and rubbed things wrong, causing friction with all it came in contact with. The sandpaper blurted out How about the tape measure? He goes around measuring things as if he were perfect. The pliers were

criticized for putting pressure on everything he touched. Even the pencil was criticized for being so small and not being in the right place when it is needed. The pencil always seemed to be lost.

Just then, before the meeting was over, the carpenter entered the shop, picked up the tools, and went to work. He used the hammer to pull out some nails from the wood, then replaced them with new nails. Then the carpenter took the screwdriver and put some screws into the wood to reinforce the piece he was building. He used the tape measure to make sure his measurements were true, and finally, he took the sandpaper, sanded the piece, and finished the furniture he was building. The master craftsmen didn't focus on what the tools couldn't do but on what they were designed to do. The tools began to focus also not on the limitations of the others; they began to focus on how they were used to be a blessing to others in the Master's hand. We must also look to the giver of the gift and how He uses us, as we were perfectly designed to be used.

Instead of judging others for their limitations, begin to focus on the gift we present in the Master's hand. During this Lenten season, focus on what you were perfectly designed to do and stop looking at the flaws of others. They, too, are a blessing to the Body.

Selected Scriptures: Isaiah 26:1-9; Psalm 143;

Philippians 2:1-11; Romans 12:9-21.

Song: "When I Think About The Lord" by Live Worship.
Jot it down!

I DON'T HAVE MUCH

Proverbs 3:27

*“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
when it is in your power to do it.”*

There are the destitute that live among us that we may not always recognize, even in small rural communities and outwardly appearing affluent towns. A few years ago, a homeless woman in the drizzling rain was pushing a shopping cart past our house with a yard sign advertising our church. In that moment, I felt compelled to follow her, and promptly left my house in flip-flops, carrying a cell phone and no plan. Understand, I am not always this quick to walk in obedience.

There are many details in the interaction, and too many to recount here. There were many takeaways and lessons for me personally from that interaction! We conversed for a long time, under a large tree that provided adequate shelter from the persistent drizzle. Quietly, I kept asking the Lord, what am I here for, and what should I do? I don't know what I am doing!

Eventually, I understood it! I contacted my husband, Jeff, and he brought several things I requested for us under the tree down the street from our home. She quoted scripture and assured me that she knew the Lord. We talked about God. She refused many suggestions for help

that would have been much better than accepting bottled water, individually packaged food, and an umbrella.

The last item we gave her was a handmade, carved walking stick with a hole drilled near the top and a leather string with a cross attached. She wept. She started praising the Lord. You see, in our conversation, she shared how much she would like a walking stick. She wept because this was an answer to her prayer. It confirmed God sees her, hears her, and knows her heart's desires. It met a spiritual need.

Little did she know, this interaction was an answer to my prayer for a sign confirming that Jeff and I were to take the next steps, increasing our capacity to do ministry together side by side. We walked away together, listening to her praise God, reflecting on what had happened, and then turning around again to look at her, she was gone.

Who are the destitute and impoverished around you? How can you be generous and give to those in need? It can be finances, time, or delivering a message. The Lord will provide, and sometimes it may be through your willingness to walk in faith and be part of an answer to prayer. This Lenten season, you don't need the riches of the world to be generous. You don't need silver and gold when you know the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Selected Scriptures: Acts 3:1-10; Proverbs 19:17;
Psalm 41:1; Psalm 112:9; Psalm 82:3-4; Psalm 146;
Hebrews 13:2; Matthew 25:40; Mark 12:41-44;
1 John 3:17.

Songs: "I Don't Have Much" by Mission House, Josh Baldwin, Taylor Leonhardt, Jess Ray, and "Evidence" by Josh Baldwin and Benjamin William Hastings.

Jot it Down!

BEAR MUCH FRUIT

John 15:8

*“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit
and so prove to be my disciples.”*

Spring is finally here, which is a sign of new life. The planting of flowers, birds singing, and the awakening of the sun, beaming out of the darkness. The beginning of spring after a long winter gives us hope that God is in control. Spring reminds me of when Carmen and I would prepare for spring planting. One of the many things we did in preparation for the spring weather and sunshine was turning the ground to prepare it for planting. We would also prune some of the trees, bushes, and shrubs that were planted but needed caring due to the hard winter months.

Spring preparation also reminds me of the scripture found in the Gospel of John 15:8, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

Jesus calls us to bear fruit. Not only fruit, but much fruit. The phrase much fruit comes from the Greek word *polus* or *polos*, with the derivative of *pelion*. These words have a plethora of meanings, which can help our understanding when Jesus says, “much fruit.” Much fruit can be a quantity. Jesus is saying to produce plenty of fruit. Another meaning of the Greek word is an abundance

of quality. Not only are we called to produce abundance in quantity, but we are called to produce abundance in quality. God is not asking us to produce apples, oranges, or grapes. God is asking that we produce an abundance of fruit in our spiritual lives. I think God is challenging us to produce the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

In order to produce an abundance of fruit, we need to develop spiritual disciplines and practices that keep us connected to the vine. In the book by Robert Schnase, *Forty Days of Fruitful Living*, he offers 5 practical essentials that help us in our growth as we attempt to bear much fruit.

1. Radical Hospitality in our personal walk with Christ begins with an extraordinary receptivity to the grace of God.
2. Passionate Worship is how we get to love God in return.
3. Intentional Faith development, this is where we do the soul work that connects us to others and immerses us in God's word.
4. Risk-Taking Mission and Service involves offering ourselves in purposeful service to others in need, making a positive difference even at significant personal loss and inconvenience to us.
5. Extravagant Generosity is when we give of our material wealth to support the needs of others.

My challenge is to live our lives as people who practice Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith, Risk Taking, and Extravagant Generosity. This will assist us in connecting with God, connect with each other,

HE DID IT FOR US

Mark 15:34

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

Have you ever wondered why Jesus, being God existing in Majesty, took on the form of a servant and humbled Himself by being clothed in flesh? Jesus, who was boundless, became imprisoned in a body. He who was limitless in His reach, touching the stars, planets, resting on the clouds, became limited by the use of arms, legs, neck, and head. Jesus, who was unlimited in His movement, became challenged by where His feet could take Him.

He who put the galaxies in place created the world, and the universe came down to earth as a humble man, born in a manger. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords entered as a mere human. Why did the all-powerful God relinquish His power and allow the Roman government to render Him powerless, condemning Him to die a criminal's death, death on the cross?

Why did the King of all creation give up His crown of majesty for a crown of thorns? Why did He allow them to torture Him to the point of death, whipping Him with a cat of nine tails, a whip that had at the end of each cord dried pointed bone and nails so that when it hit the flesh it would

rip the skin down to the bone. Why did He allow them to spit on Him and mock Him, ripping the clothes off His body? Why did He then carry the cross to Golgotha and permit them to drive nails into that already tortured body? He was so beaten that the Bible says he was unrecognizable.

It is more than what we can imagine or picture the suffering that Jesus endured. Not only was He rejected by those closest to Him. Not only was He abandoned by the disciples who were His companions in ministry. Nor did He battle against the powers and forces of the evil one. Not only did He take on the sins of the world. Not only did the Father leave Him alone on the cross, causing Him to cry out, “Why have you forsaken me?” He took on the Father's total wrath upon His shoulders, bearing the weight of it all.

Why? He did it for me! He did it for you! He did it for all humanity atoning for our sins. He did it to offer redemption and freedom from bondage. His sacrifice reconciles us with the Father. Jesus, the King of all creation, died that horrible death on the cross for you. What love to endure that for us. Oh, what a wonderful Savior! Hallelujah to the lamb!

Selected Scriptures: Isaiah 53:1-5; Matthew 27:22-23; Psalm 22; 1 Peter 2:21-25.

Song: “Worthy of It All” by CeCe Winans.

Jot it down!

HIDDEN MANNA (BREAD) MADE KNOWN

Matthew 10:26-27 (NASB)

“Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.”

Are you longing to know Christ more deeply and to know the hidden things of God to further your journey with him?

The Bible has examples of Christ being revealed to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus to the travelers, to the 500 people at one time, to the disciples in the upper room, and even to Peter, who denied knowing Jesus, was reinstated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee with Jesus cooking fish, even to Paul on the road to Damascus.

During Lent, some Christians celebrate Maundy Thursday to recount the events of the Last Supper. For thousands of years, Jews have observed the Passover, or the Seder Meal. In more recent years, an increasing number of Christians and Messianic believers have begun to celebrate the Seder meal during Holy Week, or Passion Week, through the lens of God's hidden things being revealed.

One particularly meaningful tradition during the Seder meal is the Tzafun Afikomen. The word, *tzafun*, means “hidden, locked away, out of reach.” The word *Afikomen* from the Greek, *epikomen*, or *epikomion*, meaning “that which comes after,” and in Aramaic, from the word *afiku min*, which means “bring various delicacies with which to end the meal.” Ponder this as you read.

Three pieces of matzah (unleavened crackers with many small holes in them) are placed in white linen. The middle piece is broken by the father near the beginning of the Seder meal and then hidden. At the end of the meal, the afikomen, the hidden matzah, must be found to conclude the evening, and is rewarded by a prize. Jews believe that this tzafun afikomen is about the future and the fulfillment of the Messiah. Christian and Messianic believers view this as a prophecy of Christ fulfilled in the symbolism of the matzah, read Isaiah 53. The three breads are said to symbolize the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in one. The middle matzah, broken, is a symbol of Christ, who was pierced and broken (crucified), hidden (buried), found or revealed (risen to life after death), and is the dessert to end the meal (salvation for those who believe).

May God continue to make the hidden manna of His word known to you, and that the secret things are revealed so that you may know Christ as Savior and grow deeper in knowledge, wisdom, and discernment of your faith! There is no better dessert than tasting the freedom in salvation through Jesus Christ! Praise him. Shout it from the rooftops!

Selected Scriptures: Deuteronomy 29:29; Jeremiah 33:3; Isaiah 53; Psalm 22; Luke 24:3-25; John 20:11-18; Luke 12:3; 1 Corinthians 15:1-7.

[illegible]

JESUS: THE RESURRECTION

John 11:25

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life...’”

After raising Martha’s brother Lazarus from the dead, Jesus told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life.” This was the last and greatest sign that Jesus did to prove to the people that He is the Messiah. Jesus showed that He had the power to heal when He healed the blind, the paralyzed man, and the woman with the issue of blood, proving He was the Great Physician. He calmed a storm, turned water into wine, and cursed a fig tree, showing that He controlled nature. These signs and miracles demonstrated what Jesus could do, but raising Lazarus showed that He was the “resurrection and the life”. Jesus had power over death.

The power Jesus displayed over death is crucial to our Christian faith. This represents not only Jesus’s victory over death, but it also promises the believer new life. Through the resurrection, Jesus shows that death does not have the final word and that God’s love for us can give us hope and restoration in a seemingly hopeless world. The resurrection assures believers that just as Jesus was raised, we too will be raised.

Jesus told Martha that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. Have we believed? Guys, the power of the resurrection is not confined to the past but continues to

transform lives today. It informs our faith and assists us in perseverance no matter what circumstances we face, reminding us that our struggles, suffering, and pain are not the end of our story.

Jesus' journey to the cross, ending with Resurrection Sunday, inspires us that the same power that raised our Savior from the dead, the same power that raised Lazarus from the dead, the same power that raised Tabitha from the dead, is at work in our lives to be overcomers. We can live with purpose, hope, and assurance. Because He lives, we can face tomorrow.

Meditating on these truths, we must hold onto the hope that the resurrection offers. The promise of “the resurrection and the life” challenges us to trust, believe, and walk in confidence, with a surety that our future is secure in Jesus.

I pray that this Lenten devotional encourages us to share the message of the Cross. Reminding others that although Jesus finished His mission on the Cross, it is never too late for us, because God continues to work on us. Don't quit! Keep going and keep believing, walk in the resurrection and life that Jesus secured!!!

Selected Scriptures: Matthew 28:1-10; 1 Corinthians 15; Isaiah 26:16-19; John 11:1-27.

Song: “Same Power” by Jeremy Camp.
Jot it down!

IS IT FINISHED?

John 19:28-30

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Jesus said these three beautiful words as he hung on the rugged wooden cross, “It is finished.” In Greek, *tetelestai* means “paid in full.” The sin debt was paid in full by Jesus, fully man and fully God. Prophecy was fulfilled. The final blood sacrifice for sin was made for all who choose to accept this gift of grace and mercy. Jesus chose to give up His life for you and for me. His mission to make a way for redemption is completed by death on the cross.

The thief on the cross recognized Jesus as taking on punishment even though He was innocent. He recognized Jesus as something greater than many witnesses in attendance missed. Jesus told the thief he would see him in paradise. The thief knew God was to be feared. He knew that the wrongdoing he committed deserved punishment. His confession of faith and a plea for mercy were made when he asked Jesus to remember him. Jesus granted it.

The thief on the cross came to a place of decision, and he chose wisely!

The finished work of the Cross of Calvary is accomplished, but have we accepted the gift that was paid in full for us? Are you in a place of decision to accept Christ today? Recommit your life to Christ?

Although some may prefer a scripted prayer of salvation, it doesn't need to be. It's an authentic, heartfelt plea, acknowledging God's holiness and perfection that separated us from Him because of our sinful state. We believe that Jesus is our Savior. We repent, turn away from our sin, and confess and profess faith in Him alone. It is amazing grace.

Salvation is not the end but the beginning!

We get to walk out our faith daily and moment by moment. Because He lives, we can face tomorrow! Jesus gave his disciples, including you and me, a mission called The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Until we go home, or Jesus comes back, we have work to do! I'm not, you're not, God's not finished yet! He is mending broken hearts and drawing the prodigal's home. May our lives be filled with testimony after testimony of God's goodness, mercy, and grace. He is faithful! It's an honor to share the good news of the Gospel in word and deed. God is in the restoration business, and we get to partner with Him! AMEN!

Selected Scriptures: Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 44:22; Isaiah 55:7; Psalm 9:10; Psalm 22; Psalm 119:11; Romans 10:9-10; John 14:19; John 11:25-26; Matthew 28:16-20; Hebrews 9:27-28.

Song: "Finished" by Caleb and John.

Jot it down!

ONE END IS ANOTHER BEGINNING.

Our story isn't over. He isn't done with us yet. We spent 40 days together in this devotional, reading the selected scriptures, praying, fasting, giving, serving, and writing down what God has been speaking to us along this leg of the journey. Okay, maybe we didn't do so perfectly, and maybe we didn't fast, and we gave up halfway through the fifth day. Maybe some of you are unsure what it means to have the guarantee of salvation through Jesus. Perhaps we struggle to know how to pray, aren't always sure it's God's voice we hear, and didn't write down a single word in the devotional. Let's put it another way, perhaps you experienced a few layovers, or it's become a bit of a waylaid journey due to unforeseen struggles and circumstances. God is still here, and He continues to encourage and cheer us on, regardless of the setbacks we may face.

God sees and knows the motives in our hearts. We encourage you to keep reading, praying, fasting, writing, and responding to God's direction even in imperfection.

Did you surrender and submit your life to Christ? Then Resurrection takes on new and exciting meaning for you this year! Share with someone that you made this decision. We want to celebrate with you as did all of Heaven! The Journey isn't meant to be taken alone. We are made for relationships, with Jesus and with one

another. We have a booklet to encourage you in your walk, “You Said Yes! How do I start my new life with Jesus?” available at the Welcome Desk.

Perhaps this devotional book was given to you as a gift, and now you are wondering, “Where do I go to church?” We have a place for you here to learn, grow, and heal that extends beyond a Sunday morning service.

It doesn’t matter how long you have been walking with the Lord; we encourage you to join this next leg of the journey and be discipled. You build relationships, learn about each other, and the Lord. Longtime Christians can be encouraged as they hear testimonies of new believers discovering Jesus for the first time, forging new friendships, and can share lessons they learned along the way on their journey as part of “The Journey: A Discipleship Series.”

This Resurrection Sunday, let’s celebrate the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. “And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here” (Mark 16:6).

He finished the work on the Cross for someone like me and for someone like you. His mercy and grace are vast. He is alive, and we can rest assured, He is coming back! He is not finished seeking the lost and broken to save and redeem them. He continually refines us and molds us until we take our last breath on earth. He is not finished with us yet. Amen and Hallelujah!

Jot it down!

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