



# CE NT ER ED

40 days to the resurrection



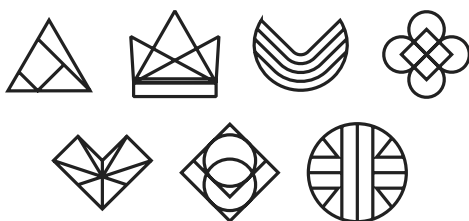


# CE NT ER ED

40 days to the resurrection

EXCHANGE CHURCH ROLESVILLE

# Centered on Jesus



Throughout Scripture, there seems to be significance to the number forty. Sometimes the number is seen as 40 years and sometimes as 40 days of preparation. For example, Noah and his family waited on the ark for 40 days and nights for the rain to cease (Genesis 7). And after Moses killed an Egyptian, he fled to the desert where he waited for 40 years and learned how to shepherd a flock (Acts 7:30). Later Moses patiently waited (and fasted) for 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai as he prepared to receive the Ten Commandments and lead the people to the land God had promised them (Exodus 34:28).

There is also significance in the 40-year wandering and waiting of the Hebrew children before they entered the Promised Land. The Israelite spies observed the land for 40 days and nights before they returned to the congregation (Numbers 13). And, in the time of the Judges, Israel served the Philistines for 40 years before God sent Samson to deliver them (Judges 13:1). Scripture says that Elijah walked for 40 days and nights to Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19:8). In addition to the significance of the 40-day preparation in the Old Testament, Jesus Himself observed a fast in isolation for 40 days and nights before He was tempted and began His earthly ministry (Matthew 4:2).

We know that as far back as (at least) the 3rd Century, the early church was practicing a fast for 40 days leading up to Easter. In an early assembly of church fathers who gathered to sort through Scripture and church doctrine, a statement about a 40-day fast before Easter was made. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) stated that two gatherings of church officials should be held each year, “one before the 40 days of Lent.”

Although Scripture certainly does not command us to participate in a pre-Easter, 40-day fast, it does lay down an expectation that fasting would be normal in the rhythms of a believer's life. Jesus speaks to the practice in the gospel of Matthew.

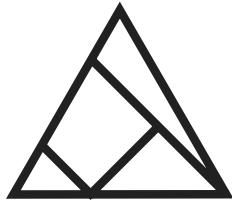
16 "Now whenever you fast, do not make a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they distort their faces so that they will be noticed by people when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17 But as for you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by people but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. – Matthew 6:16-18 (NASB)

Jesus, in His typical form, is far less concerned with the length of the fast, the type of fast, or the mode of our fast than with our heart during the fast. He never gives instructions about the fast itself except for our true motivations during it. Throughout church history, fasting – especially during the 40 days prior to Easter, has widely varied. Some have fasted from food or certain types of food. There has also been a tradition of feasts during the fast. Typically, the feasts would take place on Sundays and would encourage the church to gather in hopeful anticipation of the resurrection to come.

Because life and its seasons can become so cluttered and busy, this season provides the church with an excellent opportunity to recenter our hearts towards Christ. Consider fasting from something you typically enjoy while replacing it with spiritual nourishment. Wednesday, March 2nd begins the 40 days prior to Easter, and during these 40 days, Exchange has provided you with daily reflections on Jesus. In these readings, we will reflect on the temptations of Jesus, the "I Am" statements of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus, the compassion of Jesus, the prayers of Jesus, the promises of Jesus, and the statements that Jesus spoke on the cross. Our hope is that by reflecting on Jesus for these 40 days, our hearts will be re-centered on Him.

### **About the authors:**

This year's devotionals and reflections on Jesus were written by thirteen members of Exchange. Both men and women from various stages of life have offered their insights on these passages. And, as perspectives and writing styles shift throughout the guide, it allows us the beauty of seeing Jesus through the mosaic of the Church. We are grateful for those who have spent a great deal of time helping prepare our hearts to celebrate the resurrection of the King.



# The Temptations of Jesus

As Jesus prepares to launch into ministry, He enters the wilderness, alone with the Father. He is physically weak from fasting, and the enemy comes after Him. It is in this moment that Jesus demonstrates His power over sin and temptation as well as His incarnation -- God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Jesus did not visit us as a king rides through the kingdom, isolated from the people by His carriage and guards. No, Jesus walked among us in the muck and mire of a broken world- tempted in every way, yet without sin. In the coming pages and days, center your heart towards this: God became flesh and lived among us.

# What's in store this week:

## Centered: The Temptations of Jesus

<b>Wednesday, March 2nd</b>	God Becomes Flesh
<b>Thursday, March 3rd</b>	The Long Way Home
<b>Friday, March 4th</b>	Trusting in the Promises
<b>Saturday, March 5th</b>	Suffering in Our Place

## God Becomes Flesh, Ash Wednesday

### Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.

### Reading /

#### Matthew 4:1-2

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted for forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. (NASB)

The gospel is a beautifully humbling mystery. The prince of Creation, Who shared in glory with the Father before the world was spoken into existence (John 17:5), took on flesh “and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). And He did not live among us as He had existed from eternity past. He didn’t bring the choir of angels who constantly declared his holiness singing “holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, Almighty (Revelation 4) as they always had and will continue to do. No, instead, Christ humbled himself and took on the flesh that He created.

Philippians 2:5-11 Says, have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bondservant and being born in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled

Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross. For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Not only did Christ choose to become one of us, but He also chose to take on all our human limitations: hunger, thirst, weariness, sickness... and even temptation. As the author of Hebrews reminds us, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin” Hebrews 4:15 (NASB)

Whatever you are facing today, Jesus can relate. Whatever brokenness you are experiencing, Jesus understands. Jesus experienced this life and the full weight of its brokenness -- not because He had to, or because He deserved it. Jesus felt the full weight of the world for you. He is not a distant god, but one who cares so deeply about you, that He subjected himself to it all. He is the God who comes to be with you.





## Reflection /

What part of your life right now are you tempted to think that no one understands?

How does (or how can) the truth that Christ knows and understands all our struggles help shape the way you live and pray.



## Response /

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Lord, I confess that I often turn inward in times of struggle. I am tempted to think that no one knows or understands, but You do. Forgive me for my forgetfulness when I do not remember the humble and sacrificial life You chose for me. I pray that You would help me live in humility and worship today, remembering that the God of all creation knows me and sympathizes with me. Jesus, You are like no other king. You, Jesus, are the one, true, King.

Passages for reflection: John 17:5, John 1:14, Revelation 4, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 4:15

### No sorrow like yours

There was no sorrow like your sorrow, Lord—no love like your love. Was it not enough, dearest Savior, that you came down to pray, and sigh, and weep for us? Would you also bleed and die for us?

Was it not enough that you were hated, slandered, blasphemed, buffeted? But you would also be scourged, nailed, wounded, and crucified.

Was it not enough to feel the cruelty of man? Would you also experience the wrath of God?

And if your love was not enough, giving up your life and shedding that precious blood, was it not enough to die once, to suffer one death? Would you die twice by tasting the first, and something of the second death—suffering the pains of death in both soul and body?

Oh the far-surpassing love of Christ! Heaven and earth are astonished at it. What tongue can express it? What heart can conceive it? The tongues and the thoughts of people and angels are far below it.

Oh the height, and depth, and breadth, and length, of the love of Christ! All creation knows not how to react. Our thoughts are swallowed up.

And there they remain until glory elevates them, when our job will be to praise, admire, and adore this love of Christ. Amen.

—David Clarkson

# The Temptations of Jesus

## The Long Way Home

Thursday, March 3rd

### Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.

### Reading /

#### Matthew 4:3-4

And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’ (NASB).

Have you ever wondered with this temptation -- “what’s the big deal?” or “where’s the sin?” Jesus has the power to turn the rocks into bread, and He’s obviously really hungry! We might be tempted to think, “Just do it, Jesus... not because You have anything to prove, but because You can -- and You’re hungry!” It would not be long before He would turn the water into wine... or feed the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes... And this doesn’t seem like it is that far off!

But Jesus was much smarter than we are, and He realized that there is always, something at stake. When Satan tempts us in any way... there is always something to lose.

Satan is attempting to introduce an element of selfish disobedience in His relationship with the Father. This testing

is part of God’s plan for the preparation of Jesus’ ministry that would take place for the next few years and would lead Him to the cross... Satan is offering Jesus a shortcut.

“Since You are God’s son... “IF Jesus uses His power to shortcut suffering, then His mission is scuttled, because He came to suffer in our place! So, Jesus responds with Scripture: Matthew 4:4 “But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

Jesus was concerned with seeking the Father rather than an easy way to have His needs met. He was convinced that God would provide for Him rather than making something happen for Himself. Satan wasn’t just saying “make yourself something to eat,” but what he was really testing and asking was “Do you really TRUST the Father?” At this moment, Jesus took on all the moments that we would be tempted in this life to make our own way rather than trust the Father. Whatever you may be facing today, know that Jesus knows what it’s like to feel the pressure of an immediate need.



## **Reflection /**

What is the place in your life right now in which you have trouble trusting God?

How does the fact that Jesus demonstrated trust in God help fuel your obedience to Him?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Lord, I confess that I often believe my way is better. I am tempted to believe that my need is more immediate than You know, or even worse, than You care. But I believe that You know, and You care, and that You are somehow forming me at this moment. Help me to remember that Jesus had to trust You, and so will I. Today, I commit to trusting You. Even when my world seems dark and falls apart, I will choose to trust You.

**Passages for reflection: Proverbs 3:5, Psalm 46, Psalm 28, Matthew 6:25**

## Trusting In The Promise

### Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.

### Reading /

#### Matthew 4:5-6

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’ (NASB)

Satan attempts to use Scripture against Jesus. And in his temptation, Satan is tempting Jesus to doubt and test His Father’s plan. Not only that, but Satan is also attempting to make Jesus prove His worth and identity... “If you [are really] the Son of God...” All through His life, people doubted Jesus was anything or anyone special. (John 1:45-46, Matthew 13:55). There were moments that Jesus was tempted to prove His identity and worth before the Father. God wouldn’t send His son to this wretched earth. But He did. In fact, Scripture says that it pleased God to send His son to redeem us (Isaiah 53).

And in this temptation, Jesus responds with a deep knowledge of Scripture:

Matthew 4:7 “Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Jesus once again uses Scripture to defeat the trickery of Satan. Jesus, even Jesus, relies on it for truth. And because Jesus came, every word in Scripture is ours as well. Paul writes, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through Him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.” – II Corinthians 1:20 (NIV). Because Christ has come and defeated sin, darkness, and the grave, it proves that there is no promise that He is unable to keep.



## **Reflection /**

What are the Scriptures that bring you comfort and truth in difficult times?

How does the fact that God sent his only Son for you affect your self-worth and identity?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage.

Passages for reflection: Psalm 119:11, Joshua 1:8, Isaiah 53

### Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.

### Reading /

Matthew 4:8-11

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’” Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Satan offers to give Jesus the world that He spoke into existence. At first glance, it seems like a 16-year-old kid is trying to sell his dad the car that he is being allowed to drive. It is almost laughable! But Satan is called the prince of this world, and it seems for a time that God has given him access and at least some control over it. Satan is baiting Jesus... He knows that all of this will be Jesus’ anyway, and he is offering it to Him without Jesus having to endure the two things that no one likes: waiting and suffering. Satan is offering to walk away if Christ will bow down and worship

him. What he is really asking is, “will you be faithful to the Father, or to Yourself?”

But Jesus knew better. Not only could He not trust Satan to walk away, but He also knew the truth that there were no shortcuts in redemption. Scripture says, “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” Hebrews 9:22 (ESV). Jesus had to go to the cross; not for Himself, but for us. There was no alternative option. There was no effortless way out. Jesus drank the fullness of humanity and suffering, down to the last drop so that we wouldn’t have to. So when we are tempted to take the easy way out, to give up what we want most for what we want right now, we remember that Jesus did not.

Romans 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (NASB)



## **Reflection /**

Since the solution to sin is the Father sacrificing His only son on the cross, what does that tell you about the problem?

What does the fact that Christ willingly and knowingly came here to sacrifice Himself for you do to your faith and love for Him?

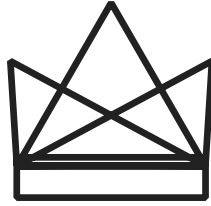


## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Lord, I confess that I often take for granted the gift of Scripture. But I know that it is filled with truth for me and about me. In it, I find hope for my circumstances, as well as confidence in what You think and feel about me. Help me realize today that because of Jesus, I can trust every word in Scripture. Help me realize that because of Jesus, You have already spoken worth over me.

**Romans 6:8-10, II Corinthians 5:15, I Corinthians 15**



# The I AM Statements of Jesus

Throughout Scripture, Jesus makes at least seven bold statements about Himself. In each one, He identifies Himself as the One who can satisfy our greatest needs. Graciously, Jesus uses basic, everyday items to communicate the deep truths of God. In the coming pages and days, center your heart towards this: Jesus came to reveal Himself to us.



# What's in store this week:

## Centered: The I AM Statements of Jesus

<b>Sunday, March 6th</b>	The Bread of Life
<b>Monday, March 7th</b>	The Light of the World
<b>Tuesday, March 8th</b>	The Doorway
<b>Wednesday, March 9th</b>	The Good Shepherd
<b>Thursday, March 10th</b>	The Resurrection
<b>Friday, March 11th</b>	The Truth
<b>Saturday, March 12th</b>	The True Vine

# The Bread of Life

## Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.

## Reading /

John 6: 32-35

“Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said to him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty.”

Shortly before Jesus said these words, He had taken five barley loaves of bread and two fish, multiplying the food to feed thousands of people. When the people recognized the miracle of their feeding, they wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king (John 6:15). While the bread He gave them was physically satisfying, their focus centered on the gift of the bread instead of the giver himself. In His teaching, Jesus redirects their attention to the One who gave the bread. He reminds them of another time when God satisfied His people’s hunger. In Exodus 6, the exiles were hungry and complaining in the wilderness. God laid a dew of manna on the ground. When the sons of

Israel saw it [the manna], they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.” Exodus 6:15

Just as the Israelites did not recognize the manna as nourishment, the crowd did not recognize Jesus as the source of their spiritual provision, the Messiah. To help them make the connection, Jesus says three times in John 6, “I am the bread of life.” Take a moment to think about His declarations: “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven.” “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.” These statements reveal so much about Jesus himself.

Jesus is eternal and sinless. He came from heaven. He existed with God the Father before time was created. Jesus is in one accord with the Father who sent Jesus for His people, for us, to give what we could not get on our own... eternal life. Jesus states His mission and purpose for coming to earth in the form of a man: to offer eternal life to the world through belief in the Son.



## **Reflection /**

Think back on your week: where have you seen God provide for your physical, emotional, or spiritual needs? How did you respond?

How does keeping your attention on Jesus the source of all spiritual satisfaction impact your worship and your outlook on present circumstances?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

### **Prayer**

God Almighty, You are the source of spiritual satisfaction. Help us to recognize that and to give You the praise and glory You rightfully deserve. You know our needs before we even recognize them in our thoughts. And You care for us daily, even on a moment-to-moment basis, working in our hearts and circumstances to demonstrate Your love for us. Forgive us, Lord, when we prioritize temporal things of this earth in our minds above You. Thank You for giving us eternal life through Jesus. Amen

Passages for reflection: Exodus 6, Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4



### **Preparation /**

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.



### **Reading /**

#### **John 8:12**

When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Have you ever been somewhere that was completely dark? So dark that you could not see your hand if you put it in front of your face? That kind of darkness only happens when there is a complete absence of light, for it only takes a small light to dispel darkness. Things that want to stay hidden love the darkness for it is easy to hide and easy to cause others to stumble or fall.

In our physical world we often think of the sun providing light during the day while the moon shines at night. It is the

sun that gives light both day and night. The moon produces no light on its own; it merely reflects the light of the sun that is shining outside of our field of view.

In our spiritual life Jesus the Son shines His light on a world that is often dark and an unloving place. He came to us in the form of man to illuminate our understanding of the love that God has for His creation and to shine His light in the dark places of our lives, where the ugliness of our sin loves to hide. As believers, we are to be like the moon, reflecting the light that Jesus shines.



## **Reflection /**

Where or when have you seen the light of Jesus shine in the dark places of your life?

What struggles do you encounter when trying to reflect the light of Jesus at home, work, or with your family and friends?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Prayer:

Father God, I confess that there are dark places in my life that I want to keep hidden. Shine Your light in these areas and dispel the darkness that resides there that I may live fully in Your light. Help me, Lord God, to reflect Your light as I travel in a world that can be a dark and unloving place. Use me and direct me to the places you want me to walk and place in my path those who could benefit from Your light and love.

Passages for reflection: Genesis 1:3-5, Matthew 4:16, Micah 7:8

# The Doorway



## Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.



## Reading /

### John 10: 7-10

So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All those who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly.

In biblical times, sheep pens were constructed of high rock walls with a single, narrow opening. After grazing in the fields during the day, shepherds brought their flocks in for the night, sharing a single sheepfold. Each night someone would be responsible for the sheep’s well-being. To ensure the sheep’s protection, that person would sleep or rest in the only entrance, becoming a human door who controlled access into and out of the pen. Nighttime predators like wolves could not enter, and the sheep

were shielded from mindlessly wandering out to become easy prey.

Just as the doorkeeper laid down his life for the sheep, Jesus foreshadowed how He would lay His life down for us, to defend and deliver us from the dangers of this world and from Satan who tries to lead us astray. Jesus is our defender and protector. If we surrender our will to Him, He will safeguard our minds, our hearts, and our souls, protecting us from ourselves when we are prone to wander from Him.

Jesus is our door, the only door to the Father. We must go through Him to enter the glory of God’s presence and share in His amazing joy and peace. Through Jesus, we have access to eternal life... for through Him, we have our access in one Spirit to the Father. Eph 2:18 NASB.



## **Reflection /**

Where have you seen Jesus's protection in your life? Where do you need His wall of protection in your life right now?

What open door does He want you to walk through? What is your response?

What door has God closed in your life that you find difficult accepting? What can you apply from this reading to help you better align with His will for you in this area?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

### **Prayer:**

Almighty Lord, You continually reveal Your unconditional love for me, laying down Your life for me, a child of the Most High God. Thank You for being the door in my life, guarding me from the evil one and from myself. Strengthen my trust in Your love, Your protection, and Your powerful provision. Help me to recognize the doors You open in my life so that I can walk in confidence and with courage by the Spirit. Forgive me when I try to gain access to places where doors are shut to me. Thank You for being the door in my life.

Passages for reflection: John 10:1-10, Acts 4:12, 1 Timothy 2:3-6

# The Good Shepherd



## Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.



## Reading /

### John 10: 11-15

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Throughout scripture people are often compared to sheep. In Psalms 100:3 it says that “we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” Psalms 23:1 says, “The Lord is my shepherd.” While being called a sheep is not a great compliment, it is, in many ways, a fair comparison. Like sheep, humans are often led astray, we wander off, and we are not well equipped to defend or protect ourselves. The consequence of this condition is that sheep need a shepherd who will care for

them, look after them and protect them from harm, who will lead them from the dry and barren places to good pastures where food and shelter can be found.

Another characteristic of sheep is that, like humans, they are mistrustful. They will not follow someone they do not know. I once had the opportunity to live in a small town surrounded by good grazing land for a fair-sized flock of sheep. When it was time to move to another pasture, the shepherd would lead his sheep, walking ahead and calling to them in a sing-song voice. The sheep followed because they knew their shepherd’s voice and they trusted him.

In John 10 Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd, and that His sheep recognize His voice. It also says that He knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. Jesus meets every qualification of being our good shepherd and He has laid down His life for us His sheep so that eternally we can lay down in His green pastures beside His still waters.





## **Reflection /**

How can you recognize the voice of your true shepherd? What is He calling you to?

Where do you desire that Jesus will lead you?

Who has Jesus called you to shepherd?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Prayer:

Lord, I confess that like a sheep I often wander away from You. I don't listen for Your voice, and I find myself in places of danger. Help me, Lord God, to break this cycle. Help me to follow closely with my eyes focused on You and my ears tuned to Your voice. Strengthen me, Lord, to also be a good shepherd for the flock that You have entrusted to my care, to love them, protect and care for them as You do for me each day.

Passages for reflection: Psalm 23, Psalm 28:8-9, Psalm 80:1-3, Matthew 9:36, John 21:16

# The Resurrection



## Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.



## Reading /

John 11:24-27 NASB

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise from the dead.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have come to believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, and He who comes into the world.”

Martha’s brother is dead. Jesus consoles her, assuring her that her brother will rise from the dead. Like many of us, Martha only thought of the resurrection as a future event. How often do we do that ourselves, missing the magnitude of a present moment as we look toward a future event? Jesus gently redirects Martha’s attention from the future to the present and onto Himself. “And the one who sees me sees Him who sent me” (John 12:45 NASB). Martha was seeing God stand before her.

“I am the resurrection and the life.” Jesus affirms there is no life without Him. Jesus is The Life. Not a life...the Life. All life is from Him, through Him and in Him.

Notice how Jesus flipped the order of what we think life and death are. When we are born, we take a breath and physical life begins, yet our souls are still lifeless.

“And you were dead in your offenses and sins, in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:1-2 NASB). When we believe and confess that Jesus is Lord, when we exchange our sins and accept the gifts of righteousness and eternal life Jesus offers, the Holy Spirit breathes into our barren, lifeless souls and our souls are truly born, brimming with delightful, fulfilling life, walking side by side with Him.

Jesus is The Resurrection. He has more than the power to resurrect the dead... Jesus is the very source of that power. His own resurrection proves His complete and total command and control over death. Jesus has the power to draw out evil, resurrecting a renewal of the soul, calling out beauty from ashes, and orchestrating good from an evil situation.



## **Reflection /**

Where does your attention need to be redirected to Jesus?

Jesus resurrects new life. What areas of your heart, circumstances or relationships need new life infused with Jesus' resurrecting power?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Prayer:

Lord, we confess that we oftentimes put our focus on the wrong things instead of directing our attention to You. We give up on relationships when there seems to be no hope of reconciliation, forgiveness, or change. We allow our hearts to harden through self-righteous judgment, bitterness, and self-centeredness. Breathe life into us, Jesus. Let Your resurrection reflect in our own hearts, where we die to self, and live through Your Spirit to reflect Your love to the world. Renew the hope we first experienced in You for a new beginning and may extend into our daily lives. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Passages for reflection: Colossians 1:13-17, Acts 2:24, 1 John 5:11-12 NASB

# The Truth

## Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.

## Reading /

### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me. (NASB)

Jesus does not say that He is a way, a truth, and a life. He says He is the way, the truth, and the life. He affirms that He is the only way to receive salvation and to come before God the Father. The world would like for us to believe that Jesus is one of many ways of reaching God and salvation. But Jesus is saying that He is the one and only way. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus explains that the road leading away from salvation is wide and many will find it, but the path to salvation is narrow and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

Jesus also say He is THE truth. Again, this contradicts current popular culture which tries to paint our world as being

one that is devoid of absolutes. People can be heard saying things like, “That may be true for you, but it is not true for me.” Or “There is no such thing as truth.” Many only take this stance when talking about issues related to morality or religion. Would you accept this answer if it involved your money, your health, or your family? The fact is that we really want the truth and nothing but the truth. Jesus Christ is the truth of God, and we can fully and without reservation put our trust in Him to fulfil the promises He has made -- promises of forgiveness, salvation, grace, abundant life, and so much more. When we accept the truth about Jesus’ death in our place, we are guaranteed eternal life with him.



## **Reflection /**

What lies has the world tried to convince you are true? How can you distinguish truth from lies?

How have you experienced new life since beginning your journey to follow Christ Jesus?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I acknowledge that You are the way and that by accepting Your truth and the sacrifice of Your Son Jesus, I will inherit eternal life. Help me, Father, to walk closely beside You as You lead me along the path of righteousness. Help me to seek You daily and not be swayed or tempted by the untruths of this world. Open my eyes, Lord, so that I may clearly distinguish Your truth from all that is false.

Passages for reflection: 1 John 4:6, John 8:32

# The True Vine



## Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today.



## Reading /

John 15: 1-5 NASB

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

In his statement, “I am the true vine,” Jesus gives us beautiful imagery into His divine relationship with the Father. Being extraordinarily interconnected and in tune with one another, they are truly one, being and sharing the same essence of one another. Jesus encourages us to remain in Him in that same way, to immerse ourselves in Him so that our relationship with Jesus mirrors the one He has with the Father.

When we are connected to Jesus, we become His branches. Have you ever noticed a plant’s branch will have other

smaller branches sprouting from it? They go in all directions, sometimes overlapping and intertwining so much that the plant struggles to thrive and grow. Oftentimes we have things in our lives that hinder our growth, making it difficult for the fruit of the Spirit to develop and blossom in us. As the vinedresser, God prunes those things out of our lives, our hearts, and our minds to allow room for the Spirit to work in us. Sometimes that pruning is a gentle tug at our hearts. Other times, he may take more drastic measures. Yikes, it can hurt! But God knows what distractions need to be removed, what priorities need to be changed, and what sinfulness needs to be cleansed. After the pruning, God can do His best work in us and through us.

That is when we start to see the fruit, the outcomes of being in sync with His will for our lives. The fruit we bear is not the amount of money or material possessions accumulated. Nor is it how we look or the roles we have in our companies, churches, or communities. Instead, God uses those things to position His children to be conduits of His love. God does some of His best work through His people. How many times have you heard someone say just what you

needed to hear at the very moment you needed to hear it? Our souls rejoice in worship when we are the receiver. In a comparable way, the speaker bears fruit by speaking encouragement, truth, and love. Let's continue to be so in tune

with the Spirit that we know deep in our souls that we are bearing fruit, doing the Lord's work for His glory.



### **Reflection /**

How does Jesus's relationship with the Father encourage you in your worship?

What areas in your heart need to be pruned and thrown away?



### **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Prayer:

Lord God, we oftentimes look to other places to satisfy our internal longings for belonging, security and happiness that hinder our relationship with You. Give us that life-changing revelation that Jesus is the True Vine, the source that fulfills our every need. At Your direction and command, strengthen our resolve to readily let go of those things that distract us from You or Your work. May the fruit we bear in You multiply abundantly into an overwhelming harvest for Your glory. Amen.

Passages for reflection: Isaiah 17:1-10, Galatians 5:22-25, 2 Peter 1:5-8,



# The Miracles of Jesus

The apostle John writes “Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25)

God, in His infinite wisdom, could have chosen to preserve through the inspiration of Scripture, any of the plethora of miracles Jesus did while on earth. Yet, He gave us exactly what we need. In all the miracles of Jesus, we are given evidence of His power and authority in and over all. In the coming pages and days, center your heart towards the power and authority of Jesus.



# What's in store this week:

## Centered: The Miracles of Jesus

<b>Sunday, March 13th</b>	The Great Catch of Fish
<b>Monday, March 14th</b>	Healing of the Man With Leprosy
<b>Tuesday, March 15th</b>	Water Into Wine
<b>Wednesday, March 16th</b>	Healing on the Sabbath
<b>Thursday, March 17th</b>	Calming of the Storm
<b>Friday, March 18th</b>	Healing of the Sick and Possessed
<b>Saturday, March 19th</b>	Healing of the Woman

# The Great Catch of Fish

## Preparation /

In preparing to meet with the Lord today, take a moment to acknowledge the things that are competing for your heart and attention. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them as you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. If you are able, write out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart today. If unable to write, present your prayers to throne of grace in audible words.

## Reading /

Luke 5:4-6

“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.” (NIV)

Following the crowds on the shore, Jesus jumps into Simon Peter’s boat and teaches the crowds. Then He turns to Simon with an invitation to understanding not only the teachings of Jesus but more so the capabilities of God and to look outside of circumstances. A tired and exhausted fisherman with no fish from the hours spent now hears

the apparent ridiculous request of Jesus to let down nets again. To paraphrase and embellish, a rational response from Simon:

“Well, I call You ‘Teacher,’ and I want to learn from You, so I trust You, but it doesn’t make ANY sense to fish again right now. Typically, I’d wait until another day to try again, but because it’s You (meaning I wouldn’t do this for anyone else and I’m skeptical about doing it for You), then I will reluctantly do so.”

The fishnets get overloaded. Wait, what?!?! Through the miraculous catch of fish, Jesus recognizes common responses at the end of much effort and sometimes with little to no apparent dividend of the fishermen.



## **Reflection /**

What is an area in your life you may feel exasperated by your efforts or where your hopes or expectations from others or God are struggling to find the value in the efforts you exert? Spend some time writing or talking with the Lord about these thoughts.

If the Lord were to surprise you with a great catch of fish like that of Simon, what might your response be? More importantly, what would your response say about the focus of your beliefs regarding your circumstances, about yourself and your reliance on your own capabilities, and/or about the ability and desire of the Lord to respond to your obedience when God gently asks you to trust Him?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer below.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, I confess that I trust in my own limited ability and energy to function throughout my day. I recognize that I may not seek You because I feel like, in my weak moments, that You do not care about the issues I face. Considering my focus on myself, I forget about trusting You for my daily catch. However, because of Your power and loving-kindness, I want to believe like Simon and to increase my faith in You. I want to see Your abundance in the “boat” or vessel of my heart in which you inhabit. For today, I offer you my feeble faith and ask for your strength and courage to know you are there with me in my circumstances. And may this knowledge provide not only comfort to my heart but allow me to use that comfort to bless someone else today because of your faithfulness.

**Passages for reflection: Matt. 4:18–20, Luke 5:1–11, Is. 6:1–5**

# Healing of the Man With Leprosy

## Preparation /

Before you begin to read Scripture, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Take a minute to write out a simple prayer seeking God's calming for what is heavy on your heart today and to focus this time centered on Him.

## Reading /

### Matthew 8:1-4

“When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, ‘See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’” (NIV)

The context of this passage immediately follows Jesus’ descent from the mountain after preaching the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Amid the crowds, a man with leprosy comes up to Jesus. This man’s disease would have made him religiously unclean (meaning cut-off from atonement by the priest) as well as ostracized from normal life due to health issues and people’s fears associated with a communicable disease. The fact that this leper approached Jesus while a crowd was present shows his boldness and may have heightened the people’s fears. Following the healing, the Gospel

writer points out Jesus’ request for the man to remain quiet about the healing and to present himself to the priests who could then allow full restoration of the leper to the community and into society.

Let’s be careful to examine this miraculous event as descriptive of the character of God rather than prescriptive in assuming that a series of words or specific conditions would demand a response from God for healing. In other words, while clearly demonstrating the power of Jesus over our body’s health and any ailments, this miracle speaks clearly about the indwelling of the fullness of God in the incarnation of Jesus. Yes, the power to heal rests in God. This passage also demonstrates the simplicity of presenting requests to God in humility, recognizing God’s capacity yet without demanding that God respond to our desires and circumstances.

Let’s also be careful not to interpret the circumstances of the leper as punishment for sin. It can be easy and common for ANYONE (yes, you and me alike) to assume that our own circumstances OR the circumstances of others are “bad,” however, assigning blame to ourselves or

others for failures misses the heart of this story and makes us jury and judge. Jesus sees past the leper's circumstances and sees also past your circumstances. He sees the deliberate pursuit by the leper against social norms and at significant risk to himself, despite circumstances, to seek change in his life.

important than constructs from social norms. And the approach to Jesus by the leper is not a demand, despite the boldness of the context, but it is a humble request with some obvious recognition and belief that Jesus was capable. The request is "Lord, are you willing?" And the Lord's answer is "Yes."

Jesus allows social barriers to be broken. Relationship in the eyes of God is more

## **Reflection /**

What issues or circumstances beyond your control prevent you from approaching Jesus in humility? Similarly, what drives your demands that God respond to your sense of unfair or unjust circumstances you may experience?

How might this leper's bold and humble pursuit of Jesus encourage you to approach Jesus courageously and humbly?

## **Response /**

Take a moment to express your feelings, fears, and circumstances to God, asking for a recognition of His power, desire, and willingness to meet you where you are. Consider some time journaling, praying walking, or memorizing and repeating a simple prayer several times throughout today (e.g.- "Lord, heal my unbelief" or "Lord, I ask you to work in my circumstances [or name the circumstance], but first I need you" or "I can't, but You can.")

Passages for reflection: Mark 1:40-44, Luke 5:12-14, John 8:1-10

# Water into Wine

## Preparation /

As today is a new day, take a minute to acknowledge the concerns and worries that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek Him above answers. Consider writing out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart. Alternatively, reframe that circumstance and imagine it as a physical object representing the actual concerns and imagine laying that object on an imaginary altar as a sacrifice for today.

## Reading /

John 2:1-11

“On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

“Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water;” so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water

knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” (NIV)

In this passage, we sense that the host family felt that running out of wine at the wedding would bring them great shame. One can almost feel the panic Mary would have been experiencing as she approaches Jesus with her concerns. Addressing her son and looking to Him for help, Mary communicates that she believed He could do something about this problem. She believed.

Next, we see Jesus pushing back with a bit of a rebuke and something about timing. She seemingly ignores His statements and continues by telling the servants to do whatever Jesus says. Relentless, she believed.

Thus begins Christ’s ministry. The glory of Jesus was revealed in his ability to

change water to wine. He cared about what His mother cared about, and He cared about the people and the party! Secondly, He reveals His grace by providing an abundance of good wine and sparing the bridegroom from shame. Jesus covered the shame. The result? His disciples put their faith in Him.

They witnessed the miracle, saw shame covered, and experienced Jesus' care and His abundant provisions. The disciples put their faith in Jesus. They believed.

## Reflection /

Mary went to Jesus about two needs: physical (wine) & emotional (preventing shame on the bridegroom and his family). What physical or emotional needs do you have today, and need to believe that Jesus has authority over?

What might you be feeling anxious about in this season of your life? Write your needs and concerns down and then pause and talk to Jesus about them.

## Response /

Take a few minutes to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or bring the following prayer into your conversation with Jesus today.

### Prayer:

“Let me seek, Lord, the gift of silence, stillness, and solitude, where everything I touch is turned to prayer, for God is all in all. Permit me to feel my helplessness before You so that I may let go of frustration, alienation, and shame. Grant me attentiveness to Your loving presence and to Your will so that I may adore You in the center of my being. From within my solitude and silence, draw out my song of praise and celebration, for the life of grace on earth is the beginning of the life of glory. Amen.”

–Adapted from reflections by Thomas Merton

Passages for reflection: Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 14

## Healing on the Sabbath

### Preparation /

As today is a new day, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them while you seek him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek him above answers. Consider writing out a simple prayer for what is heavy on your heart. Alternatively, reframe the circumstance and write it out in one sentence on a scrap piece of paper and then either ball it up and throw it away or burn it to ashes, representing the giving up of your control over these concerns and of your willingness for God to meet you there today.

### Reading /

#### Mark 3:1-6

“Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of everyone.’ Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” (NIV)

Nestled into Jesus’ teaching on the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28), we see Jesus’ adversaries accusing Him of forgetting the Sabbath when He heals the disabled man, for whom they demonstrated no pity. The context of healing on the Sabbath was that it was only allowed for rabbis in cases of life and death, and this occasion was clearly

not one of them. Jesus makes no attempt to avoid the entrapment. Instead, He asks a question that goes right to the heart of the issue – the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law. Jesus’ response demonstrates that leaving such a man unhealed was something He was unwilling to do. The silence of the Pharisees reveals their own recognition of any response as self-condemning. The healing of this man on the Sabbath was the moment when two most unlikely allies, the Pharisees and Herodians (a combination of cynicism and political opportunism), decided to get rid of Jesus and plot how they might kill Him.

“If we do not believe in Jesus, then we must finally crucify him.”

May the direction of our hearts be to believe in Jesus’ life, death, burial, and resurrection today, and every day. And may His grace be sufficient as we seek to live out the spirit of God’s law of love.

Mark also records Jesus’ anger over the hard-hearted, stubborn critics who had been spying on Jesus with motives to accuse. An accusation often implies assigning blame without evidence to



support it. In other words, it's easy to make up stories in our head about others based on our own inferences, past experiences, and other-centered contempt which are not based in truth. Such stories seem rational but lead to false accusations. We think we see or know the truth without checking our motives or asking questions to learn about others. It's simply easier

to leap to a conclusion and blurt it out, garnering support from others for our point of view. We have likely all falsely accused others and been the recipient of having been falsely accused. In both cases, Psalm 36:10 reminds us of God's perspective: "Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart" (NIV).

## Reflection /

When living under the letter of the law (like the Pharisees), a common temptation is to make accusations by looking to the failures of others, while promoting our own pride and arrogance and driving a wedge of separation. What situations, personalities, or past experiences trigger you to look for reasons to accuse or even "plot to kill" your own heart or crush the spirit of another?

In those moments of accusation, even if silent and not verbally expressed, how can you recognize Jesus' anger over your stubborn, hardened heart? How can you also rest in his absolute divine love and willingness to die on your behalf for those moments?

## Response /

Take a few minutes to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or bring the following prayer into your conversation with Jesus today.

### Prayer:

Lord, today I come to you recognizing that You care for the disadvantaged, downtrodden, and broken-hearted. Some days these characteristics describe me while other days they may describe my neighbor, spouse, child, co-worker, parent, or friend. I come to you with a withered heart and boldly stand in your presence recognizing my need for you to heal my attitude. I call on your name to bring a desire to promote your lovingkindness, joy, and grace today by allowing you to reign. I look to the cross and may your grace be sufficient for me today.

Passages for reflection: Matt. 12:9-14, Luke 6:6-11, Psalm 27:12, Psalm 109, Proverbs 3:30

# Calming of the Storm

## Preparation /

As today is a new day, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them and to focus your heart and mind on Him. Ask the Lord for the grace and ability to seek His forgiveness and the willingness to forgive others. Consider writing out a simple prayer or singing a song of praise to tune your heart to Him today so that the things of this world may grow “strangely dim.”

## Reading /

Mark 4:35-41

“That day when evening came, He said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?’ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!’” (NIV)

This story by Mark paints a vivid picture of the boat, the storm, and panic by the disciples. In effect, the disciples rebuke and discredit Jesus with their question “don’t you care?” The complaint is an attack on our Creator and His authority. And Jesus’ response confronts the allegation with a demonstration of God’s power in all circumstances, including

the storm, affecting the concerns and fears of His closest friends. In the Old Testament, God appears in a couple of instances as the One who causes storms and calms them (Gen. 7, 1Kings 18:41-46). This case with the disciples is no different. Considering Jesus’ suggestion to cross the lake, He appears to be fully aware of what was to come in this event; and the disciples agreed to Jesus’ beckoning. Sometimes, our obedience leads us into storms. And sometimes God does not calm storms immediately, even though great faith is evident; like from Paul (Acts 27).

Psalm 23 is a great comfort during these storms. It gives a great promise about the great shepherd... “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” Notice he does not say “Even though I walk TO the valley of the shadow of death.” Even in life’s greatest storms, the great Shepherd, the one who has authority over those storms, walks with us. When it seems like our boat is about to capsize, we can look over and see him there, with us. It’s then that we truly feel and know that his nearness is our good (Psalm 73).



## **Reflection /**

Furious squalls seem inevitable throughout life. And those squalls come and go, often without notice. Where might you be today in this scene? Is Jesus inviting you into the boat? Are you experiencing a storm?

Where in this storm do you have trouble believing that Jesus is capable of calming your storm?



## **Response /**

Take a few minutes to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or bring the following prayer into your conversation with Jesus today.

Prayer:

Lord, I cast my cares on You for You care for me. I do not know what lies ahead, but I want to step into the boat today and ask that You calm the storms of my heart. While I may be tempted to believe You don't care, I recognize Your faithfulness to me in the past and hold steadfastly to the knowledge that You are in control of my current and future circumstances. May Your will be done on earth, in heaven, and in my heart.

Passages for reflection: Matt. 8:22-27, Luke 8:22-25, Psalm 55:22, 1 Pet. 5:6-7

## Healing of the Sick and Possessed

### Preparation /

As today is a new day, take a minute to acknowledge the things that are heavy on your heart. Ask the Lord to speak into those things and to graciously silence them and to focus your heart and mind on Him. Ask the Lord for His grace and mercies to be renewed to you today. Consider writing out a simple prayer inviting His presence to drown out the noise and distractions and to refresh your heart.

### Reading /

Matthew 8:14-17

“When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.’” (NIV)

Matthew’s account records Jesus healing Peter’s mother-in-law and then jumps quickly to Jesus’ casting out demons and healing the sick later the same day without much more context. Matthew leaves out detail to point the reader to a different purpose. These miracles, like all others, serve the purpose (beyond the miracle itself) to point to the greater reality of the authority of God demonstrated and authenticated in Christ. Jesus has power over sickness, over demons, and as shown in the resurrection, even over death. Matthew acknowledges the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53, demonstrating how Jesus paid for our

infirmities through His death, burial, and resurrection.

If we allow, infirmities can remind us of our dependence on Someone outside of ourselves. Besides demonstrating the capabilities of the Lord and the actual benefit by the recipient or those present as witnesses, these miracles also serve to reveal His involvement with His people. In this short paragraph, we see Jesus heal someone close to Him as well as extend healing to many “with a word.” Perhaps one key to this passage is the “many” who were “brought” to Jesus. It’s often in this way that Jesus works and heals—when we bring our cares and needs to him. Matthew goes out of his way to describe Jesus’ ability to heal anything that we bring to Him. There is nothing outside of His specialty or ability. He doesn’t turn them away...He heals them. To be sure, God is in the business of caring about our diseases and infirmities, no matter the form of the affliction—spiritual, emotional, physical, financial, relational, or psychological. He invites us to look beyond such circumstances to the Hope of the gospel with an eternal perspective.



## Reflection /

How does knowing Jesus' power over everything from sickness to spiritual powers change what we're willing to bring to Him?

How does Isaiah's words in 53:1-12 change what we're willing to bring to Him?



## Response /

Take a few minutes to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or bring the following prayer into your conversation with Jesus today.

### Prayer:

Lord, You are gracious and forgiving. You are the lover and pursuer of my soul. And You bought me with a price, the price of Your only Son, as a needed atonement on my behalf. I confess that at times I pursue my own ways of healing and use You as a last resort. Forgive me for not seeing You first. Forgive me for not trusting You first. Forgive me for not choosing You first. I know that You have power and authority over the thing in my life that has me most concerned in this moment. Would You speak? Would You whisper Your word of peace in this moment? I trust You to take all that I give You.

Passages for reflection: Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-39, Is. 53:1-12

# Healing of the Woman

## Preparation /

As today is a new day, take a minute to acknowledge two or three attributes of your Heavenly Father. Now take a minute to recognize the ways the Evil One may take your attention away from the majesties of God. Ask the Lord to graciously silence the distractions and to focus your heart and mind on Him. Consider writing out a simple prayer inviting His presence to drown out the noise and to refresh your heart.

## Reading /

Matthew 9:20-22

“And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; for she was saying to herself, “If I only touch His garment, I will get well.” But Jesus turning and seeing her said, “Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.” At once the woman was made well.

Twelve years. When we wait for a few days, weeks, or months– it can seem like an eternity. Twelve years is different. In context, that’s 2010. It was the year that Apple first released an iPad. President Obama was only in the second year of his first term. Not one of our children in the children’s ministry hallway had been born. Twelve years is a long time. Luke tells us in chapter 8 that this woman had spent all her money on physicians that couldn’t heal her. She was actually worse off for going to them. Socially, the woman is an outcast. This bleeding meant she was unclean (OT Law-Lev 15). She could not go to the temple, get married, or even be touched by anyone. But in her desperation, she seeks out Jesus.

Notice three words that Matthew uses to describe this encounter:

Jesus **TURNED**: The king of the universe, the perfect Son of God, is on mission, and He turns! He could have kept walking. He could have ignored her as everyone else had done. But instead, He turns toward her. Jesus **SEES** her: He looks at this woman with compassion, a compassion that no one else seemed to give or display. And, in that moment, He says “I see your last twelve years. I know about the 4000+ nights you woke up in pain and frustration. I know about you being friendless. I know about your bank account. I know what the doctors have said. I know that you haven’t felt the touch of anyone in more than a decade. I see you. And then, he calls her **DAUGHTER**: Jesus speaks words of affection to the “woman” who had always been unknown.

In the moments to follow, Jesus heals this woman of her disease. It was no small feat, but it was something he had already proven He could do and would do again. Along with the incredible miracle of healing, Jesus demonstrates

in yet another way, the miracle of the incarnation. The miracle of “God with us.” His miracle demonstrates that He has the power, ability, and even the desire to see what others cannot see or understand.

He turns towards you, and He invites you into his family. When no one else cares or understands the full complexity of your circumstance, Jesus does.

No matter what you might be going through today, know that Jesus sees you,

## **Reflection /**

What is a place in life that you feel like no one can possibly understand or do anything about?

How can you express a desperate need for Jesus in this moment and allow Him to turn towards you?

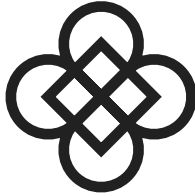
## **Response /**

Take a few minutes to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or bring the following prayer into your conversation with Jesus today.

### **Prayer:**

Jesus, I confess that often I believe the lie that no one sees me; even You. And, to make matters worse, I also sometimes believe that because I or anyone else has been able to do anything about my circumstance -- You can't either. I know that You see me, that You care, and that You are powerful enough for anything that I bring to You. Help me to be desperate for You. Help me be desperate enough to grasp even the hem of Your garment. And, when You turn, help me see and know the compassion that You have for me.

Passages for reflection: Luke 8:43-48, Matthew 6:25-34



# The Compassion of Jesus

Can you imagine how frustrating it would have been to be Jesus? At every turn, He was questioned, rebuked, ridiculed, and mocked. And, He was constantly asked for signs and healings by those who doubted Him. The One who spoke the world into existence could have easily come into the world and only seen it with disgust and frustration. Yet, throughout the pages of the gospels, we are inundated with Jesus' care and concern for people. In the coming pages and days, center your heart towards Jesus' merciful love for the people He encounters and on His compassion for you.



# What's in store this week:

## Centered: The Compassion of Jesus

<b>Sunday, March 20th</b>	For Sinners
<b>Monday, March 21st</b>	For Those Who Mourn
<b>Tuesday, March 22nd</b>	For Children
<b>Wednesday, March 23rd</b>	For The Prodigal
<b>Thursday, March 24th</b>	For The Poor
<b>Friday, March 25th</b>	For the Skeptic
<b>Saturday, March 26th</b>	For The Sick

### Preparation /

Quiet your heart before the Lord and ask for a fresh understanding of an oft-quoted passage of scripture. Ask the Lord to use this time to strengthen your faith in our compassionate Almighty God.

### Reading /

John 3:16-17

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”.

The words you just read are the very words of Jesus—God incarnate, come to save the world. He does not water down the purpose of why He came. He came because God loved the world. The very existence of Jesus is evidence of God’s immense love and compassion towards the people He created. Read the first sentence again, with added emphasis: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God did not send Jesus into the world to be exclusive. Motivated by love, He sent Jesus into the world to offer an invitation for eternal life to any and all who believe that He is the promised Messiah, Savior of the world.

The Lord is moved by even the possibility of a repentant heart. We

see this in the Old Testament when, with every act of judgment Israel brings upon themselves because of disobedience, the Lord preserves a remnant. His promise of restoration echoes throughout the history of our sin, “Bring your confessions and return to the Lord.... Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever” (Hosea 14:2,4).

Jesus is the very embodiment of God’s compassion towards sinners. He says, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32) and we see His compassion fulfilled at the cross, first for the thief and then for the world:

“One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, ‘So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!’ But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.’ And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be

with me in paradise” (Luke 24:39-43).

Perhaps you feel overwhelmed by the weight of your sin today. Perhaps such mercy and love seem more like a fairy-tale than reality. But this is real. It doesn't matter how the world may

measure the sins you've committed—whether they seem great or small. Repent and accept the love of your Savior, and you will receive everlasting life.



## **Reflection /**

Do you struggle to believe in the abundant grace given to you through Jesus Christ?

Do you find yourself denying in your heart the hope for salvation for someone you feel has “gone too far”?

Have you experienced the awe-inspiring realization of God's compassion and mercy towards you, a sinner?



## **Response /**

While reflecting on God's compassion for sinners, write a few words of response to today's passages.

King Jesus, Your love for me is more than I can fully comprehend. You have chosen to give me—a sinner deserving eternal death—eternal life, instead. Lord, give me a deeper understanding of Your love for the world and help me to carry the good news of your great compassion and love to those around me.

**Additional Passages for Reflection: Romans 5:8**

# The Compassion of Jesus For Those Who Mourn

Monday, March 21st

## Preparation /

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and to turn your attention towards our loving and merciful Savior, Jesus Christ.

## Reading /

Luke 7:11-15

“Soon afterward Jesus went with his disciples to the village of Nain, and a large crowd followed him. A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The young man who had died was a widow’s only son, and a large crowd from the village was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. ‘Don’t cry!’ he said. Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. ‘Young man,’ he said, ‘I tell you, get up.’ Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk! And Jesus gave him back to his mother.”

The story of this widow reminds us of another famous widow in the Old Testament, Naomi. After losing her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons—Naomi travels home to Judah (her family had been living in Moab) with her devoted Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. As she returned, she said to her people “Don’t call me Naomi... Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty” (Ruth 1:20-21).

It is possible that upon seeing the widow at the funeral procession, Jesus

was moved by the same momentous compassion God had for Naomi. The crowd who witnessed Jesus raise the boy from the dead likely echoed the praise of those who, hundreds of years prior, witnessed God’s provision for Naomi with the providential birth of her grandson, “Praise the Lord, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel” (Ruth 4:14).

The God of the Universe is moved to compassion when we, His children, mourn. He is not a “pull-up-your-bootstraps” god. He is a “cast-your-cares-on-me” God (1 Peter 5:7). Jesus—the embodied form of our heavenly Creator—fully aware of the broken and sinful state of the world he entered, was moved to compassion for those in mourning. He said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

When we cry out before our God and Savior, He promises to draw near with comfort and blessing. And we can rest assured in this—no matter our circumstances or how deep our sorrow—God’s nearness is our good (Psalm 73:28).

## **Reflection /**

Are you in a season of mourning or do you know someone who is in a season of mourning? Perhaps you or someone you know is mourning the loss of a loved one... a job... a dream...

Or, perhaps the conviction of sin in your life or the lives of others has caused your heart to mourn for or in repentance.

Are you tempted to shove a season of mourning aside in order to move quickly past the pain of what has been lost or uncovered?

## **Response /**

Write a few sentences responding to today's passages. If you are in a season of mourning, consider opening your heart to the God of compassion who draws near to those who cry out to Him.

**Additional Passages for Reflection: Jeremiah 29:12; Psalm 73; Romans 12:15**

### Preparation /

Ready your heart for a time of reflection on the character of Christ by clearing your mind and thanking God for the ability to experience another day orchestrated by His hands.

### Reading /

#### Matthew 19:13-15

“One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. But Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.’ And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left”.

By this point during a reading of the book of Matthew, the reader understands that Jesus is in high demand. He addressed crowds of more than five thousand (and fed them) and stirred up the attention of both the religious and the needy by performing multiple healing acts on the Sabbath. He established an urgency for His kingdom, sending out his disciples and confirming that the need is great, and the workers are few (Matthew 9:38). There is a rising tension and motion behind Jesus’ every act. At this point in the scriptures, people are paying close attention to Him and to His disciples.

The disciples are also beginning to sense that they are witnessing the greatest moment in Israel’s (and the world’s) history, and it is into this

setting of swelling tension—this moment of historic revolution—that the little children come...

“One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them” (Matthew 19:13). The children do not come by their own inclination but are brought by parents who recognize their need to be guided by the prayers and the blessing of someone far greater than they. This is an important detail, for how else would the children know to enter the crowds and approach such a Teacher if their parents (or caretakers) did not lead them there?

In response, the disciples scold the parents and accuse them of bothering Jesus. It is tempting to look on the disciples with scorn and contempt in this passage, but we must remember that at this time Jesus was actively being pulled into hot religious and political conversations, and His disciples were attempting to channel the focus to those things they felt of most importance to the mission of a Savior.

However, Jesus is not bothered by the parent’s need for Him when it comes to the care of their children. Here we see the God of the Universe in human form,

the One who at the beginning of time blessed marriage with the command to be fruitful and multiply—the One who created within a child the very physical embodiment of two-become-one—clear the way for the children surrounding Him.

Jesus says, “The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these

children” (Matthew 19:14). His compassion toward the child—the one who knows very little of this world, who cannot logically navigate the laws and bylaws of our own religious day—commands that we are not only to let them come to Him, but that we are also to come like them.



### **Reflection /**

How are you approaching Jesus today? What does it mean to come to Jesus like a child?

How are you managing the access to Jesus for the various children surrounding you? Is there any hesitation to bring the message of salvation to those who may seem too simple to understand?



### **Response /**

Write a few words of response as you reflect on today’s passage.

Lord, I know that I am tempted to overcomplicate what it means to come to you wholeheartedly. Jesus, help me to come to you with childlike faith. Help me also to never miss an opportunity to display and speak your gospel to those who I am tempted to overlook.

Additional Passages for Reflection: Mark 9:42

## Preparation /

Quiet your heart before the Lord, slow your busy mind, and take a moment to invite Him to speak into your life today.

## Reading /

Matthew 18:12-14

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish.”

The first humans to walk the earth were also the first prodigals. Having tasted the Lord’s goodness, they chose to trust in their own discernment and turned to their own desires—initiating sin in God’s created world (Genesis 3). Yet, even at the beginning—the Lord determined to set His will firm on salvation. He prophesied of the coming Savior in His curse upon the serpent (the deceiver), “He will strike your head and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

From the beginning of time, the Lord has been moved to compassion for His prodigal sons and daughters.

We are reminded of this great move of compassion in the laments:

“For no one is abandoned by the Lord

forever. Though he brings grief, he also shows compassion because of the greatness of his unfailing love. For he does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow” (Lamentations 3:31-33).

We can be assured that a person turning away from the Lord is hurting, but we can also rest in the assurance that we serve a God who longs to restore His wandering sheep to the safety of His shepherding.

Jesus, the embodiment of God’s compassion towards His people, came into the world calling out to those who are broken and feel abandoned by the Lord either in their sorrows or because of their own rebellion, and He offered His life as the means to return to the Father and a reinstated inheritance of life everlasting.

Whether you know someone who is walking away from their faith in God, or if it is your own heart that is set in rebellion against Him, know today that the Savior is passionately calling out to the lost and broken prodigals, inviting them home to His love. It is not His will that even one of the little ones should wander and perish.



## **Reflection /**

Spend a few moments meditating on the magnificent grace and ready salvation available to those who have wandered far from God.

Is there a person in your life who once walked with the Lord but is now wandering away from Him?

Is there any part of your heart that has wandered away from the Lord in rebellion against what you know is His will?

## **Response /**

Take a few moments to offer a personal prayer for someone you know who needs salvation.

Lord, you are the God who saves. Do whatever needs to be done so that [name] may fully recognize the love and mercy available to them. Turn the hearts of your children back to You, the Father. Show me if there is any part of my own heart that has wandered far from You, and help me return to You wholeheartedly, for You are kind and it is Your kindness that leads to repentance.

Additional Passages for Reflection: Luke 15:11-32, Luke 22:54-62

## Preparation /

Take a moment to thank the Lord. For inspiration, you may choose to look around the room or environment you are currently in and find something tangible for which to thank the Lord.

## Reading /

Matthew 6:1-4

“Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get, But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you”.

In this passage, Jesus is concerned about the heart of a person who gives. His instruction for His followers is specific when it comes to giving—do so in private without seeking reward. But why? Why does it matter that someone who gives to the needy should not benefit from a sought-out public acknowledgement?

Jesus not only expresses concern for the condition of the heart of the one

who gives, but He also expresses His great compassion towards the ones who receive—the spiritually and materially poor and needy. Jesus instructs His followers to give while also ensuring that the poor are spared being unwillingly or unknowingly used for the greater worldly gain of those who choose to give to them.

In this passage, Jesus offers instruction which He models perfectly when He dies on the cross for our sins. By dying on the cross, Jesus did not give of Himself in order to receive—He simply gave. And He gave it all.

Moved by compassion for both the poor in spirit and the physically poor, Jesus commands His disciples to pick up their crosses and follow Him—giving to those who need, without seeking the profit of worldly recognition. He rejects the notion of generosity in the form of give-and-take and instead calls us to perform our acts of generosity for one Audience alone—the Father, who sees everything.

 **Reflection /**

Why can it feel challenging to give anonymously?

How does Jesus' instruction to His disciples show His compassion for the poor?

 **Response /**

Write out some thoughts about today's passage. You may choose to discuss your thoughts with a friend.

Lord, it would be impossible for me to offer payment for my sins. Jesus, help me to give freely to those in need—as you have given to me, that my desire to give may uphold and reflect the great generosity of You, my Savior.

 **Preparation /**

Take a moment to think about the character of God—His trustworthiness, His understanding, and His everlasting love.

 **Reading /**

(Luke 24: 35-43)

“Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! “Why are you frightened?” he asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched”.

## **Reflection /**

Jesus is in His human body sitting at the right hand of the Father. Do you believe it? Do you ever find yourself wondering how this can be? Jesus—in His human body—is in Heaven in His rightful place of Lordship over the earth.

In today's passage we see Jesus' great compassion for His disciples when they had disbelief and skepticism in His resurrection. Jesus, the One who had just defeated death by being raised to life as He prophesied He would do, offers compassionate and loving proof to His followers. They touch His hands and feet. They watch Him take a meal. They realize He is human—a man, raised to life again by the resurrection power of God.

In our culture, it can be hard to fully believe in the resurrection. We live in a skeptical culture that demands proof. Although we are not owed proof of Jesus' Lordship, He does have compassion for our skepticism and unbelief. When a person takes a tiny, mustard seed-sized step of faith toward Jesus, He patiently begins the work of building a strong foundation of faith in His Lordship within the heart of that person (Mark 9:24).

## **Response /**

Take a moment to think about your faith in Christ. Is there any part of you that struggles to believe He is truly alive, that He reigns, or that He loves you?

Write out a short prayer asking God to help you with specific areas of unbelief in your heart.

Additional Passages for Reflection: Acts 17:27

## For The Sick

### Preparation /

Take a few moments to thank God for your life and those around you. Take a moment to ask the Lord to give you a better understanding of His character and His love for those who suffer.

### Reading /

Luke 5:12-14

“In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground, begging to be healed. “Lord,” he said, “if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.” Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared. Then Jesus instructed him not to tell anyone what had happened”.

In today’s passage we see a man desperate for healing. He had suffered pain, isolation, humiliation, and separation from others because of his leprosy. He was also forced to remain separate from the temple, unable to offer sacrifices on behalf of his sins because of the uncleanness of his disease. This man suffered in complete isolation.

His faith in Jesus is astounding. He knows that Jesus is able to heal his body and free him from years of suffering, but rather than demand a miracle, he hands the decision to heal back to Jesus. “Lord if you are willing, you can heal me....” Moved by his compassion for this man’s suffering, Jesus chooses to heal him. He does so privately, without seeking public recognition for the life he restored to this one man.

## **Reflection /**

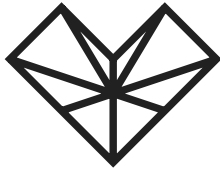
Maybe today you are suffering from sickness or a limiting physical ailment. It is incredibly frustrating to feel limited by the boundaries of our failing bodies. Physical illness can impact our ability to focus on or engage in work, family, or community. It can even impact our ability to focus on or engage with God. Perhaps you are someone who has been calling out to the Lord for healing, patiently (or impatiently) awaiting His deliverance from your physical or mental suffering.

Although no one can pretend to fully understand God's wisdom regarding whom and when He heals, we can stand firm in our knowledge that "God works all things together for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28) and we know that He is able to heal those whom He created. We also know that He draws near to those who need Him (Psalm 145:18).

## **Response /**

If you are suffering from physical pain or sickness, or you know someone who is suffering physical pain or sickness today, remember that our Savior desires for you to bring your request for healing to Him. He desires that you would "cast all of your desires on Him because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). If He is willing, He can and will heal you—and if He is unwilling for a time, you can trust that His purposes for suffering and His timing for healing and restoration are beyond our limited wisdom, but that He is good and we can trust Him. In the end, all who trust in Him will be restored (Philippians 3:21).

Additional Passages for Reflection: Proverbs 3:5-6



# The Prayers of Jesus

Scripture gives us an intimate look at the heart of Jesus through His recorded prayers. By looking at what Jesus prays and how He invites us into prayer, we can latch on to what His heart beats for and how He longs for us to be in relationship with Him, the Spirit, and the Father. In the coming pages and days, center your heart towards the prayers of Jesus.



# What's in store this week:

## Centered: The Prayers of Jesus

<b>Sunday, March 27th</b>	A Model for Prayer
<b>Monday, March 28th</b>	A Time and a Place
<b>Tuesday, March 29th</b>	You Have Heard It Said
<b>Wednesday, March 30th</b>	Jesus Prays for Us
<b>Thursday, March 31st</b>	Jesus and Extemporaneous Prayer
<b>Friday, April 1st</b>	Prayer as a Weapon
<b>Saturday, April 2nd</b>	Gethsemane Prayer

## A Model for Prayer

### Preparation /

Review The Lord's Prayer

"Our Father, who is in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses." (Matt. 6:9-15, NASB)

### Reading /

Jesus begins His teaching on prayer by giving His disciples a template. The Lord's Prayer provides a simple outline of approaching God that is surprisingly concise yet comprehensive enough to allow for the multiple ways of praying. By beginning with honoring who God is: "Our Father," Christ shows His followers that God is eager to welcome us into his presence, desiring to conform us into His image, delighting to meet our daily needs, and directing us to offer those same graces to those who may have sinned against us. The Lord's Prayer provides just the right amount of instruction and freedom for us to begin centering our lives on Christ in prayer.

It has been said that there are two types of people: those who read the instructions and those who never even unwrap the manual. Maybe human nature pushes more of us into the second category, but by approaching God without the directions of Jesus, we are often confused

and scrambled in our prayer time. Not following a clear set of instructions, we find all the pieces scattered like random parts and screws spread across the kitchen floor. The Lord's Prayer allows us to recenter and follow with Jesus, step by step in prayer. These are instructions that we should pull out of the box.

Just the fact that Jesus gave instructions on how to pray tells us a great deal about Him. He wants us to pray. He invites us to pray. And He shows us how to pray. These truths communicate the great truth, that He is not, and has no desire to be, a distant, far-off God. Instead, Jesus carefully sits with us, unfolding the directions, and walks us through step by step. Thankfully, Jesus knows and understands that we will not always get it right, and yet He has patience in guiding us.

Instead of leaving us to our own wits, Jesus graciously provides a model for

prayer—not a formulaic response or burden—but a gentle model. As we approach God for these forty days, let us allow our hearts and prayers to be directed by this template of honoring God, seeking His will, asking for simple things we need, being forgiven, forgiving, and stopping the devil in his tracks. The more we practice His ways of praying, the more joy and ease we will have with this discipline.

The beauty of the prayer Jesus provided is that it is both personal and awe-inspiring, detailed enough for our daily needs, and purposeful enough to inspire our deepest dreams and desires. As much as some of us may avoid templates and directions, let us allow this model prayer given by our Lord to provide a pattern for approaching prayer and the help we all need to pull our lives back to center on Him and His Kingdom.



### **Reflection /**

Where in my life do I feel like I need a manual of instructions right now?

Have I taken these concerns one by one to the Lord and asked for His kingdom, will, forgiveness, directions, and protection?



### **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

#### **Prayer:**

Lord, I am not particularly good with following directions. I have messed up other projects in life by seeking my own way, and prayer is exactly what I need to pull me back to center. You gave us a model by which we can approach God, our Heavenly Father, and You did not leave out the cares and concerns that face me daily. Father, help me to hallow Your name. Help me to pray for Your will and kingdom to come. Give us the bread our family needs and forgive me as I learn to forgive others. Lead me, Lord. Deliver me. For Yours is a will and kingdom that is so much better than anything I can do. Center me there, Lord.

### Preparation /

Try and find a quiet place that will be your “spot” for prayer this week.

### Reading /

**Mark 1:35**

“And in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and prayed there for a time.” (NASB)

Our men’s bible study at Exchange this past season has covered the book of Ecclesiastes. In the wisdom of this ancient teacher, he says repeatedly in verse 3, “To everything there is a time.” And a place.

Early in the morning before the day began, Jesus had already established a practice of disappearing for prayer. He arose and went to a deserted place. His prayer life required a routine time and a quiet place to be away from the noise. This beginning of each day centered on God was his secret to ministry, and for us to be centered with Him, a similar pattern and place for prayer must emerge.

Jesus demonstrates through his disciplined practice of prayer His humanity and dependence on a daily connection with the Father. In His mercy, He allowed His disciples to glimpse Him stealing away, even at particularly demanding times, as if to

say, “You cannot make it without a time and a place to pray.”

Early in my walk with God, I learned that an established spot was the beginning in consistently coming to God in prayer. In college, we would be almost giddy about meeting with God in the garden on campus, unaware of how much He desires meeting with us. Be it a hidden corner of the house as Jesus instructed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:6), or a porch, a barn, a cemetery, a garage, or the kitchen table. Wherever you must go to be alone... God will meet you where you meet Him. Something about the Father values the consistency of daily meeting with His children.

We can only imagine the demands that were placed upon Jesus during His time of ministry. Surely, He understands the difficulty of stealing away and making the world stop long enough for us to find the Father in peace. Centering on Jesus during these 40 days will hopefully build in us a habit of consistently coming to God. If Jesus used a routine place and time for prayer, how much more should I?



## **Reflection /**

Where and when am I most likely to meet with God?

If I had an ongoing appointment with anyone, how would that relationship be affected?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, you know my heart and my feet wander, but in some areas, I am a creature of unbreakable habit. Make a place and a time in my day for prayer with You to be my habit. Set an appointment with me, God, one I am inclined to treasure and keep. One I look forward to as You do, which you will never miss.

Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Luke 4:42, Luke 6:12, Isaiah 39:14, Acts 3:1

## You Have Heard It Said

### Preparation /

Take time to journal some answered prayers you have seen even this year.

### Reading /

**Matt. 5:44**

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven: for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust.” (NKJV)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches some radical concepts of prayer that challenge us to move beyond the status quo.

When He asks us to pray for our enemies, the tables are turned over because it is an unnatural posture to take towards those who persecute us and spitefully use us. Instead of animosity and backbiting, our prayers with Jesus call us to mercy and hopeful reconciliation.

“Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering” (Matt. 5:23). Our acts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and prayer for our enemies are the obedient mea-

asures required to rightly approach God in prayer. “Husbands, dwell with your wives with understanding... that your prayer may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). My relationships horizontally with those around me have a significant effect on my relationship with the Heavenly Father above me. An angry, hurtful heart cannot preside in prayer.

Instead of harboring resentment, Jesus tells us to pray that poison out by showering our “enemies” with helpful, heartfelt blessings (Romans 12:20). It may be difficult and mechanical at first. But the posture of our prayers eventually impacts the affections of our hearts. If we pray for those who hate and misuse us, it becomes very difficult to hate and malign them back.

Jesus said this type of prayer makes us like the Father, Who sends blessings on the just and unjust. It centers us with Him—who, when He was reviled, did not revile back (1 Peter 2:23). Surely Jesus knew what it meant to have real, hateful, conniving, murderous enemies. But even in His dying breath, He prayed to God for them, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

The practice of praying for our enemies is a difficult discipline intended to align our hearts with the heart of the Father. While we may not naturally want to bless those who curse us, this beginning of love in private places will eventually spill over into action. Ask Jesus to show you upon whom you need to pray a bless-

ing. Remembering His heart and His kindness towards sinners like me, I am more inclined to forgive and extend grace to others



### **Reflection /**

Who are some people you see as enemies that may need to be on your prayer list?

Where is our heart still far from the place where we can forgive others as Jesus did?



### **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

#### **Prayer:**

God, I was Your enemy, but You prayed for me. Your intercession became my reconciliation, yet I am often slow to let go of a hurt, an ill word, a slight, a heavy betrayal. I ask you, God, to help me pray for those I try to avoid the most, so that I may be the type of minister of reconciliation You taught us to be. Forgive me, Lord, for I know not what I do.

## Jesus Prays For Us

### Preparation /

Take some time to think about all that could have been going through Jesus' mind in these last days leading up to the crucifixion.

### Reading /

John 17:20-23

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (NASB).

The high priestly prayer of John 17 is the longest recorded public prayer of Jesus in Scripture. He does not mince His words or try to impress with theological mysteries but offers an intimate glimpse into both the beauty of His relationship with the Father and His deep desire for us to share in that intimacy.

That they may be one as You and I are one. That they may share in the glory that You and I share. That they may know that You love them as You have loved me.

Of all the important “to do lists” Jesus could surely have given the disciples during these days, His final briefings, relationships, walking side-by-side in

unity took priority over the kingdom tasks left to be done. It was as if He knew that if they could get this ONE right, all other items would fall in line. Like the comment at Babel, “if they be one, nothing shall be withheld from them” (Gen. 11:6).

How often are my prayers more like a grocery list of things I tell Alexa rather than focused on the priorities of Jesus. As I approach Him this day, may I remember my relationships, my children and family, my coworkers and people in the church who just need intimacy with Him above everything else. Prayer is my time of tangible unity with God, and an opportunity to experience unity with those who are walking in side-by-side relationships, but I make it more of a to do, or a to have, or a to know list.

Centering on Jesus will cause me to re-center on relationships. The high priestly prayer reveals a deep heartfelt invitation from both the Father and the Son to join with them in the glory of being known. Jesus knows that this is the one thing that makes all things begin to make sense. Let us join Him in praying for that unity with God and His people.





## **Reflection /**

What is the laundry list of items in my mind that often sully my relationships with others?

If I were to compare my prayer priorities with Jesus', how might I begin to recenter my focus?

If this is one of His recorded prayers, what other things might Jesus still be praying for me?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Lord, You have prayed that we might be one with You and the Father, but often I feel so divided and scattered. Teach me, Lord, to slow down in prayer long enough to echo the request that You showed us to pray. Help me to seek Your way in the relationships I have with those around me and help me to prioritize leading others into relationship with You. Help me to know more intimately the love You have shared with the Father and now desire to share with me. Help me to see and be a part of answering the prayers You prayed for all of us.

## Jesus and Extemporaneous Prayer

### Preparation /

Ask Jesus to give you grace to continue drawing near to Him during this season of recentering.

### Reading /

Matt 11:25

“At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants’” (NASB).

In the middle of walking through the city, we see in Matt 11 an extemporaneous, spontaneous, heartfelt prayer to the Father. Though hidden closets and quiet times may form the foundations of our prayer life, these disciplines overflow into a lifestyle of communion with God.

Jesus modeled daily, even hourly, reliance on the Father in His public prayers. “I thank you Father” He exclaims in Luke 11 just before he raises Lazarus, as if to remind us that God is always present, always there listening, and ready to talk to us.

His warning to the professional religious people was not to let their prayers become too formal. He cautions them against using rote repetitions and long prayers in public with the intention of being heard by others (Matt. 5:7).

Instead, Jesus shows us how we can approach the Father with confidence and boldness because He has made a way (Hebrews 10:22). No longer is the blood of bulls and goats needed. We can be free of guilt and condemnation because He made a way for us to enter God’s presence. We simply cry, “Abba” (Rom. 8:1).

Seeing the ease with which Jesus addressed the Father makes me free to be honest with God about how I really feel. In their recent book, *Where Prayer Becomes Real*, Kyle Stroebel and John Coe remind us that prayer is not the place to be polished and professional, “but the place to be honest.” Without worrying about how His words may be prepared or perceived by others, Jesus just shouted out to God His thanksgiving and wonder at His ways. His example and offering of himself for our sins give us that same access to God.

Enjoy the liberty that Jesus provides in prayer. Be honest with God about how you are feeling and take every advantage throughout the day to simply cry out to Him.



## **Reflection /**

Where are the places in my day I need to call out spontaneously to Jesus?

Why is it sometimes challenging for me to be honest with Him?

What might “pray without ceasing“ mean for me?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

### **Prayer:**

God, You know my heart, so there is no reason to pretend. I could try to say just the right words, but instead, You want to hear my uncensored heart. It is often ugly, Lord, but You make it clean. Let me remember always how near You are to hear me. Allow me to make prayer with You my immediate response throughout the day. I thank you, Lord, for this gift of gracious access, and help me be instantaneous in prayer before I turn to other help. Thank You for revealing Yourself to me.

## Prayer as a Weapon

### Preparation /

Clearly consider areas in your life where the enemy is tempting or trying to harm your walk with God.

### Reading /

Matthew 26:41

“Pray that you may not enter into temptation”.

Prayer for deliverance is a common theme in scripture and the lives of even nominal believers. Just when things get bad enough, we throw out a prayer to God for deliverance, like a Hail Mary pass.

“Jesus take the Wheel” is a popular country song by Carrie Underwood about a woman at the end of her rope, who out of desperation, gives Jesus control of her situation. Sliding out of control in life is the beginning of many a “Come to Jesus” story. However, God may not desire things to become out of our control before we come and submit to Him. Instead, our prayers and daily submission to Him are the proactive means for keeping our lives out of the ways of the evil one.

“I have given you authority to walk on snakes and scorpions, and authority over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you” (Luke 10:19).

All authority on heaven and earth has been given unto me” (Matt. 28:18).

“Submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

During this season of recentering on Jesus, our adversary, the devil, has become concerned about the ways things are going. He hates us drawing near to God, and part of our job in prayer is to resist him with the promises of God and ask for deliverance from his temptations.

Warfare prayer is a vital part of the template in the Lord’s Prayer. If we walk much with Him, the devil will seek to hinder us, and we will be called in Christ to overcome. “Be excellent in what is good and be innocent of evil. And the God of peace will soon crush Satan underneath your feet (Romans 16:19–20). Authority over the enemy in prayer is a gracious gift of God in the resurrection power of the Gospel. Jesus went around doing good and healing those “oppressed by the devil,” and He calls us to join in this fight against death. In this spiritual battle, we are called to pray in a way that enforces the victory won by Christ over the enemy.

Pray for deliverance for yourself and others. The flesh may seem weak, but the power of God’s Spirit in you is strong.



## **Reflection /**

Where am I and/or my loved ones being oppressed by the devil in ways about which I can pray?

How would Jesus approach the temptation and demonic oppression that hinder his people?

What scriptures give you authority to pray?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

Lord, I know in my own strength I have no power over sin and the enemy, but You have not left me on my own. You say our weapons are mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4). I ask, Lord, that You deliver me from the evil one and his schemes. Make me strong enough and free enough to deliver others also. Train my hands for war and help me pray as You did for those who are oppressed. You have the power, Lord, and I accept my authority to walk in that same freedom You gave us on Your cross. Defeat the devil today. Amen.

# Gethsemane Prayer



## Preparation /

Spend some time thanking Jesus for the blessing he purchased in our redemption. Ephesians 1:1-12.



## Reading /

Luke 22:41-42

“And he knelt down and prayed saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from me, nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done’.”

Prayer changes things—always. But as the prayer in Gethsemane tells us, prayer does not always change the difficult situations we are facing.

Jesus’ prayer for another way besides the cross was sincere and honest. When he asks the Father to take away the cup, his humanity merged with our reality, and he felt the difficulty of the task before Him.

Jesus knows exactly how daunting our daily trials can be. He does not berate us for asking for a way out of pain but steps into our own Gethsemane with deep

empathy and compassion. The anguish of soul seen in His prayer shows that He can relate when we call out to Him saying, “Surely, there’s another way.” What the disciples would learn, and what we are invited to see in Gethsemane, is that prayer does not always change the world around us, but it unmistakably changes us.

Through agonizing prayer, Jesus was empowered to embrace His cross and through prayer, we are strengthened to face ours. God’s way and will may not bow to our need for comfort. However, by bending our heart to Him first, we receive grace to accept that will, even joyfully as Jesus did, “for the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:1-2).



## **Reflection /**

Where do I need prayer to help come to terms with His difficult will?

How can I find Jesus when my soul is in anguish?

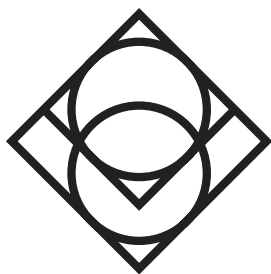
What joy or strength might give me the ability to face a trial with joy?



## **Response /**

Take a minute to write out a prayer in response to this passage, and/or use the corporate prayer.

God, I am not sure why I am walking into this difficult season, and You know I want another way. But You walked a much more difficult road for me, and You relied on the Father to get You through. Change my heart, Lord, so that I am prepared to accept whatever Your will is, not mine. Show and share with me the secret power of Gethsemane so that I do not have to go it alone.



# The Promises of Jesus

Throughout the ministry and words of Jesus, we are given truths, instructions, warnings, and promises. In these promises, we begin to understand that Jesus knows our greatest weaknesses, failures, and fears. He promises that despite all those things, He understands us, knows us, loves us unconditionally, and has an eternal plan for us. In the coming pages and days, center your heart towards the undeserved promises of Jesus.



# What's in store this week:

## Centered: The Promises of Jesus

<b>Sunday, April 3rd</b>	The Promise of Transformation
<b>Monday, April 4th</b>	The Promise of Rest
<b>Tuesday, April 5th</b>	The Promise and Picture of His Pursuing Love
<b>Wednesday, April 6th</b>	The Promise of Satisfaction
<b>Thursday, April 7th</b>	The Promise of Trouble
<b>Friday, April 8th</b>	The Promise of Presence
<b>Saturday, April 9th</b>	The Promise of His Return

## The Promise of Transformation



### Preparation /

As you begin your time today, consider how far you have come. Consider how far the Lord has brought you from where you used to be. He is a transforming God who sits at the potter's wheel, molding you into something you could never imagine. Having considered that, now consider where you would like to be in your walk with Jesus? What growth do you want to see? Ask Him now to take you there. Ask Him to take your clay and mold it as He chooses.



### Reading /

**Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17**  
Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.

This promise of Jesus gives us rich insight into His method of formation and discipleship. In this scene, Jesus is calling ordinary men into something extraordinary. If we pause and really look at this passage, we will see that Jesus architects a threefold plan for how He will transform those He calls and loves. 1. Jesus calls us to be WITH Him. 2. Jesus invites us to become LIKE Him. 3. Jesus then equips us to live FOR Him. This is literally how we structure our discipleship and formation at Exchange. Our discipleship courses all land in these three categories (WITH, LIKE, FOR). Christ invites us to apprentice with Him. An apprentice spends time with his teacher (rabbi), watches him meticulously, mimics him, and then becomes like him. Then he is commissioned to go and live as he did, thus making much of Him. We become like what we behold.

Jesus says that he WILL make us into something altogether different. There

is no “maybe” in this sentence. This is a promise. Jesus is not in the business of tweaking. He does not just move some furniture around in our lives. He will not be added as an appendage or a hobby. He desires to come into our lives and complete a total renovation of every single room in our house. He gives us a new obsession—Him. He gives us a new model—Him. He gives us a new mission—His. This will simply not happen with disordered loves. Jesus explains that we must say goodbye to inferior obsessions (lay down our nets) and embrace His expertise of forming the clay into a new and better purpose. He wants to be our first and primary love and He is worthy of it.

Much of our lives have been de-formed or mis-formed over years of going along dysfunctional cultural grains. Jesus promises to do the hard and gritty work of counter-formation against the grain of culture. The way he does this is to conform you into His image (Romans 8:30). This means we must be His apprentice, watching His every move and asking Him to make us like Him. Begin even now to imagine what

He desires for you. The one who walked along the shore, looked at these lowly fishermen, heart pounding for them, and called them to His side. That same one identifies you, calls you to Himself, with enormous plans for your growth and maturity in Him. You may wonder if you have grown at all with Him. You have. He is growing you and transforming you. But He definitely wants more of your heart. He wants every room in your

heart, especially that upstairs closet that you may have locked him out of years ago. He wants to transform even that in this upcoming season. But He wants your eyes to be locked in on Him and not the transient things of this world (Col 3:1-4). Trust today that He promises to transform you through long obedience in the same direction. Allow Him to identify and eliminate those things in your life that stand in His way.



### **Reflection /**

What “area” of your life do you think Jesus wants to renovate in this upcoming season?

What are you “white-knuckling,” unwilling to give Him? Let Him have it so He can transform it.

Reflect on how God has grown you in the last year? Ask someone who knows you well, “how have you seen God grow me this year?”



### **Response /**

#### **Prayer:**

God, show me how you have already transformed me. Will you make me like Jesus? Will you transform all of me that has been deformed? Show me what You want me to do. Help me to co-operate with You as you transform me. Make me your apprentice in Your workshop. Give me a new obsession. Renovate my heart and give me a renewed fire for You. Amen.

#### **Resources:**

*Dallas Willard Renovation of the Heart*

## The Promise of Rest



### Preparation /

As you begin your time today, be honest with how tired you are. Be honest with the busyness in your life. Be honest with how you are even now trying to explain it away. Be honest...do you want rest? Can you imagine what real rest looks like? Ask Jesus to show you real rest today. He said He would.



### Reading /

#### Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

For the second day in a row, Jesus is inviting us to come to Him. Again, He has a promise attached to an invitation. This is one of the most heartfelt promises I can imagine Jesus uttering. He knows how tired and burdened we are. He cares deeply for our souls, and He sees how ragged they are. The good shepherd described in Psalm 23 promises to restore our souls. This is the same word used for the potter remaking the spoiled clay in Jeremiah 16. Christ sees the fatigue in our eyes and hears the creaking in our souls. So, He invites us in to sit awhile.

Jesus promises to give us rest if we seek it in Him. As we sing a lot at Exchange, "all His promises are yes and amen."

St. Augustine famously said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." True rest can only be found in Christ and in what He has accomplished in our place on the cross. I have heard it said, "I will rest when everything is finished." Jesus whispers, "you don't rest when the work is done, you rest because the work will never be done." Another way to say it would be Jesus saying, "you are invited to rest because I have already finished the work." His gospel and finished work on the cross give us tremendous freedom from trying to earn His love or His rest through our puny efforts. It would never be enough.

Our unwillingness to rest has everything to do with arrogance and pride. We actually believe that we don't need it. How laughable is that? We convince ourselves that things will slow down eventually...as it continues to speed up. We think that we can handle it, even though we have watched others burn out with even lesser loads. We need margins on the page. Margin is the space

between your limits and your load. We need inhales before exhales. We need rest before rigor. We are simply not strong enough, and it was designed this way. We are not omni-anything. There is no swagger in the presence of Jesus. He says rest, we should rest. He says come, we

should come. As a two-year-old friend of mine told me recently, “He makes me lie down in a big green park.” Yes, He does sweet Haddon, yes, He does. And who wouldn’t want to lie down in a big green park?



## **Reflection /**

Return to the Preparation questions above. Are you being honest with how exhausted you are?

What has made you so exhausted? Surely Christ has not put these burdens on you. List and cast your cares on Him today, knowing that He cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Dwight Eisenhower said, “What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important.” How does this land with you?



## **Response /**

### **Prayer:**

Jesus, slow me down. Make me present to what You have said today. Welcome me into Your yoke and teach me to walk at Your cadence and Your pace. Make me more of a human being than a human doing. Thank you for Your gentle and lowly heart towards me. Teach me the humility and courage to practice sabbath. Lead me to the “big green park” and make me lie down. Amen.

### **Resources:**

*The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer

*Margin* by Richard Swenson

*Gentle & Lowly* by Dane Ortlund

## The Promise and Picture of His Pursuing Love



### Preparation /

Saying we understand the love of God is like saying we understand the depths of all the oceans on earth. We do not. We cannot. We spend most of our lives snorkeling in a puddle of understanding His love. Reading passages like the following allow us to strap on the scuba gear and drop into the depths. Today, simply read these passages in their entirety and observe the heart of Christ that pounds for you.



### Reading /

Luke 15: 1-7

John 15:13-15

John 14:21

John 10:1-18

Luke 15:11-32

Luke 19:10

These passages give us high-definition pictures of God's pursuing love for us. See the shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep in a radical pursuit of one wayward sheep. We hear Him calling us His friend. Unlovable us...His friends! We see Him promise His love to those who love Him. We see the intimacy of the good shepherd knowing and committing to His sheep. We see the father running toward the rebel, lavishing Him in extravagant grace and gifts. We see One who came to seek and save. He does the seeking. He does the finding. He does the running. He does the pursuing. He expends his energy for a people who lose drive and focus. His heart never wanes, while ours diminishes by the hour. Just think about that for a minute today. When we are running the completely opposite direction in our foolish refusal to receive his goodness, He follows and lures us to Himself. When we show up

at His door covered in mud, He doesn't ask us to enter through the mudroom. He welcomes us in the front door and offers us his best robe. He does none of this because He is required to. He does all of this because He is driven by love. A love that burns deeper than any love we have ever experienced.

This promise of pursuit is not only for the most dramatic scenes with the wayward. This is true for you and me on Tuesday morning, as we enter the mundane of the week's rhythm. This is true for you and I on Thursday evening, when we are exhausted from the week. This is true for you and me on Sunday morning, when we sit in church and believe the lie that we are unseen and unloved. This is true for you and me in the dark of the night when we feel painfully alone and unchosen.

He is pursuing us now. On this day. In this moment. He wants all we have and all we are. From the top of our head to the bottom of our feet, He wants and deserves it all. And He will pursue until it is all His. Why? Because He loves us. He knows no other way.

 **Reflection /**

Which of these texts really drove home this promise for you today? What image of Jesus do you need on the forefront of your mind when you think about the love of Christ?

How does this pursuing love motivate you today to think about yourself or love others differently?

 **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

**Prayer:**

Father, your goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life. The reason I can pray to You is because You love me first. You pursued me and I am forever different because of that. Thank You for coming through on Your promise to pursue me all the way to the cross. Help me today to remember how much You love me. Echo it in every moment of my day. Lead me to others now with a love that looks like Yours. Help me pursue others as You pursue me. Amen.

# The Promise of Satisfaction



## Preparation /

As you begin your time today, answer this simple question: What do you want? This is a very Jesus-like question. It seems high level but then quickly becomes very deep. If we really answer this question seriously, we quickly realize that we have deep, unmet longings. What is it you really want in this season? Is there something in which you are placing your hope for satisfaction?



## Reading /

John 4:13-14

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

One of the most intimate moments we see of Jesus is when He is at Jacob’s Well, having a conversation with a Samaritan woman in the heat of the day. He sees her and shows her that He knows all about her, detailing her painful relationships and exposing her suffocating social status. Like all people, this woman is longing for satisfaction in every possible sense. She thirsts for it relationally, but even more so thirsts for it spiritually. For all of us, there are things that we long for. Moments come in life when we realize that some or all the things we are going after and striving for may just not satisfy like we thought they would. C.S. Lewis described our earthly longings well when he wrote, “If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”

Jesus promises that drinking of His “water” will bring ultimate satisfaction. It is a humbling experience when your desires and affections fall flat in the light of superior pursuits. Only Christ can reveal what is most worth our utmost pursuit. St. Augustine explained that this was a matter of “rightly ordered desires.” When Christ finally climbs His way to the top of our desires, we find ourselves satisfied in a way we have never been. David expressed a longing like this in the wilderness of Psalm 63:1,5 saying, “Oh God you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water... My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.”

Whether we realize it or not, all our deepest spiritual longing is to know God personally. When Jesus talks about the living water, He is referring to the Holy Spirit, who satisfies like nothing or no one else. Jesus further explains, On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers



of living water.” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37–39).

The Holy Spirit is a guide who points us to Jesus in all things. He points us there because that is where true soul satisfaction is to be found. May we lean

into Him today and may rivers of living water flow out of us and nourish those around us. May we echo the words of Psalm 90:14 in saying, “satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”



### **Reflection /**

Return to the initial question from the Preparation section, “what do you want?”

What desires do you have today that may be out of place/order?

In what ways could you be satisfied in Christ instead?



### **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

#### **Prayer:**

Jesus, show me your glory today. I pray that Your light would drown out the glitter of things that look like gold. Rightly order my desires for You. Satisfy my thirst today. Amen.

# The Promise of Trouble



## Preparation /

We have heard it said that you are either coming out of a storm or about to enter it. This is life, especially if we are serious about following Christ. Take a minute and reflect on the difficulty of your current season. How is the weight of living in this world weighing on you today? How do you typically deal with that weight? Christ wants you to be honest. Is it too much to carry on your own? Is there courage to be found?



## Reading /

### John 16:33

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

This promise is not necessarily one that makes it onto a coffee mug. The first sentence isn't exactly a warm embrace. These surrounding chapters give us tremendous insight into the heart and honesty of Christ. He is talking directly to his disciples in this "farewell discourse." He cares so much for these apprentices. He cares enough to be honest. In a consistent fashion, He does not sugarcoat this life of following Him. His message has been the same since the day He called them to Himself. He never said it would be easy. This is a narrow road that few find or choose. This is a road filled with trouble and difficulty. In today's passage, Jesus promises tribulation (trouble) ahead. Isn't that wonderful?

More times than not, we act surprised when life in Christ gets hard. Though we would never say it out loud, we still believe somewhere deep down that in calling us, Jesus handed us a brochure promising our best life now, free of pain and filled with ease. Though He never

ever says this, we twist His words to match our short-sighted idol of comfort.

What fool says yes to trouble? Why would we jump on board with this? Who willingly invites tribulation into their life? But Jesus never gave us that brochure. Instead, He is the all-knowing realist who tells it like it is. "Listen, it's been tough and it's gonna remain tough." But Jesus never leaves us there. There is another sentence to this promise. This is what will happen to you, but this is what I have done. He tells us our condition and chases it with His care (1 Peter 5:6). This is the predicament, but here is a promise. This is chaos, but there is a Conqueror. I promise calamity but offer courage. You may feel like a victim, but I am the victor.

There is a difference between safe and secure. Following Christ in this world is hardly ever safe, but we can rest secure. Security comes in knowing what has been accomplished for us on the cross. Security comes in knowing who holds us. He may not be safe, but he always is good. As the old hymn says, "things over our head are still under His feet."

This promise helps us to not be surprised

when we face trouble in this world. This world is marred by sin and groans in brokenness. We hear its groaning loud and up close through the pain and difficulty of life, especially in trying to faithfully follow Christ. But we can take heart. We serve a conquering King, One who reigns supreme in this world and the one to come.

Trouble may come today. It helps us to not cling so tightly to the fleeting and inferior things of this world. This is not our home, but while we live here, we will be troubled victors. For the joy set before us, we can endure, knowing that the trouble will one day be silenced, and it will have its end forevermore.



## **Reflection /**

What trouble /tribulation are you coming out of or sitting in right now?

In this same passage, Jesus also promises the comfort of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-14).

How does this buoy us up for the troubles of this day?



## **Response /**

**Prayer:**

God, I know that none of the troubles of this day have caught You by surprise. You have gone before me and scouted out the land. Therefore, I thank you for leading me by Your goodness into the unknown of today. I trust You. Help me to trust You more. Thank You for not candy coating the realities of this life. If following You includes trouble, I will still follow You. Thank you for entering all of it with me. Now lead me into what You have in store for me. Give me courage and fix my eyes on You. And when pressing need and circumstance allow no immediate refreshment or reprieve, teach me better how to rest in You. Amen.

**Resource**

*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* by Tim Keller

*Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop

*Every Moment Holy* by Douglas Kaine McKelvey

## The Promise of Presence



### Preparation /

If you are reading this in the morning, think about all that lies in front of you today. Think about the meetings, responsibilities, tasks, phone calls, interactions, and unknowns that today holds. Name some of them even now. The anxieties of all of this could cripple you in this moment. Life can be overwhelming. Yet Christ is not overwhelmed. And Christ is not aloof. Christ is here. Today. For you and me.



### Reading /

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Emmanuel was the name given to Jesus long before His birth. This name describes Him perfectly as it means “God with us.” Jesus left heaven to be with us. He came to be alongside us and one of us. In no other religion does a god come down the “mountain” to be with his people. In most religions, people need to climb up the mountain of good works or self-effort to attain unity or acceptance. Christ flips the script and comes down. God with us.

Even in this passage where Christ gives this great commission, Jesus reminds them of who He is and who he will be. He explains that all authority is His.

Everywhere. In the places that He is sending them, He is present in His authority and reign. His final words are that He is “with them always.” This is who He has been before creation and throughout time. He takes up residence everywhere. He is in the center of every moment and every room. Is He in the center of your moments and your rooms?

Christ’s promise is He is present with us in every moment, for all of time. What does this mean for you in this moment? Christ is present with you on your drive to work, as you make the kids breakfast, as you change yet another diaper, as you have that meeting you don’t want to have, as you await a doctor’s report, as you watch your parents get older, as you feel like a failure, as you are told you are not good enough, as you celebrate a small win, as you parent a teenager, as you are a teenager, as you wrestle with addiction, as you mourn the loss of a relationship, and as you don’t want to face the day.

Jesus, Emmanuel, says, “I am with you. I have always been with you. I haven’t

given up on you. I actually want to be with you. I promise. You can trust me. I have never, not once, broken a promise. I can't break this promise because it would go against my character. If I did, I would cease to be God. So here I am. In it all."

Is Christ meeting you in this very moment? Can you sense His presence in the room? Can you hear Him whispering this promise again? Always means always.



### **Reflection /**

When you wake up tomorrow, you can choose to acknowledge and believe whether He is with you or not. Take this place and write a short little wake-up prayer for tomorrow morning. Something like this, "Jesus, You waited for me to wake up. Here You are. Now go with me into everything this day holds"



### **Response /**

Prayer:

Jesus, Your presence is enough. Amen.

## The Promise of His Return



### Preparation /

As you begin your time today, consider the year 3022. Where will you be? What will you be doing? Who will you be with? Where does Jesus fit in? Where are the worries of 2022?

Does what you imagined have any bearing on how you live today? Slow down in this moment and be honest with yourself. How much do you think about eternity? Does it concern you? Does it excite you? Ask Christ to give you a better picture of his return and what is to come.



### Reading /

John 14:1-3

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

As the saying goes, if you fail to plan then you plan to fail. Most of us realize the importance of planning for our futures, which is evidenced by the abundance of resources available for our retirement and financial planning. We make budgets. We write wills. We have daily/weekly/monthly planners for all our activities. Even during all this planning, the future causes most of us great concern because we cannot guarantee what tomorrow holds. The anxiety inducing unknowns of tomorrow often sabotage our peace for today. Even as the wave of tomorrow’s complexities roll in, Christ promises

that our ultimate futures are secure and settled. When Christ explained to His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them, He also promised that He would return to bring them home to be with Him. When Christ returns, He will make all things new. That’s not a wish upon a star. That’s a promise from the One who made you and me. The fulcrum moment of history was Christ’s “first coming” which we celebrate at Advent. Our basic calendars and understanding of history are literally divided into before and after this day. His second coming will be a day that ushers in a complete restoration of all the broken mess we live in now. The mere thought of that day should fill our hearts with wonder and longing. That day is the day that makes sense of this day. That day gives value to these days. We live here in the light of there.

The promise of His return should give our souls peace. It should cause us to consider our lives differently, knowing what lies ahead. We know that the

last page of this book is merely the introduction to an even better book and a bridge to a “better country.” So much of this current earth is so good but imagine the restored version of it all. As CS Lewis said, “What would it be to taste at the fountainhead that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating?” Our future is centered on Christ as is the New Heaven and New

Earth. Being convinced of this, we then realize our need and joy to center every day of our lives on Him as well. God cannot tell a lie (Titus 1:2). When Jesus says He is on his way, He is on his way. No matter what is on our plate now, dessert is coming. We can plan on it.



## **Reflection /**

Return to your picture of 3022. After today’s reading, do you have a renewed longing for eternity? If Christ were to return tomorrow, would you be ready? Would that excite you? Why or why not?

What would it look like for your today to be centered on Jesus?



## **Response /**

**Prayer:**

Jesus, one day I will see You face to face. You will return. And when You do, I will finally have no words. I long for that day. Help me long for that fountainhead even more. Thank you for Your promise to make all things new and all sad things untrue. Help me to live this day considering that day. For Your fame and your renown. Amen.

**Resource**

*The Glory Revealed* by Andrew Davis



# Statements From The Cross

In Jesus' darkest moments, we are given a glimpse into His heart and mind. As He humiliateingly and painfully hung on a cross, Jesus still expressed concern for family, His enemies, sinners, and You. In the coming pages and days, center your heart towards the heart of Christ as He hung on the cross...for you.



# What's in store this week:

## Centered: Statements From The Cross

<b>Sunday, April 10th</b>	Forgiveness
<b>Monday, April 11th</b>	Numbered With Christ
<b>Tuesday, April 12th</b>	Belonging To Jesus
<b>Wednesday, April 13th</b>	Jesus, Forsaken For Us
<b>Thursday, April 14th</b>	The Crucified King
<b>Friday, April 15th</b>	It Is Finished
<b>Saturday, April 16th</b>	The Resurrected King

# Forgiveness

## Preparation /

Before you begin to read the Scripture, consider what forgiveness means and how it affects you daily, ask the Lord to prepare your heart for a deeper understanding of His forgiveness, and take a moment to write out a simple prayer.

## Reading /

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

For the last week of our journey through the season of Lent together, we are going to linger at the foot of Jesus’ cross and meditate on his seven last words. I admit that it would be much more comfortable to rush past all the dark bleakness of horror and death here, then set up permanent residence on Resurrection Sunday’s glorious morning. But, the sweet fruit of Easter only grows in soil watered by Jesus’ blood. So, let’s resolve to stare unflinchingly at the cost of our forgiveness and redemption. Allow your imagination to drift back to that day—after being condemned to death in a midnight mockery of a trial, after being beaten to ragged shreds by professional Roman torturers, after carrying his own cross in a horrific parade through the streets of Jerusalem and up Skull Hill just outside of town, after being stripped naked for the pure humiliation of it, after being nailed down to the wood of the cross to maximize the agony of his every breath, after being hoisted up just high

enough that hecklers could still curse and spit on him, Jesus offers these words of forgiveness.

There are a hundred thousand (and a hundred thousand more!) things to say about this moment. It’s the very literal crux of the story of the world. All of humanity’s disgusting rebellion against God falls like a cosmic hammer to crush the only person in history who embodied the great commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-38).” In that moment, the One who is fully God and fully Man deals with sin and death once and for all. But let’s pause and gaze at the character of Jesus revealed by his first of seven statements from the cross--Jesus extends the offer of forgiveness to his killers, and he offers that same forgiveness to us now.

Consider the words of Jesus’ friend John. He was one of the twelve who lived closely with Jesus through the years of his public ministry; he was present at Jesus’ execution, and he was an

eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection three days later. As an old man, with a long lifetime of memories from serving Jesus and leading his people, John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." When we're truly honest about our sin, and when we agree with God about all its brutal wrongness by voicing our confession, he

responds by quick, complete forgiveness and purifying us from it all. Another way to say "purify" is to say "cleanse." Jesus doesn't hold our sin over our heads to force us to stay in line. Like the perfect Father, he draws us a warm bath called "forgiveness," and he gently washes away all our muck so we can live clean and free.



## Reflection /

Have you spent time recently confessing your sins to Jesus? Will you take a moment to share your secrets and struggles with him?

Do you truly trust that He will forgive you and purify you? Consider if there are any areas of shame you hold onto and ask Jesus to help you trust and believe his forgiveness.



## Response /

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

### Prayer:

Jesus, your forgiveness is overwhelming. Having done nothing wrong, you took the weight of every consequence that should have been ours. We acknowledge that we leveled the blows. We confess that we are the unjust, the torturers, the hecklers and humiliators. Jesus, we beg forgiveness. We stand amazed at your kind offering to remove every bit of guilt and shame from us. Jesus, thank you for placing your righteousness over us. Thank you for the gift of freedom and life! Jesus, help us trust your forgiveness, to live as though we are truly free, and to extend this forgiveness to others.

**Scriptures for further reflection:** 1 John 1:8-9, Hebrews 7:23-28, Psalm 51

 **Preparation /**

Before you begin to read the Scripture, consider the phrase “numbered with the transgressors” and what that means about you. Ask the Lord for faith to trust Him and write out a simple prayer.

 **Reading /**

**Luke 23:32-33, 39-43**

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on his left...One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Christ was crucified between two thieves. These are sinister, violent men receiving the just wages of their deeds. The prophet Isaiah saw this moment hundreds of years before it occurred when he wrote of a mysterious Suffering Servant, “numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). When humanity chose teams--one made up of

decent, honest folk, and the other made of the vile and lawless, Jesus was placed squarely in the second group, despite the fact that He was innocent of all sin. Do you know who really belongs in that crowd? Me. I know how apt my heart is to rebel against what I know is right. I know how easy it is to fall from the tightrope of loving God with my whole being and loving my neighbor as myself. And the same is true of you. We’re rightly on the losing side, save for the fact that Jesus chose to take up his place in the middle of us all.

The God we trust and follow is not looking down his nose at us from a pristine, heavenly castle far away. No, He wins his bride, establishes His kingly reign, and sets about making all things new exactly in the center of our sinful mess. We see these details in light of the chapters written after this one, yet somehow a crucified criminal sees it by defiant faith in the man dying next to him. This thief knows that Jesus’ death is minutes away. He knows with terrible clarity that this is the last day of his life, too. When he asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom,

he's declaring that his last breath won't be his last breath, that Jesus' death will be followed by Jesus' sitting on a throne to rule the world. The audacity! That kind of trust in Jesus, and that kind of allegiance to Jesus transforms a guilty wretch into a citizen of heaven. Dwell on Jesus' words: "Today you will be with Me in paradise."

These two criminals are anonymous for more reasons than the fact that it might

have been a detail unnecessary to the story. No, they're anonymous so that we will see ourselves in them. Even now, we are given the opportunity to choose to insult Jesus or to turn to Him in trust and allegiance. And so, we are given the same assurance by our Savior--whether on a cross or in paradise, we will be with Him. Because He was "numbered with the transgressors," we can be numbered with Christ the righteous.



### **Reflection /**

How does changing places from 'numbered with the transgressors' to 'numbered with Christ the righteous' affect your trust in and allegiance to Jesus?

In what ways does knowing you are a citizen of heaven influence how you choose to live here and now?



### **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

#### **Prayer:**

Jesus, we come to you, asking boldly for things we do not deserve. We are trusting Your character - that You are who You say You are and You do what You say You will do. Jesus, You promise us You and Your kingdom. Paradise! Jesus, thank you! Thank you for inserting Yourself into our place, as the transgressors, the criminal, the wretch. Thank You for giving us Your righteousness and with it the gift of life with You now and forever. Jesus, we love You, help us trust You.

Scriptures for further reflection: Genesis 8:1, Exodus 2:24, 1 Samuel 1:19-20, Isaiah

## Belonging To Jesus

### Preparation /

Before you begin to read the Scripture, think about how the idea of “family” fits into your story for better or worse, and ask the Lord to show how you belong in His family, and write out a simple prayer.

### Reading /

John 19:25–27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

On its surface, this word from Christ appears to be straightforward: Jesus loves His mother and is concerned for her future, so He ensures that she will be cared for by one of His disciples. And that is true. But there is something deeper going on here, and we must not miss it.

Despite the fact that we know the name of Jesus’ mother, he calls her, “woman.” And though this would be a respectfully appropriate way for a man to address someone, it’s no way for a son to refer to his mother. Why is John the gospel writer obscuring her identity and distancing her from her family relationship to Jesus? If I’ve learned anything from reading the

Bible over the years, it’s that nothing is there by accident. So, the question remains--why? The answer is that the gospels are not just telling the story of the happenings of Jesus’ life (though they do that with truthful integrity). Instead, these writers are telling us the good news about Jesus with the express intent of helping us see what’s really going on in those events. Thus, Jesus is not simply taking care of His mom. He’s demonstrating for us how His family grows and lives together.

Jesus takes a woman out of aloneness and gently plants her in a new family. To belong to Jesus is to join a family. Our old allegiances, family ties, preferences, distastes, and anything else that would divide “us” from “them” are replaced by the unity that comes from gathering as brothers and sisters around Jesus’ table. Speaking of the differences between Jewish people and Gentiles, the apostle Paul puts it like this, “For he (Jesus) himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making

peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16). Let's dwell on the beautiful truth that Good Friday is not the first Mother's Day (as theologian Fleming Rutledge puts it), but rather it is the day when all of us who own Jesus as

our king were adopted into a new family forever. And let's strive to embody that kind of healthy, loving relationship as we learn to live together as a church made up of diverse people united by belonging to that family.



### **Reflection /**

Are there any personal preferences, distastes, or anything else that is causing division in your relationships? Confess these things to Jesus and ask Him how peace and unity can be restored.

Think about the people Jesus has given to you to be your family. How can you care for them this week? Is there a need you have that they could care for this week?



### **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

#### **Prayer:**

Jesus, thank You for our family. We thank you for a taste of your kingdom here and now. For the way You unify us through Your forgiveness and grace. We all stand before You as the forgiven sinner, the newly made citizens of Heaven! Jesus, help us look at one another as forgiven and love one another as You love us.

Scriptures for further reflection: Ephesians 2:1-22, Isaiah 56:1-8, Romans 12:3-13

# Jesus, Forsaken For Us

## Preparation /

Before you begin to read the Scripture, consider what it would mean to be forsaken, ask the Lord to renew and strengthen your faith in him, and write out a simple prayer.

## Reading /

Mark 15:33-34

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

How do we begin to comprehend what it could mean for Jesus to be forsaken by God? He, who is himself fully God and fully man, screams out the question that has crushed so many of us facing deep pain: Why? Only darkness answers Him. Only silence answers Him. We know about the violence of Jesus’ public execution, but the gospel writers don’t hone in on that with gory details. Instead, two gospel writers tell us that Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” To them, this is the truly ghastly horror of His death. In His letter to the Galatian church, Paul writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’. (Galatians 3:13)” And again in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who

had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Sinless Jesus became sin for us. Blessed Jesus became cursed for us. We could spend our lives trying to plumb the depths of that truth, and I’m not sure we would have even begun to scratch the surface of what it truly means. It’s important to say along with the church around the world and throughout history--God didn’t do this to Jesus. God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son participate in this substitutionary curse by their unified will. As Jesus himself says in John’s gospel, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father. (John 10:17-18).

It’s no trite branding that we call ourselves “Exchange Church.” At the core of our identity is the trade Jesus made on our behalf. He was forsaken so that we could be united to God forever.



Jesus was cursed so that we could be blessed. Jesus became sin so that we sinners could become the righteousness of God. In the face of the staggering price of our redemption, Jesus paid it all. As one old hymn puts it, "Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the sky of parchment made / Were every stalk

on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade / To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry / Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky."



## **Reflection /**

Is there an area in your life where you feel forsaken?

How does knowing that Jesus took your place as forsaken change the way you see that situation?

Ask Jesus to help you believe you are never alone because you are united with Him forever.



## **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

### **Prayer:**

Jesus, we will never know what it means to be forsaken by God, because You accepted that on our behalf. You took the ultimate consequence of our sin away from us. Jesus, oh how You love us! Thank You for taking our place and bringing us to Yourself. May we attempt to love You even a fraction as much as You have loved us. You are so good to us. May we remember and live knowing we are loved by You.

Scriptures for further reflection: John 10:14-21, Psalm 22, Galatians 3:10-29

# The Crucified King

## Preparation /

Before you begin to read the Scripture, consider some of the seemingly insignificant details of your day to day, ask the Lord to help you see him as trustworthy, and write out a simple prayer.

## Reading /

John 19:28-29

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge of a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.

By now, it may be obvious that everything--everything--about the way Jesus defeats sin and death is upside down. He’s the true king of the whole world, and in this story He carries a scepter while wearing a crown and royal purple robe. However, it’s in mockery at His trial before Pilate the Roman governor. Jesus, like a king, is lifted above the crowd. However, He’s not on a throne, He’s hanging from a cross. Indeed, even his execution plaque reads, “The King of the Jews.” Our God conquers by dying. He is exalted by humiliation. His strength is displayed to everyone through utter weakness.

So, when Jesus says, “I thirst,” we are not simply hearing the very real desperation of a man undergoing His own tortuous execution. No, in the midst of it all, Jesus is demonstrating his unassailable power

and control over the whole situation. Let’s pay close attention to the beginning of verse 28. Jesus knows that his mission is accomplished, and He undertakes the following actions so Scripture would be fulfilled. This particular prophetic prediction comes from Psalm 22, and says, “My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.” The portrait John paints for us is that of paradoxical power. Christ is not mere victim of jealous religious leaders teaming up with the occupying forces of imperial Rome. On the contrary, he is fully aware of every validating point along the path of the redemption of the world, and he doesn’t miss a single detail.

So, if Jesus the king inaugurates His reign at his own crucifixion, and like a king He rules even over the details of Scripture being fulfilled, then He most certainly deserves our trust. He deserves our adoration. He deserves our commitment. He deserves our worship. He deserves our allegiance. Let’s joyfully renew our allegiance to Christ the king together today.



## **Reflection /**

Think back to a time in your life that seemed upside down or out of control and consider the ways Jesus was working in the details of that season.

Does remembering that Jesus is not only aware of, but in control of, every detail help you trust Him? Ask Jesus to help you trust Him.



## **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

### **Prayer:**

Jesus, you are in every detail, great and small. Even in the darkest moment, You are in control. We thank You for being our reigning King. Thank You for loving us. You are worthy of our trust! You are worthy of our worship! Jesus, help us remember. Help us trust and love You more.

## It Is Finished

### Preparation /

Before you begin to read the Scripture, think about the ways you have felt indebted to someone else, think about what it means for Jesus to you cancel your death of sin and really set you free. Write out a simple prayer.

### Reading /

John 19:29-30

A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

So, Jesus has fulfilled the Scriptures. He has substituted himself for sinners like us. He has borne the full weight of the penalty of death that sin dragged into the world when our first mother and father chose to rebel against God's good rule. From that story in Genesis 3, we hear God's curse upon the serpent echoing through the years, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Now Jesus feels the agony of a snake bite, even as He victoriously grinds the serpent's skull into the dirt.

Can you feel the utter finality of it? It. Is. Finished. In English, there's some ambiguity to the word "finished." It just means that something is done, that

it's over. But Jesus is being a bit more specific here. When He says that it is finished, He is saying that the work is finally complete, that the full debt is paid off, that nothing is left undone. This may be the hardest saying from the cross for us to accept. If we give our allegiance to Jesus, then every sin we have ever committed is paid in full. And the sins we will commit tomorrow? They're covered, too. It runs against the grain of everything we could devise ourselves. When we realize we've broken someone's law--or worse, when we've broken someone's heart--our natural response is to grovel and scrape, to treat the relationship like a sore spot we just can't resist poking over and over again. But God isn't like that. It's not the fear of His discipline, but rather his kindness that leads us to turn from our sins (Romans 2:4).

It's like the story Jesus told of a ne'er-do-well son who wasted his inheritance in open rebellion against his good father. When the son comes to his senses and abandons his washed up, pigsty life to return home, he fully expects to be demoted from "son and heir to the

father's fortune" to "scorned servant who should be grateful he has work to do and a cot to sleep on." But how does the father respond? With tears of relief and joy, with a vulnerable and wholehearted bear hug, with a party to remember for ages, with clean-smelling clothes, and with a ring of responsibility

and authority. When we walk the same path from wherever—we've-been back to the Father's house, the same welcome is ours. Let us receive it with joy because it is finished.



### **Reflection /**

Is there an area in your life that you are allowing to remain a 'sore spot'? An area that you have not accepted Jesus' gift of healing for? Confess that to Jesus and ask Him to help you receive the kind gift of COMPLETE forgiveness. Ask Jesus to help you trust Him when he says "It. Is. Finished."



### **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

#### **Prayer:**

Jesus, You are victorious! You have completed the exchange! Everything You have said You will do, You have done. Jesus, You paid for the curse our choices bought. We no longer live under darkness and death but in You have light and life. In kindness and love You welcome us into Your family and give us every best gift. Jesus, thank You! Help us accept Your healing and live with joy!

Scriptures for further reflection: Hebrews 10:1-4, Luke 15:11-32, Romans 8:1-4

# The Resurrected King

## Preparation /

Before you begin to read the Scripture, consider what committing your life to Jesus has meant or could mean. Ask the Lord to give you the courage to submit to his good leadership and write out a simple prayer.

## Reading /

Luke 23:44-46

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

And so we come to the last day of our vigil at the foot of the cross. The week began with Christ saying, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing,” and it ends with, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Every word from the cross has been a battle--not just a battle to speak through the agony of a torturous death, but battle against evil itself, against the Evil One himself. As Jesus Himself said in John 8:34, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” And in Ephesians 2:1-3 we find that, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now

at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.” In his crucifixion, Jesus is doing close combat, waging war against everything that would stand in the way of God’s good design to rescue the world He created and loves.

Now, at the paradoxically victorious moment of His death, and with His final breath, Jesus hands over His spirit to His Father. He isn’t giving up or fading into a bright sunset, though. Once again, Jesus is operating with kingly authority--even over the moment when His body ceases to live. When Jesus was just a boy, his parents found him in the temple (after a days-long search!), and He responds to them, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” Jesus has trusted God to be a good Father, and now He rests the full weight of His life on the character and identity of God. To quote Fleming Rutledge one more time, “...indeed, he was, all the way to the final, dreadful, unthinkable moment, still trusting: Father, into thy hands I

commend my spirit. A perfect life lived, a terrible death died, all for the sake of bringing you and me into the near presence of that same Father forever, with him.” So let us rest the full weight

of our lives on the character and identity of God. Let us live between the events of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday full of hope, and fully committed to our crucified king.



### **Reflection /**

How does Jesus committing himself to the Father encourage you to do the same?

What do you sense Jesus might be saying to you as the season of Lent comes to a close? Write that down and share it with someone you trust.



### **Response /**

Write out a prayer of response and/or use the corporate prayer below.

**Prayer:**

Father, we recognize that the only thing we add to the story of salvation is the sin that made it necessary. Thank You for loving us, rescuing us, and uniting us to Yourself by trusting in Jesus. Empower us by Your Spirit to commit our spirits into Your caring hands so that we might live in the power, joy, and hope of Your resurrection. Help us respond together to the way You have demonstrated Your love to us. To You be the glory forever. Amen.

Scriptures for further reflection: Psalm 31, Psalm 118, Ephesians 1:3-14

# Notes



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