

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR GOD



**WHERE
ARE YOU?**

**WILL YOU
PLEASE
LEAD ME?**



**WILL YOU PLEASE
FORGIVE ME?**

**HOW CAN
I THANK
YOU
ENOUGH?**

MATTHEW 7:7

**ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU;
SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND;
KNOCK AND THE DOOR WILL BE
OPENED TO YOU.**



**THE ASK IS OURS,
THE ANSWER IS HIS.**

PRAYER: EXPLORING THE HEART OF GOD | CONNECT 7 DAILY DEVOTIONS

PRAYER

EXPLORING THE HEART OF GOD



It has been said, “Prayer is to the soul what breath is to the body. When breathing sick. When praying becomes unpleasant or burdensome, the soul is sick. When the Christian stops conversing with heaven,

then hell begins to speak.” Prayer can be defined as a heart-to-heart talk with God. Prayer links our needs with God’s infinite resources.

The Bible contains over 375 references to prayer. Barna research says 84% of adults in the US pray at least once a week. What are your prayer habits? Do you pray every day? Do you have questions when it seems as if God does not answer your prayers? Are you satisfied with your prayer life? Even among pastors a poll revealed that 37% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their prayer life. Would you like to grow your prayer life?

Jesus’ Disciples even asked Him to teach them how to pray. Prayer can be as simple as a heart-to-heart talk with your best friend or prayer can be a gut wrenching plea for help. God wants us to experience prayer as little children trust their parents to supply their needs and help them in times of trouble. God wants to build a trust based relationship with us. One way we do that is by asking questions of the one we trust the most. He has promised to hear and answer us in the way that is best for us.

During the season of Lent March 6 (Ash Wednesday) through April 21 (Easter) our worship services are going to focus on prayer. We will have our traditional Ash Wednesday services with imposition of ashes, and celebration of the Lord’s Supper at 1:00 and 6:30 pm. During each of the six weeks of Lent we will focus on a different aspect of prayer. On Sundays and Mondays the worship services and sermons will begin the exploration of our weekly theme. On Wednesdays we will have a chance to dig deeper and more fully apply what each weekly theme means for our lives. Everyone is invited to attend our **Wednesday 1:00 pm Lenten Services**. Because these services will include our school children we will have both traditional and special age appropriate object lessons and songs. In the evening on Wednesdays we will resume our simple **Lenten suppers** in the lower level from **5:30 until 6:15 pm**. Our **Wednesday Evening Lenten Services** will be held at **6:30 pm** in the Narthex, overflow area. They will include traditional Lenten songs, prayers, Bible readings and time for discussion and reflection on our weekly themes. We will have child care available for children preschool to 4th grade. We will finish the evening service by 7:15 pm. On Maundy Thursday, we will have our traditional Maundy Thursday services with the celebration of the institution of the Lord’s Supper at 1:00 and 6:30 pm. Finally, on Good Friday, we will have our traditional Tenebrae service of darkness at 6:30 pm.

Lent Worship 1:00 & 6:30 pm

Lenten Supper 5:30 pm

Child Care included

March 6

Ash Wednesday

Theme: *God, Will You Please Forgive My Sins?* Psalm 51:1–13 (14–19)

Readings: Joel 2:12–19, 2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10, Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Sunday March 10 & Wed. March 13

Theme: *God, Are You Listening?* Matthew 6:9

Readings: Deuteronomy 26:1–11, Psalm 91:1–13, Romans 10:8b–13, Luke 4:1–13

Sunday March 17 & Wed. March 20

Theme: *God, Will You Please Lead Me?*, Luke 22:39–46

Readings: Jeremiah 26:8–15, Psalm 4, Philippians 3:17–4:1, Luke 13:31–35

Sunday March 24 & Wed. March 27

Theme: *Lord, Help Me Overcome My Doubt?*, Mark 9:24

Readings: Ezekiel 33:7–20, Psalm 85, 1 Corinthians 10:1–13, Luke 13:1–9

Sunday March 31 & Wed. April 3

Theme: *How Can I Say Thanks?*, Psalm 89:1–8

Readings: Isaiah 12:1–6, Psalm 32, 2 Corinthians 5:16–21, Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

Sunday April 7 & Wed. April 10

Theme: *God, If I Could Only Have?*, Matthew 7:7–12

Readings: Isaiah 43:16–21, Psalm 126, Phil. 3:(4b–7),8–14, Luke 20:9–20

April 14

Palm Sunday

Theme: *God, will You save Us now?*, John 12:12–13

Readings: Deuteronomy 32:36–39, Psalm 118:19–29, Philippians 2:5–11, Luke 22:1–23:56

April 18

Maundy Thursday 1 & 6:30pm

Theme: *Lord, is it I?*, Luke 22:21–23

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31–34, Psalm 116:12–19, Hebrews 10:15–25, Luke 22:7–20

April 19

Good Friday 6:30pm

Theme: Tenebrae (Service of Darkness)

April 21

Easter

7 AM Sunrise

Theme: *Where Are You Lord?*, Luke 24:1–12

Readings: Exodus 15:1–11, 1 Cor. 5:6–8, John 20:1–18

10 AM Festival

Readings: Isaiah 25:6–9, Rev 5:6–14, Mark 16:1–8

Connecting to Worship: March 6

Theme: *God, Will You Please Forgive My Sins?* Psalm 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Readings: Joel 2:12–19, 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10, Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Monday, March 4

The Beauty of Brokenness

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit. Psalm 51:17

Kintsugi is a centuries-old Japanese art of mending broken pottery. Gold dust mixed with resin is used to reattach broken pieces or fill in cracks, resulting in a striking bond. Instead of trying to hide the repair, the art makes something beautiful out of brokenness. The Bible tells us that God also values our brokenness, when we are genuinely sorry for a sin we have committed. After David engaged in adultery with Bathsheba and plotted the death of her husband, the prophet Nathan confronted him, and he repented. David's prayer afterwards gives us insight into what God desires when we have sinned: "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (Ps. 51:16–17). When our heart is broken over a sin, God mends it with the priceless forgiveness generously offered by our Savior at the cross. He receives us with love when we humble ourselves before Him, and closeness is restored. How merciful is God! Given His desire for a humble heart and the breathtaking beauty of His kindness, may another scriptural prayer be ours today: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23–24).

Loving Father, I want to bring You joy by having a humble and repentant heart today.

Tuesday, March 5

A Legacy of Repentance

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. — Psalm 51:17

All nations have heroes, but Israel may be alone in making epic literature about its greatest hero's failings (Ps. 51). This eloquent psalm shows that Israel ultimately remembered David more for his devotion to God than for his political achievements.

Step-by-step, the psalm takes the reader through the stages of repentance. It describes the constant mental replays, the gnawing guilt, the shame, and finally the hope of a new beginning that springs from true repentance.

In a remarkable way, Psalm 51 reveals the true nature of sin as a broken relationship with God. David cries out, "Against You, You only, have I sinned" (v.4). He sees that the sacrifices God wants are "a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart" (v.17). Those, David has.

In his prayer, David looks for possible good that might come out of his tragedy and sees a glimmer of light. Perhaps by reading this story of sin others might avoid the same pitfalls, or by reading his confession they might gain hope in forgiveness. David's prayer is answered and becomes his greatest legacy as king. The best king of Israel has fallen the farthest. But neither he, nor anyone, can fall beyond the reach of God's love and forgiveness.

Wednesday, March 6

Hurting God

Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight. —Psalm 51:4

When we hurt another person, we hurt God. If I wrong you, I am also offending Him. If I steal from you, I am robbing Him. If I lie to you, I am lying to the One who is truth. If I take your life, I destroy what is precious to God. This truth is often forgotten in the lax moral environment of our culture.

A top officer of a Japanese financial institution was in tears as he heaped blame on himself for his corporation's collapse. We too may feel sorry when our actions inflict undeserved suffering on others. This is commendable. But when there is deliberate wrongdoing, a tearful apology is incomplete if God is left out of the confession. Until we see sin for what it is—rebellion against God—we have not come to grips with it.

When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). And in Psalm 51 David confessed, "Against You, You only, have I sinned" (v.4). Surely David knew he had stolen another man's wife and murdered a loyal soldier. Yet he went to the heart of the matter—no excuses, no rationalization. He had sinned against God! That's the admission God is looking for, because He longs to give us His mercy and forgiveness.

*O Lord, return to me Your power
That once by grace I knew;
Forgive the sin that grieves Your heart,
And help me to be true. —Anon.*

No sin is little, for it is against an infinitely holy God.

Connecting to Worship: March 10

Theme: *God, Are You Listening?* Matthew 6:9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven

Readings: Joel 2:12–19, 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10, Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Thursday, March 7

Your Father Knows

Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matthew 6:8

I was only four years old as I lay by my father on a floor mat on a hot summer night. (My mother, with a baby, had her own room at the time.) This was in northern Ghana where the climate is mostly dry. Sweat covered my body, and the heat parched my throat. I felt so thirsty I shook my father awake. In the middle of that dry night, he rose up and poured water from a jar for me to quench my thirst. Throughout my life, as he did that night, he exemplified the image of a caring father. He provided what I needed. Some people may not have a good father figure in their lives. But we all have a Father who is strong and ever-present and who does not disappoint us. Jesus taught us to pray to “our Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:9). He told us that when our daily needs confront us—food, clothing, shelter, protection (v. 31)—“your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (v. 8). We have a Father who is always there. Night or day, whenever the going gets tough, we can trust that He will never abandon us. He has promised to care for us, and He knows better than we do what we need.

Thank You, Lord, for the privilege of coming to You as my Father. You know my needs before I even ask. Thank You that You will never turn me away.

Friday, March 8

Our Source of Provision

The Lord is near to all who call on him. Psalm 145:18

In August 2010, the attention of the world was focused on a mine shaft near Copiapó, Chile. Thirty-three miners huddled in the dark, trapped 2,300 feet underground. They had no idea if help would ever arrive. After seventeen days of waiting, they heard drilling. Rescuers produced a small hole in the mine shaft ceiling, and that hole was followed by three more, establishing a delivery path for water, food, and medicine. The miners depended on those conduits to the surface above ground, where rescuers had the provisions they would need to survive. On day sixty-nine, rescuers pulled the last miner to safety. None of us can survive in this world apart from provisions that are outside of ourselves. God, the Creator of the universe, is the one who provides us with everything we need. Like the drill holes for those miners, prayer connects us to the God of all supply.

Jesus encouraged us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). In His day, bread was the basic staple of life and pictured all the daily needs of the people. Jesus was teaching us to pray not only for our physical needs but also for everything we need—comfort, healing, courage, wisdom.

Through prayer we have access to Him at any moment, and He knows what we need before we even ask (v. 8). What might you be struggling with today? “The Lord is near to all who call on him” (Ps. 145:18).

Connecting to Worship: March 13

Theme: *God, Are You Listening?* Matthew 6:9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven

Readings: Joel 2:12–19, 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10, Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Monday, March 11

Dial 91:1

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. — Psalm 91:1

Most people know that dialing the numbers 9-1-1 in the United States will get them in touch with emergency help. It's so simple that even preschoolers have saved the lives of family members by using it. Three numbers do it all. In one case, a woman's car had been hijacked with her and her infant son inside. She dialed 9-1-1 on her cellular phone, but the hijacker was totally unaware of what she had done. With the police dispatcher listening, the young mother cleverly included clues about her location as she talked to the hijacker. Police were able to locate her and her baby and arrest the criminal. In an emergency, help is as close as three pushes on the phone keypad. Often, though, the situations we face cannot be remedied by human rescuers. Many times our crisis requires divine assistance. When that happens, we can call a different kind of 9-1-1—Psalm 91:1. There we find the help and protection of our Almighty God. This verse reminds us that God is our “shelter” and that we can rest in His shadow. When we face the crises of life, we often try to survive on our own. We forget that what we need most, God's protection and the comfort of His presence, are available for the asking. The next time spiritual danger strikes, dial Psalm 91:1.

*Under His wings, I am safely abiding,
Though the night deepens and tempests are wild;
Still I can trust Him—I know He will keep me,
He has redeemed me and I am His child. —Cushing*

Tuesday, March 12

Our Safe Place

I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” Psalm 91:2

My very first job was at a fast-food restaurant. One Saturday evening, a guy kept hanging around, asking when I got out of work. It made me feel uneasy. As the hour grew later, he ordered fries, then a drink, so the manager wouldn't kick him out. Though I didn't live far, I was scared to walk home alone through a couple of dark parking lots and a stretch through a sandy field. Finally, at midnight, I went in the office to make a phone call. And the person who answered—my dad—without a second thought got out of a warm bed and five minutes later was there to take me home. The kind of certainty I had that my dad would come to help me that night reminds me of the assurance we read about in Psalm 91. Our Father in heaven is always with us, protecting and caring for us when we are confused or afraid or in need. He declares: “When they call on me, I will answer” (Psalm 91:15 nlt). He is not just a *place* we can run to for safety. He *is* our shelter. He is the Rock we can cling to for refuge (v. 2).

In times of fear, danger, or uncertainty, we can trust God's promise that when we call on Him, He will hear and be with us in our trouble (vv. 14–15). God is our safe place.

Dear Father, thank You for being my Rock and my safe place.

Wednesday, March 13

He Will Reply

He will call on me, and I will answer him. Psalm 91:15

I was elated when I came upon the Twitter page of my favorite Korean movie star, so I decided to drop her a note. I crafted the best message I could and waited for a reply. I knew it was unlikely I would receive a response. A celebrity like her would receive an enormous amount of fan mail every day. Still, I hoped she would reply. But I was disappointed. Thankfully, we know God responds to us. He is the “Most High,” the “Almighty” (Ps. 91:1). His position is exalted and His power is limitless, yet He is accessible to us. God invites: “Call upon Me, and I will answer” (v. 15 nkjv). An ancient legend tells of a monarch who hired weavers to make tapestries and garments for him. The king gave the silk and the patterns to the weavers with the strict instructions to seek his aid immediately if they had any difficulties. One young weaver was happy and successful while the others were always experiencing trouble. When the boy was asked why he was so successful, he said, “Didn’t you notice how often I called for the king?” They replied, “Yes, but he’s very busy, and we thought you were wrong in disturbing him so frequently.” The boy answered, “I just took him at his word, and he was always happy to help me!” Our God is like that king—only so much greater. He is loving and kind enough to care about our smallest concern and faintest whisper.

Lord, it’s amazing to me that You—the God who created the universe—care about me and want me to come to You in prayer. Thank You for loving me so much.

Connecting to Worship: March 17

Theme: *God, Will You Please Lead Me?*, Luke 22:39-46 On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” 41 He knelt down and prayed, 42 “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him

Readings: Jeremiah 26:8–15, Psalm 4, Philippians 3:17—4:1, Luke 13:31–35

Thursday, March 14

God’s Hidden Hand

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:16

My friend was adopted by a missionary couple from the United States and grew up in Ghana. After his family moved back to the US, he began college but had to drop out. Later, he signed on with the military, which eventually helped him pay for college and took him all over the world. Through it all, God was at work, preparing him for a special role. Today, he writes and edits Christian literature that ministers to an international audience. His wife also has an interesting story. She failed her chemistry exams during her first year of college due to the strong medication she had to take for epilepsy. After some careful deliberation, she switched from studying science to studying American Sign Language, which had a more manageable workload. Reflecting on that experience, she says, “God was redirecting my life for a greater purpose.” Today, she is making His life-changing Word accessible to the hearing-impaired. Do you sometimes wonder where God is leading you? Psalm 139:16 acknowledges God’s sovereign hand in our lives: “Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” We don’t know how God will use the circumstances of our life, but we can rest in the knowledge that God knows everything about us and is directing our footsteps. Though His sovereign hand may seem hidden, He’s never absent.

Dear Lord, help me to trust You even when I don’t understand.

Friday, March 15

Give It to God

Then [Hezekiah] went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. 2 Kings 19:14

As a teenager, when I became overwhelmed by enormous challenges or high-stakes decisions, my mother taught me the merits of putting pen to paper to gain perspective. When I was uncertain whether to take specific classes or which job to pursue, or how to cope with the frightening realities of adulthood, I learned her habit of writing out the basic facts and the possible courses of action with their likely outcomes. After pouring my heart onto the page, I was able to step back from the problem and view it more objectively than my emotions allowed. Just as recording my thoughts on paper offered me fresh perspective, pouring our hearts out to God in prayer helps us gain His perspective and remind us of His power. King Hezekiah did just that after receiving a daunting letter from an ominous adversary. The Assyrians threatened to destroy Jerusalem as they had many other nations. Hezekiah spread out the letter before the Lord, prayerfully calling on Him to deliver the people so that the world would recognize He “alone . . . [is] God” (2 Kings 19:19). When we’re faced with a situation that brings anxiety, fear, or a deep awareness that getting through it will require more than what we have, let’s follow in Hezekiah’s footsteps and run straight to the Lord. Like him, we too can lay our problem before God and trust Him to guide our steps and calm our uneasy hearts.

Connecting to Worship: March 20

Theme: *God, Will You Please Lead Me?*, Luke 22:39-46 On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” 41 He knelt down and prayed, 42 “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him

Readings: Jeremiah 26:8–15, Psalm 4, Philippians 3:17—4:1, Luke 13:31–35

Monday, March 18

Hearing God

Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” 1 Samuel 3:10

I felt like I was underwater, sounds muffled and muted by a cold and allergies. For weeks I struggled to hear clearly. My condition made me realize how much I take my hearing for granted. Young Samuel in the temple must have wondered what he was hearing as he struggled out of sleep at the summons of his name (1 Sam. 3:4). Three times he presented himself before Eli, the high priest. Only the third time did Eli realize it was the Lord speaking to Samuel. The word of the Lord had been rare at that time (v. 1), and the people were not in tune with His voice. But Eli instructed Samuel how to respond (v. 9). The Lord speaks much more now than in the days of Samuel. The letter to the Hebrews tells us, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets . . . but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (1:1–2). And in Acts 2 we read of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (vv. 1–4), who guides us in the things Christ taught us (John 16:13). But we need to learn to hear His voice and respond in obedience. Like me with my cold, we may hear as if underwater. We need to test what we think is the Lord’s guidance with the Bible and with other mature Christians. As God’s beloved children, we *do* hear His voice. He loves to speak life into us.

Open our eyes, Lord, that we might see You. Open our ears, that we may hear You. Open our mouths, that we might speak Your praise.

Tuesday, March 19

Your Way, Not Mine

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5

Kamil and Joelle were devastated when their eight-year-old daughter Rima was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia. The disease led to meningitis and a stroke, and Rima lapsed into a coma. The hospital medical team counseled her parents to make arrangements for Rima’s funeral, giving her less than a one percent chance of survival. Kamil and Joelle fasted and prayed for a miracle. “As we pray,” Kamil said, “we need to trust God no matter what. And pray like Jesus—not my way, Father, but Yours.” “But I want so much for God to heal her!” Joelle answered honestly. “Yes! And we should ask!” Kamil responded. “But it honors God when we give ourselves to Him even when it’s hard, because that’s what Jesus did.” Before Jesus went to the cross, He prayed: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). By praying “take this cup,” Jesus asked not to go to the cross; but He submitted to the Father out of love. Surrendering our desires to God isn’t easy, and His wisdom can be difficult to understand in challenging moments. Kamil and Joelle’s prayers were answered in a remarkable way—Rima is a healthy fifteen year old today. Jesus understands every struggle. Even when, for our sake, His request was not answered, He showed us how to trust our God in every need.

I want to be “all in” for You, Father. I trust in Your unfailing love and give myself to You as Your servant today.

Wednesday, March 20

Buckling Up!

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence. Hebrews 4:16

"The captain has turned on the seat belt sign, indicating that we are entering an area of turbulence. Please return to your seats immediately and securely fasten your seat belt." Flight attendants give that warning when necessary because in rough air, unbuckled passengers can be injured. Secured in their seats, they can safely ride out the turbulence.

Most of the time, life doesn't warn us of the unsettling experiences coming our way. But our loving Father knows and cares about our struggles, and He invites us to bring our cares, hurts, and fears to Him. The Scriptures tell us, "This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" (Hebrews 4:15–16 nlt).

In seasons of turbulence, going to our Father in prayer is the best thing we can do. The phrase "grace to help us when we need it"—means that in His presence we can be "buckled" in peace during threatening times, because we bring our concerns to the One who is greater than all! When life feels overwhelming, we can pray. He can help us through the turbulence.

Father, sometimes life is overwhelming. Help me to trust You with all the turbulent moments, knowing how deeply You care for my life.

Connecting to Worship: March 24

Theme: *Lord, Help Me Overcome My Doubt?*, Mark 9:24 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me

Readings: Ezekiel 33:7–20, Psalm 85, 1 Corinthians 10:1–13, Luke 13:1–9

Thursday, March 21

The Antidote for Pessimism

The Lord will give what is good. —Psalm 85:12

Just as the sun can be blotted out by an eclipse, so moods of pessimism and doubt can plunge us into spiritual darkness. At times our situation may seem so desperate that we think even God Almighty can't carry us through. That was the gloomy attitude of Robert Cushman, who recorded his despair on the Mayflower in 1620. He wrote, "If we ever make a plantation in New England, God works a miracle! Especially considering how scant we shall be of victuals [vittles], and (worst of all) ununited amongst ourselves. If I should write you of all the things that foretell our ruin, I should overcharge my weak head and grieve your tender heart. Only this I pray you. Prepare for evil tidings of us every day. I see not in reason how we can escape. Pray for us instantly." In spite of Cushman's fears, God brought the pilgrims to their destination and enabled them to establish a home in the wilderness. The author of Psalm 85 praised that same providence of God. He knew how the Lord had provided for Israel in the past (vv.1-3). Now he called on God to deliver His repentant people from the present evil (vv.4-7), and he confidently anticipated the answer to that prayer (vv.8-13).

Let's not doubt God's all-sufficient enablement. He will carry us through life's darkest hours.

When life gets you down, keep looking up!

Friday, March 22

When You Doubt

Take up the whole armor of God. —Ephesians 6:13

Do you ever wonder whether the Bible can be trusted? Scottish reformer John Knox confessed that he passed through a dark time when his soul was filled with "anger, wrath, and indignation, which it conceived against God, calling all His promises in doubt." Do you sometimes wonder if God exists? The staunchest of Puritans, Increase Mather, wrote in his diary that he was "greatly molested with temptations to atheism." Are you ever so filled with questions that you feel at times like an unbeliever? Martin Luther sadly admitted, "For more than a week Christ was wholly lost. I was shaken by desperation and blasphemy against God." Don't be surprised if you pass through similar struggles. As followers of Christ, we are in conflict with God's enemy, the devil, the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). We wrestle against him and "the rulers of the darkness of this age" (Eph. 6:12). Two of the pieces of armor God has provided for us when we are attacked by doubt are "truth" and "the shield of faith." They can "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (vv.14-16).

As we saturate our minds with God's Word, our faith will be strengthened. Then we'll be able to stand when doubts assail us.

The devil is subtle, deceptive, and sly; He's clever and tricks us to swallow his lie. But his cunning methods we're sure to discern By making God's warnings our daily concern. —DJD

The best protection against Satan's lies is to know God's truth.

Connecting to Worship: March 27

Theme: *Lord, Help Me Overcome My Doubt?*, Mark 9:24 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me

Readings: Ezekiel 33:7–20, Psalm 85, 1 Corinthians 10:1–13, Luke 13:1–9

Monday, March 25

Fresh Faith

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23

When our son was struggling with heroin addiction, if you had told me God would one day use our experience to encourage other families who face these kinds of battles, I would have had trouble believing it. God has a way of bringing good out of difficult circumstances that isn't always easy to see when you are going through them. The apostle Thomas also didn't expect God to bring good out of the greatest challenge of his faith—Jesus's crucifixion. Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus came to them after the resurrection, and in his deep grief he insisted, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were . . . I will not believe" (John 20:25). But later, when Jesus appeared to all the disciples together, out of the dust of Thomas's doubts God's Spirit would inspire a striking statement of faith. When Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28), he was grasping the truth that Jesus was actually God in the flesh, standing right in front of him. It was a bold confession of faith that would encourage and inspire believers in every century that followed. Our God is able to inspire fresh faith in our hearts, even in moments when we least expect it. We can always look forward to His faithfulness. Nothing is too hard for Him!

Thank You, Lord, that Your love is stronger than our greatest difficulties—even our worst doubts or fears!

Tuesday, March 26

Carried Through

Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5

I recently stumbled across some of my journals from college and couldn't resist taking time to reread them. Reading the entries, I realized I didn't feel about myself then the same as I do today. My struggles with loneliness and doubts about my faith felt overwhelming at the time, but looking back now I can clearly see how God has carried me to a better place. Seeing how God gently brought me through those days reminded me that what feels overwhelming today will one day be part of a greater story of His healing love. Psalm 30 is a celebration psalm that similarly looks back with amazement and gratitude on God's powerful restoration: from sickness to healing, from threat of death to life, from feeling God's judgment to enjoying His favor, from mourning to joy (vv. 2–3,11). The psalm is attributed to David, to whom we owe some of the most pain-filled laments in Scripture. But David also experienced restoration so incredible he was able to confess, "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (v. 5). Despite all the pain he had endured, David discovered something even greater—God's powerful hand of healing. If you are hurting today and need encouragement, recall those times in your past when God carried you through to a place of healing. Pray for trust that He will do so again.

Lord, when our struggles feel bigger than what we can handle, help us to find comfort and strength in how You've carried us before.

Wednesday, March 27

A Difficult Hill

He will drink from a brook along the way, and so he will lift his head high. Psalm 110:7

High in a fold of Jughandle Peak in the mountains north of our home in Idaho lies a glacial lake. The route to the lake goes up a steep, exposed ridge through boulders and loose stones. It's a strenuous ascent. At the beginning of the climb, however, there is a brook—a spring that seeps out of soft, mossy earth and flows through a lush meadow. It's a quiet place to drink deeply and prepare for the hard climb ahead.

In John Bunyan's classic allegory of the Christian life, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian arrives at the foot of a steep ascent called the Hill Difficulty, "at the bottom of which was a spring . . . Christian now went to the spring and drank to refresh himself, and then began to go up the hill."

Perhaps the difficult mountain you face is a rebellious child or a serious medical diagnosis. The challenge seems more than you can endure. Before you face your next major task, visit the spring of refreshment that is God Himself. Come to Him with all your weakness, weariness, helplessness, fear, and doubt. Then drink deeply of His power, strength, and wisdom. God knows all your circumstances and will supply a store of comfort, of spiritual strengthening and consolation. He will lift up your head and give you strength to go on.

Father, at this moment I turn to You for strength in my weakness, energy for my weariness, and faith in my doubt.

Connecting to Worship: March 31

Theme: *How Can I Say Thanks?*, Psalm 89:1-8 7 In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. Who is like you, LORD God Almighty? You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

Readings: Isaiah 12:1–6, Psalm 32, 2 Corinthians 5:16–21, Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

Thursday, March 28

Unashamed Loyalty

Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together. Psalm 34:3

Sports fans love to sing their teams' praises. By wearing logos, posting notes on Facebook about their beloved teams, or talking about them with friends, fans leave no doubt where their loyalty stands. My own Detroit Tigers caps, shirts, and conversations indicate that I am right there with those who do this. Our sports loyalties can remind us that our truest and greatest loyalty must be to our Lord. I think of such unashamed loyalty when I read Psalm 34, where David draws our attention to Someone vastly more vital than anything else on earth.

David says, "I will extol the Lord at all times" (v. 1), and we are left to wonder about the gaps in our lives when we live as if God is not our source of truth, light, and salvation. He says, "His praise will always be on my lips" (v. 1), and we think about how many times we praise things of this world more than we praise Him. David says, "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord" (v. 2 nkjv), and we realize that we boast about our own small successes more than what Jesus has done for us.

It's not wrong to enjoy our teams, our interests, and our accomplishments. But our highest praise goes to our Lord. "Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together" (v. 3).

Lord, help me to have Your praise be on my lips and to boast in You. Help me to keep my focus on You.

Friday, March 29

Conceived in Crisis

I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. Psalm 57:1

Marc recalls a moment from his childhood when his father called the family together. Their car had broken down, and the family would run out of money by the end of the month. Marc's dad paused and prayed. Then he asked the family to expect God's answer. Today Marc recalls how God's help arrived in surprising ways. A friend repaired their car; unexpected checks arrived; food showed up at the door. Praising God came easily. But the family's gratitude had been forged in a crisis.

Psalm 57 has long provided rich inspiration for worship songs. When David declared, "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens" (v. 11), we might imagine him gazing up at a magnificent Middle Eastern night sky or perhaps singing in a tabernacle worship service. But in reality David, fearful for his life, was hiding in a cave. "I am in the midst of lions," David said in the psalm. These "ravenous beasts" were "men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords" (v. 4). David's praise was conceived in crisis. Although he was cornered by enemies who wanted him dead, David could write these amazing words: "My heart, O God, is steadfast . . . I will sing and make music" (v. 7).

Whatever crisis we face today, we can run to God for help. Then, we can praise Him as we wait expectantly, confident in His infinitely creative care for us.

Connecting to Worship: April 3

Theme: *How Can I Say Thanks?*, Psalm 89:1-8 7 In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. Who is like you, LORD God Almighty? You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

Readings: Isaiah 12:1–6, Psalm 32, 2 Corinthians 5:16–21, Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

Monday, April 1

Thanks for Inconvenience

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! —Psalm 118:29

Thanking God for the good things He has given us comes pretty easy. But thanking Him for an enduring “inconvenience” can be difficult. Moira MacLachlan (a pen name) experienced a shattering, life-altering event when she was raped and became pregnant. Because of her decision to raise the child, there would be a daily reminder of this violent disruption of life. Moira cautiously likens her situation to Mary’s unexpected pregnancy. She writes, “This world considers any disruption of its thoroughly detailed preparation for a life of convenience a rational excuse for unbridled anguish and rebellion. To [the world], the thankful prayer I raise to God for the radical explosion that took place in my life is akin to insanity. The disruptions in the plans of Mary and me served to bring us both to the same conclusion: Sometimes God’s purpose in shattering the peace in our lives is to remind us that He has a purpose for everything.” Moira thanks God for her beautiful child, and concludes, “Don’t pray for a life of convenience, you might get it—and wouldn’t that be too bad?”

If you’re enduring a long-term “inconvenience,” consider thanking God for what He has taught you through it.

*I thank You, Lord, for bitter things, They've been a friend of grace; They've driven me from paths of ease
To seek the Father's face. —Anon.*

Make friends with your trials, and you will learn from them.

Tuesday, April 2

Aware of His Presence

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. —Genesis 28:16

One afternoon I was deeply engrossed in a book. With the radio and TV off, the entire house seemed quiet. Suddenly my surroundings went dead, as if something alive had departed. And it had—the electricity had gone off! I had forgotten that some electrical appliances emit a barely audible hum. I had grown so accustomed to it that I had lost my awareness of it. The Lord used that incident to expose one of my spiritual problems. I had grown so accustomed to His abiding presence that I was taking for granted the dynamic difference He was making in my life. That painful revelation of my spiritual need also became its cure, and I was able to exclaim with Jacob, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it” (Gen. 28:16). But I do now! Commenting on Jacob’s lack of awareness, pastor and author A. W. Tozer wrote, “That was his trouble, and it is ours. Men do not know that God is here. What a difference it would make if they knew!”

Has your spiritual awareness been dulled because you’ve taken God’s presence for granted? May it be so enlivened today that you too can exclaim, “The Lord is here—and I know it!”

*God is always present with us, Though His face we cannot see; He protects and guides and comforts
All His children faithfully. —Sper*

God's presence with us is His greatest present to us.

Wednesday, April 3

Game of Thanks

Whatever you do, . . . do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:17

Every autumn we throw a scrumptious Thanksgiving feast on campus at Cornerstone University. Our students love it! Last year a group of students played a game at their table. They challenged each other to name something they were thankful for—in three seconds or less—without repeating what someone else had said. Anyone who hesitated was out of the game.

There are all kinds of things that students might gripe about—tests, deadlines, rules, and a host of other college-type complaints. But these students had chosen to be thankful. And my guess is that they all felt a lot better after the game than they would have if they had chosen to complain. While there will always be things to complain about, if we look carefully there are always blessings to be thankful for. When Paul describes our newness in Christ, “thankfulness” is the only characteristic mentioned more than once. In fact it is mentioned three times. “Be thankful,” he says in Colossians 3:15. Sing to God “with gratitude in your hearts” (v. 16). And whatever you do, be sure to be “giving thanks to God the Father” (v. 17). Paul’s instruction to be thankful is astonishing when we consider that he wrote this letter from prison! Today, let’s make the choice to have an attitude of thankfulness.

Lord, teach me the liberating joy of being thankful! Help me to find the blessings that are locked up in the things I complain about and to regularly express my gratitude to You and others.

Connecting to Worship: April 7

Theme: *God, If I Could Only Have?*, Matthew 7:7-12 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Readings: Isaiah 43:16–21, Psalm 126, Phil. 3:(4b–7),8–14, Luke 20:9–20

Thursday, April 4

A Stone or Bread?

What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? —Matthew 7:9

No loving father would give a stone or a snake to his hungry son if he asked him for a piece of bread or a fish. Jesus used the absurdity of that analogy in Matthew 7 to underscore God’s readiness to give good things to His disciples when they asked Him. He wanted them to have complete confidence in the heavenly Father’s provision for their spiritual needs. Sometimes, however, it may seem as if the Lord has given us “stones” instead of “bread.” But in His wisdom, He actually is working through our circumstances to give us something far better than what we requested. An unknown author expressed it this way:

I asked for health that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked God for strength that I might achieve; I was made weak that I might learn to obey.

I asked for riches that I might be happy; I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power and the praise of men; I was given weakness to sense my need of God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing I asked for but everything I hoped for; In spite of myself, my prayers were answered— I am among all men most richly blest. Yes, God always gives us what’s best for us.

We may ask amiss, but He answers aright.

Friday, April 5

Searching and Finding

You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. —Jeremiah 29:13

God will make Himself known to anyone who sincerely desires to know the truth.

Edith Schaeffer tells of a man in China who longed to know, worship, and serve the true God. The Lord honored that desire by leading him to find a torn page from a catechism that had been prepared by a missionary. On it was the question, “Are there more gods than one?” with the answer, “No, there is only one God.” Another question was, “Should we worship idols?” There was only the word “No,” and the rest was torn off. But on the basis of those words he went home and destroyed his demon altars. Then his daughter became ill. “You’ve angered the demons,” chided his neighbors. Hoping to get nearer to God, the man climbed to a 14,000-foot mountain peak and asked God to heal his daughter. Returning home, he learned that her fever had left at the exact time he had prayed. Later in a marketplace he found a copy of Mark’s gospel. After reading it and learning about Jesus, he became a Christian. Do you really want to know God? Search for Him “with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13). Look in His Word and be quick to do what He says. Put your trust in His Son. Then you’ll truly know God.

Man gropes his way through life's dark maze, To gods unknown he lifts his praise; But when he seeks to know God's Son, He finds in Him the Living One. —DJD

Seek, and you will find. —Matthew 7:7

Connecting to Worship: April 10

Theme: *God, If I Could Only Have?*, Matthew 7:7-12 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Readings: Isaiah 43:16–21, Psalm 126, Phil. 3:(4b–7),8–14, Luke 20:9–20

Monday, April 8

Confident Prayer

[Pray] always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. —Ephesians 6:18

As one of Africa’s first explorers, David Livingstone loved its people and longed to see them evangelized. His journals reveal his spiritual concern and deep faith. In late March 1872, he wrote, “He will keep His word—the gracious One, full of grace and truth—no doubt of it. He said, ‘Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out’ and ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will give it.’ He will keep His word; then I can come and humbly present my petition, and it will be all right. Doubt is here inadmissible, surely.” Livingstone had rock-like confidence in the Father’s promises. In our praying we too can exercise the trust that God will not deny our requests when they are in keeping with His will. (By the way, are we reading His Word so that we know His will?) We can defeat doubt when we remind ourselves that no matter what happens in life, He cares deeply about us and longs to give us the wisdom to handle what comes our way (1 Pet. 5:7; Jas. 1:5). Our faith will grow stronger as we realize that our heavenly Father is gracious, delighting to give good gifts to His children (Mt. 7:11). Humbly but confidently, we can come to Him with our requests.

*Thou art coming to a King, Large petitions with thee bring, For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much. —Newton*

When we love God as our Father, we won't treat Him as our servant.

Tuesday, April 9

Signs & Feelings

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. Psalm 119:105

A young man I know has a habit of asking God for signs. That’s not necessarily bad, but his prayers tend to seek confirmation of his *feelings*. For instance, he’ll pray, “God, if You want me to do X, then You please do Y, and I’ll know it’s okay.” This has created a dilemma. Because of the way he prays and the way he thinks God is answering, he feels that he should get back with his ex-girlfriend. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she feels strongly that God doesn’t want that. The religious leaders of Jesus’s day demanded a sign from Him to prove the validity of His claims (Matt. 16:1). They weren’t seeking God’s guidance; they were challenging His divine authority. Jesus replied, “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign” (v. 4). The Lord’s strong response wasn’t a blanket statement to prevent anyone from seeking God’s guidance. Rather, Jesus was accusing them of ignoring the clear prophecies in Scripture that indicated He was the Messiah.

God wants us to seek His guidance in prayer (James 1:5). He also gives us the guidance of the Spirit (John 14:26) and His Word (Ps. 119:105). He provides us with mentors and wise leaders. And He’s given us the example of Jesus Himself. It’s wise to ask God for clear direction, but He may not always give it in ways that we expect or want. Perhaps the larger point of prayer is that we learn more about God’s nature and develop a relationship with our Father.

Lord, it is impossible for us to comprehend Your nature, and yet You welcome us to approach You in prayer. And so we seek Your guidance today and ask to know You in ways we haven't seen before.

Wednesday, April 10

Selfish Prayers

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. —James 4:3

Some people see God as a supernatural change-agent who answers their every whim, a kind of divine genie who stands before them to grant their every wish. Take the well-meaning fan at a basketball game who said, “Our team’s behind. Pray!” Or the executive who left 30 minutes late for an important sales presentation and asked her colleagues to pray that she would get there on time.

People who are preoccupied with such self-centered requests have a very shallow view of God and His redemptive purpose in the world. They see Him as One who exists to provide for their wants and needs, alleviate all their suffering, and make their lives as pleasant as possible. They may get that kind of picture of God from secular novels but not from the Bible.

All attempts to manipulate a sovereign God into serving our own selfish purposes insult Him. And James related selfish praying to “friendship with the world,” which he said is “enmity with God” (Jas. 4:3-4).

For the next few days, let’s analyze our prayers. If they are usually for our own convenience, comfort, or pleasure, it’s time to change our praying.

Forgive us, Lord, our selfish askings,

All that's petty in Your sight;

Oh, help us pray with godly motives

And to seek what's good and right! —DJD

Prayer isn't a time to give orders but to report for duty.

Connecting to Worship: April 14 Palm Sunday

Theme: *God, will You save Us now?*, John 12:12-13 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Readings: Deuteronomy 32:36–39, Psalm 118:19–29, Philippians 2:5–11, Luke 22:1–23:56

Thursday, April 11

A Parade of One

Behold, your King is coming to you . . . lowly and riding on a donkey. —Zechariah 9:9

Parades have long been used as celebrations of great achievements. In American history, the greatest parades focused on people such as pilot Charles Lindbergh, the Apollo 11 astronauts, and war heroes. These celebrations were marked by ticker-tape showers and adoring crowds lining the streets of a major city as bands and celebrities passed in review. But the greatest parade of all time was quite different. It happened in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. It was a simple one-man donkey ride. Instead of ticker tape, the way was lined with garments and palm branches. Perhaps the most remarkable element of Jesus’ ride into the Holy City was its prophetic significance. Sure, the mega-parades of remarkable heroes in more recent days took careful planning, but nothing like the preparation for Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It had been completed and recorded long before it happened. In Zechariah 9:9, the prophet described the scene that would unfold more than 500 years later. When Jesus rode that donkey into Jerusalem, fulfilling prophecy as He went, He was giving us one more reason to shout, “Hosanna!” He indeed was, and is, the promised Messiah.

Jesus, Savior, Friend, and Lord, Now and evermore adored, Always with the Father one, Thee we own as God the Son! —Renwick

If we believe in Jesus' kingship, we'll bow to Him in worship.

Friday, April 12

The Promise of a King

Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey. —Matthew 21:5

For all his education, Austrian-born psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud couldn’t predict how history was going to unfold. When Communist revolutionaries were laying the foundations of Soviet tyranny on the corpses of their own countrymen, Freud wrote, “At a time when great nations are declaring that they expect to find their salvation solely from a steadfast adherence to Christian piety, the upheaval in Russia . . . seems to promise a better future.” How mistaken that godless man was! Freud’s failure to predict the future stands in stark contrast to the hundreds of fulfilled prophecies of the Bible. People may make educated guesses, but only God knows the future. None of the Bible’s prophecies are more wonderful than those about the Messiah. The Old Testament foretold many details of Christ’s life and death, such as His virgin birth (Isa. 7:10-14), sacrificial death (Isa. 53), and even His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Zech. 9:9; Mt. 21:5). How wonderful that the all-knowing God promises that the King who came on a donkey nearly 2,000 years ago will one day return in glory and power (2 Th. 1:7-10). Until then, the same Divine Promise Keeper will care for those who have asked Christ to reign in their hearts.

God kept His promise of the Savior's birth. That wondrous night when Jesus came to earth; And still today the prophets' message rings: He'll come again to reign as King of kings. —Hess

Christ's second coming is as certain as His first.

Connecting to Worship: April 21 Easter Sunday

Theme: *Where Are You Lord?*, Luke 24:1-12 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!

Readings: Exodus 15:1-11, 1 Cor. 5:6-8, John 20:1-18

Monday, April 15

Till He Comes

Do this in remembrance of Me. —1 Corinthians 11:24

Why did Jesus command His followers to participate in what we call the Lord’s Supper or Communion? Because He wants us to remember His death on the cross and to anticipate His return. As He broke the bread centuries ago, He said, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:24). And taking the cup, He instructed, “This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (v.25). The bread reminds us that the Second Person of the Trinity “became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14) so that He could bear our sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). The cup symbolizes the blood He shed “for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28). We must be careful, therefore, not to partake of the elements “in an unworthy manner” (1 Cor. 11:27). The apostle Paul said that each person should “examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (v.28). When we gather around the Lord’s Table to remember Christ’s sacrifice for us, we should search our hearts and confess our sins to God. May we who know Jesus Christ as our Savior obey His commands and faithfully observe the Lord’s Supper—“till He comes” (v.26).

Without the bread and sacred cup I might forget the price That You, Lord, paid so willingly— The utmost sacrifice. —Anon.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper should move our hearts to mend our ways.

Tuesday, April 16

Tears & Laughter

No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping. Ezra 3:13

Last year at a retreat I reconnected with some friends I hadn’t seen in a long time. I laughed with them as we enjoyed the reunion, but I also cried because I knew how much I had missed them. On the last day of our time together we celebrated the Lord’s Supper. More smiles and tears! I rejoiced over the grace of God, who had given me eternal life and these beautiful days with my friends. But again I cried as I was sobered by what it had cost Jesus to deliver me from my sin.

I thought about Ezra and that wonderful day in Jerusalem. The exiles had returned from captivity and had just completed rebuilding the foundation of the Lord’s temple. The people sang for joy, but some of the older priests cried (Ezra 3:10–12). They were likely remembering Solomon’s temple and its former glory. Or were they grieving over their sins that had led to the captivity in the first place?

Sometimes when we see God at work we experience a wide range of emotions, including joy when we see God’s wonders and sorrow as we remember our sins and the need for His sacrifice.

The Israelites were singing and weeping, the noise was heard far away (v. 13). May our emotions be expressions of our love and worship to our Lord, and may they touch those around us.

Lord, You welcome our sorrow and our joy, our tears and our laughter. We bring all of our emotions in their raw honesty to You. May we praise You with our whole being.

Wednesday, April 17

A Dead Man Cannot Save

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and . . . rose again the third day. —1 Corinthians 15:3-4
A young boy stood outside an art store looking intently at a painting of Jesus on the cross. A man approached and asked, “Do you know who that is?” The boy answered, “Yes, sir, that is Jesus the Savior who died on the cross to save me. Those people around Him are the soldiers who killed Him. And that woman who is crying was His mother.” The man patted the boy on the head and walked away. He had not gone far when he felt a tug on his sleeve. The same little fellow he had spoken to moments before said, “Please, sir, I forgot to tell you something else. Jesus is not on that cross anymore. He is alive because He rose again. He is in heaven today.” That youngster knew the living Savior who died and rose and lives today. He knew the truth of the gospel. The climax of the gospel is the resurrection. Every sermon preached by the apostles included the news that Jesus is not dead. Today, no matter how eloquent a sermon may be, it is not the gospel if it leaves Jesus on the cross or in the tomb. A dead man can save no one. Do you personally know and boldly proclaim the living Savior?

I will sing of my Redeemer, And His heavenly love for me; He from death to life has brought me, Son of God, with Him to be. —Bliss

The good news is not that Jesus lived and died, but that He died and lives.

Thursday, April 18

The Resurrection

[Jesus] was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. —Romans 4:25
The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the keystone of the arch of salvation. Remove it and the whole structure of the plan of salvation crumbles in the dust. The good news of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), and that He rose again (v.4). The resurrection of Christ is the proof that His death atoned for sin. The wages of one single sin is death. One sin brought the curse of death upon all mankind (Rom. 5:12-15). If Jesus had paid for all the sins of mankind except one, He could not have risen, for one sin would have been enough to keep Him in the tomb. When Jesus arose, it was proof that He had completely met redemption’s price. When He cried, “It is finished!” (Jn. 19:30), the work was fully done. God was satisfied and then proved the completeness of the work by raising Christ from the dead. This victory should not only be commemorated on a special day each year but on the first day of every week—even every day! Because Christ did not remain in the tomb but conquered death by rising again, we can live in the joy of the full salvation provided by a risen, living, coming Redeemer.

What has that empty sepulcher to say to you and me? It tells us that the Savior's death has set His people free; He died, our sins upon Him laid; He rose, because the debt was paid. —Reich

The resurrection assures what Calvary secures.

Friday, April 19

The Mention of His Name

I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. John 16:22

When the soloist began to sing during our Sunday service, the congregation gave him full, hushed attention. His mellow bass-baritone voice brought them the soul-touching words of an old song by Gordon Jensen. The song's title expresses a truth that grows more precious the older we become: "He's as Close as the Mention of His Name."

We've all experienced times of separation from our loved ones. A child marries and moves far away. Parents are separated from us because of career or health. A child goes off to school in another state or country. True, we have texting and Skype. But we are *here* and they are *there*. And then there is the separation of death.

But as believers in Christ, we have His promise that we are never alone. Though we may feel alone, He hasn't gone anywhere. He's right here, right now, always and forever. When He left this earth, He told His followers, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). He also promised us, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

The silent plea, the whispered mention of His name, even the very thought of Him brings us solace and reassurance. "He's as close as the mention of His name."

Jesus, thank You that You are near. I need You.