


Savior Word Jesus Lord
Messiah Son of God Judge
Witness of God Stone
Peer and Teacher
Vine of Life
of God Bread of Life
The Life Friend of Sinners
Mediator The Last Adam

FIXING OUR EYES



NAMES
OF

JESUS

2021 LENT DEVOTIONALS



UNIVERSITY
BAPTIST CHURCH

Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

A Message from Our Pastor

I remember having the thought as I drove home from work. It had occurred to me that I had not been as intentional as I would have liked in reading the Bible with my children. So, I decided that we would start reading through the Book of Mark together. The next several weeks proved to be very meaningful to me as I watched my children process the story of Jesus. So many questions would pour out of them each night we read. Good questions. Hard questions.

Naturally, I savored this time spent with them and trusted God would do something meaningful with it. When we arrived at the last chapter of the Gospel, it gave me an opportunity to share with them once again what it means to believe in Jesus and to follow Him. On that last night when we finished the Gospel of Mark, my daughter Annabelle decided she wanted to get baptized. My son James made a similar decision a few weeks later. As it turned out, a few months before the pandemic, I would baptize my two oldest children

It is incredibly special to see your children baptized. I share this brief testimony because when I think back on the last year and a half, this special moment represents one of the many ways that I saw God's power at work. Baptism is an external symbol of an internal change prompted by a divine power. It was such a humbling and joyful experience to be a part of the work that God displayed in my children.

All of this leads me to an important question we must always be willing to ask: How have you recently seen God's power at work in your life? If we have seen God's power at work in the past, then we should expect His power to be working in the present and in the future. We should constantly be praying for God's power to be at work in our lives.

We want to set aside the Lenten season as an intentional time of personal reflection and prayer, a time when you can come before the Lord and truly pray for Him to unleash His power within you. This devotional booklet aims to assist in this focused approach by helping us all fix our eyes on Jesus. As I have given greater thought to how we continue to navigate the unusual circumstances of our present day, I am convinced the best thing we can do is to keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith.

As you read through this booklet each day, we hope that you will gain a clearer picture of your Savior and your King. And, in so doing, His word will once again stir your heart and show you that He is working within you. Let us take this journey to the cross, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, so that His power may truly be at work in our lives.



Jeremiah Smith

40 Names of Jesus

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FEBRUARY 17, 2021

Savior

Read 1 John 4:14

So many names!

Most people you know only have three names: first, middle, last. Maybe you know someone with a hyphenated last name or who has added their maiden name to their middle name. If we ever meet someone with more than four or five names, it makes us pause, and we usually ask them to repeat themselves.

In the book *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson, a girl named Imogene is coming to church for the first time. The pageant director explains to her that an angel told Mary what to name her baby. Another child pipes up with the Scripture, “And He shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” to which Imogene replies, “He’d never get out of the first grade if he had to write all that!”

When April and I were deciding on what to name our son, we read many baby books and looked up historical meanings of names. We found charts of name popularity trends over time and comparisons of which names sound good together when said aloud. We thought back over our family members’ names and names that were meaningful to us. But still, with all that effort, we only gave him three names.

Jesus is God’s Son, and He has more names than anyone I have ever met. Each of Jesus’ names carries significant meaning and speaks to an aspect of His incredible life. One of my favorites is “Savior.”

Jesus came to Earth for one primary reason, to seek and save those who are lost. If Jesus only came to tell us interesting things or to encourage us to be nice to each other, that would have been really polite, but it would not have had the eternal power that His true purpose possessed. He came to save us. He is our Savior.

No matter how good we are, no matter how perfect we try to be, we are still sinners and we are still lost. Our destiny is death. But Jesus, in His incredible role as our Savior, rescues us from that destiny and saves us. He saves us in this life to stand beside us in our troubles. And, more importantly, He saves us for the next life, where we will live with Him forever. -KL

Personal reflection:

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed with life, especially now. With so many things around me to drag me down, it really comforts me to know that my Savior, Jesus, saves me. “Thank You, Jesus.”



FEBRUARY 18, 2021

I Am

Read Exodus 3:10-15; John 8:48-59

What makes your name so important? Your name gives you an identity. It reveals who you are. My parents named me for the Apostle Paul. Knowing that had a profound influence on me.

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He called him to return to Egypt and lead God's people out of slavery into the land of promise. Moses wanted to know God's name so the people would know Who had sent him. The ancient world believed names revealed one's nature, character and identity.

"God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM . . . Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you . . . The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever . . ." (Exod. 3:14-15, ESV)

What did this name reveal to the Israelites? I Am related directly to the covenant name already known to the patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—literally, "He is," usually translated as "LORD" (ESV), but also as "Jehovah" (ASV) or "Yahweh" (HCSB). I Am means that God is eternal. He has no beginning or end. He is perfect and complete. He rules supreme over all creation.

In Jesus' later ministry, He went to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles and began teaching in the Temple. At one point He declared, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) The religious leaders challenged His authority to make such claims. When Jesus said, ". . . if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death" (John 8:51), they thought this absurd, noting that Abraham and the prophets had died. Jesus asserted that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58, ESV) The leaders became so enraged they wanted to stone Him. Why? Jesus had identified Himself with God.

When Jesus used I Am, He proclaimed that He is fully God and fully equal to God the Father. He has always existed. He is eternal and over all creation. Yet, Jesus did not hold to His rights as God. He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross, the perfect sacrifice for sin, so that everyone who has faith in Him will have eternal life and never really die.

How have you responded to Jesus, the I Am? -PG and SG

Personal reflection:

"Lord Jesus, thank You for coming from Your sovereign position on the eternal throne of Deity to die for me. You are my Lord and my God, and I worship You."



FEBRUARY 19, 2021

The Word

Read John 1:1-5, 9-14; 1 John 1:1

“Word” translates into the Greek word “logos,” a concept in Greek philosophy more than 700 years old when John wrote his Gospel. At the risk of greatly oversimplifying a complex concept, Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish philosopher, taught that the logos was the intermediary between God and the created order, both the agent of creation and the way humankind can understand and approach God. This concept tied in neatly with the Jewish view of God, Who uses words as a means of creative action.

In the initial creation story of Genesis, God ordered the world through His words (logos): called forth light; divided light from darkness; called into being the atmosphere; divided the waters from dry land; called forth vegetation; ordered the sun, moon and stars; called forth life in the waters; called forth animals from the earth; and created humankind, with stated blessings and responsibilities. (Gen. 1:1–2:3)

God, having assembled a suitable place for humankind to dwell with Him, made His creation a sacred space by “resting” in it. When temples were built in the ancient world, pagan worshippers would convert the temple building into a sacred space by installing the form of an image/idol. The deities would “rest” in their temples, giving attention and favor to worshippers who would honor them. When Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, a cloud of God’s glory entered the Temple to take up residence where the faithful could approach and worship their God. This view of resting can also be seen in Psalm 132:7-8, where the psalmist describes God enthroned upon the Ark of the Covenant in the midst of the Temple, His “resting place.” So, when the Bible described God in Genesis 2:2 as “resting,” they understood that God had created the physical world as a temple for Himself, a temple not made with human hands (Acts 17:24-25), where women and men serve as the priests and mediators of His goodness and creative works.

The Gospel of John begins with echoes of the opening of Genesis, identifying Jesus as the Agent of creation and the Way humankind understands and approaches God. To know Jesus is to know God. He is the Word spoken to us. -WM

Personal reflection:

“Lord Jesus, help us recognize Your presence as You redeem the world through us. Although this world is fallen, You will return to set things in order. May we be faithful as we fulfill Your kingdom work.”



FEBRUARY 20, 2021

Jesus

Read Matthew 1:21; Philippians 2:9-10

When studying the names of Jesus, we must also examine the name *Jesus* itself. Because God acts purposely in everything He does, interestingly, He chose a commonplace name to become “the name that is above every name.” (Phil. 2:9, NIV)

Jesus is the Greek form of the ordinary Hebrew name *Joshua*. In fact, Hebrew and Arabic speakers still pronounce Jesus’ name “Yeh-shoo-ah.” Both names mean “the Lord saves.” However, the angel who heralded Jesus’ birth announcement in Matthew 1 gives Jesus’ specific name a much deeper meaning.

“You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21)

With the pronouncement of Jesus’ name, the angel made God’s message clear—this is the One who will save. Yet, the Jewish people had misplaced expectations regarding this salvation. This caused many of them to miss the true significance of Jesus’ birth, ministry and, ultimately, His death and resurrection.

He will save: *Save* had a much deeper and greater deliverance than anything the Jews understood from their interpretation of Scriptures. They expected political, economic, religious and even military deliverance. The salvation Jesus offered meant infinitely more. The Scriptures contained the truth, but their hopes were simply misdirected. Jesus brought true deliverance, spiritual deliverance—not just now but forevermore, not just in part but completely and ultimately.


His people: The Jewish people expected the Messiah to deliver **them**, God’s chosen nation. Jesus came for the Jews first but also for the whole Gentile world. (Rom. 1:16) The angels proclaimed to the shepherds that the birth of Jesus is “good news that will cause great joy for **all** the people.” (Luke 2:10)

From their sins: This salvation in Jesus for everyone delivers from the powers of sin and darkness that rule in this world. (Eph. 6:12) Jesus has filled the very chasm separating the brokenness of humankind from the holiness of God. His glory floods the earth through this salvation, bringing restoration, redemption and sanctification, replacing striving, betrayal and loss.

Truly, the name Jesus represents no ordinary name at all. “God, we give You glory for bringing us into the fold of Your heavenly family, and we praise the name of Jesus Who has saved us from our sins.” -JS

Personal reflection:

What sin is the Holy Spirit illuminating in my life? What do I expect Jesus to be doing specifically in my life and community? Are my expectations misplaced and perhaps keeping me from seeing what God is already doing? “Father, forgive me for sinning against You. Give me a renewed vision.”



She
will
bear a son,
and you shall call
his name Jesus,
for he will save

his
people
from
their
sins.

- Matthew
1:21, ESV



FEBRUARY 21, 2021

Weekly Reflection

Which name of Jesus from this week's devotionals resonates the most with you? Why?

How can you apply this truth about Jesus in your prayer life? In your day-to-day interactions with others?

Whom do you know that needs to know this about Jesus? When will you tell this person?



FEBRUARY 22, 2021

Messiah / Christ

Read Daniel 9:25; Matthew 1:16, 16:16; John 1:41, 4:25-26

I grew up in the Southern Baptist tradition. My family participated actively in our church's ministries. When I was young, I remember one pastor who had served as a missionary to Brazil prior to coming to our church. He played a big role in commissioning missionaries whom God had called to serve in other parts of the world. He invited our family to attend a commissioning service in the convention center of our city. When we walked into the center, we saw so many people and so many missionaries! During the service, the leaders called all those who were going to serve to stand up. Then they blessed and prayed over them. They were sending them out into the world to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. I imagine the blessed, prayed-for and newly appointed missionaries never forgot this ceremony. I know I have not forgotten that powerful, moving service.

Jesus' name "Messiah" (Hebrew) or "Christ" (Greek) means Anointed One. In Old Testament times, kings were anointed with oil to show God had set apart and empowered them to do a particular work for His service. In New Testament times, the Anointed One referred to Jesus Christ: "We have found the Messiah!" (which means "Anointed One"). (John 1:41, HCSB) Simon Peter called Jesus "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." (Matt. 16:16) When Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman, she spoke of the Messiah, called Christ. Jesus told her, "I am He." (John 4:25-26)

God set apart Jesus, the Messiah, to do a particular work. He came to the earth in the form of a baby, grew up, was baptized, performed miracles, preached the good news, was crucified, died and resurrected. He was anointed to save His people from their sins and bring them eternal life. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit to do these things.

When I became a Christian at the age of 9, I knew in my heart that Jesus had saved me from my sins. As I grew in my faith, I came to realize that God had anointed me also with the same Holy Spirit. He equipped me to share the gospel of Christ with others and to serve Him.

At University Baptist Church, we send out missionaries and mission groups with blessings and prayers. These moments look similar to what I experienced so long ago at the commissioning service. I realize now what made that service so powerful: the moving of the Holy Spirit in the missionaries' lives equipped them to go and serve God. -TR

Personal reflection:

"Lord God, thank You for Jesus, the Anointed One, who rescued me and equipped me to serve You! Amen."



FEBRUARY 23, 2021

Son of Man

Read Matthew 25:31-46; Daniel 7:13-14

The gospel writers recorded Jesus using the phrase, “the Son of Man,” as a reference for Himself nearly 90 times in the four Gospels, more than any other name. As a young Christian, reading through the New Testament, I could not understand why Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man instead of the Son of God. It seemed to be a denial of His divinity, as if He were emphasizing that He was only a regular man. Yet as I neared the end of the Gospel of Matthew, I came to the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in chapter 25:31-46.

The parable focuses on the Son of Man, the One Who will sit on His glorious throne and judge humankind, separating them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, the righteous sheep from the unrighteous goats. He divided them by the way they treated the vulnerable in society: the hungry and thirsty; the foreigner/refugee; those who did not have adequate clothing and shelter; and those who were sick or in prison. Their reward surprised the righteous, for they were just doing what came naturally out of their transformed character as disciples of Jesus. The Son of Man explained it to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of Mine, you did it for Me.” (Matt. 25:40, NASB) Jesus, as the Son of Man, identified Himself with humankind, especially the “least of these.” We can know His presence in the difficult, exhausting and rewarding work of being advocates and helpers of the most vulnerable in our society. We serve Jesus by serving others.

A few years later, I was reading through the Old Testament, book by book, for the first time and I came across a reference to “a son of man” in one of Daniel’s puzzling visions. Daniel 7:13-14 describes “one like a son of man” coming with “the clouds of heaven” and was presented before the Ancient of Days. He was given dominion, honor and an everlasting and indestructible kingdom over all the nations. I realized that it described the ascended Jesus in His glory. He was not only human (“like a son of man”) but the exalted King of every tribe, nation and language. His kingdom is everlasting.

How do we serve the Son of Man, this great King? By serving those who have needs, in His name. -WM

Personal reflection:

“Lord Jesus, give me the holy imagination to see You in others. Empower me by Your Spirit to serve when it is both easy and difficult.”



FEBRUARY 24, 2021

Prophet

Read Deuteronomy 18:14-22

“The young college minister and I walked the campus as I poured out my heart to him. I was a new transfer student with the weight of the world on my shoulders. Over the next hour I shared with him about how my life had taken a radical turn from the path God had chosen for me. The weight of sin and guilt was crushing.

Just getting to confess to this fellow believer brought such a relief. My sin was not stuffed or hidden anymore. What followed was some of the most direct, wise instruction that I have ever received. He was calling me to repentance: to implement some extreme plans of action into my life so I might experience lasting freedom from sin. It was sobering. The words were hard, but I knew in my core that they were true. Oh, how I had longed for someone to care enough for me to “say it like it was!”

Much like me, the people of Moses’ day were prone to wander after lesser loves. They were enticed to return to the gods they left behind in Egypt. They grumbled against Yahweh and His servant Moses. They even fashioned a golden calf to satisfy their adulterous hearts.

Despite all this, Moses prophesied of God’s mercy, saying, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers.” (Deut. 18:15, NIV 1988). What words of hope! Though many prophets would follow, the people of God would continue to hold out for the Prophet spoken of by Moses.

As Jesus entered the scene, His miraculous signs and wonders marked His fulfillment of this prophecy. (Acts 2:22) He preached with authority, commanding the people to turn from their sins and to prepare for God’s coming kingdom.

Jesus convinced many hearts that He was, indeed, the promised Prophet. They not only believed in Him but committed themselves to follow Him with their lives. Still others turned away, dejected like the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30). The cost was just too great.

Moses exhorted the Israelites: “You must listen to him.” (Deut. 18:15) How do you respond to the Prophet who has come?
-SP

Personal reflection:

“Jesus, You are the Prophet for Whom we have waited. Speak to my heart. Show me Your way. Free me from the strongholds of sin in my life. Teach me practical steps to take that will produce real change in my life. I want to be holy, as you are holy. I believe that by Your grace and power what has seemed impossible is possible in You. Please give me a willing heart. May Your name be glorified. Amen.”



FEBRUARY 25, 2021

Lord

Read Philippians 2:9-11; John 13:13; Acts 2:36, 10:36; Romans 14:9

I have been known to be a control freak. It's true. My parents love to remind me that a common phrase from my two-year-old mouth was, "Do it self." Not much has changed. Trusting someone else with something of importance feels risky.

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Phil. 2: 9-11, ESV)

The word "Lord" occurs the most frequently as a name for Jesus in the New Testament. Perhaps control freaks like me who desperately need this authority figure should take note. Confessing that Jesus is Lord means He has control—of everything.

Sometimes as much as I say, "Jesus is Lord," I limit Him because I hold on to what He has asked me to surrender. Do I examine my heart and truly reflect on His lordship in every area of my life? Well, that has me feeling a bit territorial.

Lord of my time.

Lord of my successes.

Lord of my finances.

Lord of my life.

Lord of my words.

Lord of my insecurities.

Lord of my motives.

Lord of ALL.

Lord of my thoughts.

Lord of my relationships.

Lord of my health.

Believers sing, and we say that Jesus is Lord. The hymn crowns Him the Lord of life, of peace, of love. We bless the Lord, praise the Lord and lift high the name of the Lord. But have we allowed Him to be the Lord of our lives?

In my experience, the times I lose control, in my own power, my life feels chaotic and unfulfilling. When I release control into the capable hands of my Lord, that choice is liberating and fulfilling. As I learn to make Jesus my Lord, it does not mean I dump these areas of my life off in His lap and run the other way. No, I prayerfully and intentionally release them into His care, His Lordship, and allow Him to help me trust Him with the things that are hard to let go. He walks with me, because He is as loving and patient as He is sovereign and powerful.

Bowing our knee to Jesus as Lord gives us freedom in this life on earth and the promise of eternal life with Him. Let Him be your Lord—Lord of all—today. -ST

Personal reflection:

When was a time in my life I let the Lord take control? What did I experience? In what areas of my life am I striving to be my own lord and master?



FEBRUARY 26, 2021

The Holy One of God

Read Luke 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 2:22-39; Colossians 1:15-20

To me, Colossians 1:15-20 captures the heart of Jesus' name, "The Holy One of God." This passage proclaims the glories we yearn for. It inspires our longing for His majesty and the worship the Father desires for His Son. All things were created through Him. Life was in Him, and that life was the light of humanity. His followers recognized His glory as the Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth, seated at God's right hand far above every ruler and authority and dominion and every title given, with everything put under His feet. (John 1:1-18; Eph. 1:20-22)

However, Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or held onto or used for His own advantage. His love for us and His determination to redeem us from Satan's dominion compelled Him to empty Himself of all privileges, honor and even common recognition as The Holy One of God (although Peter and a demon both called Him that). Jesus humbled Himself beyond relinquishing His status in heaven. He became one of us: a poor, often misunderstood preaching tradesman. His preferred name, Son of Man, mirrored His humility. His mission to endure every trial and temptation without succumbing to sin qualified Him to offer His perfect life as a sacrificial offering for ours, bearing God's wrath in our place.

Jesus sacrificed His life to reconcile us to God Who "made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Cor. 5:21, KJV). This means "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." (Gal. 3:13. HCSB). What an exchange! How incredible to consider the Holy One of God draped in my filthy rags, and I, swathed in His righteous robes! From cursed to redeemed!

Peter preached to the Jerusalem crowd at Pentecost that they had crucified The Holy One. The people were pierced to the heart and cried, "Brothers, what must we do?" Peter replied, "Repent . . . for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:37-38)

How do you respond? Have you repented? Stop justifying yourself. Stop vindicating your opinions. Stop explaining your beliefs. Stop rationalizing your actions. Agree with God's decree: you have sinned and stand condemned. Accept Jesus' offer of His sacrificed life for yours, His righteousness for your sin. -MM

Personal reflection:

*"Lord, I have sinned. I fall short of the glory of God; I am justified by Your grace. Thank You for declaring me righteous through faith in Your Son." **Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood. Sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah! What a Savior!****



FEBRUARY 27, 2021

Son of God

Read Luke 1:32, 35; John 1:14, 49; Hebrews 1, 4:14

Whom do you think of when you hear the word “king?” Maybe King Arthur? King Aragorn? King Tut? King Henry VIII? The Burger King? In twenty-first century America, the word “king” has lost some of its power and significance. In the Ancient Near East, however, the king was the most important person in all of society, identified as a divine “son of God.”

The king held equal importance in Ancient Israel. Although the Israelites did not consider their king divine, he was uniquely associated with God. During the enthronement ceremony, the new king was identified as the son of God and God as his Father. (Ps. 2:7) He had divine blessing and was expected to lead the people and serve as God’s perfect representative. Unfortunately, no Israelite king could meet that high expectation, resulting in Israel’s destruction and exile.

After Israel’s exile, a belief arose that a perfect son of God would come and rescue Israel. This Messiah would come from King David’s lineage as a conquering king, driving out all oppressors and restoring Israel’s kingdom. By Jesus’ time, the ancient Israelites’ descendants desperately awaited the arrival of this son of God who would crush their Roman oppressors.

But instead of sending a conquering hero, God sent His own Son in the form of a helpless baby. This King was unlike any earthly king the world had ever seen. This Son of God had no interest in political power, religious control, military might or any of the usual trappings of an earthly king. Instead, He focused on the poor, the hungry, the broken, the down-hearted, the prisoner, the oppressed—the very people Israel’s past kings ignored or exploited.

This king, this Son of God, was—and is—eternal, present at the time of creation. He is all powerful, all sustaining, and the Heir to all created things. He is enthroned not on the throne in Jerusalem, but in Heaven at God’s right hand. He is the perfect representation of God for the people on earth because He is God. (Heb. 1:1-3)

Yet, the people rejected and killed Jesus. Why? He did not live up to their expectations of Who they thought He should be. He did not conquer the Romans, restore the kingdom of Israel and make everything “right.” They had created their own idea of the Son of God and could not accept Him as He really was.

How do you view the Son of God? -BB

Personal reflection:

“Jesus, reveal Yourself to me—not as I think You should be, but as You really are. Give me courage and strength to follow You, the good and perfect King, the true Son of God, wherever You lead me.”



dwelt among us

And the Word
became flesh and
dwelt among us,
and we have seen
his glory, glory as of
the only Son from
the Father, full of
grace and truth,

-John 1:14



FEBRUARY 28, 2021

Weekly Reflection

Which name of Jesus from this week's devotionals challenges you the most? Why?

Why is it important to better understand this name of Jesus?

How can you learn more about this name of Jesus? Whom can you talk to, or where can you turn?



MARCH 1, 2021

Creator

Read John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3

In a beautiful sunset, we marvel how golden streams of light paint the clouds with an array of colors—pink, purple, orange and red. Who created this scene? Jesus Christ, God’s Son, did.

For “in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col. 1:16-17, RSV)

How could Jesus Christ, Who died and rose again, be the Creator? Christ is “before all things.” He has existed eternally with God the Father Who appointed Him “heir of all things.” (Heb. 1:2) The Father gave Him all the authority and power to call creation into existence. The creation belongs to Jesus.

What did Christ’s work embrace? Creation happened “in him,” that is, within His dominion and under His rule. Since He made it, He stands supreme over everything in heaven and on earth, what can and cannot be seen. This includes all rulers in both the physical and spiritual realms. “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (John 1:3, NASB 1995)

How did Christ create? Colossians 1:16 states twice that “all things were created” by Christ. The first use refers to His definite and complete act of giving existence to everything. The second use of “created” can be translated “stand,” “remain” or “have been created.” All things continue to exist as a result of Christ’s on-going activity. Creation happened “through him,” as the mediating agent for the Father. In Christ “all things hold together.” He maintains the being of all things. He prevents the universe from breaking apart. He is “sustaining all things by His powerful word.” (Heb. 1:3, NIV) He holds up and carries along everything.

What purpose does Christ have in creating all things? The phrase “for him” means that the total and the particular parts of creation in all its diversity and complexity exist to accomplish Christ’s purpose of redemption and new life in Him.

What impact should the truth of Christ as Creator have on our lives? When we think we are in control, we need to realize that He rules—and we do not. When things around us appear out of control, we can rely on Him because He continually cares for us. When we see ourselves as broken, we should remember that Christ created us for His purpose. When we follow Him, He will make us whole. -PG

Personal reflection:

“Creator Jesus, help me to remember that You are in control. I am not. Help me to trust You.”



MARCH 2, 2021

Judge

Read Matthew 25:31-34, 41; John 5:19-30; Revelation 20:11-15

The theme of God as Judge runs throughout the Old Testament. God judges every aspect of obedience beginning with Adam and Eve, through the world of Noah, to the patriarchs with their sometimes successful, sometimes sordid stories, continuing through Israel's kings, prophets, warriors and enemies. Those centuries prove that humanity cannot continually keep His laws completely. A faultless Law-Keeper, Who in sacrifice would exchange His record for theirs, emerges as the only hope to achieve Jehovah's requirement of holiness.

As the New Testament epoch dawned, the Father made an executive move to entrust "all judgment to His Son" (John 5:22, ESV), giving Him all "authority to execute judgment" (John 5:27). By this ruling, God granted Jesus total authority to judge Satan, evil itself and people. (John 3:16-18, 12:31) In his book, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer explains that "Jesus, as true God and perfect man, makes a perfectly just judge." As Son of God, Jesus holds complete allegiance to His Father's holiness, and as Son of Man, He experiences intimate compassion for our struggle with flesh and the devil. He alone understands the imperative for holiness and our absolute need for mercy simultaneously.

Colossians 1:15-17 pronounces that all things hold together in Jesus. This is particularly evident in the heavenly courtroom. There Jesus serves in all roles concerning divine judgment: He is the sacrificial Lamb who atones for our sin (Heb. 10:10); He is our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1); and, He rules as the Supreme Judge before Whom we must all appear. (2 Cor 5:10) All aspects of justice lie in Him. Our Savior is our Lawyer, Who is also our Judge. What judicial security! What infallible safety!

Revelation 20:11-15 draws back the curtain on the throne room judgment scene of those who died depending on the record of their life as their hope for divine justice. They will hear the proclamation, "None is righteous, no not one." (Rom. 3:10). The Lamb's book of life holds the only admittance criteria.

So, it would be unjust of God to condemn Christians for their sins: Jesus received our death sentence and suffered our warranted punishment. To condemn us too, along with Him, would constitute a double payment, discrediting Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus paid it all. Requiring more would be a travesty. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) This is love! This is the gospel! -MM

Personal reflection:

With whom will I share this glorious news this Easter season?



MARCH 3, 2021

Bridegroom

Read Mark 2:18-20; Ephesians 5:23-30; Revelation 19:7

When I was a little girl, my mother told me that one day Jesus would return for His bride. In my childish, concrete way of thinking, I began to look around at different women in my church whom I considered very godly. I wondered which one Jesus would choose as His bride and why He would marry such an old woman! Obviously, I did not understand metaphors.

The bridegroom-bride imagery originated in the Old Testament which often pictured Israel as Yahweh's bride. Prophets, such as Hosea (2:16-20), Isaiah (54:4-6; 62:4-5) and Ezekiel (16:7-34), used the marriage relationship to describe the covenant relationship of Yahweh with His people.

In the New Testament, Jesus identified Himself as the Bridegroom. When the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus why they and the Pharisees fasted, but His disciples did not fast, He answered, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?" (Mark 2:19, ESV). His presence merited rejoicing, not the mourning associated with fasting. Who would fast during a celebration of joy and happiness?

The Apostle Paul described the relationship of Christ and His church in terms of the intimacy of marriage. The husband symbolized Christ, the Bridegroom, and the wife symbolized the church, the bride. These metaphors point to the intimate oneness believers have with Christ. Jesus has incorporated us into Himself in an unbreakable union.

The Bridegroom image views believers corporately, not as individuals. Jesus is not my Bridegroom but our Bridegroom. He belongs to the gathered community of faith. Jesus loves the church and gave Himself up for her. This name for Jesus encourages us to love Him completely and submit ourselves to Him daily. We will do that well as believers together as each of us individually loves and surrenders to Jesus.

We, His church, now await our Heavenly Groom to come for us, His bride. Unlike a bride today who prepares herself to look lovely for her groom on their wedding day, Jesus Himself prepares His bride: ". . . having cleansed her . . . so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Eph 5:26-27) We will join Him in heaven for the marriage feast that lasts through eternity. "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come. ..." (Rev. 19:7) -SG

Personal reflection:

How do I show my love for Jesus? How will I surrender to Him today? How does my church show love for and surrender to Jesus? What role do I have in these actions?



MARCH 4, 2021

Pioneer and Perfecter

Read Hebrews 2:10, 12:2

“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.” (Heb. 2:10, NIV)

Earlier this year, I was reading about the life of 19th-century Scottish theologian, Phoebe Palmer. Her holiness journey, as she struggled to accept the loss of three of her children, moved me. She had two boys who died just months after being born. The death of her third child, three-year-old Eliza, seemed, by far, the most tragic. She succumbed to severe burns that occurred when a servant accidentally dropped an oil lamp on her crib. Phoebe’s outcries to God after her daughter’s terrible death incredibly impacted me. She penned God’s answer to her excruciating pain, saying it came to her in a still, small whisper: “What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know in the hereafter.”

In the months that followed, Phoebe began to contemplate what she would do to move forward in her life. She journaled the following: “And now I have resolved that . . . the time I would have devoted to her, shall be spent in work for Jesus. And if diligent and self-sacrificing in carrying out my resolve, the death of this child may result in the spiritual life of many.”

The suffering and death of Jesus was the only avenue by which our salvation could be made perfect, and in His obedience, Christ provided this new hope. Humanity’s opportunity to be reconciled to a Holy God came at a horrific and painful price. Contemplating the heart of God and how He wrestled in agony as Jesus died, Phoebe Palmer’s statement resounds: “That the death of this child may result in the spiritual life of many.”

“Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God’s throne.” (Heb. 12:2, NCV) -SLP

Personal reflection:

“God, may I never take for granted what it meant for Jesus to pioneer a path for my redemption, nor fail to remember the agony You endured. May I praise You for this all of my days, that the ransom paid on my behalf, bring You, and You alone, all glory and honor. Amen.”



MARCH 5, 2021

Cornerstone / Stone

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

Several years back I needed a new desk, but I also wanted to save money for a trip. An unassembled desk seemed to be the answer. Boards A1, A2, A3 and A4 laid on the floor, along with numerous other boards and a bag full of screws. Using the provided Allen wrench and some of the screws, I attached A2 and A3 to A1. Next, I picked up A4 and positioned it on the other side. Nothing aligned. No matter how I turned A4, the holes were mispositioned and the boards uneven.

I reread the directions, checked all the other pieces and with resignation took apart the beginnings of the desk. Finally, by re-examining each board with a flashlight, I discovered my mistakes. A random mark next to the 1 made it look like a 4. Meanwhile the outer edges of the 4 were faded, creating the appearance of a 1. Starting over with the correct board, the desk came together with aligned sides and a strong base.

Humans often resemble my first effort in building that desk. We misalign ourselves with people who leave us off-balance. We use misinformation to try to make sense of things. We base life on assumptions. We build our own truth and create instability.

This unstable, out-of-balance perspective leads to an “us versus them” attitude. We constantly establish camps: Blue Lives Matter versus Black Lives Matter, praise songs versus hymns, conservative versus liberal, climate change versus climate denier, and so on. The early Christian church shared this same divisive approach pitting Gentiles against Jews.

Paul reminded the followers of Jesus in Ephesus, both Gentiles and Jews, that to end division Christians should create their relationships through Jesus. Christianity is built “. . . with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Eph. 2:20, NIV) Just as a cornerstone provides the reference point for every stone in a building, Jesus must serve as the reference point for the Christian to view every relationship with “the other.” Christ Jesus’ love and grace align both sides with His design to bring us together.

By making Jesus our cornerstone, we “are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” (Eph. 2:22) United as one with the Spirit, His people stand strong, ready to do His work. -RP

Personal reflection:

What relationship should I improve by using Jesus as my reference point? How can I do this? What do I need to do to align myself with God’s design for His church?



MARCH 6, 2021

Servant

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:7; Mark 10:45

Steve quickly became concerned. I came home from the store with 500 balloons and an amazing plan for Sawyer's birthday. Steve has learned that when I have a great plan, it seldom works out as envisioned. We had two hours before Sawyer walked through the door. I assigned Steve the task of blowing up ALL 500 balloons. I bought a balloon inflator. What could go wrong?

As my husband began to inflate and tie the balloons, I soon realized we could not blow up 500 balloons in 120 minutes. Yet, Steve pressed on without complaint or reprimand for his wife's crazy idea. We stuffed Sawyer's room with as many balloons as we could inflate. She was delighted—all because Steve chose to serve Sawyer and me joyfully and with kindness.

Isaiah's text contains many adjectives describing God's Servant. Graphic writing challenges me to visualize the treatment of the Son of Man at the hands of His oppressors. Some words seem to catch in my mouth when I read the passage aloud. Yet, the writer also conveys phrases of peace, healing and intercession.

The verses of peace and hope naturally draw me. I want to memorize those verses. I want them to bear fruit in my life. Yet, those harsher verses carry such depth and truth for me. The very Son of God was rejected on my behalf. The very Son of God gave His life in serving the Father that I might benefit. If I am truly a follower of Christ, should my life be any different from the One I follow?

Chasing after God means intentionally serving God for the benefit of others. Following Christ means serving God without mourning the personal costs that He may ask. Because of the outrageous price that Christ paid, I have abundant riches with which to serve others.

Jesus walked this earth and submitted to death with intentionality and purpose. He moved toward pain, affliction and undeserved punishment. He moved through the suffering to justify many and intercede for humanity. This perfect Servant focused on the One He truly served. He recognized that with much suffering comes much freedom. Only through serving the Father do freedom and hope become a reality in our lives. -CP

Personal reflection:

“Lord Jesus, reveal Yourself to me in a new way through the words of Isaiah. What individuals have You called me to serve? Help me to be willing to suffer indignities and reproach so others might receive justice, freedom and hope. Strengthen my resolve to serve. Reveal to me areas where I am serving things rather than You. Lord, realign my values. Make the attitudes I bring with me as I serve acceptable in Your sight. Amen.”

To give
His life as
a ransom

For even the Son of Man came not
to be served but to serve, and to
give his life as a ransom for many.

-Mark 10:45



MARCH 7, 2021

Weekly Reflection

Which name of Jesus impacted you most this week? What was your emotional response to this name?

How does knowing this name of Jesus affect the way you pray? How does it affect the way you love others?

What did you read this week that confused you or that you wanted to study more? Write down your questions below and ask God to show you next steps in learning more about this aspect of Jesus' name.



MARCH 8, 2021

Head of the Church

Read Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:11-16; Colossians 1:18

The human head has many fun facts:

- The human head houses all the body's major sensory organs, including the brain.
- The brain is the main control center of the nervous system which receives information from stimuli and helps the body respond to it.
- The brain will grow three times its size in the first year of life and will continue to grow until about the age of 18.
- The brain of a human contains approximately one hundred billion neurons. Neurons are the pathways that move information to and from the brain.

These details show the fascinating structure of the human head. Even more interesting, Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus and Colossae, identifying Jesus as the Head of the church and the church, the community of believers, His body.

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Eph. 1:22-23, NIV) Just as the brain acts as the main control center of the physical body, so Christ serves as the main control center of the church, His body. Jesus rules over the church. Without Him, the church cannot exist or function as God intended.

"And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." (Col. 1:18) The human brain rules the body. As Head, Jesus has authority and supreme rank. He rules the life of the individual believer and body of believers, the church. He deserves first place in all our thoughts and activities.

Just as the human body grows, so does Christ's body grow. "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Eph. 4:15-16) Believers help each other in this process of growth, as we all exercise our gifts under the direction of our Head, Jesus. We need Jesus and each other to "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)

Is Jesus Christ the head of your life? Are you helping the church to grow and build itself up in love by doing your part? -TR

Personal reflection:

"Lord Jesus, may you be the Head of my life and the Head of our church. Grow us up to serve You well. Amen."



MARCH 9, 2021

True Vine

Read John 15:1-8

Last year I decided to try something new in my garden: sweet potatoes. I had grown potatoes before, but never sweet potatoes. Growing regular potatoes requires little preparation, only cutting a few potatoes into pieces and letting them dry a bit before putting them in the ground. Sweet potatoes require a lot more time before planting.

In January, I suspended four sweet potatoes with toothpicks in jars of water and began to wait for slips to grow. Every few days I dumped the old water and replaced it with clean water. For weeks, my family laughed and made jokes about my gardening skills. Nothing changed in the appearance of the potatoes as they sat on the windowsill.

Then, a tiny bud appeared near the base of a sweet potato—then another and another. The buds grew slowly. We continued to doubt that anything would come of this experiment. After several more weeks, real slips grew and produced leaves.

In April, I planted the slips in a soil mixture in 17-gallon buckets. I watered them regularly and trained the growing vines to wrap around a trellis. The process moved slowly. My family continued to laugh and make jokes. We all waited.

Throughout the summer I cared for what I hoped were sweet potatoes hidden in the soil and not just leafy vines that grew thick and beautiful. In August, I cut the vines to allow the potatoes to dry a little before harvesting dozens of them! They would have grown bigger and better had I allowed them to grow another month, but I had already cut them from the now dry, brown vines. About two months later, I found a stray vine that had rooted itself in the dirt beside the buckets where the other sweet potatoes had grown. I dug a little around it and, to my surprise, found more mature sweet potatoes.

Growing sweet potatoes in my garden mirrors my spiritual growth in Christ. For my life to change, I must prepare for change. I must throw out what makes my life dirty and replace it with what makes me clean. I must spend time regularly with Jesus, the True Vine, Who creates and sustains growth. I must be patient, accepting that change takes a lifetime of work and waiting. I must bear fruit as evidence of the growth, allowing God to multiply His work in me, until my family and I can laugh and celebrate together the miracle of new life. -KR

Personal reflection:

“Thank You, God, for gardens that teach us about how we can grow in You. Thank You for the fruit You produce in our gardens and in our lives. Amen.”



MARCH 10, 2021

High Priest

Read Hebrews 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:10, 6:20, 7:26, 8:1-2, 9:11

I have always been a pleaser. You can imagine how my heart leapt when I first read Leviticus and learned that God gave His people an explicit set of rules and expectations to follow. I remember thinking, “If I were alive back then, I would totally be good at that.” (True story—don’t laugh.)

God gave Moses His Law to set the Israelites apart and make them a blessing to the nations. The Law provided them much-needed order to live in a chaotic, pagan world. It enabled God’s people to purify themselves and remain in His holy presence as He dwelled among them in the Tabernacle.

Every year the High Priest would sacrifice a goat on the Day of Atonement. This sin offering covered all the unintentional sins of the people. The priest would go behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the Ark of the Covenant to atone for Israel’s sins. He could do this only after cleansing himself and offering a sacrifice for his own personal sins. The High Priest could not take lightly coming into God’s presence, a privilege not allowed to any other Israelite. Only one chosen priest, and he an imperfect sinner, could enter the Holy of Holies.

The Law may have given God’s people rules and rituals for living in His midst, but it could not purify their hearts. It is “impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (Heb. 10:4, ESV)

When the sinless Jesus died on the cross, He entered behind the curtain on our behalf as both our holy High Priest and perfect sacrifice. When He breathed His last breath on the cross, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). No better visual describes what Jesus had accomplished. A torn curtain means access to the Father. We no longer need an earthly replica of the throne room or priestly representatives or physical sacrifices because Jesus is forever seated at the right hand of our Father “in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.” (Heb. 8:2).

Jesus Christ secures our salvation. He will forever be our perfect representative—our Great High Priest —seated at the right hand of the Father, holding the curtain open for God’s faithful people to approach Him boldly and know Him intimately. No rules or expectations to follow, just a relationship. No perfection required, just faith. -JP

Personal reflection:

Do I try to enter God’s presence on my own merit? What would it look like for me to submit myself under the authority of Jesus as my Great High Priest? How would such submission affect my prayer life?



MARCH 11, 2021

Image of God

Read Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3

“Let me see.” We have lost count how many times we have heard those words come out of the mouths of our children, but we know the number keeps growing. “Let me see that picture you just took; let me see that video you are laughing at; let me see what you are talking about; and on and on . . .” Seeing is believing. It makes things real to us. It happened that way for Moses and the burning bush, Jonah and the whale and Thomas and the wounds. The Bible is the story of God and His children, who constantly ask Him, “Let me see.”

We do not have to wonder what God is like. We know because He revealed Himself in Jesus. Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15, NIV) and “the exact imprint of the Father.” (Heb. 1:3, ESV) He does not resemble God in physical form, but in character and nature. When we see Jesus in Scripture, we see God. Jesus says, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9, NIV) During His time on Earth, Jesus showed us God’s goodness, love, mercy, grace, truth, authority and righteousness. Everything He did was fully the Father’s will and consistent with what God would do. Because He is the perfect image of God, He was able to present Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins and bridge the gap between a Holy Father and His sinful, stiff-necked children.

At creation God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.” (Gen. 1:26) While Jesus is a perfect representation of God, as fallen people we only reflect part of God’s image. As we grow in our faith, our hearts, minds and lives become transformed into the image of Jesus. The more we decrease our sinful desires and impulses and increase His holiness and love within us, the closer we get to reflecting His image. When we follow the examples of Jesus in how we obey, forgive, pray, love and treat others, we show God to our world.

Every day we have the choice to spend time learning Who God is through His image, Jesus Christ. When we open our Bible and get on our knees to pray, we are saying to our Heavenly Father, “Let me see!” -LC and MC

Personal reflection:

Do I desire to see and share God through His image Jesus as much as I want to see and share that viral video? “Thank You, Jesus for giving me a glimpse of God. Help me to see. Amen.”



MARCH 12, 2021

Light of the World

Read John 8:12

Pitch black. No moon. Checking to my right and to my left, I only see a few feet into the Big Empty, an almost deserted part of Texas near the Panhandle. I gingerly step onto the hardened dirt, leaving behind the porch and its dim red light. I keep my eyes on the narrow path ahead of me. I know my friends are out there, but where? How far away? I inch along in darkness.

My ears pick up a sound. I stop. Scratching? Scampering? Slithering? My eyes try to focus on the location of the sound. Suddenly, I feel something brush my foot, and I leap in the air to avoid the mysterious critter. I release my breath as I land and catch sight of a horned frog scurrying away.

I restart my slow progress toward the unknown. The astronomically verified dark skies of west Texas brought me to Comanche Springs, but my decision appears less reasonable while standing alone in a field at 2 a.m.

After a lonely journey down the almost invisible path, I spot a series of shadowy lumps. Human shapes rise up and wave to me. With relief I slide into the closest vacant chair and join my friends in looking upward. An array of shooting stars begins to fill the sky. My concerns in the darkness transition to awe and wonder with the display of the Perseid meteor shower lighting up the heavens. The majesty of the Creator's light display fills the void.

In life we often create our own darkness with choices that separate us from God. Insecurity, despair, uncertainty, fear and loneliness form our personal voids when we make decisions without the right guidance.

You can choose a different way. Seek Jesus to be with you where your own Big Empty exists. "When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" (John 8:12, NIV) If you follow the path of Jesus as your Savior, you discover the Lord's glory, and His Light goes with you into the world.

The light of Jesus will fill your void, and His peace will fill your soul. -RP

Personal reflection:

"Father, Creator, You know the darkness that dwells within me. I seek your forgiveness for _____. I ask that the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, walk with me through this darkness as I face _____. Give me peace. In Your Son's name I pray, Amen."



MARCH 13, 2021

Rabbi

Read John 1:38

A rabbi is a teacher. Teachers have the unique ability to make or break us. You can probably think of at least one of each. One of my favorite seminary professors taught a subject I swore I would hate. But, among other things in his class, I learned that God created us and was therefore creative. So, we may be *creative* in how we respond or engage with Him. For this devotional, I have written a poem. Perhaps you will use it as a prayer, or maybe it will spur you to express your deepest thoughts to our Great Teacher in a creative way.

Where Are You Staying?

Rabbi, I hear your whisper in my deepest thoughts,
“What are you seeking?” is the question that you’ve brought.

Rabbi, my answer’s really simple, it’s my own question, you see,
“Where are you staying?” that I might spend more time with thee.

Rabbi, I know that you’re the Son of God who came to seek and
save, To bring us peace and freedom and ransom every slave.

Rabbi, you’ve taught me to love the world and all of those around,
To forgive the deepest wounds and always let grace abound.

But Rabbi, today the world is broken more than I’ve seen before
Sickness is all around and the future so unsure.

Rabbi, it’s then I hear your whisper in my deepest thoughts,
“What are you seeking?” is the question that you’ve brought.

Rabbi, my answer’s really simple, it’s my own question, you see,
“Where are you staying?” for the world needs to see.

Rabbi, I find myself losing hope in all the things you’ve said.
The darkness is closing in, and my heart is filled with dread.

Rabbi, Rabbi, in all the things you’ve taught What do I need to focus
on to bring peace to all my thoughts?

Rabbi, I ask you now to teach me how to shine into the shade.
Show me what I’m searching fo that my heart be not dismayed.

Rabbi, I try to find an answer in each and every day.
What am I seeking? Rabbi, I’m not sure I know what to say.

Teach me, Rabbi; show me, Master for I’m at a total loss.
That’s when I hear your whispered answer deep within my thoughts,

“**My child, take a breath.** What you seek is me. And where you are, is
where I’ll be, for I’ll always stay here with thee.” -JPi

Personal reflection:

What lessons have I learned from the Great Teacher, Jesus? What deep thoughts do I need to share with Him?

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying,

**“I am the light
of the world.”**

Whoever
follows me
will not walk
in darkness,
but will have
the light of life.”

-John 8:12



MARCH 14, 2021

Weekly Reflection

Which name of Jesus resonated with you the most this week? Why?

How does this name of Jesus lead you to worship Him today?

In what area of your life are you sensing God calling you to change or bring into the light? How can you do that before Jesus today?



MARCH 15, 2021

Bread of Life

Read John 6:32-51

If you have a sibling, you probably remember the days of sharing food. My brother is severely autistic, but that does not change the fact that I had to share with him. Every time we ate at Whataburger, he would want my chicken sandwich. I ended up giving him the last fourth of my sandwich to keep him from throwing a fit. I gave up my lunch reluctantly, fearing that I would not have enough to eat.

To this day, I still have the habit of not eating all my chicken sandwich. Even when my brother is nowhere around, I find myself setting aside those last few bites. Now that I am older, I do not worry about not having enough to eat. The Lord has blessed me where I can eat as much as I need to be satisfied.

Jesus has provided a way for us to be satisfied like that in a much more significant way. He proclaims, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35, NIV) This means that Jesus will spiritually sustain those who come to Him. He has plenty to go around for all. No matter how many siblings in Christ we have, none of them will take any amount away from us.

When I have questions and fears, I turn to the word of God and find nourishment. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus speaks to us in the Bible and fills us with understanding. As Christians, we can consume knowledge and truth to our heart's content. Our souls will never be without truth to absorb.

Jesus does more than just provide knowledge. He tells us, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51, NIV) Because Jesus gave His body for us, we received everlasting life. No matter how often we need spiritual nourishment, Jesus's sacrifice continually gives us access to it.

How do we access Jesus's nourishment? We pray. We turn to Scripture. We go to church and bond with our church family. We hear sermons. We listen to advice from our mentors. We hear Jesus in podcasts and books. We never have to go without our heavenly food. Our soul can constantly find nourishment and satisfaction -KW

Personal reflection:

"Thank you, Jesus, for being the Bread of Life and giving me a life where I am never hungry. In You, I am always full."



MARCH 16, 2021

Door

Read John 10:7-10

While my parents worked, my brother and I stayed with my maternal Grandma. She preferred us to play outside instead of inside. We could go in or come out as we pleased with one condition, “Don’t let the door slam!” Her unlocked door gave us access and security.

Grandma’s door also represented a haven of rescue or “salvation.” Any struggling family member had a place to sleep and eat in that home. That included my mother, brother and my six-year-old self when my father abandoned us for months.

Entering Grandma’s door gave me an abundance of family members, gatherings, food, laughter and conversations. It gave me joy.

For me, Grandma’s door signified access, security, “salvation” and abundance. Believers possess analogous spiritual benefits in Jesus. He affirmed, “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7, ESV) and “I am the door” (v. 9). This image reflects its first-century setting: many sheepfolds had an opening for entry but no door or gate. The shepherds themselves became the door. They allowed their sheep to enter but prevented thieves or wild animals from harming the flock.

By identifying Himself as the Door, Jesus declared that He Himself and no other is the only access into the Kingdom of God. Jesus promised, “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (v. 9). The Door opens to any person who believes in Him. Only Jesus provides salvation, rescuing individuals from the punishment their sin deserves. The door metaphor affirms the same truth as John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus is the only means of a personal relationship with God the Father. No other option exists.

Those who enter through Jesus “will go in and out and find pasture” (v. 9). Jesus provides spiritual access, security and nourishment. Those who enter will “have life and have it abundantly” (v. 10). This means both eternal life and a qualitatively different life. Believers enjoy a life of a restored relationship with God. We experience a life of transformation as we grow increasingly to reflect Jesus Himself who indwells us through His Holy Spirit. This abundant life is overflowing, full and satisfying. It gives joy.

Jesus becomes the Door for us when we believe in Him as the Son of God who died for our sins and was raised from the dead. He blesses us then with many spiritual benefits, including access to a personal relationship with God, salvation, security and abundance. -SG

Personal reflection:

“Thank You, Jesus, for opening the door for me to have a restored relationship with God the Father. Thank you for giving me life in all its fullness.”



MARCH 17, 2021

The Way, the Truth and the Life

Read John 14:1-7

It was dark, and we had lost the road. I had already lived in Sub-Saharan Africa for a couple of years and was well acquainted with navigating the bush. Our visit to a neighboring village had gone long. So, we said our goodbyes, loaded up our family and chased the sinking sun with dust trailing behind—until we bogged down into a patch of muddy terrain from the seasonal rains. An hour or so later, we freed our Landcruiser, but a new obstacle threatened our return. It was so dark the tracks had become indistinguishable.

Just when I thought things could not get worse, somehow, we found our way into a field of millet stalks that rose above the top of our vehicle. All seemed hopeless. Then one of our extra riders had a brilliant idea. He climbed up onto the roof rack and scanned around for anything familiar. In excitement he let out a joyful yelp! He caught sight of our town's newly installed cell phone tower. The red light at its peak became our beacon leading us home.

Jesus's disciples found themselves in a similar situation. They had just been told about their Master's imminent departure. These men had come to depend on His life-giving words. Now, He was going to a place they could not follow. Dismayed and discouraged, Jesus encouraged His friends, "Trust in God; trust also in me." (John 14:1, NIV 1988)

Jesus explained that He would go to prepare a place for them at His "Father's house." (v. 2) What good news! Even better, He promised that He would return to bring His followers home to abide with Him!

Thomas quickly replied, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (v. 5) Like many of us, this disciple quickly missed the wonderful proclamation that Jesus will be the One to lead us home.

Like the red blinking cell phone tower on that pitch-dark African night, Jesus reassured His disoriented companions, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (v. 6) What joyful assurance we have that Jesus is the path that leads us to the Father! His words are truth and fully reliable. If we listen to His voice, we know that we shall safely arrive at home. And through faith in Jesus Who died and rose to life again, He bestows everlasting life!

We need look no further than the One, the Only, Jesus Christ! Fix your eyes upon Him. -SP

Personal reflection:

"Lord, Jesus, thank You for being the Way, the Truth and the Life! Empower me as Your servant to share this hope with those who do not know You."



MARCH 18, 2021

Firstborn

Read Romans 8:29-30; Colossians 1:15-20

I firmly believed my son would be born with blonde hair. Much to my surprise, after delivery the doctor handed me a newborn with a head full of thick dark hair! All children come with surprises and bring much joy. Firstborns play a unique role within a family because they experience things first. They get teeth first, go to school first, and become spoiled by grandparents first . . .

Jesus was the firstborn son of His earthly parents Mary and Joseph. Yet, it surprises us to see Him described as “the firstborn of all creation.” (Col. 1:15, ESV) Did Paul imply here that God created Jesus? And, what does Jesus being “the firstborn from the dead” mean? (Col. 1:18)

God did not create Jesus, but Jesus Himself is the Creator! Early Christian statements of faith emphasized this aspect of Jesus’ nature. “True God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.” (Nicene Creed, A.D. 325) Therefore, the Greek word “firstborn” (*prototokos*, Col. 1:15) does not mean an eldest child. Instead, it means one who is supreme or preeminent.

Jesus is preeminent over all His creation. Jesus Himself created everything. He existed before anything else and holds everything together. (Col. 1:16-17) Despite the suffering, injustice or global pandemics we encounter on this earth, Jesus remains in control.

The phrase “firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18) does not mean Jesus experienced physical resurrection first. He Himself raised His friend Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter back to life. Yet, Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter eventually died again. Jesus defeated sin and death when He died on the cross and rose again from the grave. He experienced glorification first. Preeminent over death and alive in a glorified body, Jesus will never experience death again. If death did not defeat Jesus, then it cannot defeat us either! When Jesus returns, we too will be resurrected and receive renewed, glorified bodies. (Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Cor. 15:20-23, 51-53)

Jesus is Firstborn of all creation, in control over everything He made. Jesus is Firstborn of the dead, sharing His inheritance of resurrection and glorification with us if we trust in Him.

Have you trusted in the Firstborn? Have you surrendered control to Him? -LW

Personal reflection:

What issues in this world cause me to worry? What issues with my earthly body cause me pain or frustration? “Lord Jesus, I praise You for being sovereign over these situations. Because You rose again and live in a glorified body, I will also. Thank You.”



MARCH 19, 2021

Friend of Sinners

Read Luke 7:33-34, 19:1-10

On a beautiful fall Friday, I made my way to the hospital office to pick up paychecks for my staff. On the way back to the Child Care Center, as I bounded down the concrete steps, suddenly I found myself suspended in air. As I came down, my right ankle hit the edge of one of the steps. I was stunned, but immediately knew my ankle was broken. After having surgery and returning home, many wonderful church friends brought food, sent cards of encouragement and performed other acts of kindness. I desperately needed those gifts, and I gratefully accepted them.

Life involves friendships and relationships. In the beginning God set the expectation for us by emphasizing the importance of relationships. He wanted a relationship with the people He had created. God also knew it was not good for them to be alone. (Gen. 2:18)

Jesus continued that commitment as He reached out to people during His time on earth. Some accepted His call and left everything to be with Jesus as His disciples. Matthew, a former tax collector, became one of His disciples. The Jews despised and hated tax collectors because many of them cheated the people by collecting more money than they owed.

Another tax collector, Zacchaeus, wanted anxiously to see Jesus. As Jesus walked down the street, He saw Zacchaeus in a tree and immediately commanded him to come down because He wanted to go to his house. Zacchaeus accepted Jesus's invitation. The relationship Jesus built with this short tax collector led Zacchaeus to give half of his possessions to the people he had cheated. Jesus would later pay for the gift of salvation that Zacchaeus accepted with His life on the cross.

The Pharisees saw Jesus befriend many sinners, and they criticized Him. Jesus responded, "And I, the Son of Man feast and drink, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of the worst sort of sinners!'" (Luke 7:34, NLT) But Jesus saw them as sinners who had receptive hearts.

Jesus is the Friend of Sinners. That includes each one of us. Jesus loves and pursues us. When we respond, He abides with us. What a wonderful assurance! As we look toward Easter, we should offer gratitude for His love and sacrifice. -NC

Personal reflection:

During this time of division in our world, am I hesitant and fearful of what others will say if I associate with people who are on the fringes? Those who need to learn about the gospel should feel my love and acceptance just as I felt the love of my friends in recovering from my broken ankle.



MARCH 20, 2021

Shepherd

Read John 10:11-16; Matthew 26:31; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25, 5:4

Wanted: Individual of hearty stock, unassailable character; interminable days, vigilant nights, weather-proof. Constituency prone to straggle, skittish, susceptible to attack by thieves and beasts. Experience in animal whispering, self-defense, finding sustenance required. Pay not commensurate with effort.

The line forms here. Anyone? Thankfully, I see one candidate has stepped forward.

Jesus calls Himself “the good shepherd.” (John 10:11, 14) What context does this amazing declaration have? The “shepherd” metaphor finds its roots in the Old Testament. God refers to Israel’s kings as shepherds. He instructs David to “shepherd my people Israel” (2 Sam. 5:2, NASB). David describes the Lord as his shepherd in Psalm 23. Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 refer to rulers as shepherds.

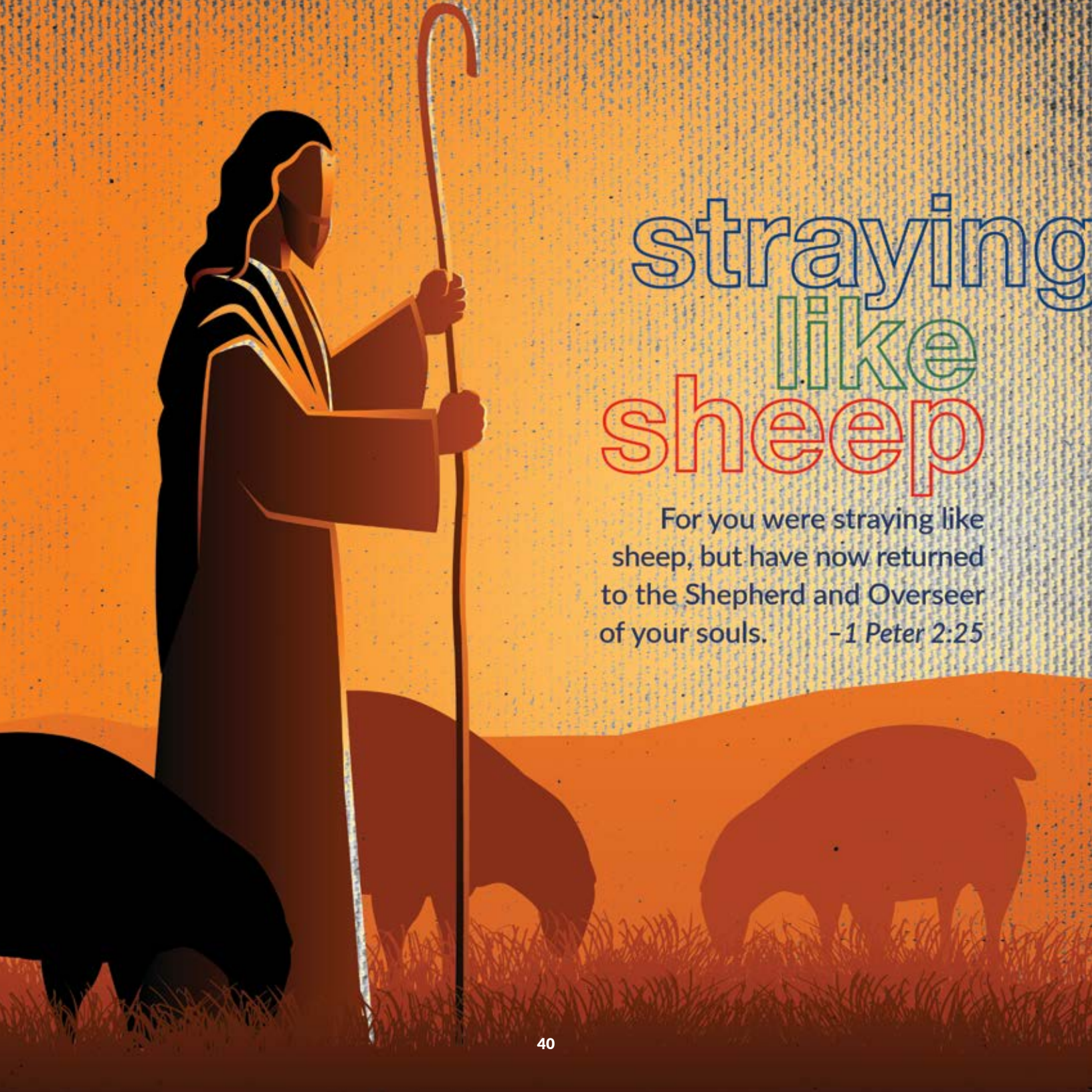
But what about “good?” Does a comparative “bad” exist? God brings charges against Israel’s kings. “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” (Jer. 23:1). Self-serving leadership has “scattered My flock and driven them away, and *have not attended to them . . . I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds . . .*” (Jer. 23:2, italics mine). The outcome we know: *bad* shepherding.

God declares: “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves . . . [and not] the flock” (Ezek. 34:2). He accuses: “Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost . . . with force and severity you have dominated them.” (Ezek. 34:4). The people “became food for every beast of the field” and were “scattered over all the surface of the earth . . . and there was no one to search . . . for them” (Ezek. 34:5-6). *Very bad shepherding.*

With this as a backdrop, Jesus proclaims: “I am the good shepherd.” In stark contrast to previous shepherds, He strengthens the weak, heals the sick, bandages the injured, returns strays, seeks the lost and feeds the hungry. He goes even further: He would lay “down His life for the sheep.” (John 10:11) This would have raised eyebrows to a first-century audience who would not have understood willingly dying for stinky, dumb animals. Jesus also knows His own, and His own know Him. (John 10:14). -StP

Personal reflection:

Knowing Jesus alone is good, how often do I look to other shepherds besides Him for guidance, comfort and safety? How often, as a result, am I disappointed? Jesus alone meets the criteria of the Good Shepherd. May I acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice the Good Shepherd made for me and seek to know and be known by Him. He is my best hope.



straying like sheep

For you were straying like
sheep, but have now returned
to the Shepherd and Overseer
of your souls. -1 Peter 2:25



MARCH 21, 2021

Weekly Reflection

How did the names of Jesus comfort you this week? Or inspire a sense of awe?

How can you apply some of the knowledge you are learning about Jesus in your life?

Have you surrendered all areas of your life to the Good Shepherd who cares for you? What area(s) have you been holding back? Confess that to God now and invite Him to enter into these areas.



MARCH 22, 2021

Immanuel

Read Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23

The bad news came in the form of a phone call. The kids were sleeping soundly. I was wide awake, alone, crying. No light on in the house. I felt as dark and alone as my house looked.

Then, the door opened and in walked Julie and John Fisher filling the room and my heart with their presence. They left their own home well past midnight to sit with me while I grieved the loss of a loved one. What seemed impossible to get through became bearable because someone made the effort to be with me.

The presence of friends reminds me that I am not alone. God generously promises His people that they are not alone. He tells of the fulfillment of this promise in the birth of Jesus, the great Immanuel.

In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, “Immanuel” means “God with us.” God gave this promise to His people as a corporate body, a community. When Isaiah recorded this promise, God’s people were scared. Not like, “Caroline is scared.” More like, “Everyone in our country fears the same thing. Rumors are running rampant. We are envisioning and fretting over the worst-case scenario.”

God’s answer to His people’s distress came as a promise to be with them. They could look to Him. They could trust Him. They could know that He was present, active and aware of their fears. He knew what the future held, and He would be with them every step of the way.

Centuries later, in New Testament times, God fulfilled His promise with the birth of “Immanuel.” Jesus came to redeem all of creation. The promise that initially applied to the Jewish people now belongs to all His people: “God is with us.”

In this walk toward Easter, cling to the promise and the truth that God is with His people. God is with us. God is with you. -CP

Personal reflection:

“I praise You, Father, for Your faithfulness in sustaining me during past difficulties. Please remind me of brothers and sisters in Christ for whom I can pray who need to be reminded that You are with them. Father, You know where I now feel as if I were alone. You promise that You are with me. Help me to rest in Your presence and provision.”

MARCH 23, 2021

Faithful and True Witness

Read Revelation 1:5, 3:14, 19:11

The Sanhedrin stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58-60). A gladiator stabbed noblewoman Perpetua in a North African arena (A.D. 203). Religious and political opponents burned John Huss at the stake in Germany (1415). Reformer Ulrich Zwingli had Anabaptist Felix Manz drowned in Switzerland (1527). Authorities in Japan tortured and strangled Magdalene of Nagasaki (1634). Native Americans in Washington state killed missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman (1847). The Waorani speared Jim Elliot and four co-workers in Ecuador (1956). Hindu extremists murdered Pastor Munsu Thado in India (2020).

The believers named above number among a multitude of Christian martyrs through the centuries. They suffered death for their witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word for “witness,” *martus*, has come over into English as “martyr.” The word became a technical term for Christians put to death because of their faith commitment.

The apostle John identified Jesus as the faithful witness (Rev. 1:5), the faithful and true witness (3:14) or simply Faithful and True (19:11). Jesus said of Himself, “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” (John 18:37, ESV) As a witness, Jesus is absolutely trustworthy. He speaks the truth about God, His kingdom, our human nature and need for salvation. Jesus assures us of God’s promises and fulfills all of them in Himself.

The Christians who first received the Book of Revelation needed encouraging words about the reliable witness of Christ. Many had already faced persecution; others would experience it soon. Jesus showed them how to stand firm and never compromise God’s truth. His own testimony led to suffering and death at the hands of the religious-political authorities of His day. He encouraged His followers to remain faithful even when facing death. (Rev. 2:10)

Following our Lord’s example, we too should proclaim the good news about Jesus to a world where people often question, as did Pilate, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) We know Jesus Who is truth. We must share our stories of our relationship with Him. We must witness fearlessly and loyally despite personal discomfort or rejection by others. The day may come when persecution or death itself may confront us as it has past and present fellow believers.

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us as the Lord’s faithful and true witnesses. -SG

Personal reflection:

Where am I in the “witness spectrum” below? Where would I like to be?

Staying in my comfortable
“Christian bubble”



Cultivating relationships with non-
Christians to share Jesus with them



MARCH 24, 2021

The Last Adam

Read 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Romans 5:12-21

“The Last Adam” is not one of the more common names of Jesus. It does not appear in many songs or hymns. It does not usually find its way into Christmas cards or needlework displays. But when Paul uses that name in 1 Corinthians and in Romans, he paints a beautiful and powerful picture of the connection and contrast between the first Adam and Jesus, the Last Adam.

God created Adam to be the beginning of the human race. God’s wonderful creation had its crowning achievement in Adam. But Adam sinned, and that sin shadow fell over all the rest of creation. Each of us can draw a line from our lives all the way back to Adam. That means we also draw a line back to that original sin. Adam’s mistake descended to us.

Think about what that means for us all as descendants of Adam. We live lives full of hard work and suffering. We are disconnected from God. We are all going to die.

So, God worked His creation wonder again. He sent Jesus, born of a woman, Who was also with no earthly father, also without sin, also the beginning of life for us all. But where Adam sinned and broke the perfect creation of God, Jesus lived a life without sin. He now set God’s plan right. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection means that we no longer have to be descendants of Adam’s flaws, but we can be children of Christ.

Now think about what it means to be a descendant of Jesus. We have hope. We are reconnected with God. We will live beyond death.

Paul beautifully shows the parallels and glorious opposites of Adam and Jesus. Condemnation has turned into justification. The disobedience of Adam becomes the obedience of Jesus. With Adam, we are earthly creatures but with Jesus we are heavenly creations. Sin has gone; grace has come. We do not have to spend our lives in fear of death but can look instead to our eternal life.

Paul’s naming of Jesus as the Last Adam powerfully points to the differences of what came before Jesus and what came after Him. -KL

Personal reflection:

If I am in Christ, I am a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. Am I living my life as if I were created for suffering, distance and hopelessness? Or do I live as a descendant of Jesus, full of hope and life?



MARCH 25, 2021

Peace

Read Isaiah 9:6; Ephesians 2:14

We often ran late on Sunday mornings. My parents' leadership responsibilities at church may have contributed to the stress we felt. This Sunday morning, however, we were visiting my grandmother out of town and attending her church. We were still running late.

As my mom hustled around trying to make sure we all looked our best for people I considered strangers, or acquaintances at best, my grandmother sat down at the piano. She did not sing along, but we all knew the words to the hymn she played:

**When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.***

My mom, feeling not so peaceful in that moment, boiled on the inside. Her mother's attempt to calm our hurrying family may have been well intentioned; my mom took it as a jab instead. Her face hardened, and we fled out the door. Once at church, the smile on her face displayed none of the tension she felt inside.

Family dynamics often hide behind the masks we wear. Our differences divide us. We struggle and break, sometimes quietly and other times violently like a storm at sea, rather than floating peacefully together down a quiet river.

God sees our divisions, both in our families and in our world. He offers a solution in His Son, Jesus Christ. As Israel and Assyria fought for land and power long before Christ's birth, the prophet Isaiah spoke words of hope about Israel's future and our own. God promised not a military leader but a child who would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6, NIV) When God promises peace through Jesus, He promises more than the absence of war. He promises personal well-being. He promises unity. He promises to relieve isolation and break down barriers that create hostility. He promises to join us to Himself for eternity. His peace creates hope in us and for us.

Weathering the hard times creates reminders for us of God's presence and peace. Our family smiles at the memory of that Sunday morning. Now my mom takes her seat at the piano to play that old familiar hymn, and we all laugh together. -KR

Personal reflection:

"God, thank You for bringing peace into our lives and our hearts. Use us to bring Your peace and unity to our families and all people. Amen."

**From the hymn "When Peace Like A River" by Horatio Spafford.*



MARCH 26, 2021

Hope

Read Colossians 1:27; 1 Timothy 1:1; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:3-4

When we got married, we hoped to have a family. Our excitement overflowed as we found out that we were pregnant with twins. Then came May 9, 2007. That was the worst day of our lives, the day we lost our daughters at 21 weeks. Their death destroyed the hopes we had for a life with our two girls. We hoped we could have more children, but month after month we were let down. We had to confront the reality that our hopes and dreams of what we thought our life would be evaporated. What would we do now?

Over time, the Lord steadfastly reminded us of His comfort. Jesus came near and helped us heal. We learned placing our hopes in the things of this world, however good we may think of them, will disappoint us. As believers, we do not set our hopes on the uncertainty of this world. We ultimately named our first baby Faith because our faith in God enabled us to get through this difficult time. Our second baby, we named Hope because of the hope we had for our future.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.” (1 Pet. 1:3-4, NIV)

Jesus is our living hope. Hope, as a name of Jesus, is a Who, not a What. Hope anchors us in the past through His resurrection and victory over death. Hope resides with us every day because He lives within us through the Holy Spirit. Hope points to our future of an eternal life and a great heavenly reunion. To experience this hope requires our faith and our response to the suffering of this world by fixing our eyes on Him, the Source of hope and healing. He alone brings joy and peace to overcome, an impossibility on our own.

The hope of His glory restored and redeemed us. Through Him we have hope that we will see our twins again. One day we will have a glorious reunion in Heaven. Hope is not a wish; it is a promise. Hope is Jesus, and with Him, a forever family.
-LC and MC

Personal reflection:

Even on my worst days, Jesus is Hope for a restored eternity. “Jesus, thank You for Your promise that one day I will be with You in glory. Amen.”



MARCH 27, 2021

King

Read Isaiah 11:1-9; Luke 19:28-40; Revelation 17:14

As the mom of a toddler armed with a Disney+ account, we end up watching a lot of Disney movies, none more than Frozen featuring Queen Elsa. As a high school English teacher, I have the privilege of exposing students to some of the greatest works of literature ever written, from the Ancient Greeks to Shakespeare and beyond. So, what could Elsa possibly have to do with Hamlet . . . or for that matter, the Bible? All of these have the underlying theme of kingships, featuring the threshing out of good versus evil, balance of power, goodness, righteousness, fairness and justice. Yes, even in kids' movies! It seems to me that as humans, we have a fascination with royalty.

For better or worse, the role of an absolute monarch has multiple facets. His or her role is not only political, but cultural, ethical and spiritual. When Isaiah prophesied the coming king in Isaiah 11, he described a king who sounded like one who would “out king” any before him—a king who would reign with the Spirit of the Lord upon him, a king who would reign with perfect wisdom, understanding, equity and righteousness (Isa. 11:1-5). His Kingdom would be one of perfect, radical peace (Isa. 11:6-9). Even Disney cannot recreate anything like it!

Centuries later, when Jesus rode through Jerusalem, His disciples followed, worshipping Him as they went. The Pharisees complained, but Jesus responded that even if His followers remained silent, “the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:38, ESV). Can you imagine? Throughout history, mankind has built great stone structures to honor their kings, but those rocks will crumble without ever uttering a note of praise to those they honor. What the Pharisees could not understand is Jesus is the ultimate King. The Bible says He is KING of kings. (Rev. 17:14)

Jesus certainly “out Kinged” any before Him when He died on the cross for our sins. There has never been nor will there ever be a king like King Jesus. He deserves our worship, our loyalty, our surrender. He should reign as the center of our lives. He should sit on the throne of our hearts and define our politics, our customs, our ethics and our way of living. One day, we will join multitudes of people worshipping this King of kings in the ultimate throne room: heaven! What a King! What a privilege to follow Him! -SE

Personal reflection:

Does Jesus sit on the “throne” of my life? Does he command my whole heart, whole mind and whole soul? What other kings have I let into my life or heart? What “thrones” do I need to surrender to Him?



He is Lord of lords
King of kings.

the Lamb will
conquer them

They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

- Revelation 17:14



MARCH 28, 2021

Palm Sunday Reflection

How does the knowledge of Jesus as King change the way you worship Him today?

What name of Jesus impacted you the most this week and why?

With whom can you share what you are learning? Write their names down below and make a plan to share with them all that you are learning about King Jesus.



MARCH 29, 2021

Advocate

Read 1 John 2:1

If we sin, we have an “Advocate” with the Father, Jesus the righteous. (1 John 2:1) The word “Advocate” translates as the Greek word *parakleton*, meaning “helper, advisor or counselor.” Sometimes we hear this explained as Jesus being like a lawyer, standing for us in a heavenly courtroom before the Judge, the Father, pleading our case so we will not face the Father’s wrath. However, while the idea of Jesus speaking for us in the Triune counsel of the Father, Son and Spirit has an element of truth, the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ has already resolved the issue of sin and God’s wrath. (Heb. 10:12-18)

A good attorney, however, also provides many services that do not involve the courtroom. We can be completely honest and blunt in our privileged communication with our attorneys, who help us navigate complicated situations with tact, expertise and knowledge. Since Jesus was tempted in all ways just as we are (Heb. 4:15), when we sin, He can advise us how not to make the same mistakes again and how to make things right with the people we have wronged.

Another way to understand Jesus as our Advocate considers how this same Greek word appears in John’s Gospel. Jesus speaks of the Advocate (also translated as Helper, Comforter, Intercessor or Counselor in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) as the Holy Spirit Who would come upon Jesus’ disciples at Pentecost. These verses show us the Triune nature of God at work. Jesus the Son serves as our Advocate, seated at the Father’s right hand. The Holy Spirit actively works within and through us as an Advocate-Helper, empowering the extension of Jesus’ ministry through our lives.

Jesus invites all who worn are out by religion, who do not feel good enough, who are burned out by the expectations of others, to join His life. He offers His easy yoke, an agricultural metaphor indicating that He will walk closely with you. He will gently train you how to walk with Him and find rest for your souls. (Matt. 11:28-30) You will find a satisfying, meaningful life even in the seemingly mundane things of your everyday routine. Jesus is your Advocate before the Father and Spirit, working together with Them to transform and empower you as you learn to do the things that Jesus did. As you pray, Jesus stands ready to dispense grace and mercy according to your needs and requests. (Heb. 4:14-16) -WM

Personal reflection:

“Lord Jesus, please give me faith to understand that You are my Advocate, so I can set aside unproductive guilt about my sin and instead receive grace and make progress in the work of the Kingdom.”



MARCH 30, 2021

Mediator

Read 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15

I did it again. I hurt someone I loved. I trusted in creation more than the Creator. I loved myself more than my neighbor.

I really hate my sin.

Whenever the sins in my life confront and grieve me, I close my eyes and bring them to the cross. Surely I can find healing and forgiveness there in that place, where Jesus accomplished what I never could.

Recently I have come to better understand and appreciate the role of Jesus as Mediator. Merriam-Webster defines a mediator as “one who mediates between parties at variance.” The sin that marks my human condition keeps me at odds with God, but through the mediation of Jesus a way opens to resolve this conflict and make things right.

We see examples of mediation throughout the Old Testament, as God selects certain men as righteous intercessors on behalf of His people—men who serve as prophets, priests and kings. Sinful men filled all these positions, but Jesus Himself completes and perfects these same roles through His sinless life, death, resurrection and ascension to His heavenly throne.

Jesus is the “mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” (Heb. 9:15, ESV)

The Law formed the basis of the first covenant, a reciprocal relationship between God and humanity. Moses served as the first mediator. As part of the covenant, the Israelites were to have no other god before Yahweh, and yet, within moments of entering the covenant they chose to build a golden calf. (Exodus 32) Moses interceded for them, and God exhibited His loyal love and faithfulness. He would do this again and again for His people who would continue to break the Law.

The first covenant, broken repeatedly, laid the groundwork for Jesus to enter our humanity, where He would keep the law on our behalf. We may be destined to betray God in our fallen state, but Jesus steadfastly and perfectly mediates our broken relationship. He has rendered us whole so we can receive our eternal inheritance through Him. This is the best news for all sinners who put their trust in Jesus! -JP

Personal reflection:

Have I trusted in Jesus as Mediator in my relationship with God?



MARCH 31, 2021

Lamb of God

Read John 1:29-36; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6-12, 7:17, 13:8

The juxtaposition and complementary nature of the pastoral metaphors for Jesus create a measure of holy dissonance toward understanding His person and mission. We have already seen Him self-identify as “shepherd” (March 20), but John the Baptist emphatically revealed Him as one of the kept rather than the keeper.

John had been traipsing in the wilderness eating crazy stuff, dressing austerely and stirring things up with religious leaders. Was he the Messiah, Elijah or the Prophet? “No,” John answered. Then who are you, they asked, and who gave you the right to dunk people in the river and use God’s name to do it? (John 1:19-25)

One can imagine John’s patience waning, but despite personal affronts, he responded that, while religiously symbolic, his actions primarily resulted in people getting doused. One was coming, however, who would immerse people in something completely different, and they better be prepared. (John 1:26-27; Matt. 3:11)

Into this tense situation Jesus appeared, and how did John address Him: the magnanimous one, all-powerful, ready to show these doubters who’s boss? No. John instead referred to Him as a “Lamb,” and not just any lamb, but God’s Lamb, not a mere sanctimonious title but one with a purpose: to take “away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, CSB)

John’s audience would have known the metaphor. The Old Testament spoke of lambs used as sacrificial offerings. He was announcing to those within earshot, and ultimately to all of us, that the perfect, unblemished Lamb of God, whose soon-to-be-shed blood would open the door for humanity’s redemption once for all, had now shown Himself to the world.

The cross was a mere three years away. God sacrificed the Lamb and splattered His blood so believers could be saved. God resurrected the Lamb three days later to provide the means to eternal life for those who accept His invitation.

This Lamb, in the end, was exalted and glorified. Heavenly beings “fell down before the Lamb.” (Rev. 5:8) Angels proclaimed: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered.” (Rev 5:12) And all creatures said: “Blessing and honor and glory and power . . . to the Lamb.” (Rev. 5:13)

Finally, in a striking passage reimagining the Shepherd imagery, God assures those who have come through the tribulation, “the Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them; he will guide them to springs of the waters of life.” (Rev. 7:17) -StP

Personal reflection:

The Lamb as Shepherd, and the Shepherd as Lamb. He Who is my Shepherd is He who sacrificed Himself on my behalf. The Lamb Who was sacrificed for me has become my Shepherd. Could I ever be in better hands? “Thank You, Shepherd-Lamb, for such grace.”



APRIL 1, 2021

Atoning Sacrifice

Read 1 John 2:2, 4:10

In the beloved childhood story, *Guess How Much I Love You*, Little Nutbrown Hare desperately wants to communicate how great his love is for Big Nutbrown Hare. Yet, no matter how great his expression of love is, Big Nutbrown Hare seems capable of more extraordinary, more profound, higher love. In the end, Little Nutbrown Hare falls asleep, covered thoroughly by Big Nutbrown Hare's love which has proven itself to be beyond anything he can fathom.

The term *atoning sacrifice* may seem like a theologically distant term—a word used by theologians in ivory towers. Even more theologically distant, some translations use “*propitiation for our sins*” instead of “*atoning sacrifice*.” The translations’ differences stem from the difficulty of translating the Greek word, *hilasmos* (1 John 2:2, 4:10). How should we understand this ancient Greek word in 2021?

First, we must orient ourselves from the position of a perfectly sinless God who stands opposite all evil. His wrath against sin is without limits because His goodness is equally without limits. Equal to His goodness is His uncompromising, unconditional love. He loves us because that is simply part of Who He is. God cannot unlove you any more than He can stop being good.

Now, we have a problem: how can we stand perfectly loved before God while also tainted by the stain of sin on humanity? No human can achieve this task. God must deal with His wrath against sin in a way that does not compromise His goodness nor His love.

Enter Jesus Christ. Fully God. Fully human. Christ alone was uniquely capable of absorbing the entirety of God's wrath against sin. He hung on the cross on our behalf—as an atoning sacrifice or for the propitiation for our sins. Understanding propitiation reveals how understandable it was for Christ to plead in the garden that the cup—God's wrath against sin—would pass from Him. Still, He prayed, “may Your will be done.”

On the cross, Jesus absorbed the entirety of God's wrath against sin on our behalf so that we could each stand before God fully loved and redeemed. God's goodness and love uncompromised. Like Little Nutbrown Hare, we may spend our entire lives expressing love and praise for God. Still, as we lay down to sleep, God covers us in love so deep, we may never fathom this side of eternity. Christ's atoning sacrifice—or propitiation—for us means we will never be asked to fathom how great His love for us extends. -KF

Personal reflection:

“God, thank You for covering me with love so deep I cannot fathom it. Thank You for Christ's atoning sacrifice, shielding me from Your wrath so I could know Your love. Amen.”



APRIL 2, 2021

The Resurrection and the Life

Read John 11:1-44

The call came in the dark morning hours. Our infant son Luke, born 14 weeks too early, had taken a turn for the worse. He had struggled with life's demands from the beginning—breathing, receiving nourishment, gaining weight. He seemed to be making progress until a fungal infection attacked his tiny body during his fourth week. We arrived at the NICU in time to hold Luke in our arms as he breathed his final breath.

As we walked away from the hospital that morning, we experienced an incredible peace. We knew without a doubt that our son was with our Heavenly Father. We would see him again some future day. Why? Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Jesus's friend Lazarus was seriously ill. His sisters Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus, hoping He would come. When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the grave four days. Martha believed her brother would still be alive had Jesus been present. She also believed that Lazarus would rise again at the last day. Jesus assured Martha: "I myself am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25, J. B. Phillips) "Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die." (vv. 25-26, GNT) Jesus proved His words true by calling Lazarus out of the tomb, out of death, into life again.

What does Jesus as the resurrection and the life mean for believers? It means that we have a life that never ends. The moment we put our trust in Jesus we possess the eternal life of the age to come, the fuller life that death cannot touch. The Greek word for resurrection literally means "to stand again." Jesus' own resurrection guarantees that we too will stand again. (1 Cor. 15:20) The Lord has already swallowed up death in victory. (1 Cor. 15:55, 57) Death is not the end but the beginning. Our physical death merely opens the gate to richer life and fellowship with God. We cannot imagine what God has prepared for us who love Him. (1 Cor. 2:9) We need not fear death because it will mean being with the Lord Himself. (2 Cor. 5:8)

As the resurrection and the life Jesus also gives hope. We do not grieve as unbelievers who have no hope. (1 Thess. 4:13) We have comfort and encouragement, knowing we will see our believing loved ones again.

"Luke, I know you are having a great time in the Father's house. I will join you some day!" -SG

Personal reflection:

How does knowing that Jesus is the resurrection and the life change the way I live now?



APRIL 3, 2021

Alpha and Omega

Read Revelation 1:8, 2:16, 22:18

I have this vibrant memory of one afternoon from my childhood when the sunlight was golden and slow—the way it becomes only in the ease of autumn. A slight breeze gently rustled the monkey grass planted by my front door. The uncharacteristic easiness of the day enabled me to ask my brother a question about God, something along the lines of, “When was God created?” I will never forget the way he described to me how God, as the Creator of all things, is Himself outside the limitations of creation. The truth stood simple, eloquent and confounding.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev. 1:8, NIV)

God declares what my brother was essentially teaching me all those years ago. Alpha and Omega represent, respectively, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the original language of the New Testament. God is the first and the last, the beginning and the ending. Since the moment creation leapt forth at His command, everything earthly has a beginning. Since the moment Adam and Eve first sinned, everything earthly has an ending. God affirms that He is the beginning (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1) and the ending. (Rev. 21:6, 22:13) All things find their place in Him because He has given all things a place.

Here we find the heart of Lent. God, Who is outside the limited bounds of creation, took up a place within creation as Jesus Christ. He, Who would know no ending, took the restraints of time and death upon Himself. This serves as the ultimate ending—not because the cross ended Jesus’ life but because His resurrection ended the reign of death! (Rom. 6:8-10) This seals the promise that “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) This is Alpha and Omega.

Whether my brother meant all of that or not with the words he spoke that golden afternoon, I do not know. But when I think of all that has happened throughout time, I think of Christ. I think of the purposes that He sets forth in and through our lives—purposes that He is carrying through to completion. I think of eternity—the end of endings. And eternity, in my finite mind, is golden and slow, and a slight breeze is blowing. -JS

Personal reflection:

When I pray today, I will remember that I pray in the name of the One Who is, Who was and Who is to come. All His purposes are rooted in eternity.

Alpha & Omega

“I am the Alpha and
Omega,” says the Lord
God, “who is and
who was and who
is to come, the
Almighty.”

-Revelation 1:8





APRIL 4, 2021

Easter Reflection

What name of Jesus has meant the most to you in your life and why?

Have you given your life fully to Jesus? Is there any area of your life that you have been holding back? How can you surrender to Jesus today?

Write out a prayer in the lines below and praise Jesus for His many names!

There Is Power in the Name of Jesus

We hope you have seen God's power the past six weeks as you've heard from many of your brothers and sisters in Christ. We hope that these devotionals have challenged you and helped you grow in a meaningful way.

We now ask you to spend the next couple of weeks reading through the Key Convictions of our church and prayerfully considering the questions after each one. How will you commit to Jesus this year? Where do you want to grow? How will you serve the body of Christ and your community? As you reflect upon these questions we hope that you are able to personally re-commit to following Christ in very practical and meaningful ways.

We also understand that following Christ is not just a personal journey, it's a communal one. Our prayer is not just for God's power to be at work in our lives, but in our church. As the Lenten season draws to a close we further our focus, not just on our commitments as individuals but our commitments as a church. You'll be hearing more about where God is leading our church and how your personal commitment can be a part of God's power being unleashed in our lives.

As that day approaches, let us continue to fix our eyes on Jesus and run with perseverance the race marked out for us.



Jeremiah Smith



Key Convictions

These are the key convictions of our church, the tenets that guide us and lead us in everything we do as we seek to glorify God and be His disciples. We ask that you read these convictions and the reflection questions that follow, and use them as a guide for your own personal growth and commitment for the year.



Gospel-Centered

The central characteristic of UBC is an unwavering commitment to the Gospel. The Gospel is consistently proclaimed in the weekly services and in the lives of the members. It is a clear expectation that everyone associated with UBC has an opportunity to hear the Gospel and be encouraged to share the Gospel. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

Is everything in my life centered on the Gospel?

What areas in my life do I need to re-evaluate to make them more Gospel-centered?



Biblically-Guided

We consult the Scriptures and submit to them in all things that we do. We pursue doctrinal integrity to the best of our ability by seeing the Word of God as authoritative and living and active. 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

Am I spending time reading and meditating on God's word consistently?

Am I demonstrating an obedience to God's word with my thoughts and actions?



Prayer-Driven

UBC strives to be a praying church in all aspects of service. We seek to acknowledge that God leads us in all things. Consequently, prayer is essential to who we are and is a core part of our identity. EPHESIANS 6:18-20

What areas in my life am I praying to see God's power unleashed?

Key Convictions (Continued)



Discipleship Focused

Ministry efforts at UBC are anchored in the core principles of discipleship. As seen in the Great Commission, we are committed to go make disciples. We seek to take Gospel to the lost and not wait for the lost to come find us. We pray earnestly for a movement of God that leads to salvation and baptisms among the lost. We also commit to teaching our church family to obey all that He has commanded. In short, this means we are a church that makes disciples who make disciples.

Am I committed to regularly participating in our three areas of discipleship at UBC – Worship, Sunday Connect and a Discipleship Group?

Am I committed to impacting lostness and nominality by investing in the lives of others? If so, who are those people?



Emphasis on Fasting

Fasting complements and accentuates prayer. It is a physical and holistic response to help facilitate our prayers. Fasting and prayer spotlights God's freedom that sets prisoners free, provides justice and community. ISAIAH 58

Have I committed to set aside one day each month to fast? If not, why?

What steps can I take to move forward in greater commitment and/or understanding of fasting and prayer?



Spiritual Worship

The key theological message of worship is one that adheres to the truths found in Romans 12. Specifically, worship is much more than a weekly expression of a genre of music but a way of life. It is found in a renewed mind and offering ourselves as living sacrifices. UBC seeks to stress this truth in every capacity. ROMANS 12:1-2

Do I live my life as an act of worship?

Read Romans 12 and reflect on what it means to live a life of spiritual worship.



Holistic Giving

We seek to be a church that gives sacrificially, generously and cheerfully. Rather than emphasizing a financial formula we cultivate an atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to surrender not only their finances to God but all other areas of life as well. As Paul encourages the church in Corinth, we seek to excel in faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness in love as well as the grace of giving. 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7

Am I living a life of radical generosity that is rooted in radical love?

How will I give cheerfully, sacrificially and generously of my time, skills and finances this year?



Families Valued

Families are a priority for UBC. We are a church for every stage of life and a church that emphasizes the importance of family. DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

In what ways can I go deeper with my family and spend more intentional time with them this year?

Is God opening my heart to consider fostering, adopting or supporting someone who is?



A Loving Community

UBC is a place for all people. We seek to love everyone who comes through those doors no matter their gender, race, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status or any other delineation by which an individual can be defined. UBC will be a place where all people can come and be well loved. 1 JOHN 4:7-12

Am I committed to a radical and unyielding love for my neighbor, both within and beyond the walls of UBC?

Do I serve my church and community? If not, why?



Next Steps

How Will You Respond?

We want to see the power of God unleashed in our lives, our church, our community and our world – where can you begin? How can you commit your life to Christ and our church in 2021? After reading the Key Convictions and thinking through the questions on the previous pages, please use the space below to write out some ways you would like to grow this year.

Please complete your Personal Commitment survey at ubcfortworth.org by April 25, 2021.



Thank You

Thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Lent Devotional Book possible!

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Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

-Philippians 2:9-11, NIV