



THE
ANCHOR
A FORTY DAY LENT DEVOTIONAL

INTRODUCTION —

Lent is traditionally a forty-day period that is used to prepare a believer to commemorate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. The forty days are calculated differently by churches across the globe, but most begin observing Lent on Ash Wednesday, forty-six days before Easter, and end on Easter Eve, the Saturday before Easter. Sundays are not traditionally counted toward the forty days of Lent, because the church takes a break from the solemn fasting of Lent to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus each Sunday. During the Lenten season, some fast from meat or various things that they feel distract them from focusing on the Lord. As is always the case with fasting, the point is to focus more on Jesus and grow closer to Him, and not just to do things that we think will make us 'look' more holy or religious; do whatever God is leading you to do this season.

This devotional is a tool that you can use to prepare during the season of Lent. It focuses primarily on Jesus and his life. It will follow the tradition mentioned above, beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 13th, skipping Sundays, and ending with Easter Eve on March 30th. Our desire is that by using this devotional, you are able to understand Jesus more fully and are able to focus on Him as we approach Easter.

We hope you'll learn during this time. If there is something that stands out to you, pull out your Bible and read the verse in context. Use the free space to write any additional thoughts or prayers that you would like to add. Think through the questions that are presented. Reflect on what you are hearing from God!

All of the devotions have the same flow to them; we used the 'SOAP' acronym to put them together. 'SOAP' stands for Scripture, observation, application, and prayer. You can even use this acronym after Lent is over to study the Scripture you're reading on your own. In effect, you'll be writing your own devotionals.

We hope you enjoy this book, and that it's useful for growing closer to the Lord. We especially look forward to celebrating Easter with you and remembering Jesus' death on the cross for our sins, and His triumph over death through His resurrection!

FEBRUARY 13TH —

"We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priests forever after the order of Melchizedek."

- *Hebrews 6:19-20 (ESV)*

Have you ever felt lost, out of control, hopeless, or like a rowboat in the middle of the sea getting tossed by the giant waves? It is during these times in our lives that we all realize we need something to ground us, secure us, and give us hope. When we are without hope, we are left paralyzed and defeated with nowhere to go. We all need an anchor. We all need hope!

The Anchor was a common ancient metaphor used by the Hebrews for stability, hope, and security. This imagery emphasized that those who have put their faith in Jesus have a firm basis for spiritual security and an eternal hope for the future.

The word "steadfast" refers to something that is reliable, well-founded, or confirmed. So our hope in Jesus, rather than based on emotions or wishful thinking, provides a firm basis for a life of stability.

This book of devotions is titled "The Anchor," as its goal is to point us to Jesus, the ultimate and only source of true, eternal hope. It is through Jesus that we can approach the throne with confidence [Heb. 10:19] and find forgiveness, love, and grace.

Be blessed on this 40-day journey of discovering the Anchor.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How have you experienced Jesus as an anchor in life?

God, thank you that you have given me the Anchor, Jesus. Thank you that, while my life might not be perfect all the time, I have a perfect hope through Jesus. Help me to discover a deeper and richer understanding of who Jesus really is and who I am through faith.

FEBRUARY 14TH —

"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry."

- *Luke 4:1-2*

One of the very first things we can see from these two verses is that Jesus did not enter into this time of fasting and temptation under his own power. In verse one, Luke wrote that he was "full of the Holy Spirit." When I find myself trying to go through life on my own, without the power of the Holy Spirit, I fail miserably at even the small things. I find myself becoming a grump, and it never fails that I bring others down with me; it usually involves some type of argument with my wife over something as stupid as what kind of toothpaste we should use.

We cannot give what we ourselves do not have. Is your cup full and running over, or do you need to be refueled? I'm reminded of what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:7b: we need to "train ourselves to be godly." Stop "trying" to be godly and start "training!" Find ways to incorporate Jesus into your daily activities. As you walk to class, turn off the music and enjoy the silence, have a conversation with God, or just marvel at nature and God's creation. Life is full of busyness! Find ways to "get away" and be refueled and refreshed by the Holy Spirit, so that each day you "train yourself to be godly."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are some steps you can take to include God in your daily activities? How can you start to train yourself to be godly?

God, thank you for your gift of the Holy Spirit to guide, comfort, and protect us. Help me to have a desire to become more like you each day.

FEBRUARY 15TH —

“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’”

- John 4:13-14

It's easy to find temporal joy in this life. It really is. Money, fame, good grades, relationships, you name it. At the end of the day, though, when you reflect on those things, what's left but a desire for more of it. “If only I could make X amount of money, then things would be perfect.” “If only my friends could witness some of the amazing successes I've had, then they would think the world of me.” “If only I had companionship, then my day-to-day life would run so much smoother.” No, not exactly. These things, while in theory may sound enticing, leave you feeling empty, disappointed, or perhaps only “thirsty” for more.

How wonderful is it, though, that we have a God who, in his mercy, everlasting love and kindness, freely offers us water that doesn't provide temporal joy, but everlasting peace. Your past and present behaviors and circumstances are of no matter to Him, as He loves you all the same, but you have to be willing to accept the water He so freely provides.

Jesus isn't promising immortality with the water that he offers. In fact, he even goes on to explain to his disciples that “in this world you WILL have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” By accepting the water that Jesus speaks of, we will instead be equipped to endure the hardships of this world. He'll protect us, love us, and guide us along His path of peace, and eventually into his open arms in the heavenly realms. What a beautiful promise that is.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Have you accepted the water Jesus has offered you, or are you still holding on to something that's keeping you from everlasting peace and happiness?

Thank you, God. Thank you for so freely forgiving us and accepting us as your dearly loved children. If there's something holding me back from surrendering to you and drinking from your well, make it known to me, please. Help me to humbly come before you now and cast all my anxieties and worries on you, leaving them at the foot of the cross. Please, Father, allow me to drink from your well and encounter you today and every day. Amen.

FEBRUARY 16TH —

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

- *Hebrews 12:1-2*

Every four years, millions of us gather to watch the Summer Olympics. As spectators, we love to watch athletes from around the world overcome great pain and adversity to bring honor to their countries. This is not because we are all sports fanatics. It is because there is a hope within humanity that the hardships we all must endure will lead to something greater.

The writer of Hebrews compares the Christian life to a race. Like any race, we often experience intense pain, opposition and exhaustion. In addition, we are constantly threatened by sin which hinders and entangles. However, we are surrounded by a cheering crowd—"a great cloud of witnesses" (other faithful believers described in Hebrews 11)—which reminds us that we do not run alone.

We also know that Jesus ran this race, enduring the sin of the whole world and yet finished with perfection. He was beaten, spit upon, and killed, yet He endured. His endurance led to great victory that saved us and brought honor to His Father. He now holds the most honorable place "at the right hand of the throne of God."

Running the race God has called you to means that you will face hardship. As you encounter pain, opposition, exhaustion, and the temptation of sin, remember that you are not alone. Today, run a race of honor. Run after Jesus, the one who endured with perfection.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What is hindering you from running the race of honor?

God, thank you for giving me a race to run. Thank you that I do not run it alone. Please give me the wisdom to look to you when I encounter hardship and the strength to persevere. Lord, help me to bring you honor.

FEBRUARY 18TH —

"Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean."

- Mark 1:41-42

Jesus healing people with many types of ailments, including leprosy, is widely talked about in the Bible. But, have you ever seriously thought about this? Often, we overlook the power of Jesus in healing because it's just something He seems to do regularly, but in all reality, the implications of this shouldn't be overlooked.

This passage reveals that in his character, Jesus is compassionate about his people and he yearns to heal them because he is so grieved by the pain they are in. Jesus touches and heals a leper, a person who would normally be exiled and shunned in society during those times. Normally, being in contact with a leper meant that you would also contract leprosy; however, Jesus was willing to take that risk because of his compassion for his people.

We are also shown Jesus' faithfulness. Right after Jesus says he will cleanse the man with leprosy, the leprosy leaves the man immediately. Jesus follows through with his commitment to this man. This reveals that Jesus is faithful and can be trusted.

So often we fail to understand Jesus and put him in a box, limiting him to a human standard, but according to this passage, that is not who Jesus is. He is different from every human; He is God, and he will stay true to his word.

Do you ever find yourself doubting Jesus and his character because of failures you see in others? Set aside a time of prayer and ask the Lord to help you understand him as he is instead of comparing his character to others.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How have you experienced God's true character and faithfulness in your life?

Lord, I know I don't completely understand who you are, but please cleanse my understanding of you and help me see your faithfulness and true character in my life.

FEBRUARY 19TH —

“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

- Mark 7:8

In this passage, the Pharisees criticize some of Jesus' disciples for eating food with “unclean” hands, as this was against their religious custom. This practice was probably derived from Old Testament teachings that prohibited contact with unclean things (Lev 5:2-3). But Jesus replies with this verse from Isaiah:

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

Have you ever asked yourself why we do the things we do? We all grow up following a set of rules and customs that are passed on through generations. Whether we are aware of it or not, we engage in these customs on a daily basis. It is so easy to go through the motions and to follow the crowd without questioning the meaning behind our behavior. Have you ever questioned a social norm or religious custom that you regularly follow?

Jesus is not concerned with religious customs or human traditions. Instead, He cares where our hearts are at regarding all that we do and say. Our main purpose in life is to glorify our God. For He says, “whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31).” What would it look like if we did all things in His name and for His glory?

As you go about your day today, try examining your heart alongside your usual behaviors and thoughts.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What “human traditions” am I following that aren't bringing glory to God?

God, thank you for being a God after my own heart and for your patience with me when I fall into the trap of mindless routines that don't glorify you. Point out the areas in my life where I am living by tradition instead of following you with my heart.

FEBRUARY 20TH —

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

- Luke 11:13

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Those are the promising and encouraging words of truth Jesus tells his disciples. There are no prerequisites, as we're all imperfect. The apostle Paul makes that clear in Romans 3:23, stating that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." How wonderful, though, that we're still able and even encouraged to approach the throne of God through prayer, asking His Holy Spirit to dwell among us.

Jesus makes such a profound statement here. We have the ability to speak with the Almighty God, asking His Holy Spirit to live within us, guiding us along His path of peace. Have you ever taken a moment, in the midst of your busy and perhaps chaotic day, to bow your head before the Lord and simply pray that His Spirit would lead you, direct you, and make your paths straight? Try it. The Father wants to hear from you, and He will respond according to His will and plan for you.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How have you allowed God's Spirit to direct and lead you in your life?

Father God, your love truly knows no bounds. Thank you for so freely offering the incomparable gift of your Holy Spirit. Help me to let go, and allow your Spirit to lead me along your righteous path.

FEBRUARY 21ST —

"His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."'"

- *Matthew 25:21*

Have you ever felt the satisfaction of a job well done? In this passage, the master is encouraging his servant in a job well done. The verse at the top comes from the Parable of the Talents. In this, the master entrusted two of his servants with a small amount of money. The first servant not only invested the money, but he had a good return for his work. He used what he was given and served his master well. In contrast, the second servant, instead of investing the money he was given, hid it in the ground out of fear that he would not be a successful investor. The master grew angry over this because the servant was not given the gift to hide it, but to invest it and serve the master well.

In the same way the master in this parable gave money to his servants, God gives us gifts and talents, skills and abilities. The master in this story wanted his servants to invest his money and get a good return, just in the same way God wants us to invest our time, gifts, money and talents for His glory and His kingdom. The faithful servant in this parable did much with what little he was given. He did not allow fear of failure to dictate his actions, but instead stepped out in faith, believing he could be successful. Someday, we will all face the Lord, and I don't know about you, but I want the Lord to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Think about the gifts the Lord has blessed you with. Think about your personality and the things you are passionate about. Commit to being a person that is faithful with a little, so that the Lord can bless you with much. Figure out what being a "good and faithful servant" looks like in your own life. Take a step of faith! Get involved or take on a position of leadership. Emma Bombeck once said, "When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me'."

REFLECTION QUESTION

Am I faithfully using everything the Lord has given me?

Dear Jesus, Thank you for giving us a clear picture of what serving you with our gifts and abilities looks like and what it doesn't look like. Please help us to be a community committed to serving the Master well. Calm our fears and take away any feelings of inadequacy. Help us to be faithful to your call on our lives and revolutionize the way we view service for Your kingdom.

FEBRUARY 22ND —

“Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.”

- 1 John 2:6

Colossians 1:15-20 shows us that the creator of all things has reached down to us. No one truly meets the God of the universe and leaves unchanged. Throughout the Bible, we see people encounter God and begin to change and grow to be more like Him. How then as Christians do we explain the times where we don't seem to be walking as He did? The answer that Jesus gives us in John 15:4 is that we will only bear fruit if we remain in Him.

A lack of fruit in your life may be coming from a lack of connection with God. Maybe you have become so busy and distracted that you are drifting away from His presence (Hebrews 2:1); your heart is becoming hard and you are not letting Him affect you.

Remaining in Jesus does not naturally happen. Paul instructs you to “train yourselves for godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7). You must be intentional with your time to connect with God. You need scheduled times of Bible study and prayer alone with God where you can drown out all the noise.

If you want to walk as Jesus walked, you must be connected to Him. Don't focus on your failures, but instead fix your eyes on Him. It is by getting to know Jesus and admiring Him that we will become like Him (2 Cor. 3:18).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Read Luke 10:38-42. Do you have time in your life where you stop what you're doing and simply sit at Jesus' feet? How does this play out in your life?

God, thank you that you have chosen to love me. Move me in my heart to seek after you. Let me see more clearly how beautiful you are and let this change me.

FEBRUARY 23RD —

“He must become greater; I must become less.”

- John 3:30

We often live lives of entitlement. We feel that “good” behavior or a hard-working person deserves a just reward. Every day, we make decisions with only our own interests in mind. Yet what we really deserve is death and eternal separation from God. We have all fallen short and have all turned away from God. We are in desperate need of Him because apart from Him, we are corrupt and void of life.

But God became flesh. This is revolutionary. He surrendered his seat in Heaven in order to live as a servant, without any privileges of a King. His life was spent with sinners, outcasts, hypocrites, the dirty, and the unloved. He was mocked and ridiculed. What is more, He died a sinner’s death, in the most detestable way: death by crucifixion. If anyone had a right to feel entitled and to receive the privileges of a king, it was Jesus. Yet he lived a life that couldn’t be farther from the life of a king, in order to bring glory to God.

Living a life like Jesus’ will go against our natural tendency and will require that we die to our flesh. This means fixing our eyes upward and not looking to the world for answers.

Try taking on a position of humility and reverence during your prayer time. Kneel before the Lord with your face to the floor and picture yourself at the foot of the cross. Think about your reaction to the King of Kings dying for your sake.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Are there areas of my life where I feel entitled or where I am living in the flesh?

God, thank you for humbling yourself in such a way as to die for my sins and giving me the ultimate example of love. Rid me of myself and give me more of you in every aspect of my life.

FEBRUARY 25TH —

"Jesus answered them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"

- Luke 5:31-32

In Jesus' day, tax collectors were despised. They were Jews who worked for the foreign Roman government, implementing heavy taxation and often helping themselves to taxes they collected. So when Jesus asks Levi, a tax collector, to follow him, the Pharisees were displeased. They couldn't understand why Jesus, this so-called "man of God," would seek a follower so unworthy, a man considered a traitor by his own people.

Jesus answers them by saying "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Jesus didn't come to find people who are already found. Rather, he came to seek those that are lost. He came as a doctor to heal our souls. In this he tells us that we must step out and seek the "sick" as well, those people who need salvation and a spiritual doctor.

So often we act as a Pharisee. We judge others and forget to minister to them. Jesus showed mercy and compassion to the "sick" people he encountered, unlike the Pharisees, who abandoned the "sick" and dedicated their lives to the "healthy." We are the ones who must seek out the sick now, so that we can share the word of God with them and heal their souls. You can't minister to people you avoid.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Who are the people you know who need Jesus? Are you trying to find ways to tell them about the salvation he offers?

Lord, show me how I act like the Pharisees in my own life, considering myself "righteous" while others might be "sinners". Let me be like Levi instead, ready and willing. Let me have the faith to abandon everything and simply follow you as you ask. Let me depend on you and seek you out daily. Amen.

FEBRUARY 26TH —

"And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world."

- 1 Corinthians 15:17-19

The most important question everyone will ever answer is this: "Who is Jesus?" This question carries eternity on its shoulders and the answer points to the future and life of everyone. If Jesus is an "imaginary friend" or just a guy that lived long ago, we have no hope. However, if Jesus is who he said he was, that being God, then our lives of faith mean something very different.

The historical event of the resurrection is one of the many proofs of Jesus' deity. The importance of this issue can hardly be overstated. Paul himself said, apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ there is no savior, no salvation, no forgiveness of sin, no hope of resurrected eternal life, and Jesus is reduced to no considerable value to us in this life or at its end. Plainly stated, without the resurrection of Jesus, the few billion people who worship Jesus today as God are fools and their hope for a resurrection life after this life ends is the hope of silly fools. Refusing to believe that Jesus rose from the dead means that he is not God and we are still under the penalty for our sins. HOWEVER, all of that said, Jesus DID rise from the dead, which means that we do have hope through faith in him!

And while Christians may indeed face difficulties in life, the fact of the resurrection changes everything. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, he has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again. Jesus was the first to be raised to never die again. He is the forerunner for those who believe in him, the proof of their eventual resurrection to eternal life with God. That through faith is Jesus; we can celebrate a great future with Him in eternity to come.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Who do you say Jesus is? [Matthew 16:13-20]

God, thank you that you have sent Jesus to die in my place, for my sins. Thank you that by rising from the dead, He defeated death, sin, and Satan, and has secured a future for me with You. I declare now and forever that Jesus is God and I will follow Him for the rest of my life.

FEBRUARY 27TH —

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

- Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG)

Reread the passage. Think about what Jesus is saying to us. He said “come to me.” That is his invitation for you to trust in him and truly believe in him. He wants us to know how to take a real rest – in other translations he says “find rest for your souls.” The rest he is talking about is the eternal rest for those who know Jesus.

At the time that Jesus said that, the Pharisees were beginning to resist Jesus’ ministry. They were hostile to his teachings. Jesus is sharing that we do not need to be imposed by the burden of religious legalism. We are not going to earn our way to Heaven or to eternity. No amount of good works will grant us freedom.

Only Jesus can. And He can do that by his beautiful and unforced grace. He loves us so much that he freely allows us to spend eternity with him. Another translation uses the phrase, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” A yoke is a wooden frame that two oxen would be hooked up to in order to carry a heavy load. Jesus is saying that when we are with him, he will keep our load light. Again, it’s his beautiful and unforced grace. Have you thought about that? We do nothing to earn God’s love—He just loves us.

Is there an area in your life where you are trying to earn God’s love? Have you taken time today to think about God’s love and grace for you? There is freedom in knowing that Jesus has taken care of our eternity by dying on the cross for us. There is freedom in knowing that God loves us. Jesus gives us the invitation to know him. Take time today and respond to his invitation. Take time to learn the “unforced rhythms of grace”. Rest in the promises God gives us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How have you responded to Jesus’s invitation? Are you trying to earn God’s love, or are you accepting that he loves you unconditionally?

Lord, thank you for your love. Thank you for your grace. I cannot fathom your immense love for me. Please help me to understand and find rest in your love.

FEBRUARY 28TH —

"When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten."

- *John 6: 12-13*

Jesus' comment here might be easily overlooked, but is profound. Jesus had just miraculously transformed a boy's lunch into enough food to feed some 5,000 people. Everyone present had enough to eat—they actually ended up with more leftovers than what they started with! What stands out to me is that after abundantly providing, Jesus says 'Let nothing be wasted.'

Growing up I was always told to clean my plate at dinner, and some of you may be familiar with sayings like 'waste not, want not.' I don't think this is the only point Jesus is making. We need to recognize who our provider is: God. When He provides for us—our daily bread, a roof over our head, family, friends, jobs, opportunities—we need to recognize who they are from and honor our provider by not wasting them. Instead of wasting, we should be embracing the gifts God gives us and then offer them back to Him in His service and for His glory—to recognize how glorious and awesome God really is, and to help others do the same. This is what the boy did when he offered Jesus his lunch, and Jesus did more with it than the boy, or even the disciples, could have imagined.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What things are you wasting by keeping them to yourself and not offering them to God and to others?

Take some time and think through your day. What you are doing with your time and resources? Ask God to show you how to specifically take leftovers in your day and turn them into a feast—a time to feast on His word and presence, or a feast for others as you give your time and resources to bless them.

MARCH 1ST —

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."

- John 10:1-13

Jesus is called many different names in the Gospels: 'I Am,' The Bread of Life, the Lamb of God, to name a few. These names represent facets of God's character. When Jesus calls himself "the good shepherd," he shows another aspect of himself by comparing the good shepherd to the hired hand.

The hired hand does not own the sheep and cares nothing for them. The sheep are a part of his job, but if danger comes, they are not worth his life. Simply, he is associated with the sheep, but sees them more as a paycheck.

When the good shepherd looks at his sheep, he cares about them. He is fully invested and would risk not only danger, but his very life. When Jesus says, "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep," he is saying, "I lay down my life for my sheep."

Jesus is all in. He cares about and is fully invested in you. He laid down his life for you. When shepherds watched over their sheep, they faced constant danger from lions, bears, wolves, and thieves. In our own lives, there are daily temptations and trials that can come between us and Jesus. Consider the ways you can protect your relationship with Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What would have to change in your life to be able to say you daily lay down your life for Christ?

Father, I thank you that you laid down your life for me; that you love and care for me so much. I pray that I would lay down my life for you daily, just like you laid down your life for me.

MARCH 2ND —

"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.'"

- Luke 9:23-24

The free gift of Salvation is just that - free. But the cost of being a true follower of Jesus is your life.

If we really want to come after him, then we will deny our own comfort, will, plans for the future, etc., so that we can pick up God's will for our lives.

When Jesus told his disciples about the suffering that was to come and the heavy burden of being his follower, he used the image of the most gruesome and shameful death the Roman government had to offer. And he told them to pick up that death daily.

Picking up Jesus' cross involves sacrifice. Jesus gave up his life for you. When you want to save your own life on your own merit, you lose it. There is no way you can save yourself. But if you lose your life for Jesus, if you give your life over to him, then it is saved.

Take some time today to pray and think about the ways God may be asking you to follow him and deny yourself. Often when God asks us to say 'no' to something we desire, he is leading us to something better. Think about times in your life when you said 'yes' to God, even when it was hard. How may God have used those times for good?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

When are times in your daily life where you actively say 'yes' to God?

God, thank you for giving your life for me so I may live through you. Please help me to say 'yes' to you and to pick up my cross daily. Thank you that you are good, that you love me and desire true life for me.

MARCH 4TH —

"Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.'"

- *Luke 7:44-47*

Jesus was invited to Simon the Pharisee's house to eat, but he was not given even the minimal level of hospitality. This woman with a notorious life showed the Messiah more love than a man who trained his whole life in Jewish Scriptures to seek and wait for the Messiah he snubbed.

She was clothed in humility and brought low by an understanding of the sin in her life, so she sought Jesus to love him and elevate him more. Simon was puffed up and so distracted by himself that he could not even minimally love Jesus, let alone put Jesus above himself.

In our own lives, we are notorious for only coming to God with our problems, big events, and tragedies. When our studies are going well, our friends are doing fine, and our families are healthy, it is easy to forget that we need God. We may be diligent with religious activities like going to church and Bible study, but forget about coming to God in humility, welcoming him into our daily lives and loving much.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How can you welcome God and love him more in your own life?

Father God, thank you that you are my God who loves much. You humbled yourself for me. I pray that I can humble myself to welcome you more into my life and love you more each day.

MARCH 5TH —

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

- *Genesis 1:1-3*

Reading through the creation account can be like therapeutic poetry. I like to let my imagination run wild while I read. Imagine an utter void, a deep space in the universe without the thought of a star. Then it starts. Unseen lips announce the arrival of light, a delicate spark rolling off its master's lips. But then it bursts into an explosion of brightness in its full array of plumage—untouched whites, deep purples, blues bleeding into rich reds, energetic oranges gleam with startling yellows, as vibrant hues of green and colors unknown invade the dark.

I prefer to read it out loud or listen to it being read; the effect of the spoken word can be enormous. Notice, God uses His voice as the catalyst for this creative process. Can you imagine having something in your mind come in to being by simply speaking? Incredible!

While this feat is breathtaking, we too have great power in our speech. Scripture tells us we have the power of life and death in the tongue. It also explains that what we say is an overflow of what is in our heart. We can bring forth good from our heart into the world, or we can bring forth darkness. In the Genesis account, we see that God brings order and light to darkness. He doesn't desire for our lives to be without form, void of purpose or good. As the Holy Spirit was present before light entered darkness, so God is near us waiting to shine light and love and purpose into our life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Are your words creative or destructive? Are you speaking light into your life and the lives of those around you, or darkness?

MARCH 6TH —

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

- John 1:1-5

Did you catch that? Read it again. Maybe a third time also, slowly. The first chapter of John is phenomenal, revolutionary, packed with meaning and truth...and worded in a way that is difficult to understand without time and care. Ever wonder if that is intentional? Jesus taught in parables to help people understand. He also spoke at times in what seemed like riddles, which caused the uncommitted to turn away while the earnest followers scratched their heads, slowed down, and dug deeper. Let's dig deeper into John 1:14-16. We find the Word referred to here was made flesh, dwelt among us, and is the Son of God. The Word is Jesus Christ.

Something astounding is that this passage parallels Genesis 1:1-3. From the beginning, Jesus was at work with Father God and the Holy Spirit, creating and providing life and light. This is an incredibly encouraging thought. The physical light that was spoken into existence at the beginning of creation is still shining. In the same way, the spiritual light to men, Jesus, continues to shine life and light into our hearts and this world. It won't end. He will never leave us or forsake us; the darkness has not and *will not* overcome.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What are areas in your life that seem dark?

Lord, I ask that You would shine Your light in and through my life. Reveal to me where I am harboring darkness, and give me Your strength to overcome and live full of Your light. Jesus, help me to dig deeper and make the light of Your word the light in my heart. Amen.

MARCH 7TH —

"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist.

Return to me, for I have redeemed you."

- *Isaiah 44:22 (NIV)*

Do you ever stare up at the clouds, watching them float through the sky? They are so far away that we don't often take in how enormous they really are. They just seem to bob along, but they are so large and far away that we can't tell they are being blasted by high speed winds. Moving these giant, cumbersome blobs is quite a feat.

We think little of fog and mist in the morning when the sunrise burns away the vapor. However, given the proper conditions, fog can fill valleys and cover cities, bringing everything to a standstill. Life can't move forward because the inert vapor has become an encompassing blindfold.

God uses these weather conditions to help us understand the realities of sin. Bit by bit, sin will fill our lives, blind us from truth, and separate us from God—like a thick fog. It grows into a cloud that we can't move of our own accord, which covers our life. God has made great efforts to burn through the fog with His truth and to sweep away the cloud through His grace. To be able to say 'it is finished' on the cross cost Jesus His life, and Christ's is a life worth more than we could ever fathom. Let the enormity of your sin cause you to love Christ more, knowing only He can save you from it, as He calls to you: 'Return to me, for I have redeemed you.'

REFLECTION

Meditate on this verse and repeat the truth in prayer that 'I am a great sinner, and Christ a great savior.'

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind but now I see!*

MARCH 8TH —

"For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit."

- 1 Peter 3:17-18 (NIV)

Often times as children we may experience rewards for choosing to be obedient or do the right thing. I remember as a child getting special privileges like staying up a little later because I did not whine that day or fight with my brothers. However, as we grow up we quickly learn that doing the right thing is not always the most popular choice and in fact can result in persecution.

Sometimes in the Christian realm there is a twisted view that once you become a Christian, all your troubles will magically go away. Jesus tells us the opposite truth in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus is confident that, as believers, we will experience trials and even suffer for doing the right thing, but He was willing to suffer alongside us. As you read above in verse 18, Peter reminds us that Jesus also suffered. The suffering Christian must remember that he has a suffering Lord. You are NOT ALONE in this journey.

My favorite part of John 16:33 is where Jesus says, "...so that in me you may have peace." I find myself getting anxious when I experience trials, and find comfort in this verse. I pray you feel the Lord's peace whenever you experience suffering for doing good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Are you experiencing suffering for doing good? Do you have peace in the midst of that suffering?

Lord, please give me the strength to suffer well for you today. As I follow what is right and good in your sight, give me endurance through the trials that may come.

MARCH 9TH —

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

- *Luke 18:1*

Take a moment to read through Luke 18:2-8. In that time, a woman's value was based on her husband. If her husband died or left, she would have no rights and no value in the eyes of the law. She would live a life of poverty and great struggle.

Can you imagine being a person with no value in the eyes of the law and coming to a notoriously unjust ruler to ask for justice? Now, imagine being told "NO." Would you go back again? And again? Any chance of receiving justice would seem hopelessly impossible. But that is exactly what this woman did; she persevered despite the overwhelming odds against her, and in the end she was granted her request. Why would an "unjust judge," who cared nothing for God nor man, grant the request of a "worthless" widow? Because she was relentless!

Jesus used this story to represent the way we should cry out to God. Notice that the king does not represent God; he is used as a contrast to God's character. If this widow persisted in her request to this wicked judge, how much more should we persist in our request to God, our loving Father?

It can be easy to equate persistence with being bothersome. However, through the eyes of a loving father, a child's plea is anything but bothersome. What's more, through the eyes of our Father, who is just and loves us with an unconditional love, our persistent pleas are always heard (1 John 5:14-15).

Faith is believing what we haven't yet seen. Faith is not blind, though. God has shown us his character and how his heart is for us. This truth we've been given is what we base our faith upon. Not upon our ever-changing circumstances, but on the consistent character of our God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to reflect on God's character. Is there any plea you may have given up on too quickly?

Lord, thank you for your love that never fails. You love when I come to you, you delight when I bring my concerns to you. Please help me to see past my circumstances and trust in you. Nothing in my life is too much for your strong arms to handle! Show me what areas in my life you want me to be relentless in bringing to you, and give me the faith to know that you hear me.

MARCH 11TH —

"Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. And he said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.'"

- Mark 5:33-34

This woman is frightened and trembling at the realization of what has happened to her—so frightened she fell to her knees before the Lord. Why? Why is she trembling so much? What has happened?

This woman has had an incurable bleeding condition for 12 years. She hears that Jesus is in town, so she gets up the strength to push through the crowds of people so she can touch Jesus. She was nervous and scared to touch him in public, but also deeply determined. She knew if she ran to Him and touched Him she would be healed, so she does just that! We see here that the second she touches Jesus, she already fears he will be disappointed with her, so she tries to tell him everything; she tries to explain *why* she had touched Him. He gently and lovingly responds. "Daughter [beloved child], your faith has made you well. Go in peace. [Let your mind and your trembling calm down.] your suffering is over. [I have healed you.]"

God is gentle and compassionate; he deeply desires to heal us. This woman was *healed* by her faith. She believed if she just touched Him, she would be healed. AND SHE WAS! Take a minute and be still; quiet your mind and your heart. If you are suffering today from anything (physical illness, broken heart, anxiety, unforgiveness, guilt, etc.), don't be frightened to go to God with it.

Beloved, he wants you to go in peace. He wants to bring an end to your suffering.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What holds you back from going to God immediately when you are suffering?

Father, thank you for being so gentle. Thank you for not being an angry, distant God. Thank you that I can come to you in this moment with everything that I am suffering from. (Take a moment to let go and tell God what suffering you are experiencing that you want to end.)

MARCH 12TH —

"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)*

Jesus understands our weaknesses because he experienced all the same temptations we experience as he lived his life on earth as a human being. Knowing that Jesus experienced the same temptations and trials we do today can bring a deep comfort. Though Jesus was tempted with the same things we are, he never sinned, giving us encouragement that even though we are tempted, we do not have to give in. How do we stand firm and not give in when temptations come?

We see in verse 15, "...let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God." In other words, 'let us pray.' This verse doesn't just say come pray; it says come *boldly*. How can we come boldly? We can come to God in prayer with boldness and confidence because we can trust that God understands our weaknesses, and promises to give us grace and help us.

Today, when you face trials or moments of weakness, remind yourself that Jesus has faced the same things you are facing. Take comfort in this and go to God with confidence to receive His grace.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Does the realization that Jesus faced all the same testings we do give you comfort and encouragement?

Father, today as I face trials and temptations, let me not be overwhelmed—let me look to you and find comfort that you understand my weaknesses.

MARCH 13TH —

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”

- *Philippians 2:5*

What does it mean to have the same mindset of Jesus? Philippians 2:5 isn't a spiritual quote offered as advice for peace and harmony among others, but is instead a call to model the very attitude of Jesus,

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”
- Philippians 2:6-8 [NIV]

Woah. Jesus, in all of his glory and power, did the most vulnerable thing—God became a baby. Babies need mothers to survive. Not only that, but he became the baby of a 14-year-old mother! Then, for the next 30 years he lived a human life, became a carpenter, and did daily servant tasks...though he is God! But then, verse 8 says that he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death on a cross. And he did all of that for our benefit, that we may be made right with God.

So what does that mean for me? How can I apply Philippians 2:5-8 into my own life? Maybe it means that I don't hold onto any authority I have, and instead serve others. Or maybe it means that I put others' needs or interests before my own. It could even be just acting on what I read in the Bible that day.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How can you “have the same mindset of Christ Jesus” right now?

God, thank you that you humbled yourself through Jesus for our benefit. Thank you for making a way for us and giving us an example to live by. Open our eyes so that we may have a new perspective, and help us to see the people around us in the same way that you see them. I want to live by your example. Amen.

MARCH 14TH —

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

- John 15:5

Have you ever thought about the fact that, when Jesus gave us the Great Commission (Matt 28: 18-20) to go and make disciples of all nations and to baptize them and teach them His words, it is actually going to *happen*? That His Great Commission will one day come to fruition? I recently heard someone say, "Whether I am a part of it or not, God will bring His mission to completion." But how awesome would it be to experience and be a part of the completion of God's mission? God's mission to share His hope and offer of salvation to every neighborhood, every country and corner of this world, is the only mission that really matters in the grand scheme of things.

Read John 15:5 again. Jesus says to us that He is the source of anything good. If you remain in Jesus and act on the words He gives us in His Word, you will bear fruit. But apart from Jesus, you can do nothing significant in the Mission of God.

In Romans 10:14-15, Paul poses the question, "How can people believe if they haven't even heard of the good news of Jesus?" Do we realize that we have all been sent so people can hear the good news of Jesus? That if we claim to be a disciple of Jesus, then those words of Matthew 28:18-20 were spoken to us? Again in John 20:21 Jesus says, "...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you!" We have been sent by God to go and share the hope of the gospel with the people around us, that one day we might witness the completion of God's mission!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How can I stay connected to the Vine? How can I contribute to God's mission?

God, thank you for calling me to be a part of the winning team! Help me to focus on staying connected with you every moment of every day, that I may be able to have a faithful presence in Your mission, not my own. Amen.

MARCH 15TH —

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

- John 17:20-21

As followers of Christ we pray often to Him, but have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus prayed for you? Two thousand years ago, as Jesus was walking this earth, he uttered the words above. When he prayed for "those who WILL believe in me," he was talking about you and me.

It seems like it would be important to take note of what Jesus prayed for. His prayer was rather simple. Not for riches, or good lives, or good health, or even good morals. He prayed that we would "be one" so that the world may believe in him.

He was praying for a unity of love, a unity of obedience to God and His Word, and a united commitment to His will. There are great differences between uniformity and unity. Jesus was not praying that we would all be the same, but that we would share a common love for him and others!

Today, think about how unified you are with others who worship Jesus. Thank God for those in your life who help draw you to him. Contemplate any area where you are not "being one" with others in the body of Christ, and commit to living in unity so that the world may believe!

REFLECTION QUESTION

How is your unity with others in the body of Christ, and what does your unity (or lack thereof) communicate to those who don't know Jesus?

God, thank you that I don't have to live this life alone. Thank you for your body, the church, that is here to strengthen, encourage, and challenge me in my walk with you.

MARCH 16TH —

"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"

- *Matthew 26:39*

This is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, during some of his final moments as a free man. We can see that he is aware of his impending death and in great anguish over what he knew would happen. While Jesus is conflicted, he models for us what true submission to the Father really looks like.

During this moment in the garden, we see the humanity of Jesus up close and personal. He is in the ultimate depths of human despair; one of the gospel accounts (Luke) even says that his sweat was "like drops of blood." Much of that anguish had to come from knowing the physical pain that was set before him on the cross. But, there was also an emotional and spiritual component to his despair—one that came from knowing the Father would forsake him and pour out his wrath on him, so that all of us could be reconciled to God through Christ. Yet through of all this anguish, Jesus' consistent prayer was, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Are you able to say 'not my will, but yours be done' in your life? Take a moment to search your heart. Are there areas that you are having a hard time submitting to God? Take this opportunity to seek God and ask him to give you strength to submit every plan, every problem, and every opportunity to him. May we all follow the example of Jesus in saying, "Not my will, but yours be done."

REFLECTION QUESTION

Is there an area of your life that you have not submitted totally to God?

Thank you, Jesus, that you were willing to submit to the Father in the face of a painful death. Thank you for loving me enough to go to the cross in my place. Give me the strength to submit to your will in all that I do.

MARCH 18TH —

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

- *Isaiah 53:5*

It's difficult to grasp the kind of agony and pain Jesus experienced on the cross. Words like "pierced" and "crushed" describe the intensity of his beatings. While the physical pain was undeniably brutal, the emotional and spiritual pain of being crushed under the weight of our sin must have been unbearable... And to think he endured all of it for us while he deserved none of it! He took on all the sins of the world and carried the burden himself, while we were the ones who deserved his punishment.

Isn't it ironic that His physical wounds healed our spiritual wounds? His pierced, crushed, slaughtered body actually healed our souls. We can even find joy in His wounds because of the freedom and salvation they give us. Instead of experiencing the punishment we deserve, we can now experience peace with God!

Take a moment today to recognize the consequences of sin. It can even be uncomfortable to think about, but the reality is that our sin was what caused Jesus to die. Reflect on the magnitude of his love for us, that he would suffer such a brutal death in order to save us.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Have you ever considered finding joy from Jesus' wounds on the cross?

God, thank you for sending your son to take our punishment. Thank you for the freedom we have from sin and the healing that freedom brings to our spirit. Our salvation is found in no one else!

MARCH 19TH —

"And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments."

- Luke 23:34

Jesus's first words on the cross were, "I still love you." This is the Gospel (good news) at its finest: that God, no matter what we've done, desires to know us and longs for that relationship with us. Do you long for him?

I want to share with you an example of what this type of forgiveness looks like from *Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by A. Leonard Griffith:

A young Korean exchange student, a leader in Christian circles at the University of Pennsylvania, left his apartment on the evening of April 25, 1958, to mail a letter to his parents. As he turned from the mailbox, he was met by eleven leather-jacketed teenage boys. Without a word, they beat him with a blackjack, a lead pipe, and their shoes and fists - and left him lying deaf. All of Philadelphia cried out for vengeance. The district-attorney planned to seek the death penalty for the arrested youth. And then, the following letter arrived, signed by the boy's parents and twenty other relatives in Korea: "Our family has met together and we have decided to petition that the most generous treatment possible within the laws of your government be given to those who have committed this criminal action.... In order to give evidence of our sincere hope contained in this petition, we have decided to save money to start a fund to be used for the religious, educational, vocational, and social guidance of the boys when they are released... We have dared to express our hope with a spirit received from the gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ who died for our sins." When you forgive, you are no longer a victim but a victor.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Is there a situation in your life where you need to become a victor instead of a victim and forgive?

Jesus, thank you for showing me how to forgive and for extending your grace to us. Thank you for loving me even when I feel unlovable because of my actions.

MARCH 20TH —

"Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' And they slapped him in the face."

- John 19:1-3 (NIV)

The trained torturers whipped Jesus with a cat o' nine tails and performed a technique called 'forty minus one' (which means Jesus received 39 lashings). This cat o' nine tails was a whip consisting of stones, broken glass, shell, bones, and other torturous things. The rocks would deeply bruise the skin, the glass would penetrate the skin, and the bone would then rip off the skin. Jesus was struck with this 39 times!

He was beaten beyond recognition and then had a crown of thorns placed on his head by mocking soldiers. He was then forced to carry a cross that weighed an estimated 150 pounds. I don't know about you, but this makes my stomach churn and stirs up anger. Then I remember that my sins—our sins—were responsible for this! Jesus was completely innocent, but yet he *willingly* went through all of this for me and for you.

I'm reminded of the song "How He Loves Us" by the David Crowder Band. Take a minute to truly listen to this song and the words: "Drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes, if His grace is an ocean, we're all sinking." Jesus surrendered his life so that we could be set free from the bondage of sin. Will you accept his offer, place your anchor in something that lasts for eternity, and become a follower of Christ? Or will you continue to be a spectator?

REFLECTION QUESTION

Is there something in your life that is "mocking" Jesus?

Lord, help me not to forget the pain and suffering you went through for me. Thank you for your great sacrifice!

MARCH 21ST —

"About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*'
- which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

- *Matthew 27:46*

In Jesus' last moments on the cross, He cried out to His Father in heaven. These words have impacted many and confused others. Some have wrongly stated that this speaks to the fact that Jesus was only human. In actuality, it demonstrates the intimacy He experienced with His Father as part of the Trinity. Jesus was God incarnate. As the God-Man, he took on mankind's sin. Philippians 2:7 tells us that although Jesus was God, He took on human flesh to give Himself up for us. In Matthew 27, we see the humanity of Jesus feeling separated from His Father, and this takes nothing away from His divinity.

The feeling of being forsaken is devastating, and is experienced by the Son of God during His execution. In Matthew 27 we see something dramatic—for the first time, Jesus is having feelings of disconnect from His Father.

Romans tells us that the result of sin is death—a spiritual separation from God. In Genesis, when Adam and Eve sinned, they were afraid and hid themselves from God. Our own human experience tells us that when we sin, we feel shame: alone, guilty, and distant in our relationships. Sin interrupts intimacy. When Jesus took on the sins of the world, it interrupted his intimacy with God.

We too, in our sin, can feel forsaken. But we can be assured that Jesus died to bring us back into an eternal intimacy with God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Are you experiencing the closeness of your Heavenly Father? Is there unacknowledged sin in your life that is distancing you from God and others?

Jesus, thank you that you were punished on the cross for my sin. Thank you that you experienced separation from your Father so that I never have to. I acknowledge my sin to You now. (Take time to reflect.) I admit all my mistakes to you, and receive Your grace and forgiveness. Restore to me the joy of Your presence, and thank you for bringing me back into a close relationship with You.

MARCH 22ND —

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

- *Philippians 2:8*

Think long about this. The creator of all things humbled Himself. Why did he do it? Surely if anyone has the right to uphold their crown, it is King Jesus. Yet, he laid it down. A passion for his glory and a love for his people drove Jesus to and through the cross (Hebrews 12:2). He knew that His humility would bring us life.

Jesus sets the standard for humility, and it is his example we must follow. From Jesus we learn that humility is painful and it is powerful. We know that humbling ourselves can lead to hurt because it hurt Jesus on Calvary. We choose to put others first and miss out on a chance to build more of our own kingdom. Humility asks us to let a little more of our sinful desires die, and dying is not pleasant. It's no surprise that the King of humility says that following Him will require denying ourselves (Luke 9:23).

The pain of humility is worth it because of its life giving power (John 10:10). It has the potential to change people, ourselves included. Think about a time in your life when someone put your needs before their own and it had a dramatic impact on you. How did it make you feel? Choosing humility allows you to meet the needs of others and love them like Jesus has loved you.

In your struggle to choose humility, look to the cross for comfort, knowing that our King isn't asking us to do anything he hasn't already done Himself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Are there people in your life who need to be served? Do you have any opportunities to humble yourself as Jesus did and love them, at your own expense?

Lord, would you let me learn humility from Jesus? Help me to understand and be impacted more by the gospel right now. Change my heart and bring me to a humble place where I can receive from you and serve others.

MARCH 23RD —

"It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two."

- Luke 23:44-45 [ESV]

The Jews of the New Testament worshipped in the Temple, designed by God Himself to publically display His holiness, compared to the flawed state of humanity. Perhaps the pinnacle of this display is the Holy of Holies. This was the innermost, most sacred space of the Temple. It was where God's personal presence dwelt, and no one was allowed to set foot in that sacred place except the Jewish High Priest, once a year. The Holy of Holies was closed off by a heavy, embroidered curtain—a tangible picture of our spiritual separation from God.

For hundreds of years, humanity lived in this relationship to God, denied free, intimate access by our sin. But, when Christ died, the veil was torn right down the middle! The picture of the impassable wall between God and us was destroyed, representing the closing of the real gap between God and anyone who trusts in Christ.

This is victorious, awesome news! But, do we live in this kind of victory every day? Too often, we get bogged down by the endless to-do lists and projects present in our lives. This leads us to become anxious and depressed—not at all living Jesus' promise of life to the fullest. Instead, remember that Jesus won, the curtain is torn, and anyone in Christ shares in the victory. Take advantage of your intimate access to God, given to you by Jesus Himself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What kinds of anxieties keep you from taking joy in Jesus' victory? What are some ways you can combat these?

God, I praise You for being the Victor over sin and death. When You died on the Cross, you tore down the barrier between You and I. Thank You for going to the Cross for me, and I pray that I could live in Your victory and let it shine to the world. Amen.

MARCH 25TH —

“And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”

- *Luke 24:2-3 (ESV)*

I have a tendency to roll over (no pun intended) this verse in my reading. As the hymn goes, I “know the old, old story.” But, there is so much significance in this verse. Really, our faith rests on the outcome of this verse. That Jesus was truly raised from the dead—and not just stolen away like the Pharisees claimed—was proof positive that Jesus was telling the truth about Himself.

The fact that Jesus came back from the dead meant that death didn’t affect Him the way it affected normal people. It meant He wasn’t cursed with death like normal people. It meant he was the Son of God. And not only did it mean that Jesus was who He said He was, but it meant that He could do what He said He came to do: “give His life as a ransom for many.” That Jesus was resurrected meant that Jesus’ death was accepted by the Father as the sacrifice for our sins!

As Christians, we often talk about the importance of Jesus dying for us, but it’s important to remember that Jesus was resurrected. Jesus’ resurrection proves Jesus’ rightful claims to be able to die for our sins. Not only that, Jesus’ resurrection means that He’s alive right now! He’s the living God! Sometimes I lose sight of that as I read about Him in a 2,000-year-old document, but this verse reminds us that Jesus isn’t still dead—He’s alive right this minute.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are some ways we might treat Jesus like He’s still dead? How can we celebrate His resurrection more often in our own lives?

God, I praise you because You are who You said You were. The empty tomb is proof that You saved me from my sin. Help me to remember to celebrate that you’re the Living God. Amen.

MARCH 26TH —

"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'"

- John 20:21

Jesus' disciples were scared, frightened, and even doubtful that the man they committed their livelihoods to would "live" up to his promises. His death stunned them and the reports of his missing body and resurrection left them overwhelmed and confused. As they gathered in that locked upper room, they hardly expected Jesus to appear before them with a simple greeting, as if he were just an old friend returning from his travels. "Peace be with you."

Yet Jesus repeats this standard Hebrew greeting (v19 & v21), emphasizing the deeper spiritual peace that only He can bring. He wasn't simply trying to calm the nerves and heartache that His followers were experiencing, but encouraging them to remember that He does not give the same type of peace as the world gives—a peace that expresses a longing or a wish—but a total well-being and inner rest of spirit, in true fellowship with God (John 14:27).

This would be the peace that they were going to need in order to accept and carry out the commission that Jesus was about to give them. Reflective in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus is about to send out these same scared and frightened people to teach the world of God's love and the saving redemption achieved through Jesus Christ alone.

Furthermore, Jesus reminds them that he does not leave them only with this inner peace, but with the absolute assurance of his presence. Just as "the Father has sent [Jesus]," empowering him to know God's will during his ministry on earth, so also Jesus sends his disciples out with that same empowerment through the assistance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

Jesus gave these promises of peace and assurance not only to the chosen few who were in that locked upper room that day, but also to us! We can know that same inner peace and assurance when we put our trust and hope in Christ. And what have we to fear when we are called to share about the love of God and saving work of Christ to others?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Are you able to sense the deep and total well-being and inner rest of the spirit in your life? What holds you back from experiencing Christ's peace?

God, you have given me all the tools I need to be an effective witness for you. Thank you that I do not need to depend on myself and the peace that the world gives, but that I can lean fully on you. Please help me to rest in your peace and to depend on the direction of your Spirit.

MARCH 27TH —

"Jesus said to him, Because you have seen Me, Thomas, do you now believe (trust, have faith)? Blessed and happy and to be envied are those who have never seen Me and yet have believed and adhered to and trusted and relied on Me."

- *John 20:29 (AMP)*

In this passage, Thomas, one of Jesus's disciples sees Him face to face after His resurrection from the dead. Before this encounter, Jesus had appeared to the other disciples, and when they told Thomas of this, he didn't believe them. He replied with something along the lines of, "I need to see it to believe it." Then, a little while later, Jesus shows up to Thomas, who is surprised and overjoyed to see his dear friend alive and is fully convinced that Jesus is God.

Jesus says to Thomas, "Now that you have seen me, do you now believe? Blessed are those who haven't seen me, and still believe and rely on me." There are times in our relationship with God where we will see Him move powerfully. Those times are incredible. They do wonders in building our faith and should rightfully be treasured and remembered. Then, there are other times that come where we don't know what God is doing. We can't seem to sense how He's working in us and in our lives. It is in these times that Jesus says we are blessed.

Even when we can't see him, we trust and rely on him. As we remember who he is (his character) and what he has done for us, we come to a conclusion that this is a God we can trust; a God who works everything for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). We are incredibly blessed.

REFLECTION

Take a moment and reflect on a time where you have seen God move in your life.

For the next few minutes, spend some time with God and thank him for the ways that you have seen him move. Ask him to encourage you in any areas or situations in your life where you don't see him moving. God cares about what you care about.

MARCH 28TH —

"Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water."

- John 21:7 [NIV]

Peter and some of the other disciples had been fishing all night, but caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus appeared to them from the shore (but they didn't initially realize it was him since it was after his resurrection). When he told them to throw their net on the right side of the boat, the men took his suggestion and soon their net overflowed with fish. That's when the disciples realize who it was.

Don't you love Peter's response in the verse above? His passion and enthusiasm for the Lord is evident. He doesn't want to waste time. Instead, "as soon as" he knows it is Christ, he dives in to get to his Lord as fast as possible.

Not long ago, Peter denied three times he even knew Christ! And yet, now, rather than hesitating due to shame, guilt, and regret for the past; Peter boldly jumps into the water to approach Jesus. He is well aware of the love and forgiveness he will find waiting on the shore. Peter's focus is solely on the Lord and being with him.

Today, spend some time approaching Christ openly and honestly. He's waiting for you with open arms.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

When you think of your past, how do you respond to Christ? Are you hesitant to "jump in the water" to come to the Lord? Ponder your response to this and ask God to help you accept the forgiveness that is in Christ.

Thanks, God, that because I have accepted you as my Lord and Savior, your attitude toward me is one of love and forgiveness. You simply want me to come to you as I am. Help me to know and experience your grace (undeserved mercy) more and more.

MARCH 29TH —

“Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’”

- John 21:16a

Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is “to love the Lord your God.” Of all the things that God could ask us to do, he only requires one thing...to love Him! He doesn't want motions, or good deeds, or anything else we could ever do, but instead, all He wants and requires of us is our love!

And the amazing thing is, he helps us love Him more by giving us the Holy Spirit! In doing this, He has given us freedom in Himself to turn from our sinful selves and become a new creation. Even further, this new creation that we are called to be is “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness!”

So, by knowing that God loves us unconditionally, and understanding that all God asks of us is to love Him in return, we must now ask ourselves the same question that Jesus asked Simon. Do we truly love Him?

Today, reflect on your relationship with God and examine your heart. How have you experienced God's love recently? How do you show God your true love for Him? (Through worship? Prayer? Sharing your love with others?) Take time today to silence yourself and show God just how much you love Him!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

It is commonly said that the things we love, we value most. Think about your life today; can you truly say, “God, I love you more than anything in this world?” If not, what is getting in the way of experiencing a true, intimate relationship with God?

God, thank you that you love me. Thank you that your love is unconditional, that you sacrificed your son, Jesus, to show me just how much you love me. I pray that I can show you my love for you more and more each day, just as you have called me to do. Help me be still as I take time to love you today.

MARCH 30TH —

"But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ."

- 1 Corinthians 15:57 [NLT]

Guess what? It's over! Express gratitude! Celebrate! Party hearty! God's done so much for you by giving blessings, gifts, relationship, renewal, kindness, unconditional love and so much more. This allows you to know him and be known. It gives you connection to a family and community like never before. We cry 'ABBA!'—'Daddy, Daddy!'; he hears and responds with affection.

Why? Victory! The war is over! The enemy has no sting or bite. No way to hurt, mar, or disfigure you spiritually any longer. There is victory over separation from God. You no longer have to fear death (Yes, the dark-cloaked, tall guy with the long pointy thingy... what is up with that anyway?!?) You are sealed and protected, destined to be with God for all eternity, enjoying his friendship.

Jesus Christ laid it on the line for you. He gave all, for you to have it all. He calls you his own; Zechariah 13:9b says, "...They will call on my name and I will answer them. I will say 'These are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

You have a relationship with the God of the universe. Get to know him. He wants to know you. Be honest... spiritually honest. Share your frustrations, sorrows and joys. He desires to hear from you and will respectfully listen to your heart. There is nothing stopping you anymore.

Sin has no sting and death's got nothin' on you—celebrate with God! Now *that* is a reason to thank him!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What would you like to say to God right now? What might be blocking connection with him?

God, thanks for the victory in you. It may be hard, but I want to be known by you.. (No matter what you may feel right now—hurt by him, angry with him, close to him, have questions—just start talking. He wants to connect and hear your voice.)