



2025
*Lenten
Devotional*



Introduction

Welcome to our 2025 Lenten journey! In the following pages, you will hear from others in your St. Stephen's family. All our contributors have graciously given their time and willingly shared the words God has given them. To all of them, I want to say a big THANK YOU!

I recommend you get your favorite Bible in a cozy space and set aside a block of time over the next few weeks to enjoy the devotional guide. Pray before you begin, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, and speak to you through the words you read. If you intend to follow other Lenten traditions of giving up something for a season (or lifetime) or plan to add a new discipline, allow this reading to enhance those practices.

Lent and Advent are great seasons to explore new faith practices and intentionally work to grow our faith. Use this season to grow your faith and connection with God. Allow this time to help you succeed in your connections with yourself and others. I would also encourage you to find the author of any of these writings that speak to you or that God uses to speak to you and say thank you. Even if you do not know who they are, work to meet them, as this will be an excellent way for us all to strengthen our ties to each other and St. Stephen's at large.

I pray that we all have new encounters with God during Lent and that our discipleship practices grow our faith. I am so grateful for St. Stephen's and you and the numerous ways this body blesses my life. Thank you, St. Stephen's, for being a refuge of hope and welcome to so many people. Blessings to you during Lent!


Rev. Damon Stalvey



March 5, 2025

Joel was an Old Testament prophet who wrote to the people of Israel after they had experienced a devastating locust plague. His admonishment to “sound the trumpet” warns them that far greater hardship and devastation will come if they do not collectively ask for repentance and change their ways.

As the chapter progresses, Joel gives specific directives on what they need to do to repent. His message is about inward repentance of the heart, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning” (Joel 2:12), and not outward repentance. Joel goes on to remind them and us to “Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.” (Joel 2:13). God is a forgiving God, and His Word is a roadmap for our lives.

As we begin the days of Lent, let us experience it as a journey with our Lord. Are our hearts open to looking inward at our lives? Are we living as Christ wants? Are we moving in a direction to be more Christ-like with love in our hearts? Each day of our Lenten journey leads us to the cross, where we can experience the greatest love the world has ever known: Christ’s sacrifice. Let our hearts be transformed each day as we approach Easter. May each one of us be a blessing this Lenten season.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we are thankful for your Word and the love and forgiveness you give us. We pray during this time of Lent; after that, we can become better servants individually and collectively in our homes, churches, and communities. Help us share Christ’s love. Amen



March 6, 2025

What does Psalm 51 have to do with Lent? It's not a story about Easter. King David wrote this Psalm after the events found in 2 Samuel 11 & 12. Allow me to remind you of the situation...

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. When she became pregnant, David arranged for Uriah to be killed in battle, hoping to cover up his sin. David then took Bathsheba as his wife, but God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David about his sin. It took a parable (story) for him to see the extent of his sin. But once he realized the seriousness of it all, David wrote this beautiful Psalm showing his genuine repentance.

Maybe you haven't committed a sin as serious as adultery. We tend to rate sins on different levels, but any time we turn away from what God calls us to do, it is sin. If we are called to love God and love people, but we don't, we are not living the way God wants us to, and, to put it simply, we are sinning.

Lent is a time to remember how we have let God down when we've intentionally turned away from loving Him or loving other people. Maybe it's gossiping about a situation that doesn't include you. Maybe it's speaking harshly about or to someone who really needs your mercy and understanding. Maybe you flat-out lied about something. Whatever it may be, we need to understand how those times hurt others and our relationship to God Himself.

We also need to repent of our actions. Repenting isn't just saying, "I'm sorry," and not changing our actions. It includes actively working on ourselves so we don't repeat that sin. I'm not saying it's easy.

Go back and reread Psalm 51:1-17 knowing what you know about David and how you may feel about how you hurt God or others. My favorite part of Psalm 51 is:

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Each day of Lent, let us take a few minutes asking God to change us and look for the places in our life that need repenting and changing.

Prayer

Lord, as we come into the season of Lent, we ask that you not cast us away but restore us. Help us move forward in our relationship with you and others, learning how to love you and others better. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

Shannon Siderius

March 7, 2025

Paul powerfully reminds me of my calling as his ambassador for Christ. I am entrusted with the incredible privilege and responsibility of representing God and calling others to be reconciled to Him. Though sinless, Christ became sin for me so I might be righteous before God. Even in the face of hardship, endurance, and sacrifice, I am to embody God's love, truth, and power. Through my trials, I reflect on His strength and grace for those around me.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for making me a child of your love and grace. Help me to live with endurance, to bear witness to your love and truth, and to serve others with kindness. May I never take your grace for granted and always be reminded of your strength and abundant love for me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen



March 8, 2025

In this first part of Matthew 6, Jesus is teaching about hypocrisy and humility, two concepts that have plagued mankind across the ages. He does this by looking at the three components of Jewish piety: almsgiving (charity), prayer, and fasting. These three components are so foundational to the Jews that the passage assumes their practice. Notice the focus is not IF you do these things, but WHEN you do these things. Jesus wants his followers to understand how to practice these spiritual habits and why it is important to practice them correctly. By extension, he is teaching how to be truly humble before God.

The teachings for each spiritual habit parallel each other to the point that one cannot miss the overarching message. That is, hypocrisy is everywhere, and the best and only defense is solitude and attention to God. In expert rabbinic fashion, Jesus breaks it down. He takes each spiritual practice in turn and precisely describes what not to do and what should be done.

Hypocrisy is behavior that contradicts what one claims to believe or feel. No one aspires to be a hypocrite. Jesus cites and scorns hypocrisy as it relates to each practice. In each teaching, Jesus instructs us not to be like the hypocrite who practices spiritual habits ostentatiously in public to gain praise and admiration from others. The passage implies that these showy practices are so common that they may no longer seem odd or out of place to the masses. I doubt the flamboyant participants perceive their own hypocrisy, just as we rarely see our own hypocrisies.

Jesus points out that attention-seeking has no place in spiritual practices, no matter how it is dressed up in religious language or outward action. The result is a false humility that pridefully points to self and away from God. It is a trap. It prevents us from achieving the highest reward, a closer relationship with God, and substitutes the hollow and transitory reward of attention and self-pride. Yet, we are probably just as blind to our own religious hypocrisy as the ancient Jews. It is a gift from God when we recognize our hypocrisies or have them painfully pointed out to us.

Jesus has the answer to avoid the trap. His answer is solitude and attention to God. Bottom line: Don't make a big deal out of your spiritual practices; just do them. God will reward such behavior. The reward specified is a heavenly one; however, I expect the reward is also earthly. A closer connection to God produces a more contented life in countless ways. As a bit of irony, people tend to eventually notice and admire those whose lives reflect true humility. The truly humble people I have known are generally unaware of this admiration, which is, I think, another gift from God.

Prayer

Lord, help me to recognize and eliminate any hypocrisy in my life and spiritual practice.

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

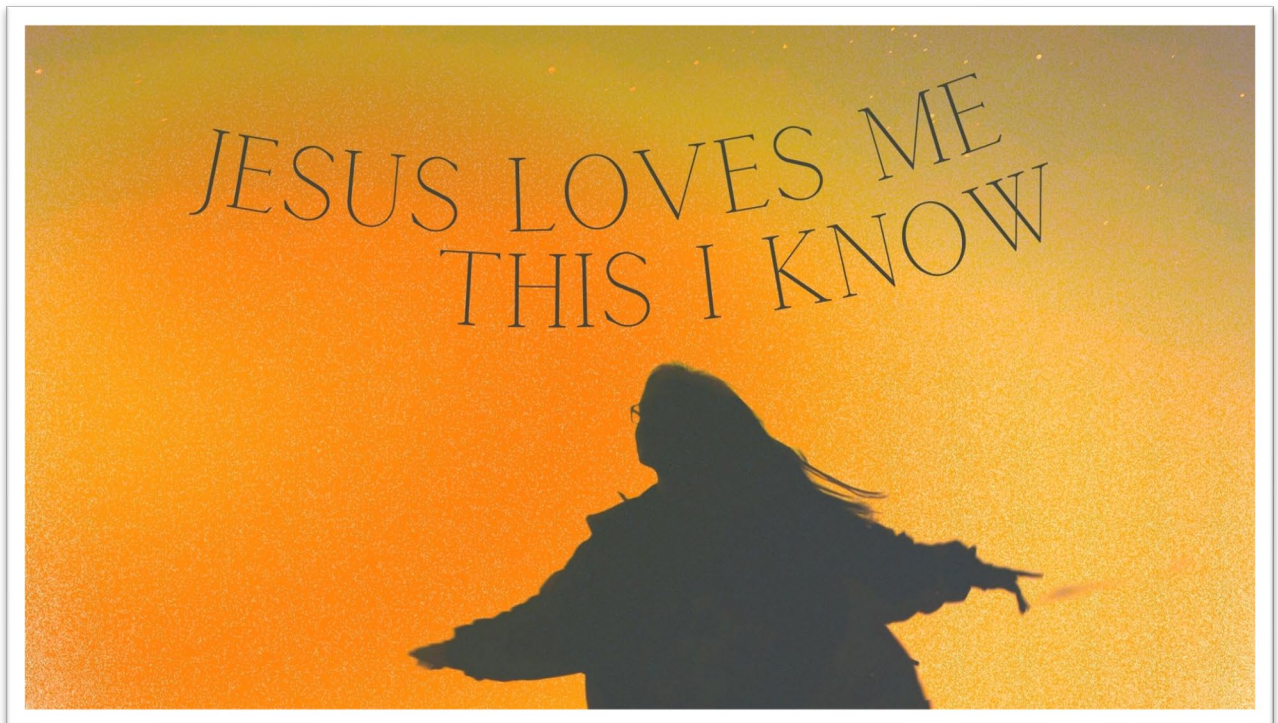
Steve Prentice

March 9, 2025

In the passage, I was assigned to read and contemplate Deuteronomy 26:1- 11. After reading this passage from the Old Testament and contemplating its meaning for myself and my life, I realize that this portion of scripture speaks to all the gifts and blessings God has given me. I have a wonderful wife, and we will soon be celebrating our 45th year of marriage. I have two wonderful sons who do valuable work for our society, two wonderful daughters-in-law who also do valuable work, and two lovely grandchildren who fill my life with much joy and happiness. I realize all that I have is a gift from God and Christ, my savior, and my response should be one of gratitude and thankfulness. And this gratitude should be evident in my desire to freely give back to the church a portion of my time, gifts, and resources.

Prayer

My prayer is short and simple: "Father, may I freely return to you a portion of my time and my assets as an act of gratitude for all that you, my Creator, and Christ, my Savior, have done for me. In your holy name, Amen."



Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16

Karen Cleland

March 10, 2025

I began a new book, *The Book of Maybe - Finding Hope and Possibility in Your Life*, by Allison Carmen. Within the first chapter, I realized that the book was not what I was looking for. The philosophy of Maybe was the author's answer to what she deemed as her addiction to certainty, which was negatively impacting her life. She defined the philosophy of Maybe as the part of uncertainty where endless possibilities live and breathe. She found that shifting her perspective to see all the possibilities that life offers is the answer to giving her a foundation to accept life's difficulties. I discovered that this was the opposite of my beliefs and what I found in the scriptures. Psalm 91 is a testament to faith; we learn that the LORD is our dwelling place. That I find refuge in the LORD is where my foundation is found to deal with the troubles and uncertainties of the world.

Prayer

LORD of refuge, thank you for the dwelling place you provide to all who trust in you. Clear our minds and hearts so we will know you and seek the shelter you provide. I pray that within your shelter, we can reach out with strength for those who have yet to find the security you will provide to all who trust your shelter. Amen.



Romans 10:8-13

Andrea Johnson

March 11, 2025

I think this passage is about having a right relationship with God. The AI on my phone defines that as a personal connection with God based on faith, where we acknowledge our dependence on God, accept God's love and grace, and strive to live according to God's teachings.

Even on our best days, we can't create and sustain a relationship like that. God knows this, yet still desires a right relationship with us, so God sends Jesus.

Jesus's sacrifice on the cross sets us right with God. Jesus makes it possible for all who accept him as Lord and Savior to have a right relationship with God, a relationship that causes us to want to emulate Jesus's sacrificial love. We must trust Jesus to create and sustain this relationship. We can't do it, so Jesus does.

This passage makes me think of an upward spiral. We take a step of faith and ask Jesus into our lives. We learn more about Jesus, and our faith in God increases. Our increasing faith leads us to depend on God more and to emulate Jesus better. As we trust Jesus more and follow him more closely, our faith increases even more.

We will stumble along the way, but Jesus keeps us connected to God and sets us right with God. It's even possible that each stumble brings a leap in faith that accelerates the upward spiral so that we are more spiritually aligned with God.

Prayer

Jesus, we want you as our Lord and Savior. Teach us to trust that you set us right with God. May our faith grow so that we more closely follow God's will. Amen.



Luke 4:1-13

Heidi Herrera

March 12, 2025

As I read and reread this passage, several things stand out to me. Before Jesus went into the wilderness, he was "full of the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Spirit." Even before Jesus begins his ministry, he is in tune with God. We, too, should always be "full of the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Spirit." What this means is that I need to know what God wants of me in any situation.

During each of these three temptations, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. Jesus' knowledge of God's Word is a bridge. We, too, must come to understand God's will and direction through the reading of our Bibles. Loyalty to God involves loyalty to the Word; trust in God comes from trust in the Word. God uses situations (tests) in our lives to show us where we stand before him. Jesus' temptations show he stands solidly with God. Our temptations should reveal that we have a similar character.

Tests in life are not bad; in fact, they can be divinely sent (James 1:2-4). The main issue is my response to a test:

Do I respond in a way that looks to God to guide me through it?

Do I trust him, or do I put him to the test?

How do I respond to personal struggles in my life? Do I get angry? Do I seek to reassert my control (even when I know I cannot control events!)?

Or do I rest in faith, look for God's hand, and ask him what I should learn from what I am going through?

Though I personally wish I could say that I always rest in faith, I know I do not, but that should certainly be my goal. If I am to grow spiritually, I can expect trial. If I am to grow spiritually, I need to look to God in the midst of it.

Prayer

So, next time you feel you are being tested, put yourself in God's hands. Look to him and the Spirit to guide you and keep your feet on solid ground. Lord, make this our prayer, amen.

March 13, 2025

At the heart of this scripture is the concept of covenant—God’s promises and Abraham’s response of faith—that runs right down the spine of the Bible and forms the basis of God’s dealing with humanity. Fascinatingly, Abraham’s great faith is not exactly steady. He begins with an almost sarcastic question in response to God’s gracious introduction and promise of great reward. Even after he believes God and it is credited to him as righteousness, his faith is riddled with questions and doubt, and he demands proof that God will do what He promised.

In this sense, Abraham is just like us as we journey along in this Lenten season, believing but questioning, trusting but doubting, looking for certainty in the darkness. The only certainty is the God who always initiates, who always responds, who always keeps his promises, who is present in the darkness, and whose grace is at the heart of the covenant. As Paul so precisely put it, we are saved by grace through faith—the prepositions being absolutely crucial in the doctrine.

Several years ago, I was involved in a Bible study at a former church that studied the book Epic of Eden by Dr. Sandra Richter. The book looked at the covenants of God in the Old Testament and how they relate to our faith in our daily lives. The study really helped me to understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. This scripture relates just one of the stories of the covenants that God made with his people and how his people have responded. As with this story, I know my faith has not always been great, and I have questioned and doubted God’s promise to be with me. But my faith has grown stronger over the years as I have gone from being unsure to having a close relationship with our Lord and Savior. I know that his grace will save me through all the trials and tribulations of this life. I now have faith that God will be with me on my journey in this life.

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, give us the strength to honor your covenants and maintain our faith daily. I know that we will not be perfect, but I ask that you forgive us for our sins. I pray that my heart remains open to receiving your grace today and every day. May I welcome the gifts you so freely give, embracing your love with gratitude and joy. Help me also to share your grace with others as I journey through life, extending kindness, compassion, and understanding to those I encounter. Amen.

Psalm 27

Terry Foxx

March 14, 2025

This reflection is based on Psalm 27, written by David. It explores themes of faith, struggle, and divine protection intertwined with a personal narrative of overcoming diversity. David begins by praising God, declaring, "The Lord is our salvation and light." The second part of the Psalm deals with what he seeks most: to meditate in His temple and always worship Him.

There is a universal truth. Humans yearn for God's presence at all times yet often hesitate to embrace Him as our Lord and Savior fully. We question whether God is truly integrated into our daily lives and whether we genuinely see his divine direction. This tension between wanting divine intervention and resisting it is a common human experience.

At the tender age of four, my sister Ann and I were abandoned by our biological mother. Ann was just two years old. This abandonment left a deep scar on Ann, who never recovered from it. She clung to the hope that our biological mother would rescue us. As a teenager, she found our biological mother and grieved the loss. She discovered that Hazel, our biological mother, lived only blocks from us and our half-brothers played in a park across from our home, but we did not realize they were our brothers. I did not look her up until I was in my 40s. I found the woman who gave us birth had little interest in us or our children. Ann, who died at 73, lived a life colored by this abandonment. She struggled with relationships, never fully connecting with our father, stepmother, or anyone in her sphere.

Now, at 85, I look back on this tragedy with a different perspective. I see the myriads of ways in which God was in my life, helping me to overcome challenges. Was it patience that saw me, though, or something deeper? I am in awe at how God helped me overcome. I was brave and stouthearted when the District Committee on Ministry told me I was too old to serve as a CLM at 64. I choose to persevere. I took classes for local pastors and reviewed the requirements for a Certified Lay Minister. I served the Santa Cruz Methodist Church for over 3 years. God was our salvation and protected the little girl of 4 as she grew into adulthood. He protected her under all circumstances, even when she didn't realize it.

Singing the Song of Confidence is not about praising God but acknowledging the struggles and doubts that come with faith. It is about recognizing the divine interventions in our life.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for protecting me throughout my life. Now, at 85, I see many things I discounted before.

Philippians 3:17 - 4:1

Yolan Grover

March 15, 2025

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians referenced in this scripture passage was sent to the church in Philippi. Located then in Macedonia, now modern-day Greece, Philippi was the site of Paul's first European church. Paul was imprisoned several times during his missionary travels around the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Paul may have written some of these letters while in prison.

One thing that strikes me when reading this passage is the underlying joy and passion in his demeanor as his words encourage and instruct his dear Philippians. This while he was likely suffering in difficult conditions. I have to surmise this faithfulness comes from his deep devotion to Jesus Christ and the personal awakening which he experienced on the "Road to Damascus." There was no turning back or denying Jesus after that moment!

With such a fire as this in his heart, Paul fervently encouraged this church at Philippi to keep their eyes focused on the promise of our Savior. The promise of forgiveness of our sins if we repent, and the promise of eternal life in Him. Paul beseeched them not to go astray with worldly distractions. He soberly and lovingly made a heartfelt plea to look to his example as a guide and not to those whose way of life made them "enemies of the Cross of Christ."

During this Lenten Season, let us as Christians repent and earnestly strive to be "Citizens of Heaven." We feel agony thinking about the sacrifice Jesus made for us but then rejoice in the promise of forgiveness and eternal life, dazzled by the wonder of it all. With our focus on the promise of the Savior, as Paul urged, the story of the Cross is not the sad end but rather the glorious beginning of everything for those who believe.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as we witness the steadfast faith exhibited by Paul, give us the conviction, wisdom, and courage to believe in the promise and apply the lessons to our daily lives. During this season of Lent, may we repent and renew our desire to live as children of God. Amen.

March 16, 2025

In Luke 13:31-35, four groups are brought together: Pharisees, Herod, religious leaders in Jerusalem, and the people of Jerusalem. While political and religious leaders focused on power and control, Jesus was moved by the people's need for meaning and purpose. The image he used to express his heart was one of gathering chicks under the loving wings of a mother. Jesus touched those he could in his time, then left the task of communicating God's love to his disciples and us.

Like in Jerusalem then, today, there is a deep desire in our hearts for meaning and purpose in life. Our culture is failing to answer that desire, so in widespread but quiet ways, people are still seeking. However, few are turning to the church and are turning instead to other things. Most disturbing is the use of anger to fill the need.

News and social media are waiting in line to serve up reasons for anger, always pointing out the sins of others. But while anger offers a pretense of meaning and purpose, it is a destroyer; it is a distraction and never satisfied. We see this when we pause from the passion of anger and hear the echoing silence in our hearts that sounds like hollowness, not peace. We sense the need for a relationship with God but can't see it.

As Christians, we have an opportunity to demonstrate that relationship to God by living out Jesus' two commandments: love God first and love neighbor as ourselves. When we focus on the sins and failures of others, we sound just like another voice selling anger or judgment (whatever good we intend). By focusing on the good and worth of others, we begin to show God's love and offer true hope.

The love of God can fill the hollowness in our hearts and build rather than destroy them. We have seen it in ourselves and will show it to others when we care for them. God can deal with sin and failure; our job is to be a window into heaven.

Prayer

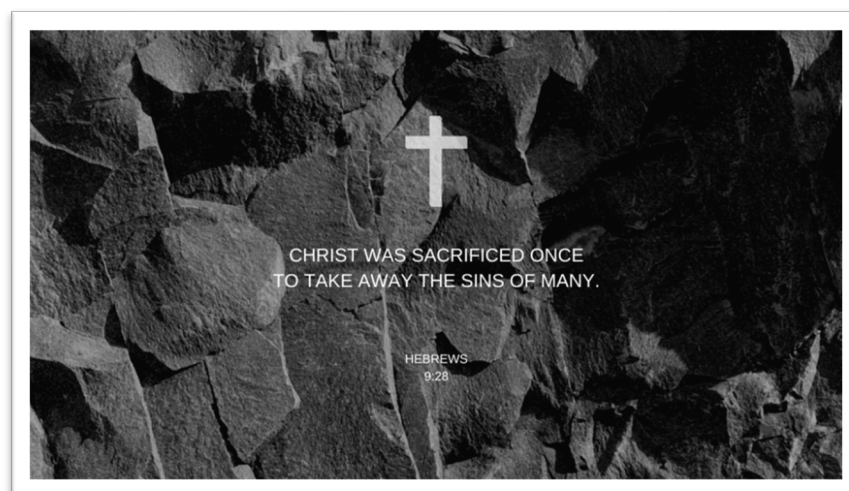
Jesus, teach us to see the beauty and worth in those around us; teach us to care. Our world is so filled with people profiting from anger and hatred; show us how to be a place of rest and hope. And remind us that we don't need to be judges. Thank you for making a way for us to be with you always. Amen.

March 17, 2025

"Why do you spend money for what is not bread? And your wages on what does not satisfy?" These words from verse 2 remind me of what so many of us do today. We are constantly looking for the next best thing, the most recent upgrade to our devices, or the latest fashions when we have a closet full of perfectly good clothes. Our culture bombards us from every side, telling us that we need more and more material goods to be truly happy. If only we had the latest and greatest, we would be satisfied. That is until the next latest and greatest thing comes along! I get caught up in some of this myself (especially with clothes), but then I remind myself that all the upgrades and new features added to items I don't really need just cost more and ultimately don't satisfy my real needs. Isaiah wasn't talking about upgrades to our latest gadgets but knew what would upgrade our lives. He exhorts us to "listen carefully to God and eat what is good. And delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen that you may live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you." Sounds simple, doesn't it? Surely easier than trying to make your wireless printer talk to your wireless computer or keeping up with the latest Apps on your smartphone. The real value of being a part of a church family is the love and friendship you can find with others and receive a new commitment to serve God. As Isaiah says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord. He will have compassion on him and to our God. For He will abundantly pardon." Even if sometimes I want to take a hammer to my devices!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to remember that You are the only thing in our lives that truly satisfies and that You are always with us and will abundantly pardon us for our sins.



Psalm 63:1-8

Jeff Anderson

March 18, 2025

Psalm 63 starts with a very strong expression of the need for God. It continues by praising the characteristics of God that led the author, David, to declare how he will act in response to God. David wrote this psalm about his time of need in the Desert of Judah. Since it is a song, when we read the words, they can become our words. We could say these things to God in our own voice. A great point to think about then is, would we? Would we say these words? Could we say these words and mean them? Let's try that out. Instead of writing things like, "David said" or "the author said," I'm going to substitute "we." "We" are singing this song, "we" are saying these words. Do they fit us? Can "we" make them our own? Here goes:

We start our song by saying that we seek God and thirst for him like a thirsty person in a very dry place. We mention that we have seen God, that we have sensed his power and glory. We are saying that we need God and know he is there. In tough times, we may doubt this, but saying the words of the Psalm as our own should remind us that God is there and that we need him.

We continue by saying, "because your love is better than life" we will do many things. We say our lips will glorify him, we will lift our hands, we will be satisfied, and we will remember him in the evening and through the night. What a great list of ways to respond to God's love.

Being satisfied seems like the hardest item on the list for me. Could I be fully satisfied with God's love? Can we be satisfied without asking for anything by just recognizing the greatness of God's love? I think one of the points of reading a Psalm and trying to internalize the words is to remind ourselves of the place we can be, even if we don't think we are there as we read the Psalm. If we read the words and meditate on what they mean, we can take a step toward making them true in our hearts.

In verses 7 and 8, we say that "because God is our help," we will sing in the shadow of his wings, cling to him, and that he is our support. A bird shelters its young under its wing to provide warmth and to protect from dangers. If we are that young bird under God's wing, the psalm does not say we cower in fear. We cling, but we also sing because we are that safe.

Prayer

Dear Lord, let the words of this Psalm grow to be true in our hearts. Let us sing this song and mean it because we thirst for you. We do know your power and presence. We will praise you, lift our hands, and be satisfied. We know that you are our help and support. We sing from the protected place under your wings. You love us so much that you sent your son to die for our sins, to allow us to be this close to you, this satisfied. Amen.

I Corinthians 10: 1-13

Justyn Rippie

March 19, 2025

The passage of 1 Corinthians, Chapter 10, verses 1-13, mentions several things that led the people of Israel astray.

From my perspective, the first five verses talk about how we all come from one God and our family. We all have a foundation and spiritual awareness, which is Christ. However, the 5th verse mentions that God became displeased with most of them due to losing their way. They began to worship idols; however, it's not directly implied, but I think we could think of this as anything to separate us from God. Perhaps certain people claim to do miracles. Perhaps connecting it to the modern day, this could be anything: cell phones, social media influencers, etc.

Furthermore, the next few verses mention how they indulged in revelry, which, from my perspective, means getting loud, drunk, and losing control of oneself.

Likewise, verse 8 mentions how many indulge in sexual immorality. I have a tough time understanding this as there's not much context in the verse about this. However, I think this can be thought of as giving in to temptations and perhaps being unfaithful. Perhaps this also means not looking at people as objects but as humans. I've had so many questions about this area of the Bible, including how to properly interpret passages related to this.

Lastly, verses 11-13 inform us how we can overcome temptation. I really enjoyed these last few verses as they really struck me. It mentions how God will not allow us to be tempted more than we can bear and that he will offer us a way to overcome that temptation. I think God will not put more than we can handle in our lives in one moment. However, it's up to us to see that, ask for guidance, and do the work to help us overcome that temptation.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you guide me in my life to further understand you and allow me to work in your name wherever and whenever possible. Amen

March 20, 2025

It was well known that Pilate disliked the Jews and had them murdered as he thought that they were rebelling against Rome, which led to Jesus' question to the crowd, "... are those who died worse sinners than others?" To which He answered His question as a firm no. He gave the same response about those who died when the tower of Siloam fell on the laborers. None of them died because of their faith or lack thereof. Neither the Galileans nor the workers should be blamed for their misfortunes. If a person is killed in an accident or in some way survives, it is not a measure of their righteousness, as everyone is destined to die at some time or other. Instead of dwelling on why some escape a tragic event and others don't, Jesus continued to point out the need for everyone to repent or they will perish.

At this point in the discussion, Jesus turns the question around and speaks of the need for everyone to ask forgiveness for their sins, or else they will die apart from God.

This leads us to the question and the definition of what Jesus meant by our need to repent, or all who don't will perish. The term to repent, as used in the Bible, means to have a change of mind and attitude, leading to a transformation in behavior.

Repentance begins when we have regretful feelings about our sins and our desire to turn to God in obedience to His will. When Jesus speaks to us about the term to perish, He is referring to our suffering, a spiritual death, and permanent separation from God, which comes when we reject Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Jesus then tells of the fig tree that would not bear fruit. He is calling the Jewish nation to repentance. In His parable, we can see that the man represents God, and the tree represents Israel, or bringing it closer to home, refers to this country today. Jesus warns His listeners that God will not forever tolerate their or our lack of productivity, saying, "Have you been enjoying God's special treatment without giving anything in return?" Isn't it time to respond to the special care we've received from God and thus begin to bear the fruit God created us to produce?

The vineyard keeper denotes Jesus, who asks that the tree be given more time and that it will bear a good crop with proper care. This is a call for all of us to repent to bring forth the fruit of redemption.

Prayer

Dear and loving God, bless us and help us turn our thoughts, work, and prayers into helping others by bringing the Good News to them so that they may enjoy eternal life with Jesus. Amen

Joshua 5:9-12

Greg Gallagher

March 21, 2025

At first glance, this brief passage may seem unassuming and just another account of a Passover feast. However, when you consider it within the context of the entire book of Joshua, what can be gleaned becomes much more rewarding.

This Passover feast occurs between two significant events most of us may recognize. Right before this, the entire nation of Israel crosses the Jordan River, and in an echo of the parting of the Red Sea, God once again provides for the Israelites by drying up the Jordan River the moment the feet of those carrying the ark of the covenant touch the water. Right after this Passover feast, the nation of Israel follows God's instructions in their conquest of Jericho and those famous walls that came "a tumblin' down." So why is this feast so significant? Because it is the first in the fulfillment of God's promises made during their deliverance from Egypt. It is the first Passover feast where they eat from the fruits of the Promised Land, leading to the cessation of the manna from Heaven, God's provision of food for them in the wilderness. They have arrived, and God's promises are coming to fruition. But let's unpack this further. First, we should recognize that they prepared for God's promise. In chapter 1, Joshua assumes leadership from Moses and prepares the people to enter the land by sending spies to Jericho and having Israel prepare to cross the Jordan River. After crossing, they memorialize the event with an altar of stones and reflect on God's providence. Then, the Lord commands that the entire nation be circumcised. This is important because it involves the second generation—those men born in the wilderness after the Israelites wandered for forty years. They are the children of those who would not see the Promised Land due to their unfaithfulness. It signifies that the entire nation belongs to the Lord.

We then arrive at verse 9, where God declares He has "rolled away" the disgrace of Egypt from them. They name the place Gilgal, meaning "circle" or "rolled away." What a fitting name! The Israelites have come full circle in their deliverance from Egypt and are now inheriting the Promised Land. This serves as a fantastic foreshadowing of the Gospel, where this significant place in Israel's future becomes a symbol of sanctuary from oppression, marked by a memorial of stones and the name "rolled away." It serves as a reminder of the One who would ultimately roll the stone away, forgiving our past disgraces, offering us refuge from oppression, and granting us life in the Promised Land!

But it doesn't end there. Verse 12 states that the day after they ate from the land, the manna ceased. Notice that God's provision of manna did not stop until after they had eaten from the Promised Land. What an incredible testament to God's faithfulness and provision. He sustained them until the end, ensuring they were never in need.

Prayer

So, this Lenten season and beyond, I encourage all of us to reflect and pray on the following: In what ways is God preparing you to fulfill His promises? In what ways are you preparing to inherit the blessings of God? How can you memorialize His faithfulness so that you and future generations might remember His goodness?

Psalm 32

Martha Benn

March 22, 2025

"Forgiveness brings true joy. Only when we ask God to forgive our sins will he give us real happiness and relief from guilt." Psalm 32 focuses on Confession, Repentance, and Forgiveness. Additionally, a number of the following Psalms emphasize these themes, along with reference to the joy we experience in being forgiven.

For this piece, I am going to focus on Forgiveness. What does it mean to forgive? I have discovered that much is written about Forgiveness; therefore, the message is that "there is a major need to forgive. " A common definition: "Forgiveness is a deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness." The end of this statement got my attention. What is your response?

How can you relate:

Start with the ways in which God has forgiven you. An example of someone (or more) that you need to forgive. My challenge to you: In your Small Group, with a group of friends over coffee - around your dinner table - with family..... Is there someone you need to reach out to... to forgive?

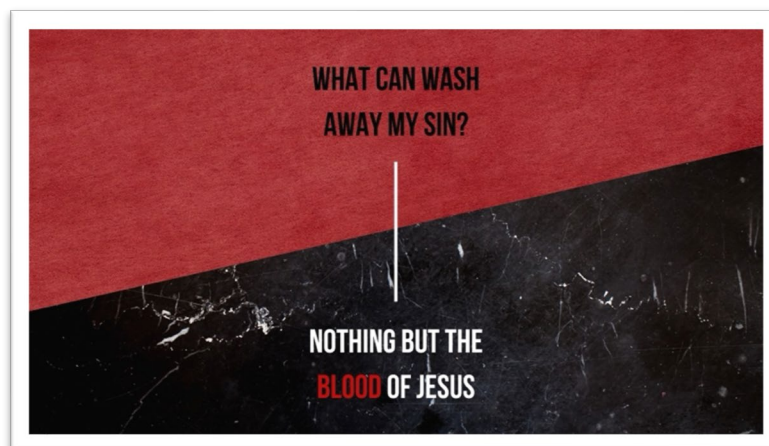
Be Aware:

"Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart" Psalm 32: 11

Resources. Life Application Study Bible NIV; Wesley Study Bible NRSV; The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for guiding us in this direction.



2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Jo Anderson

March 23, 2025

As we approach Easter, I want this to be the greatest one of all. I've felt God calling me to live a new way of life based on Jesus' death and resurrection for a while. Many of us believe this, but are our lives based on it?

As I age, each new day brings difficult decisions, but Christ's death and resurrection motivate me to act, decide, and respond. I used to keep my faith tucked away and only bring it out when I needed it.

In 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, we see three things that this new life involves:

- a new perspective
- a new reality
- a new relationship

A New Perspective

For the apostle Paul, the Corinthians didn't consider him a credible minister - he suffered in many ways and wasn't flashy or dramatic. Likewise, Christ was humble and sometimes seemed defeated by the cross. Being a Christian involves a renewed perception. Non-Christians don't see things the same way that Christians do.

When you look at Jesus, who do you see? Do you see a teacher? Do you see a leader? Just a good man, influential person, or historical figure? The fact is, non-Christians cannot see Jesus for who He truly is. Those who have been saved can see Jesus as our glorious, living Lord. As Christians, this is the new perception that characterizes our new life.

A New Reality

The new life in Christ involves not only a new perspective but also a new reality. If you are trusting and following Him as your personal Lord and Savior, you are no longer living in your own way but are trusting and following him in day-to-day living. It is a dramatic change when you enter a new life with Christ. It is a whole new reality. When you enter a life with Christ, the old person you once were fades away, and a new you is formed. As a non-Christian, Christ seems like a fraud or an insignificant person. Now, as a Christian, he becomes your Lord and Savior.

Christians and non-Christians live in completely different worlds. The biggest difference, though, is in relationships.

A New Relationship

Our new life in Christ involves a new perspective, reality, and relationship.

As a Christian, you are designed to have a relationship with God. God made us wonderfully in his image, and at the center of this image is the need for us to have a relationship with him. Without this, we are living outside of our God-given design. Life doesn't work without a relationship with God.

I go back to COVID-19. COVID-19 separated us from relationships with people we cared about, worked with daily, and had family. Sin separates us from God, and we can't be close to him in a sinful state, so we have to fix it.

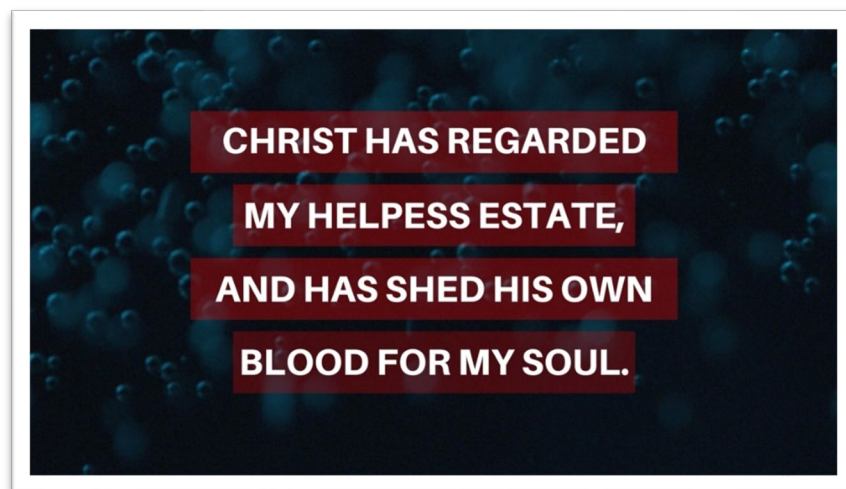
This is where Jesus Christ comes in. Through his death and resurrection, God gave us the ability to reconcile with fellow Christians and to help non-Christians be reconciled with God to live in the light of their relationship with Him. This is what Christianity is all about.

For us to be reconciled to God, someone had to pay the consequences. Who was that? God. He absorbed the consequences of our sin through Christ. He paid the debt we can't pay so we can be right with Him.

Every Christian falls short of God's perfection. We all sin, maybe not all the time, but we do fail to live according to his design. God offers forgiveness so that we can have a relationship with him. We are his Children, and he is our father.

Prayer

"Dear Heavenly Father, let me begin a renewed relationship with you. I want to be an ambassador of Christ and to minister to those who may not know you as I do. I want them to know how it feels to have You as their Lord and Savior and to trust in you. I pray all of this in the precious name of Jesus." Amen"



March 24, 2025

The Message version of Luke 15: 1-3 says that many men and women of questionable reputations were hanging out with Jesus. The Pharisees and religious leaders didn't like that. They grumbled that He treated such people like old friends.

In verses 11-32, Jesus decides it is a good time for a story.

The parable Jesus tells could more aptly be titled The Running Father rather than The Prodigal Son. Depending on our stage of life, we might identify with each of the characters in the story. We have likely all been the blundering youngest son, the irreproachable oldest, the obliged servants telling news of wayward return, and the ardent father at one time or another.

The thing is, parables are not about us. Indeed, we identify with them- that is a critical element in good storytelling. But parables are designed to reveal to us the character of God. They point us to His goodness. Always.

There were no banks in Jesus' day. The listeners understood that the Running Father had to liquidate assets to give the entitled prodigal his "share." The father does this, still fervently and actively looking for the son to return. Then, he welcomes him home with gusto and throws a party.

That's the offense. Someone got more of something than was fair.

Have you ever been offended by someone else getting more? Have you ever felt slighted by another receiving some form of extravagant grace? Have you ever been the recipient of such warmth?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the parables that help us to know you more. Thank you for longing to be in a relationship with us. Thank you for your scandalous love. Give us softened and generous hearts that love as you do- with abandon, with no sense of not enough. Teach us to spread your kind of love around like it comes from a bottomless well. Amen.

March 25, 2025

The vastness of the ocean, with its endless depths and untamed power, reminds us of how small we are. It is beyond our control, a force we cannot subdue. Similarly, life often presents us with overwhelming situations—struggles that feel as unmovable as the waves or as chaotic as a raging sea. But Isaiah reminds us that God is the one who makes a path through the sea, demonstrating that no human power is needed for Him to act. He is sovereign over all things, even the most formidable challenges. Just as He parted the Red Sea for the Israelites, He can part the overwhelming troubles in our lives. War, strife, and uncertainty may seem insurmountable, but He is our deliverance. He alone brings peace where there was conflict, making a way where there was none.

God does not merely make minor adjustments; He enacts abrupt, transformative change. He calls us to look forward, not back. "Do not consider the former things," He tells us because His plans are new and beyond what we have seen. This is the beauty of His renewal—we are not bound by our past, nor are we doomed to repeat it. Through Him, we are made new. Just as He turns the sea into dry land and provides rivers in the wilderness, He brings life to barren places within us. When we feel lost in a desert of despair or drowning in a sea of troubles, He is there. He is the God of contrast—the one who controls both the flood and the drought, the chaos and the emptiness; in all things, He works to bring restoration.

Even the creatures of the earth respond to God's works, giving Him praise when He provides water in the wilderness. If the animals honor Him, how much more should we? We are recipients of His goodness and are called to reflect His glory. He blesses us so that we may be a blessing to others, leading them to honor and acknowledge Him. As we witness His transforming power in our lives, we become vessels of His hope and light in the world. He is always doing a new thing, and through Him, we are continuously renewed. Let us walk in the confidence that the God who commands the seas and makes rivers in the desert is still at work in our lives today.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the God of the impossible. You part the seas, bring peace to turmoil, and make streams in the wilderness. Help me to trust in Your power and not my own. Teach me to let go of the past and embrace the new thing You are doing in my life. May I be a reflection of Your goodness, bringing honor to Your name in all that I do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Psalm 126

Karli Massey

March 26, 2025

Psalm 126 is a beautiful picture of restoration and joy after a season of struggle and difficulty. The psalm begins with a remembrance of how God restored His people, filling them with laughter and praise. But it also acknowledges that life is not without hardship—tears are sown, struggles are faced, yet the promise remains: joy will come.

In the Easy English Bible translation, the heading used for Psalm 126 is “a song to sing as we climb.” I feel that prompts help to set our gaze upward and lift our chins to remind us to keep praising our Lord. With this, I recall one of my favorite song lyrics:

“I'm gonna sing in the middle of the storm
Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar.”

In 2024, my husband and I had an unsettled year with health complications and working through the process of remodeling and moving. In October, after we moved stacks of boxes into our new home, we then traveled to Arizona for my husband's surgery. After several weeks of recovery, we returned home and were finally able to decompress and focus on getting settled.

The words that are guiding me in 2025 are *settled* and *strength*, as the message of Psalm 126 conveys. Life often takes us through valleys of difficulty, where trouble seems to be the only seed we have to offer. The good news is that God is faithful to restore and provide us with rest, recovery, and a sense of being settled.

The psalm also reminds us that we reap joy in good times and in our struggles—and not just any joy, but joy that comes from seeing the hand of God at work, bringing restoration, renewal, and strength.

Whatever translation you read of Psalm 126, it helps us reflect on those times of glory and feelings of happiness. The common term used in the various translations is “like a dream.” What a glorious cue that prompts memories of good times that undoubtedly overshadow the bad. “Yes, the Lord has done great things for us.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding us of Your promise of joy after struggles. Help us to trust in Your faithfulness even when we walk through seasons of difficulty. Remind us that tears are not wasted and that You are working and planting seeds for good. Fill our hearts with hope and assurance that joy will come. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Philippians 3:4-12

Jeff Berger

March 27, 2025

The Bible often seems to reach out and smack me in the head, but at the same time, it offers a way out. This passage is another example of this mechanism.

We all have things in our past that we may be tempted to rely on—our achievements, good works, reputation, or even our religious background. At the same time, we may also carry failures, regrets, and sins that weigh us down. Paul teaches us that nothing—good or bad—compares to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. His invitation is clear: let go of everything that keeps you from fully pursuing Jesus and press on toward the goal of a deeper relationship with Him.

Paul begins this passage by listing his impressive religious and cultural credentials—his lineage, his strict adherence to the law, and his zeal for God. If anyone had reason to boast in their righteousness, it was Paul. Yet, he boldly declares that all these things are worthless compared to knowing Christ.

Paul shifts his focus to what truly matters. He considers everything a loss compared to the ‘surpassing worth’ of knowing Christ. His righteousness does not come from his own efforts but through faith in Jesus.

Paul’s life goal is not just to believe in Jesus but to know Him deeply—to experience His power, share in His sufferings, and become like Him. He acknowledges that he has not arrived but is continually pressing forward. I think this pressing is part of the sanctification process.

Prayer

God, thanks for using your Word to remind us that nothing compares to knowing you, especially through Christ. Help us to release anything that distracts us from pursuing this. Give us the strength to push forward. Amen.



John 12: 1-8

Dave Giddens

March 28, 2025

In today's reading, Mary, sister of Lazarus, anoints Jesus with nard, a very expensive perfume. Judas criticizes Mary, telling her that the perfume could have been sold and the money used to help the poor. Jesus rebukes Judas, basically telling him to back off because the perfume was intended for His burial, and there will always be poor people after Jesus is gone.

John comments that Judas did not really care about the poor but was a thief who stole from the disciples' money bag. Jesus almost certainly knew about Judas' stealing but did not say or do anything to stop it. When we choose the way of sin, God may not stop us, but he does not approve. What we deserve will come. Jesus knew what was in Judas' heart. Satan is the father of lies, and a lying character opens the door to his influence. Because Jesus knows us, we should want to keep our actions consistent with our words.

Mary's anointing of Jesus and Jesus' response does not teach us to ignore the poor or spend extravagantly on Christ. This was a unique act for a specific occasion—the death and burial of Jesus. Mary's act was a declaration of her faith in Jesus as Messiah, a powerful expression of deep devotion and love for Jesus, which signifies complete surrender and an act of worship. This is contrasted with Judas' focus on material value rather than spiritual significance.

Jesus' words should have taught Judas a valuable lesson about the value of money. However, in a few short days, Judas would sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Prayer

Father, please show us how to declare our faith in Jesus as our Messiah while at the same time using the blessings you give us to bless those who are less fortunate than we are. Amen.

March 29, 2025

Being asked to write a devotional on this passage is not easy because it's packed with so much excitement and fulfilled prophecies. In 2025, we have a millennium of scholarly interpretations, sermons, and devotionals. All that anyone must do is reference any reputable commentary, and you will find so many nuggets in this passage. At this point in Jesus's ministry, so many prophecies were fulfilled in such a short amount of time. I am using the Amplified Bible on purpose just to see all the prophecy references and their significance. Instead, I would like to focus on what Jesus said at the beginning and the end of this passage. He already knew that at a SPECIFIC point in time, there would be a colt ready to be taken for Him. He already knew that there would be no trouble if anyone asked- which they did- and there's no mention about any squabble with the disciples and the owner of the animal. At the end of the passage, Jesus reminded us that even the dead stones would come to life and rejoice if the people hadn't. I firmly believe that would have come to pass if the people hadn't rejoiced. To me, these subtle things in scripture remind me of the absolute mystery of God's sovereignty over time, matter, people, events, and space. That alone shows how infinitely powerful our God really is. I'm glad God is a mystery. I'm glad that I don't understand God's eternal nature or that three persons exist as one. I'm glad God doesn't fit in my "cookie cutter, three-dimensional world." Because if He did, I would be worried. He can't be put in a box of human logic. My God is a mystery with how He interacts with his creation.

Prayer

Eternal God, what is dimly lit now will come to light when we leave this world. Please remind us of the specific timing of events and circumstances that YOU orchestrated to fulfill the prophecies of your Son entering as Messiah and dying for our sins. You are awesome in all your ways. Let the fear of Your immense size not frighten us but cause us to find comfort in the fact that You choose to be patient and love us. Help us rejoice, Lord, if we have become dead stones.

March 30, 2025

This passage, for me, gives just the slightest glimpse into what it will look and feel like to finally enter Heaven and what that day might look like. When we arrive, whatever that might look like, we will thank the Lord for his forgiveness and unending love for us. Now, He is truly our salvation as we experience this moment. 19 Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. 21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" is a Bible verse that appears in multiple places, including Psalm 118, Matthew 21, and Acts 4. The phrase is a metaphor for Jesus Christ and his role in the Christian faith. He was rejected but is the lens through which God views us. He willingly gave himself up so that we could be forgiven. Let us rejoice! 22 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 23 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad. Here is where we glimpse the unending joy and celebration "with boughs in hand." We will join the festal procession up to the horns of the altar! The imagery here should bring you peace and happiness! There will be no more burdens, pain, or stress. Only the love and joy we experience with our God. 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord, we bless you. 27 The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. Finally, we find joy in what will be one day and, for now, will continue to praise and exalt our God, giving thanks for his enduring love forever. "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10); let the imagery and promise of such a celebration carry you through the difficult moments you experience. 28 You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. 29 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the gift of your Son, who is our true salvation! I am thankful for the unending love you give us and the promise of joining you in a place so wonderful that it is truly unimaginable and indescribable. I praise you for the many blessings you continue to bestow on me, and I pray for those who are still searching for your light. May you shine that light upon them and us all so we may find our way to you one glorious day in Heaven. May you continue to use me here on earth for your will. Amen.

March 31, 2025

These verses in Isaiah tell us about the suffering servant. Sometimes, God sends trials for us to endure to discover our purpose. Recently, we were given the opportunity to take a test to determine our gifts from God. These Bible verses explained the gift I found I had for Healing. It is the genuine gift of caring for and understanding a situation and wanting to help the person cope.

Having had experience in coping with something like cancer in your child made me understand what is more fully involved. Back in the 60s, most people were very wary of any kind of cancer because they were afraid it was contagious. They would speak to you briefly, but with a little distance, and would always be busy and never visit.

Our son had been born on November 9, 1966, with a malignant brain tumor that was very deep into the center of the brain. They did a surgery at two months but were unable to get it all without damaging too much needed good tissue. They did radiation therapy that I sometimes had to help with, and a second surgery. For the radiation therapy, I sometimes had to help them tape him down to a board so he wouldn't be able to move, or it would destroy good tissue. The radiation bought him some time. They didn't think he would make it a year, but we ended up getting to know him and his personality for just over three years. He was a sweet and very caring child. At the time of his death, March 11, 1970, I asked the doctor to do an autopsy on him so we might be able to help another child in the future with what was found. Autopsies were not done then and were frowned upon by the public. What they found was that the tumor itself kept growing to the back of the head, where the nerve center is located. It eventually pinched off all nerve action. The doctor was sure he lived on love.

Through this, God has given me the ability to see the reality side of things instead of the emotional so that I can take in the rest of the world instead of my own four walls and consider others. When necessary, I can take a mental step away from a situation in order to deal with it. The experience and result made me take an associate degree in radiology to become a technician. I always felt confident that God would not let me make a mistake that would harm anyone. My faith has always been strong, and nothing is going to take that from me. I have had the Lord's touch a few times, which has helped me through some very tough situations.

More often, you get to use your talents rather than give money. In today's world of unbelievable price increases, financial giving isn't always an option. Talents can always be used.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please help us to see more opportunities for using the talents you have blessed us with to serve you to the best of our ability. Amen

April 1, 2025

David, the subject of this psalm, was no stranger to difficulty. As a boy, he found himself battling Goliath, a seemingly unbeatable warrior. As a young man, his favor with God earned him multiple attempts on his life by King Saul. He even faced rebellion from his own men in the wilderness. David's life was blessed in the long run, but that doesn't mean it was easy. It doesn't mean he never had to navigate spirit-splintering chasms of despair.

We, too, face despair in our lives. Maybe kings aren't hurling spears at us, and maybe our giants are metaphorical, but we know fear. We're familiar with frustration. With loneliness. With the feeling - the *certainty* - that any strengths we had have withered away. We've had times when we are all too ready to claim our identity as, to quote the psalmist, "broken pottery" (v. 12).

And yet. Even in the depths of the chasm, even when "terror is on every side" (v. 13), David doesn't give up. He *does not give up*. In his darkness, he seeks and finds the light. Instead of tallying his woes and demanding, "Why, God?" he tallies his woes and proclaims, "But I trust in you, Lord" (v. 14).

We may ask, "Why the tallying? Why dwell on the negative? Isn't that...whiny?" In our modern culture, and no doubt back in David's as well, acknowledging the negative is often seen as a weakness or something to avoid. Few people are willing to take a moment to sit in the darkness. To just sit there. But the darkness is useful. Not only useful but necessary. The dark, the chasm of despair, is where we realize how much we need the light. It's where the full glory and mercy of the light are revealed to us. Without the dark, the light would be meaningless.

Prayer

Lord David used his darkness as a springboard to renewed faith. When he had nowhere to turn, he turned to You. May we do the same in our times of trouble, no matter how trivial, no matter how cataclysmic. May we see and receive the light in our darkness and reflect that light to the world. Amen.

Philippians 2:5-11

Ashley Barnes (youth member)

April 2, 2025

We've all heard the saying, "What Would Jesus Do?" at some point in our lives. It's a phrase that serves as a quick reminder to pause and think before acting. However, as much as we might recognize the importance of this phrase, we often find ourselves falling short of living it out. It's not enough to ask the question; we must strive to embody the actions and mindset of Jesus in our daily lives.

Looking at the life of Jesus, especially in the verses we reflect on today, we see a powerful demonstration of humility. Jesus, the Son of God, had ultimate power and authority over all things. Yet, He chose to humble Himself for the sake of others. Philippians 2:6-8 describes this by saying Jesus, "Being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant." Despite His divine status, He didn't use His position for personal gain or to elevate Himself. Instead, He came to serve, heal, and restore what was broken. His humility wasn't just in His actions; it was in His very nature.

This example of selfless service is not just something for us to admire from afar but a call to follow. In Philippians 2:5, we are reminded, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." We are called to adopt the same attitude of humility and service in our own lives. But this can be difficult, especially when we're caught up in our own lives and responsibilities. We may feel too busy to help or deserve to be treated better than others. But Jesus calls us to think differently.

Living humbly means putting others before ourselves. It's about finding ways to serve, even when it's inconvenient. It could be something as simple as offering a helping hand to a neighbor or making time to listen to someone struggling. It could also be as involved as volunteering at a shelter or reaching out to those in need.

Regardless of how big or small the act is, the key is doing it with a humble heart, seeking nothing in return but the opportunity to serve others. Jesus' example challenges us to rethink our priorities. In a world that often elevates self-promotion and personal gain, Jesus calls us to a different standard.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for all that you have done in our lives, allowing us to have the ability to help in the world. Please forgive us for any time we have put ourselves above others and refused to help in a time of need. We ask that you help us search in our lives for opportunities to act humbly while serving the world you created for us and help us embody your actions in our lives. Amen

April 3, 2025

The setting for this scripture is the Jewish Feast of the Passover, the celebration of God bringing the Jewish captive nation out of Egypt. The Passover Feast is a Celebration of Thanks with a meal. Jesus intended this scriptural event to move his disciples from participating in a symbolic meal to a sacramental meal. Current Christians corporately celebrate this sacrament in the Eucharist, our sacrament of Communion.

Jesus knew that his time was quickly coming to an end because the temple priests would have to act fast to capture Jesus, hold him for trial, and then crucify him before the Feast of the Passover began. Jesus desperately wanted to eat the Passover meal with his disciples before his death. His death would be the fulfillment of God's Kingdom.

The practice of breaking bread together was a custom representing a pledge of both solemn affection and mutual concern, as well as a symbol of deep intimacy. Jesus used this custom to bless the cup of wine and break the bread before the meal to portray the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood as a sacrifice for ALL mankind. This symbol of the wine and breaking of the bread also portrays what was to come with his crucifixion.

Jesus incorporated this intimacy into illustrating the human traits of jealousy, fear, hate, and betrayal within his disciples by communicating that personal servitude was equally important as individual prominence. Jesus asked if the disciples had a sword, and two were produced. The swords symbolized worldliness and spirituality. Jesus would no longer be among the disciples physically but would continue to exist spiritually as part of the Kingdom of God for all mankind.

Prayer

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. AMEN

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Luke 23:1-49

Mary Berger

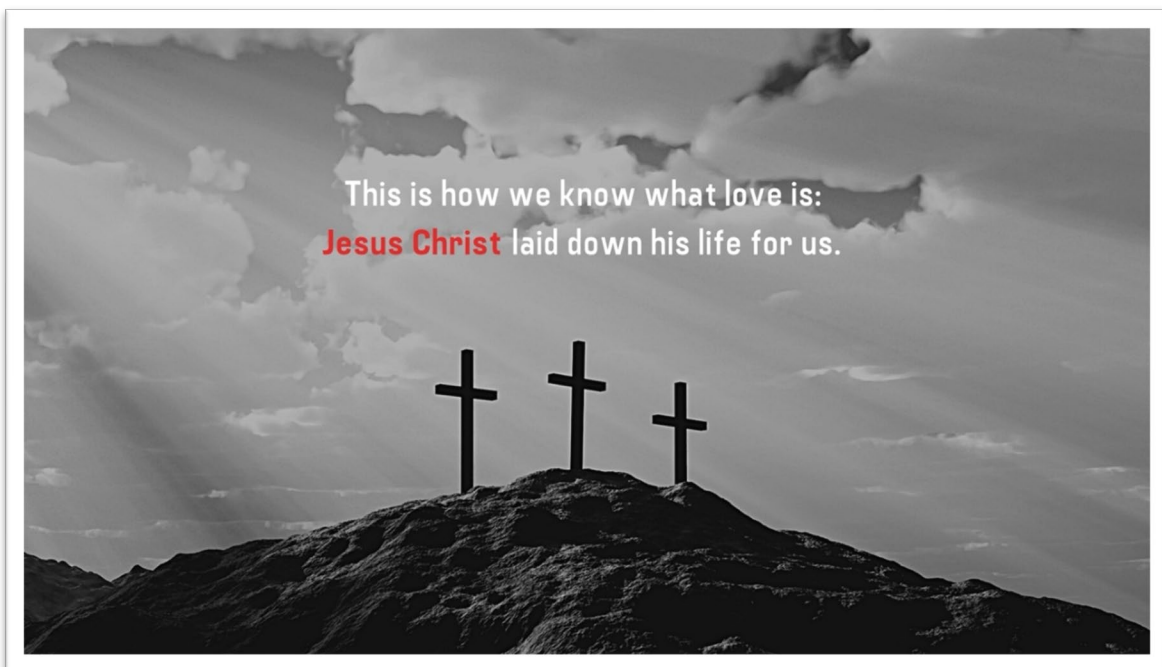
April 4, 2025

Jesus stood before Pilate, Herod, and religious leaders, although innocent, was accused and condemned. He did not fight back or defend Himself, knowing His purpose. Even as Jesus was mocked, laughed at, and nailed to the cross, He extended forgiveness: "Father, forgive these people because they don't know what they are doing." Jesus later replied to the repentant thief beside Him on a cross, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." In His final breath, Jesus did not cry out in despair—He surrendered. "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands." The sky darkened, the temple curtain was torn apart, and the weight of the moment was felt by all.

Even knowing this story since I was a very young child, I am brought to my knees as I reflect on what Jesus did for me. His every step, every word, and every moment of suffering on the path to His crucifixion was endured for love—love for you, me, and the world. And when that temple curtain was torn, and Christ took his last breath, the barrier between God and humanity was removed so we could approach God directly through Christ.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for loving us, even in Your suffering. You walked the hardest road so that we could walk in freedom. Help us trust You fully and reflect Your love in how we live. We surrender our hearts to You. In Your precious name, Amen.



April 5, 2025

According to gotquestions.org (a great resource, by the way), this is the first of four 'Servant Songs in Isaiah' that point to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Some wonder if the author is talking about Israel in this passage, but I genuinely believe that Isaiah is pointing to Christ. As I reflect on this passage, I'm reminded of specific events in Jesus's life.

"my chosen one in whom I delight" – Jesus's baptism in which God said: This is my son, in whom I am well pleased.

"He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets" – as he dragged the cross through the streets without crying out.

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." –the resurrection, that wonderful moment as he appears to Mary Magdalene.

"till he establishes justice on earth" –his promise to come again

But this passage continues, in my mind, to talk about Christ's bride, the church, and the further teachings guided by the Holy Spirit.

"who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it" – this seems to be discussing about the believer's walk and the partaking of our 'daily bread' from the spirit.

"I will keep you and make you a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles." – this passage, more than the others, seems to point to Christ himself and not the people of Israel. Christ was the one true light that kept the faith even after almost 2,000 years after his death.

In wrapping up this 'Servant Song,' God makes a clear declaration that can never be denied: "I am the Lord, that is my name!" He is Yahweh, and we can always be comforted by the fact that He will never "yield his glory to another."

In my closing prayer for this devotional:

Father, I celebrate Jesus's life on Earth, His death, His resurrection, His presence in the church, His light to the world, but most importantly, the 'new things that You declare.' The promise of hope, peace, joy, and love that is truly eternal. I praise You, and I praise the church! May this reflection be a moment of clarity for everyone who reflects on it as it was for me. I pray to become Your better Servant. Amen

Psalm 36: 5-11

Elaine Prentice

April 6, 2025

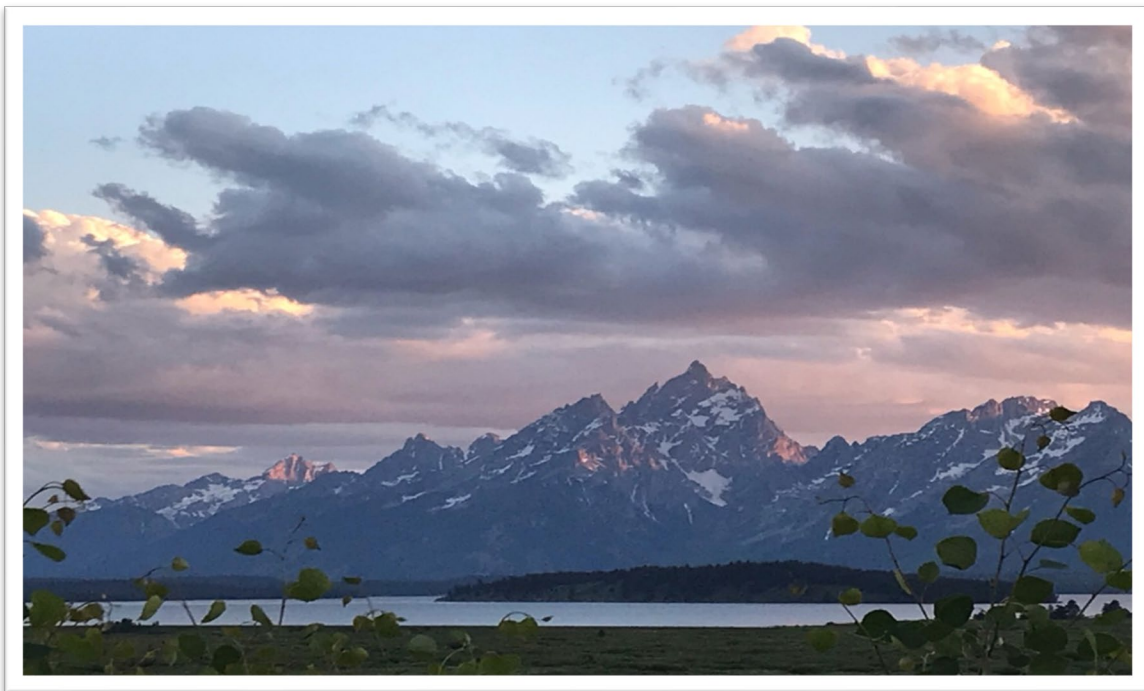
One of my favorite places to be in the world is sitting on the deck at Jackson Lake Lodge overlooking Jackson Lake in Grand Teton National Park: the grandeur of the mountains, the excitement of children to see perhaps a moose, languages from all over the world being spoken as foreign tourists marvel at the beauty before them, my own loved ones close by. In such a place, I feel certain of God's great love for His creation. But when I get back home and back to the busy routine of life, I need to remember that God also inhabits the everyday. We are promised His "righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep."

In this scene, set in shadows,
Like the night is here to stay,
There is evil cast around us
But it's love that wrote the play.

David Wilcox

Prayer

Lord, hear our prayers. Amen



Hebrews 9:11-15

Kimberly Wood

April 7, 2025

When reading this passage, we felt hope and excitement for the new covenant through the Messiah! Now that Jesus had come, the Jews looked forward to more incredible blessings, a deeper understanding of the path to forgiveness, and a consciousness free from guilt. The confirmation of God's divine favor through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood meant we had "obtained eternal redemption." It is comforting to know that we are so loved that God gave his only son so we may live! There are many stories in the Bible about the priests as if there was a cloud of judgment over the tabernacles where sacrifices needed to be made for cleansing and traditions. This new covenant described in Hebrews 9:11-15 gives a sense of relief that, through Jesus' sacrifice, we have received the promise of eternity. We are "spiritually insecure" when it comes to being worthy of God's love, but we can be confident that through His death, we are free from sin, not through works, but through the loving sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Prayer

We pray that we may also feel the excitement and hope of the new covenant that the Jews felt. We thank you, Jesus, for the promise of a new life through your sacrifice. We pray that we may feel worthy of God's love through the sacrifice of your body and blood. We pray that we may gain confidence knowing that you gave your only son so we may live free from sin. Thank you for all you have done for us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



John 12:9-19

Aiden Stalvey (age 10)

April 8, 2025

This is what this means to me: We want power. The Pharisees wanted power, and they hated God because he was raising the dead. On the Passover, God was on a donkey colt. They waved palm branches at God. One of them said, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He!" And they had a feast.

Later, they killed Him. When God died, we missed Him. One day, Mary and some other girls came to the tomb, and the tomb was open. Mary saw God and brought the good news. Then, they remembered about the donkey and what it said in the scriptures.

Prayer

Oh God, we are sorry for what we have done and for forgetting how much we love you. You have given us so many chances that we have ruined because we think we are better. But thank you for everything you have done for us. Amen.



April 9, 2025

Are we not all guilty of out-of-control self-reliance at one time or another? We look at the chaos in our lives, the mistakes we have made, the individuals who wish us harm and say something like, "I can fix that...with just a little more effort, with just a little bit more attention, with just a little bit more personal strength, I can put everything right. I am in control."

While diligence and personal responsibility are undoubtedly commendable and can oftentimes be a solution, are there not other times when our effort, our strength, and our determination are simply not enough? Who among us has not encountered the unsolvable problem, the hopeless circumstance, or the personality that simply will not see us and treat us with basic human decency? When met with the insurmountable, our choice comes down to this: give up or give it over to the Most High. In these times of utter helplessness, I am most starkly reminded that my real and lasting strength, my ultimate protection and refuge, and my hope for eternity is found in the creator of the universe.

When I seek God and listen to the words put on my heart from heaven, I find countless reasons to rejoice. When I long for God, beautiful days, moments, and experiences are rightly attributed to His grace, mercy, and steadfast love for me.

When I'm hurting, full of fear, or frustrated with circumstances out of my control, God is just as close and just as willing to show me grace, mercy, and steadfast love. My plea for comfort doesn't have to be well-reasoned, poetic, or complex. I can be ok with my insufficiency and simply say, "God, I need you. Please help me."

God knows that I am weak, that I am spiritually poor when separated from him, and through Jesus, he has already ransomed my soul. How, then, could I ever doubt his care and love?

Prayer

God, may I never forget that you are infinitely great and always near. When I call upon your name, you will come quickly, help me, and deliver me from the trial I am facing. Thank you for the countless reasons to rejoice and be glad in you and for shepherding me through the pitfalls of life. On my own, I am ultimately poor and helpless, but because of you, because of my savior Jesus, I am never alone. Amen.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Don Mayhew

April 10, 2025

When I read this passage, a couple of things came to mind. First, I was taught that whenever I encounter the word "Therefore" in the bible, I need to read the previous chapter if I want to understand what the author was telling me here. I then asked myself, who are these "great clouds of witnesses," and why are they surrounding me? Are they the Christian friends I encounter today, my friends and loved ones who have passed? Certainly, there are tough times and easy times as I live out this gift of life I have been given. It is at those times, both easy and hard, when I try to rely only on myself rather than my faith to get me through.

What I have come to realize is that the author is extorting me to remain firm in my faith and to throw off those sins and temptations of everyday life that interfere with my ability to have complete faith in our Lord and trust that he will fulfill his promise and that only at the end of this life will I experience the complete fulfillment of that promise.

The patriarchs and prophets of the Bible show us through their life experiences that we will receive what was promised by faith. Even if we can't see that promise today in our current circumstances, we need to remain firm in our faith.

So, who is this great cloud of witnesses? I believe it is the early patriarchs, the prophets, and my loved ones who support me, cheer me on, and tell me that no matter what I'm experiencing in this life now, be it pain, shame, or joy, this is only one part of what will later be great joy and the fulfillment of a great promise from God.

Prayer

Lord, help us know that you and others champion us, even when we feel the opposite.
Amen.



John 13:1-17,31-35

Dawn Tarman

April 11, 2025

This scripture shows us Jesus as the teacher and leader of the disciples. He is trying to teach one last but ultimately the most important lesson before he is put to death.

Jesus finds that the best way to teach the lesson is to model what he would like the disciples to do after he is gone. He takes the role of servant and washes their feet. As is usually the case, some students, in this case the disciples, need more explanation and incentive to follow Jesus' command. Simon Peter initially refuses Jesus' request because he doesn't understand what Jesus wants him to do. With gentle prodding, Jesus explains again how he expects him to continue after his death. He asks them to love one another as he has loved them. He does this even though he knows that Judas will betray him, and Simon Peter will deny him before the end of the evening.

Jesus calls all of us, not just his disciples, to love one another. No person is better than another, regardless of station or wealth. It is not enough for us to know this. We must show it. Let us all strive to follow this last request from Jesus each day.

Prayer

Help us love one another and be a good servant to you and others. May we serve with joyful grace and obedience. Amen.



April 12, 2025

For years, I wanted to read the Bible cover to cover, but I always got stuck early in the Old Testament. In January 2024, I discovered *The Bible Recap*, Apple's top religious podcast at the time, and decided to try it. Fourteen months later, I've read the entire Bible and am starting my second journey.

What were my biggest takeaways? Both relate to the Old Testament in particular. First, I learned that God builds relationships with His people over time. The Bible demonstrates progressive revelation—just as in human relationships, we don't learn everything at once. This understanding brings me peace when I have questions about God. Second, when reading the Old Testament through a New Testament lens, the Trinity is present—not just in the New Testament, which I knew best. In Isaiah, both the Father and the Son are revealed, deepening my awe of God's plan for us from the very beginning. As Tara-Leigh Cobble notes in *The Joy of the Trinity*, the co-equal, co-eternal, and co-relational Trinity is evident throughout the Old Testament: God the Father initiates, God the Son sustains, and God the Spirit fulfills.

Many consider Isaiah 52 and 53 among the most significant Old Testament prophecies of Jesus as the suffering servant—written approximately 700 years before His birth. While some Jewish interpretations view these chapters as referring to Israel, Christians see them as a foretelling of Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection. This realization makes Lent even more meaningful to me. In Luke 22:37, Jesus references Isaiah 53, affirming, *"For the time has come for this prophecy about me to be fulfilled: 'He was counted among the rebels.' Yes, everything written about me by the prophets will come true."*

Prayer

Dear God, Thank You for the gift of the Bible, revealing the story of Your people and the Trinity. We regret that sometimes, we don't read carefully to truly understand Your Word and the genuine joy of what you have to offer. Please open our eyes, grant us patience, and help us seek Your revelations as You build a relationship with us. Teach us to focus less on ourselves and our failures and instead embrace the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. Nothing can make You love us less; ignoring that truth means ignoring Your salvation. During this Lenten season, we surrender our lives to You daily. Help us honor and rejoice in Your gift rather than worry over trivial things. Thank You for never changing. Amen.

Psalm 22

Richard Schetnan

April 13, 2025

Psalm 22 opens with the psalmist, King David, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The opening seems more like a complaint than a prayer, more like a demand for accountability than a request for help. But by the end of the passage, the tone shifts as the psalmist says that "in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee" and that God had not ignored one who is afflicted "but has heard when he cried out to him." Why the sudden change?

Beginning in the sixth verse, the psalmist describes a nightmarish scene of anxiety, fear, and humiliation in which everyone mocks him. He is surrounded in turn by bulls and dogs and evil men who have "pierced my hands and feet" and who "stare and gloat over me" and "divide my garments among them." Much of this fever dream foreshadows the horrifying events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion, in which Jesus repeats David's lamentation shortly before his death. But like David, Jesus does not end with grievance but with a simple, powerful affirmation, saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" - an echo of another psalm in which David refers to God as his source of strength.

Once again, we start with grievance and end with affirmation, and we may wonder what brings about the change. Both David and Jesus experienced dark, terrifying moments when they could not feel God's presence, but they could at least reach out to God as best they could under the circumstances. Maybe just reaching out, however, strained or awkward, and acknowledging and welcoming God's grace is enough to replace fear and anxiety with comfort and peace, to replace grievance with affirmation.

My spiritual journey began in a dark moment long ago when even my belief in God's existence was tenuous, at best. But I was at least willing to reach out, believing that God, if God were present, could somehow help me. So, I prayed. Was it a great prayer? No, but it was the best prayer I could come up with at that moment, and it marked the beginning of a transformation in me that continues to this day. All that was and is required of me is an acknowledgment of the power of God's grace and the willingness to let God's grace fill the dark corners of fear and anxiety with comfort, peace, and understanding.

Prayer

God, please keep me in your care and guidance and help me become ever more willing to accept your comfort and care. Please replace my anger, resentment, bitterness, anxiety, and fear with your peace and understanding, and please guide my thoughts, attitudes, and actions to help me become the person you intend me to be.

April 14, 2025

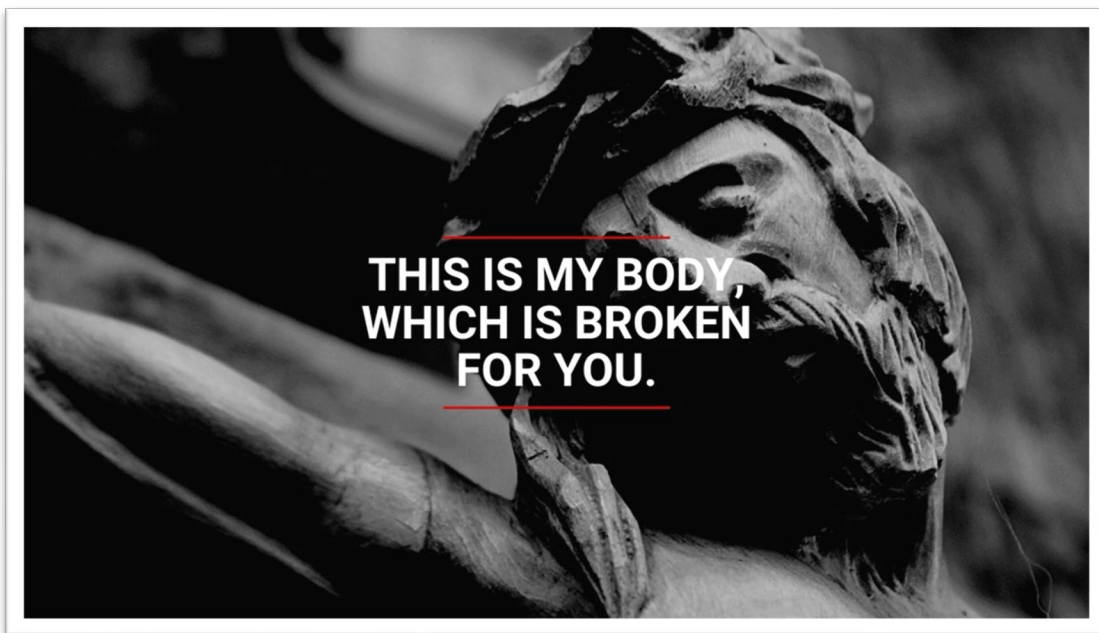
This passage discusses a new covenant with Jesus Christ. His sacrifice provides a perfect atonement for sin, allowing believers to approach God confidently and encourage them to participate actively in the Christian community. They should now gather to support and encourage one another in their faith.

This is a powerful and moving moment in the history of the human race. The act of Jesus paying for my sins with His life is overwhelming. Then, to realize that He did so that I could have a personal relationship with my heavenly father is too much to appreciate fully. This act took us from choosing a religion that worships God to a true, loving relationship with our heavenly father.

I don't know if I have the words to express how blessed we are. I know I don't have the words to express how thankful I am that Jesus loves us so much that He became the ultimate sacrifice so that we can have a loving relationship with God the Father.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I am humbled and grateful for your love and grace as I read these words. Your efforts to have a relationship with us are mind-blowing. We know we are sinners and don't deserve to be in a loving relationship with you. You don't care. You just love us. Thank you, Father, for your love. I pray that you guide our steps each day so that we might glorify you. I pray that our words and acts reflect our gratitude. I humbly pray this prayer in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



April 15, 2025

"That's not fair!" I don't remember saying this as a child, but I'm certain I did because we all do. As an adult, I try not to say it. After more than 24 years of teaching, I've heard it all too often. It usually means, "I don't like this, so you need to change it." It also tends to be unfair only to the speaker, who does not see how unfair their demand would be to others.

These two chapters show us the trial and death of Jesus. They are a prime example of "not fair." After his arrest, Jesus was first sent to be judged by Annas. But Annas is only the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Caiaphas was the high priest with the right to judge, not Annas. And there were no witnesses - for or against Jesus. Then Jesus was sent to Pilate, who tried very hard to tell the Jews he had no right to judge him, but they refused to listen. When Pilate offered to free Jesus, who had done no wrong, or the rebel Barabbas, the people chose the rebel.

How was any of this fair? Didn't Jesus pray to have the unfairness removed from him? He felt that it was something that he didn't like and wanted to change.

But God knew it had to happen, and Jesus' response was to accept God's judgment. While our human view is appalled by the unfairness, Jesus knew the divine view: what would be unfair would be to deny us our salvation—the salvation we receive only because of His suffering and death. No matter how unjust the circumstances, Jesus accepted it to provide us with the ultimate good. When we experience unfairness, we need to remember that sometimes it masks a greater good we can't see at that moment.

But we cannot make the mistake of thinking this means we can be unfair to others or see them mistreated without changing it. We are not blessed with the divine long-sightedness of God, so we need to work hard to prevent the harm that being unfair does. Even when we are not the ones being unjust, when we see others being mistreated, we cannot be like Peter and deny that it has anything to do with us. As followers of Jesus, we must try to do as Jesus did - doing what we can to alleviate the unfairness. It was not fair that Mary lost her son, possibly leaving her alone and in need, so her Son gave her into the keeping of a disciple He knew would care for her. His actions show us what we need to do when we witness unfairness - acknowledge it and do our best to minimize the impact on those affected.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please help us to be patient when we suffer unfairness. Help us to see a higher purpose in it. Above all, please grant us the help we need to always do our best to aid those being dealt with unfairly. In Jesus' most precious name, Amen.

Job 14:1-14

Damon Stalvey

April 16, 2025

"If mortals die, will they live again?" is the question at the beginning of verse fourteen. As we near the end of our Lenten journey, this is a pressing question. As Christians, we place our faith in a resurrected Savior and profess the creedal belief that we will be resurrected at Christ's return. The implied answer to Job's question - is yes.

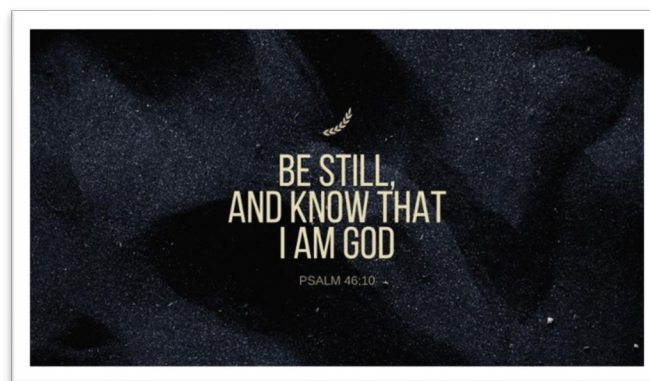
I have spent enough time in ministry to know that most people have doubts, fears, misunderstandings, and suspicions about life after death. As with the Holy Spirit, life after death raises many questions. Job presents us with a few questions in this passage. He struggles and pleads for answers to why these recent tragedies have plagued his life. Job's pain is real, and these questions are just as real.

Your questions are just as founded as Job's. But we, like Job, must remember another central belief that we have - HOPE! Hope is not a misplaced thought or unrealistic. It is the very substance of perseverance. It is the shoot in the stump that Job harkens us back to. Job may be struggling, and you may be struggling, but during Lent, we sit in the ashes and HOPE! All around us, the trees may be falling and rivers drying up, but we trust the God who created those trees and rivers. We cling to the HOPE we have seen before and trust that it will come again.

Will we live again? Our faith says yes. In these last few days before Easter, let us declare our hope in life after death by looking for resurrection in the messiness of life. Let us extend life/HOPE by offering help and care in the lives of others and by doing good in Jesus' name. Eternal life has already entered the world, and you and I, as followers of Jesus, have the authority to extend that HOPE to the world!

Prayer

Author of life and life after death, give us this HOPE so that we might be a source of HOPE for others. Amen.



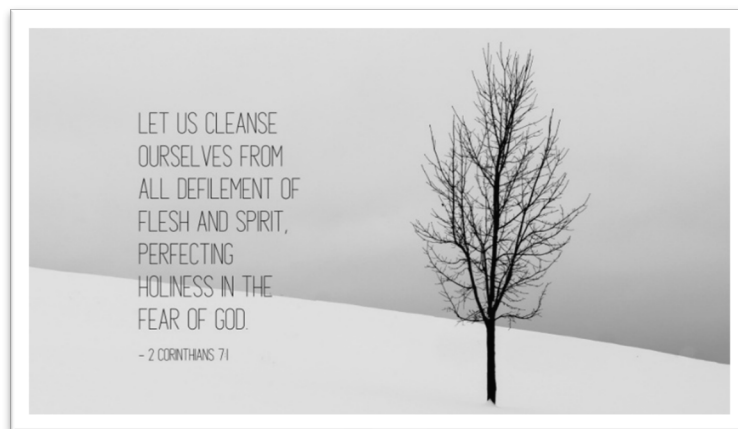
April 17, 2025

This is the story of the tomb where Jesus was laid to rest. The few remaining followers of Jesus lovingly wrapped his body and laid him in the tomb. A heavy rock was rolled to seal the tomb, and guards were placed there by the Romans. Behind the obvious story of Jesus being laid inside the new tomb and the Romans guarding the tomb is the concept of fear vs faith. The Romans were fearful that the body would be taken by the followers of Jesus to fulfill the prophecy, so measures were taken to foil any such antics. Some of Jesus's followers, Mary and Mary Magdalene, remained faithfully outside the tomb, waiting for the resurrection. Sadly, with the exception of a few, Jesus's followers had let fear drive them away. The opposing states of faith and fear come into clear view during the three days before the resurrection.

Fear is a driving force for nearly all the destructive actions in my life. Often, I try to control situations to keep others in line with my ideas of what is right. I have fear in my heart for what may happen if my wishes aren't followed. I play God, believing I have the answers and understand the right path. Rarely does life go smoothly when I choose to play God. God has a plan; I must keep faith in my heart that his plan is ultimately better than mine. Living a life with fear as a guiding principle is no life at all. Faith can push away worry and regret.

Prayer

Dear God, please help me keep from rolling that rock in front of my heart to control the fear I can experience when getting out of my comfort zone. I pray to have the faith to take chances and believe in your wisdom and plans to live the life you've designed just for me. Let me apply the resurrection story to living a renewed life that the sacrifice of Jesus's life promises me, not just eternal life but a new life today. In Faith, not fear. In Jesus's name, Amen.



April 18, 2025

Jesus was dead. His apostles had fled. Only the women remained, and at that time and place, women held very little power. They could not have gotten possession of the body. However, there were two wealthy and prominent disciples who kept their devotion to Jesus a secret. In Luke 12:8, Jesus tells us to acknowledge him publicly. Paul admonishes us more than once to make our belief known. Yet these two men, who kept their belief a secret to hold onto power, were there when they were needed.

They stepped forward and asked for the body. They bought an extravagant amount of herbs and spices—seventy-five pounds, an amount fit for a king. They wrapped him in linen and placed him in a nearby tomb. Normally, they would have done a bit more preparation and taken him to the place where his family was buried, but they were in a hurry. The Sabbath would start at sundown, so they laid him in a nearby tomb.

Through this passage, we learn several things. Although we sometimes think of Jesus as coming to redeem the poor and the outcast, which he did many times, he also had wealthy and influential followers. Some of his followers kept their devotion hidden. Jesus said those who acknowledge him publicly will be commended in heaven. Paul positively condemns those who keep their devotion a secret. However, the secret followers were able to provide the herbs and spices and the tomb. Proper burial was of great importance in first-century Jewish culture, as it is in modern Jewish culture. And it was thanks to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus that Jesus was honored properly after his death.

Prayer

Lord, whether I have shouted it from the rooftops or kept my faith quiet, help me be prepared to do what I can to honor you and further your kingdom. When the time comes that you need me to step forward, help me see the need and act boldly to serve you. Let all my actions bring honor to you.



Psalm 34:1-4

Holy Saturday

April 19, 2025

We wait today, but Sunday is coming! Invite friends and family to join you for Easter worship tomorrow.

