

Following
Jesus

LENT DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

2020

UNIVERSITY BAPTIST CHURCH

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A Message from Our Pastor

Jesus said, "Come, follow me." When He first offered these words it meant one would give everything they had to follow Him. People left their families, their jobs, their homes ... everything. Others heard this invitation and wanted to respond but prioritized other responsibilities. They needed to care for their aging parents. They had just gotten married or just purchased a new home. They had all these other things they needed to settle first. Jesus told each and every one of them to leave those things behind and follow Him. When Jesus said, "Come, follow me," He meant immediately and with complete devotion.

This invitation to follow Jesus Christ rings out from generation to generation. And it calls out to you. How have you responded? Have you given Him everything? What does that look like today? How do you know you've given Him everything? It's not enough for us to set our own standard of what it means to follow Him. It requires meaningful reflection and courageous obedience. There are times when the priorities of our lives fall out of place. We still associate with Jesus, still think about Jesus, but we don't fully follow Him. We prioritize our jobs, our families, our personal goals and so many other things over Him. There are times when following Jesus is something we schedule and a hobby we practice rather than a life we live. What does it look like for you? How would you describe your current practice of following Jesus?

The season of Lent is an ancient practice designed to help believers prepare for the miracle of Easter. It was likely formalized as early as 325 AD, at the First Council of Nicaea and endures even today, though it is practiced differently in various traditions around the world. This year, our church is going to join in this season of Lent by encouraging you to engage in personal reflection as we journey towards the cross and the empty tomb. As we walk through these daily devotions derived from the book of Luke, ask yourself again what it means to answer the call of Jesus. Evaluate your life, your priorities and prepare your heart to respond to Christ by committing everything to Him. As you read these daily devotions we hope that you hear His voice once more calling to you, saying, "Come, follow me." Come, behold this wonderful mystery that is Jesus Christ and discover once more that He is the only one worth following.

IN HIS GRACE,



Jeremiah Smith

WHEN DO YOU EXPECT GOD TO ANSWER YOUR PRAYERS?

FEBRUARY 26 | READ LUKE 1:5-25

WRITTEN BY SHARON GRITZ

My 4-year-old daughter announced one day, "God has not answered my prayers. I've prayed and prayed, and I'm still not a little mermaid!" The Lord did answer her prayers. He said, "No." Our Heavenly Father knows our wants but gives us what we need. He responds to our prayers with "yes" and "no." Sometimes He replies with "not now, wait."

The priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth probably believed the Lord had said "no" to their prayers for a baby. Elizabeth had passed the normal age of childbearing. Aware of their advanced years, did this godly couple continue to pray for a child?

Now the highlight of his priesthood had arrived for Zechariah. He and priests of his division were serving during one of their annual weeks at the temple. Chosen by lot, Zechariah had the honor of offering incense in the holy place, a once-in-a-lifetime privilege. This important duty included presenting a prayer with the incense. What did Zechariah pray? Did he make a personal petition for a child on behalf of his wife and himself? Or, in keeping with his priestly role, did he pray for the coming of Israel's promised Redeemer?

While offering the incense, Zechariah "was startled and . . . gripped with fear" by the presence of the angel Gabriel. (Luke 1:12, NIV) God's messenger said, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John." (Luke 1:13)

God's perfect time had come. He did far more abundantly than all Zechariah and Elizabeth had asked or imagined. The Lord answered two "not-now-wait" prayers — a child for this righteous couple and the Messiah for His people's deliverance. Their son John would have a unique role in God's redemptive plan: to serve as forerunner to Jesus — the Messiah. John would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17) The Father's delayed answers resulted in joy and delight to Elizabeth and Zechariah and rejoicing to many others.

When do you expect God to answer your prayers? Following Jesus means trusting the Lord to answer your prayers in His timing and for His greater purposes.

Personal Reflection:

How does our immediate-gratification culture influence your prayers?

What makes waiting for God's answers to your prayers difficult for you?

What roles do trust and surrender play in your waiting?

#KeyConvictions
#PrayerDriven

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SURRENDER WHEN YOU FOLLOW JESUS?

FEBRUARY 27 | READ LUKE 1:26-38

WRITTEN BY SHARON GRITZ

We Americans enjoy our rights. Among other privileges, we have the right to worship (or not worship) as we please. We have the freedom to express our ideas and opinions. We have the right to vote. We may even travel anywhere in our nation whenever we so desire. We cherish these rights and cannot imagine surrendering them.

Surrender, however, should mark the lives of those who follow Jesus. Teacher and evangelist Oswald Chambers defined Jesus' disciples as those who surrender their right to themselves. How do we do that? A young girl who lived in the obscure village of Nazareth in Bible times exemplifies one who gave up her right to herself.

Six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy with John, the angel Gabriel appeared again with incredible news for a peasant, engaged-to-be-married teenager. He greeted Mary as one highly favored — the recipient of God's grace. Gabriel assured her that the Lord was with her, a reminder that His presence and power would help her.

Gabriel's greeting troubled Mary. Why did this messenger address her with such exalted words? The angel explained that Mary had found favor with God. "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." (Luke 1:31-32, NIV) In His gracious sovereignty, God had chosen her to bear His Son.

Although Mary did not doubt Gabriel's declaration, she wanted to know how all this would take place. The angel explained: the miraculous conception would take place through God's power manifested in the Holy Spirit. Mary responded in faith, humility and surrender. "I am the Lord's servant." (Luke 1:38)

Mary willingly accepted God's interruption of her life despite the consequences. She gave up her good reputation. She risked the charge of adultery—and its death penalty. She submitted to humiliation, scandal, misunderstanding, shame, ridicule, embarrassment, isolation, pain, sorrow and loss. She surrendered her rights to her own body. She surrendered her rights to her own life. She viewed herself as God's slave. She obeyed her Master. Do we dare follow her example?

What do you have to surrender when you follow Jesus? Following Jesus means surrendering your whole self. God's presence and power will help you.

Personal Reflection:

Father God, forgive me for clinging to my rights, for wanting my way instead of Yours. Help me to surrender my rights. Take me away from saturation with self and use me as You desire—when, where, and with whom You desire. I am Your servant.

HOW DOES THE BIBLE IMPACT YOUR PRAYER LIFE?

FEBRUARY 28 | READ LUKE 1:39-80

WRITTEN BY SHARON GRITZ

Personal Reflection:

What steps can you take to internalize God's word more effectively?

Have you learned to pray God's word?

Re-read the prayer-songs of Mary and Zechariah. Use some of their words and phrases to offer your own prayer to God.

#KeyConvictions
#PrayerDriven
#BiblicallyGuided
#SpiritualWorship

During Lydia's 13 years in Fort Worth's public schools, I participated in Moms in Prayer—a group who met once a week to pray for their children and their school. The mother who led the group for half of those years taught me much about prayer. She had absorbed God's word through years of worship using her church's Episcopal liturgy and her own personal study. Her prayers reflected how much she had internalized the Bible. Her use of Scripture energized her prayers.

In his birth narrative, Luke recorded two beautiful prayer-songs of praise. We know them by the first word in the Latin version of each: the Magnificat, Mary's song (Luke 1:46-56) and the Benedictus, Zechariah's song (Luke 1:67-80). Both songs freely use Old Testament language—unsurprisingly since first-century Jewish education involved massive memorization of the Hebrew Scriptures from early childhood. The priest Zechariah, as well as the peasant Mary, knew God's word.

Mary modeled her prayer after that of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10). Perhaps as she traveled the 50-70 miles from Nazareth to Zechariah and Elizabeth's home, she thought about Hannah's story and meditated on the Scriptures she knew. That reflection enabled her own outburst of praise. According to one Bible scholar, Mary referred to 12 different Old Testament passages! Her prayer recognized God's redemptive purpose as He worked in history and in Mary's own life. She praised Him for His greatness, power, holiness and mercy. She proclaimed His works in turning attitudes and society upside down.

The Holy Spirit inspired Zechariah to use the language of the Old Testament to praise God's redemptive work in and through Israel. One interpreter notes 16 Old Testament parallels in the priest's song. Zechariah praised God for the Messiah and His deliverance. He also celebrated the role his son, John the Baptist, would have in this work. He emphasized God's tender mercy and compassion as the basis of the coming salvation. Zechariah's song reflected the understanding of the history of the Hebrew people from Abraham to John and Jesus as one redemptive act of God.

Mary and Zechariah both possessed "memorized treasures of Scripture." Those words saturated their prayer life. How does the Bible impact your prayer life? Following Jesus means using God's word to energize your prayers.

WHAT RULES YOU? FEAR OR JOY?

FEBRUARY 29 | READ LUKE 2:8-21

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER SMITH

Have you ever felt crippled by fear? That swelling-of-your-throat, heart-pounding and pit-in-your-stomach fear? Fear has a funny way of seeping into our minds and bodies in expected and unexpected ways. Fear can surround us and paralyze us. It can keep us down—if we allow it.

Great fear filled the shepherds when they saw the angels that night. It was a normal night for them, watching over the livestock. Nothing was different or extraordinary about this night—except what happened next. Out of the dark of the night, the Lord's angel appeared to them and the "glory of the Lord shone around them." (Luke 2:9, ESV) The angel proclaimed the new message that would spread across the world: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

Fear Not. Great Joy. All People. But first, Fear Not.

The shepherds first had to get past their fears before they could go find this "Great Joy." What if their fear was too great? What if it was safer to stay in their comfortable field that night? What if their trembling was too strong to move?

After the angel and the heavenly hosts praised the name of God, they went away, giving the shepherds a pivotal moment in their lives to ponder their next steps. Did they say, "What shall we do now?" Or, "I'm not so sure about this. How about a few of us stay back—just in case?" NO. The Bible says, "They went with haste." (Luke 2:16) Haste means excessive speed or urgency of movement or action, to hurry.

Fear Not. Great Joy. All People. They went WITH HASTE.

I spent almost a decade of my life in a state of chronic fear. I can assure you that fear and joy cannot co-exist together. One will overrule the other. What will rule you? Fear or Joy?

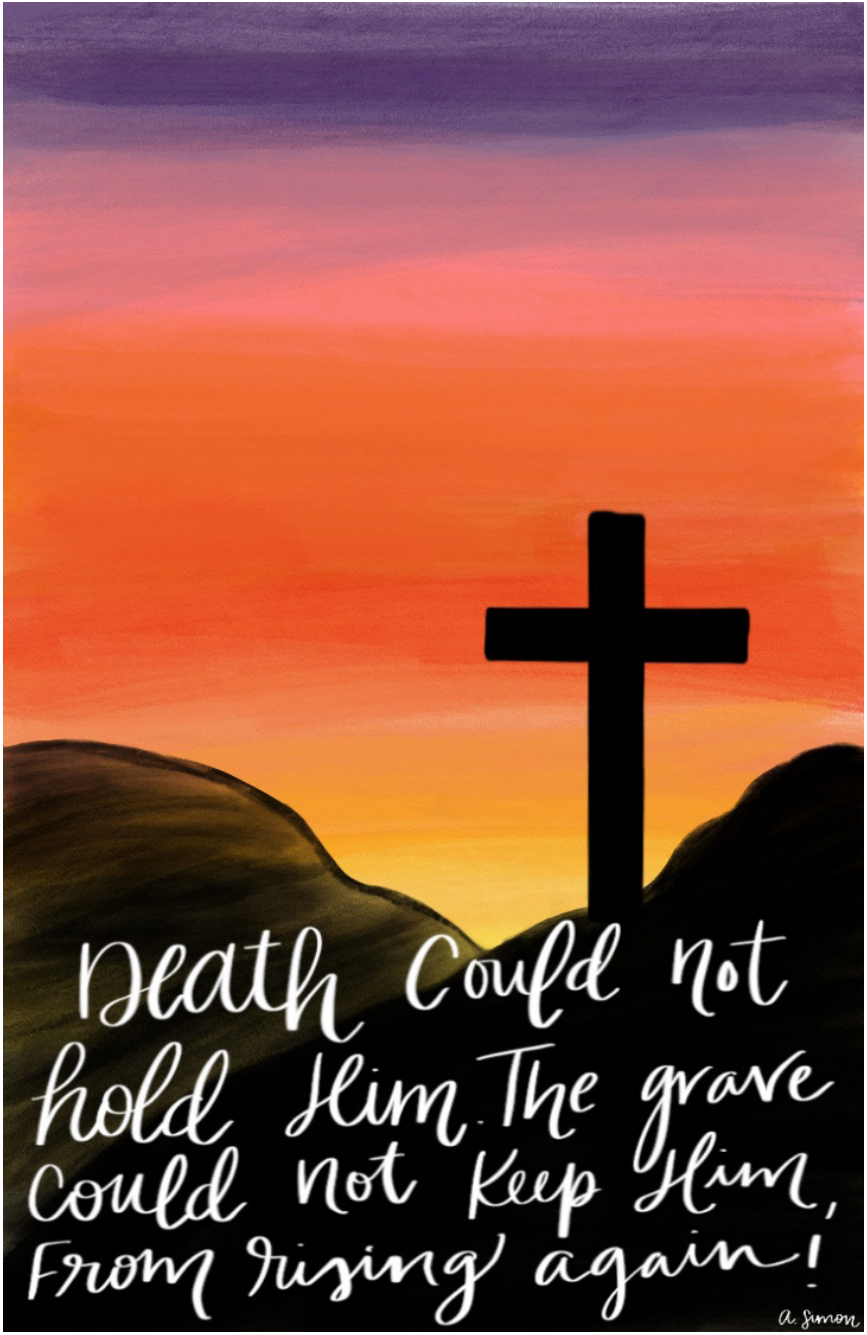
Today begin your journey towards this Great Joy that exists on the other side of fear and struggle. We find this Great Joy for all peoples—including you and me—in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—not in circumstances, power, fame, family, children, health, money, beauty.

Following Jesus means moving with haste past your fears toward this Great Joy found only in Jesus.

*Personal
Reflection:*

Will you allow your fears to cripple you, or will you move with haste toward the calling the Lord is putting in your heart?

How can you step past your fears, knowing that joy is on the other side?



Art by Ashley Simon

MARCH 1

GLORIOUS DAY (LIVING HE LOVED ME)

One day when Heaven was filled with His praises
One day when sin was as black as could be
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin
Dwelt among men, my example is He

Word became flesh and the light shined among us
His glory revealed

CHORUS

Living, He loved me
Dying, He saved me
Buried, He carried my sins far away
Rising, He justified freely forever
One day He's coming
Oh glorious day, oh glorious day

One day they led Him up Calvary's mountain
One day they nailed Him to die on a tree
Suffering anguish, despised and rejected
Bearing our sins, my Redeemer is He

Hands that healed nations, stretched out on a tree
And took the nails for me

One day the grave could conceal Him no longer
One day the stone rolled away from the door
Then He arose, over death He had conquered
Now He's ascended, my Lord evermore

Death could not hold Him, the grave could not keep Him
From rising again

One day the trumpet will sound for His coming
One day the skies with His glories will shine
Wonderful day, my Beloved One, bringing
My Savior, Jesus, is mine

Glorious day, Oh, Glorious day

J. Wilbur Chapman (1909); Michael Bleecker and John Mark Hall (2009)

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

MARCH 2 | READ LUKE 3:1-38

WRITTEN BY CHRIS WHITT

“Hungry.”

A disheveled man held the sign which he had crudely fashioned on a flap of cardboard. He stood on the I-35 access road near Berry Street. I sometimes encounter this man—or others like him—as I go to and from UBC’s ministry at Morningside Apartments. Over time my reaction to people like this has changed. In the past, I felt a desire to avoid them. Now, though, I think of Jesus when I see them. “For I was hungry, and you fed me.” (Matt. 25:35a, NLT)

As my reaction has changed, so has my action. I now work at keeping small bags of snack bars in my car so that I have food to offer. Sometimes these exchanges are very brief, especially if the traffic light turns green for me. If possible, though, as I offer the person something to eat, I ask his or her name. God leads me to help people who are physically hungry in these very small ways — sharing a bag of snack bars and asking the person’s name.

John the Baptist encountered people who were hungry spiritually. Three different groups of people asked the same question, “What should we do?” (Luke 3:10-14) John made it plain to each group that following Jesus involved much more than getting baptized. Each time John responded to the question with a very specific action or actions to take.

For the crowds, John responded by telling them to share what they had to meet the physical needs of others, needs such as clothing and food. He told the tax collectors to collect only what the government required. He urged the soldiers not to extort money or make false accusations and to be content with their pay. John gave them do-able, relevant instructions. The way they lived—the actions they took—would demonstrate that they were followers of Jesus.

What should you do? Following Jesus means showing by your actions that you follow Jesus. It also means cultivating a hunger for God’s word and listening to Him as you pray. “In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for Me wholeheartedly, you will find Me.” (Jer. 29:12-13)

Personal Reflection:

As a follower of Jesus, what do you hunger for today?

Since you are reading this devotional, you already show a hunger for God’s Word. Are you also hungry to spend time alone with Him in prayer?

The next question — at least for me — adds a serious challenge: Are you hungry to listen to God as you pray, simply to be quiet and open to Him?

#KeyConvictions
#PrayerDriven
#BiblicallyGuided

WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR SATISFACTION AND FULFILLMENT?

MARCH 3 | READ LUKE 4:1-13

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY GARTNER

I get cranky when I'm hungry. Most of us can relate to that feeling of having to wait longer than expected for a meal. In those moments of having an unmet need, we find it difficult to think of anything else.

When Jesus was in the wilderness and had gone without food for 40 days, the devil tempted Him. He said to Jesus, "Tell this stone to become bread." (Luke 4:3, NIV) This temptation focused on ending the hunger rather than trusting God to satisfy His need. Jesus responded, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'" (Luke 4:4)

Jesus, "full of the Holy Spirit," knew God would supply His needs. (Luke 4:1) He understood that He did not have to take matters into His own hands because God alone would satisfy. Society encourages us to seek comfort whenever possible. Our culture promotes worldly things as the source of fulfillment. Seeking satisfaction in temporary things tempts us daily. In His moment of temptation, Jesus affirmed that honoring God with His obedience

would offer greater satisfaction than having His physical need for food met.

The devil then showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, saying, "If you worship me, it will all be yours." (Luke 4: 7) Jesus responded, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" (Luke 4: 8) When we have an unfulfilled desire, whether it is a physical need, circumstance or status, temptation strikes: "I shouldn't have to do without that." We want to decide when or how to fulfill our real—or imagined—needs. Our human nature wants to choose when we eat, how much money or status we have and whether that person accepts us. When we worship and serve God, however, we acknowledge that He has the right to decide how and when He will meet our genuine needs. He invites us to trust Him. The way He chooses to provide for our needs will truly satisfy us the most.

Where do you look for satisfaction and fulfillment? Following Jesus means looking to the Lord for satisfaction and fulfillment. He will meet all your needs from His glorious riches given to you in Christ Jesus.

Personal Reflection:

In moments when you feel "hunger" for an unmet need, do you tend to take matters into your own hands? Or, do you wait with assurance that God will truly satisfy that need according to His will?

How has God already met your past needs in ways that satisfied you more than if you had tried to fulfill those needs on your own?

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR JESUS TO VISIT OUR CHURCH?

MARCH 4 | READ LUKE 4:31-5:11

WRITTEN BY WILL MCDONALD

It was a sabbath no one would forget.

Jesus visited Capernaum and was invited to teach in the synagogue. His words pierced the air with a quiet, intense authority, and unsettled the congregation with joy and dread. His words seemed to open the heavens, for God felt very near.

Suddenly, a man screamed at Jesus, "I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus calmly commanded the spirit to be silent and leave. The man fell limply to the floor. A moment later, he was back in his right mind. Astonished, the congregation stared at Jesus. If Jesus could command the demons, what else could he do?

Simon, a local man who knew Jesus, invited Jesus to Sabbath lunch and an afternoon of rest and conversation. When they arrived at his home, his mother-in-law had a high fever, too sick to host—or do anything else. Jesus commanded the fever to leave, and it did. She happily got out of her bed and hosted their lunch.

Simon, his family and Jesus talked for hours and told stories about themselves and their families, drawing both laughter and tears. When Jesus spoke, His words seemed to have the power to reorder their lives. The shadows grew long, the sun slipped behind the hills, and sabbath ended. Soon they heard voices outside the home. Jesus excused Himself, walked

outside and greeted a large crowd of people. Curious, Simon joined Jesus and saw hundreds coming from every direction. Many were helping sick and disturbed people make their way to meet Jesus.

Apparently, many in the crowd had witnessed the miracle in the synagogue and had spent the afternoon thinking of the people they knew who were sick and demonized. As soon as Sabbath had ended and they could travel, they hurried to retrieve loved ones, neighbors and friends. Perhaps "the Holy One of God" could help them. He did.

Jesus individually healed, blessed and encouraged those who came to Him until the morning light. It was time for Jesus to go, but the crowd begged Him to stay since God was doing something in their midst.

The immediate presence, goodness and generosity of God was tangible. Clearly, God was working through Jesus. But Jesus needed to go to all the other cities to teach and let them experience the presence and authority of God. Simon left his fishing business that day and followed Jesus. He would become known as Peter, Jesus' most prominent disciple.

Following Jesus means sharing Him with others that they may also experience His healing, blessing and encouragement.

Personal Reflection:

Whom do you know who needs to meet Jesus and experience His healing, blessing and encouragement?

#KeyConvictions
#GospelCentered
#FamiliesValued
#ALovingCommunity

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE?

MARCH 5 | READ LUKE 5:12-39

WRITTEN BY JILLIAN SMITH

“How do you deal with a difficult friend?” my friend asked. I decided to look at how Jesus dealt with difficult people and respond to her with godly advice.

We can learn a lot about dealing with difficult people from the stories recorded in (Luke 5:12-39). When the disfigured leper asks for healing, Jesus “reached out his hand and touched the man.” (Luke 5:13, NIV) Jesus knows the power of empathy and touch. Though He tells the healed man to tell no one, the news spread. Soon crowds begin to follow Jesus, and He continues to teach and heal. But Jesus also knows when to disengage. He “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:16) He walks away not out of anger or self-preservation, but to center His heart on God.

One day, inside a packed house, Jesus is teaching a crowd that includes the religious leaders. Suddenly, people lowering a paralyzed man through the roof interrupt Jesus! Jesus stops what He is doing—He is flexible. He turns His attention from the crowd to the man and says, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” (Luke 5:20, NIV). His words offend the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Jesus knows their thoughts and immediately heals the paralyzed man to show His authority to forgive sins. Jesus does not focus on what people think. He focuses on the will of God. Jesus knows that the religious leaders think unkindly of Him, but He boldly forgives the man’s sins and then heals the forgiven man. He does not become defensive when the religious leaders accuse Him of blasphemy. Instead, Jesus asks questions, showing His engagement and willingness to listen.

When Jesus dines with tax collectors and sinners, the Pharisees and teachers of the law complain, asking “why?” They will not socialize with these outcasts, but Jesus eats with them. Jesus responds that He spends time with those who need Him. Instead of avoiding difficult people, Jesus allows the Spirit to work, approaching others with an open mind.

Jesus is an expert at dealing with people. Following Jesus means imitating His example: showing empathy, using touch, withdrawing to center your heart on God, allowing interruptions, choosing flexibility, engaging others with questions, listening, focusing on God’s will—not on what others think, allowing the Spirit to work and approaching others with an open mind.

Personal Reflection:

Am I asking Jesus to show me His heart for everyone I meet?

Am I actively using the people skills Jesus exemplified?

Am I letting God show me where I’m being “the difficult one” and need His correction and grace?

WHAT MAKES YOU HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS?

MARCH 6 | READ LUKE 6:1-26

WRITTEN BY SUZANNE YOST

Think of a jar of creamy peanut butter. When you first spin the lid open and remove the protective paper, you see smooth perfection. It's completely untouched. But as soon as you stick your knife in that smoothness, (or spoon if you're like me), you alter the peanut butter forever. If we think of ourselves like that jar of peanut butter, sin forever alters us. We can never be holy or righteous on our own. All the mistakes we make every day continue to mar any idea of perfection — especially next to a holy, righteous God.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day had many rules about how to be holy and righteous. These included activities forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus crushed their man-made laws. He defied the expectations of the Pharisees because He allowed His disciples to pick grain to eat on the Sabbath. He also healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The Pharisees did not see these acts as benevolent, but blasphemous. Jesus was breaking their rules. Their human traditions had become more important for them than honoring God by loving other people. Jesus' actions declared that human need had priority over the Pharisees' legalism. He came to do good and to save life (Luke 6:9).

In His Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), Jesus proclaimed blessings on those who are poor, hungry, downtrodden and hated. When I read "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20, NIV), I am filled with joy — not because of what my bank statement says, but because I know my spiritual need. To use the peanut butter analogy differently, I am a peanut butter jar scraped down to the bottom. I know I must completely depend on Jesus—not my own attempts at keeping God's law like the legalistic Pharisees believed they had to do. With Jesus, I can have "a full jar." Yes, I am so poor. But by accepting the gift of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, He fulfills the law for me. His death presents me as holy and righteous in God's sight, "without blemish and free from accusation." (Col. 1:22)

Following Jesus means not trying to become holy and righteous by your own efforts in attempting to obey God's law. It means accepting the gift of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. His work fulfills the law for you and presents you as holy and righteous in God's sight.

Personal Reflection:

How does Jesus' sacrifice prove that you cannot do anything to become holy and righteous before God? Thank God for Jesus and His gift of sacrifice on the cross for you.

ARE YOU LISTENING?

MARCH 7 | READ LUKE 6:27-49

WRITTEN BY SHARI BARNES

Jesus begins this passage by saying, "But to you who are listening I say..." (Luke 6:27, NIV) He also asks, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46) Jesus' words painfully remind me that I am not always listening.

One day I asked my husband, "What are you thinking?" He replied, "Nothing. I'm not like you. I don't have a gerbil running around on a wheel in my head all the time!" Mildly insulted by his comment, I eventually realized the truth of his statement. And, even worse, I had to admit that the gerbil keeps me from listening to what's important.

In this Luke passage, Jesus gives us practical advice on living with those around us. Yet, when I'm not listening, I miss the message that I must do more than love those who love me. When I'm composing my grocery list in my head during the sermon, I miss the revelation that discipleship requires me to turn my cheek and bless those who curse me. When I'm planning my weekend during my meditation with God, I miss His voice and message to me.

When I am truly listening, I find that Jesus' teaching presents a contrast to the wisdom of this world. The world tells us to hate our enemies, but Jesus tells us to love them. To love is to give and to forget rights and self-centered interests. Jesus teaches: "do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:31)

Toddlers grab toys and loudly yell, "Mine!" As adults, we understand that everything we have comes from God. Jesus encourages us to show generosity, expecting nothing in return. Instead of laying up treasures for ourselves and hoarding what we have, we must show openhandedness to others. Part of our stewardship includes giving generously as Christ has given to us.

We do not fully grasp God's mercy until we learn not to condemn others. We find it so easy to judge the lifestyles and decisions of others. When we understand that God has extended His grace to us, we can begin the journey of extending grace to others.

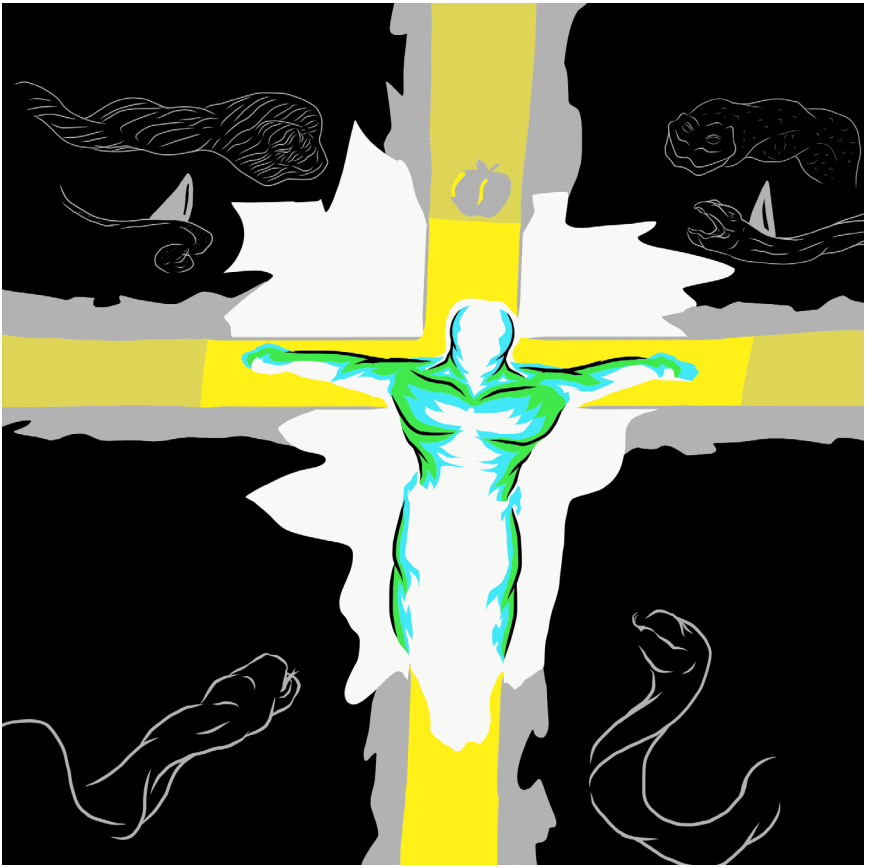
Following Jesus means becoming a good listener. Are you listening to Jesus?

Personal Reflection:

Do I approach spiritual dialogue with God in a sincere desire to hear Him, or am I only going through the motions?

Am I asking God to show me how He expects me to relate to others?

Am I searching the Scriptures to inform my walk with Jesus?



Art by Timothy Johnson

MARCH 8

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

“Oh, to see the dawn
Of the darkest day:
Christ on the road to Calvary.
Tried by sinful men,
Torn and beaten, then
Nailed to a cross of wood.

CHORUS

This, the pow’r of the cross:
Christ became sin for us;
Took the blame, bore the wrath—
We stand forgiven at the cross.

Oh, to see the pain
Written on Your face,
Bearing the awesome weight of sin.
Ev’ry bitter thought,
Ev’ry evil deed
Crowning Your bloodstained brow.

Now the daylight flees;
Now the ground beneath
Quakes as its Maker bows His head.
Curtain torn in two,
Dead are raised to life;
“Finished!” the vict’ry cry.

Oh, to see my name
Written in the wounds,
For through Your suffering I am free.
Death is crushed to death;
Life is mine to live,
Won through Your selfless love.

FINAL CHORUS

This, the pow’r of the cross:
Son of God—slain for us.
What a love! What a cost!
We stand forgiven at the cross.”

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (2005)

ARE YOU EXPECTING SOMETHING ELSE?

MARCH 9 | READ LUKE 7:1-35

WRITTEN BY MIKE MCQUITTY

One Christmas, my mother-in-law gave me a crockpot. This gift was especially perplexing because I never cook. Never. Part of the reason for marrying into the family were the amazing dishes that appeared at every meal. Good reasons existed for the gift, but then it did not make sense.

(Luke 7) contains a such a mixture of expectations during difficult days. The powerful Son of God certainly did not disappoint the Roman centurion. All involved encountered the Healer, Jesus, just as they expected Him to be.

The widow must have had quite different expectations. Any hopes concerning her family and future drained away with her only son's death. In this moment, the Author of Life defied human limitations by speaking life to the dead man and returning him to his mother. Jesus became more than anyone there could have imagined.

However, the reaction of John the Baptist perplexes people the most. This cousin of Jesus witnessed God the Father testifying about His Son at the baptism. John had spent his whole life in self-denial and dedication to prepare the people for the appearance of Jesus, the Messiah. By all accounts, John the Baptist should have been the person most convinced that Jesus was indeed God's promised Savior. Yet, he sends disciples to question Jesus. "Are you the One who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:20, NIV)

How could John, of all people, lose faith? What changed? Why would he question the one to whom he had devoted his life? Perhaps Jesus just did not meet John's expectations. He was

waiting for the Messiah to come clean house, casting out the spiritually corrupt and the politically oppressive. By his own testimony, John confessed that he yearned for the Messiah "to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Luke 3:17, NIV)

In addition, John finds himself in prison. Things had not worked out for him as he might have expected. Jesus graciously reminds him that the kingdom of God is restoring lives and bringing salvation in the midst of his personal suffering. Further, Jesus explains to all who can hear that although we may play a pipe or sing a dirge, God's ways are best. They serve a greater purpose even if they do meet our expectations.

Following Jesus means trusting Him and His greater purposes even when people or situations do not meet our personal expectations.

Personal Reflection:

How do you react when God does not meet your expectations?

What situations do not make sense to you?

How does God call you to trust Him in those circumstances?

#KeyConvictions
#DiscipleshipFocused
#BiblicallyGuided

DO YOUR THOUGHTS, WORDS AND ACTIONS REFLECT GRATITUDE FOR JESUS?

MARCH 10 | READ LUKE 7:36-40

WRITTEN BY COOKIE CHAMBERS

My mind easily settled on gratitude as the topic of this devotional as I was writing over the Thanksgiving holidays—gratitude for the forgiveness of my sins through Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. However, my focus quickly turned to the behaviors of the Pharisee and the uninvited woman and what my personal behaviors reveal about my gratitude.

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus as a dinner guest at his home. An uninvited guest, a sinful woman, also came. She began to wash Jesus’ feet. Simon spoke silently to himself, “I knew it. If Jesus were a prophet, He would know that the woman is a sinner.”

Jesus answered Simon’s private thoughts by telling him a story about a moneylender who forgave the debts of two people. One of the debtors owned 500 denarii and the other 50 denarii. Jesus asked Simon which of the two debtors was the most grateful. Simon replied the one with the greatest debt. To drive the point home, Jesus explained in great detail.

I began to think about Simon and the woman and found disturbing attitudes and convicting behaviors.

Even though Jesus was a guest, Simon’s lack of common courtesies showed disrespect for Jesus. He was skeptical and judgmental of Jesus as evidenced in his thoughts. At the same time, he was proud of himself for identifying the “sinful” woman in their midst. He may have been embarrassed that Jesus did not rebuke the woman for her public actions.

The uninvited woman could have been thrown out of the house, but she was unafraid. She quietly began washing Jesus’s feet with her tears, drying His feet with her hair and soothing His dry skin with oils. She was humble as she bowed down to wash His feet. She did not ask anything of Jesus, nor was she expecting anything from Him. Her actions showed her gratefulness.

Do your thoughts, words and actions show gratitude, or do they prevent you from seeing people as individuals for whom Christ died on the cross? When are your thoughts and your outward behaviors so subtle that you are conforming to this world while thinking that you are being transformed? (Romans 12:2)

Following Jesus means cultivating thoughts, words and actions that reflect gratitude for Jesus.

Personal
Reflection:
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When do you think and act like the Pharisee?

When do you think and act like the woman?

What would keep you from judging other people?

HOW CAN YOU FIND COMFORT DURING TRIALS?

MARCH 11 | READ LUKE 8:22-25

WRITTEN BY SHERRI PARK

Years ago, we were traveling on a small boat to an island just off the coast of Tunisia. Our assigned driver was not exuding confidence in getting us to our destination. The wind began to increase, and the waves were getting higher. The fact that we were not given life jackets became cause for panic. Perhaps the scariest part was the driver asking Shane if he felt like we should turn back.

We called out to the kids that we were heading back to the shore and would not make it to the island. They were devastated because the waves had seemed fun to them. As we turned in the opposite direction, we felt instant relief.

A few minutes later, I saw something close to the wave tips. It was a butterfly, using the air current atop the waves to give itself lift. Then I saw hundreds of them. We were witnessing a butterfly migration! We were all in shock because we knew that they were coming from the direction of Spain! We later learned that the painted lady butterflies were traveling over 840 miles from the coast of Spain across the Mediterranean to Tunisia. We were seeing them at the end of their week-long journey. God allowed our little, disappointed family to witness one of the most beautiful miracles of nature!

Looking at Luke 8:22-25, I can understand the disciples' angst in a fearful situation that felt so out of control. Though completely subject to the wind and waves, Jesus was asleep and undisturbed. One disciple said, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38, NIV) Jesus got up and said, "Quiet! Be still." (Mark 4:39) The wind and the waves ceased. All in the boat witnessed this miracle. As Jesus confronted them about their fear and lack of trust, I wonder what was going through their minds?

Watching the butterflies so dependent upon the air lifts provided by the same waves that might also cause their demise, I am left with a sense of awe and wonder for the majesty of an all-powerful, mysterious God. I've found comfort in the truth that trials are sometimes apportioned so that we might observe miracles.

Following Jesus means finding comfort in the truths that God is in control during our trials and that some trials reveal deeper truths.

Personal Reflection:

With whom do you identify in the story of Jesus calming the storm?

In what ways have you seen God allow trials in your life in order to reveal a deeper truth?

When the next trial comes your way, how can you be prepared to embrace the truth that He is in control?

#KeyConvictions
#DiscipleshipFocused
#BiblicallyGuided

HOW CAN YOU FACE BROKENNESS?

MARCH 12 | READ LUKE 8:26-56

WRITTEN BY LYDIA WHITLEY

Sam no longer lived a quiet nor predictable life. Each day he encountered new people and new places. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam accompanied Frodo on a journey to destroy a ring whose magic power threatened their world. As they shared this experience together, they faced many challenges—hunger, cold, battles and monsters. By following Frodo on this adventure, Sam often stepped into dark situations.

The disciples followed Jesus, touring nearby towns and villages. What an adventure! They heard Jesus preach with authority. They witnessed Jesus perform miracles with power. Following Jesus, however, sometimes placed them in uncomfortable situations.

After surviving a storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His disciples encountered a man possessed by multiple demons. How terrifying to be confronted by this naked, shrieking and suffering man! After returning to Galilee, a crowd surrounded them. How frustrating to be bumped into by people all trying to get close to Jesus! A distressed Jairus begged Jesus to heal his daughter. A bleeding woman interrupted their journey to his home by touching Jesus. Along the way, they learned Jairus' daughter had died. How discouraging to enter a home full of grief and mourning!

What a day! In each situation the disciples encountered brokenness. They saw, smelled, heard and touched suffering people. How could they face such brokenness?

The disciples did not step into these situations alone. Instead, they followed Jesus. In each encounter, Jesus demonstrated His great love and amazing power. He showed His authority over demons, sickness and even death. With a command He cast out the demons, freeing the enslaved man. With a touch He healed, restoring the suffering woman. With a gentle word He brought a little girl back to life. How amazing to witness the victory of Jesus! How comforting to follow their Teacher and Friend who could mend such brokenness.

Jesus stepped into our broken world to suffer and die on the cross. He offers us forgiveness for our sins. He alone can mend our brokenness.

Do you expect following Jesus to be easy or difficult? Following Jesus means receiving forgiveness and healing from Him. Following Jesus sometimes means stepping into brokenness and encountering suffering people. Yet, we do not face these situations alone. We follow the One who already defeated the darkness of sin and death. We follow the One who redeems and transforms brokenness. How joyful to share Jesus' victory with others!

Personal
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Reflection:
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How do you react to difficult situations?

How do you respond to people who are suffering?

Do you avoid broken people?

How can you comfort these people in your life and point them to victory and hope in Christ?

DO YOU WORRY — OR TRUST GOD?

MARCH 13 | READ LUKE 9:10-17

WRITTEN BY MAHLON TATE

Do you worry too much when you should trust more in God?

Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat

or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (Matthew 6:25, ESV)

The story of the loaves and fish in (Luke 9:10-17) elaborates on this idea of not worrying. It emphasizes our human frailty and utter dependence on God. It reminds us of our tendency to worry, showing our lack of faith. Yet, God's provision defeats human weakness and fear every single time.

After a long day of teaching and healing the sick, the disciples were tired. Jesus and His disciples withdrew to Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, but the crowds followed them to this remote region. Jesus welcomed the people and continued to teach them. Now exhausted, the disciples implored Jesus to send the huge crowd away to find food and lodging.

The story changes, as Jesus said, "You feed them." (Luke 9:13, NLT) We often skip over this simple utterance, as we hurry on to read of the miracle. Could this suggest that we are called to help do good in the world by taking the first step?

"How can we do this?" the disciples protested. "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish." (Luke 9:13) At this junction, human frailty and weakness meets the power of God. We can do nothing without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus instructed the disciples to have the people sit in groups of 50 and 100. Jesus took the food, looked to the heavens and blessed it. As the disciples distributed the bread and fish, they had such plenty that Jesus told them to gather the extra food in baskets in order to waste nothing.

Sometimes, we feel scarcity in our lives. The miracle at Bethsaida proves what Jesus said: "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35) He embraces us in our broken human condition. Sometimes we think, "I don't have enough." However, God asks us for obedience. He asks us to give of what we have with the faith that He will use it to make us part of His perfect will.

Following Jesus means trusting God and stepping out in faith.

Personal Reflection:

Dear God, help me to give You my worries and trust Your provision for my needs. Help me to step out in faith and rely on You.

#KeyConvictions
#HolisticGiving
#DiscipleshipFocused

WILL YOU CHOOSE JESUS TODAY?

MARCH 14 | READ LUKE 9:28-62
WRITTEN BY KYLE JOHNSON

I read this chapter for the first time as a college senior, eating breakfast at my dad's kitchen counter. Recently diagnosed with terminal cancer, dad was nearing the end. Desperate for good news following his diagnosis, I began reading the New Testament from the beginning. By this morning, just a few days before Christmas Eve, I found my bookmark lodged at Luke 9.

With my dad in such bad shape, I had by now decided against going to the obligatory Christmas Eve church services with my mother and stepfather across town. Dad was already spending most of his days sleeping in his hospital bed just through the kitchen archway in the dining room. In my mind, anything that pulled me away from his bedside represented a dereliction of duty as his son.

Then verses 59 and 60 "came out of nowhere." Jesus had just heard the same excuse I was giving in real-time about why it wasn't practical to follow Him intentionally in a certain season of life. Jesus wasn't having it. The Kingdom at hand demands our attention.

I panicked. I still remember pushing my breakfast bowl and Bible forward as I put my forehead straight down to the countertop—crying as I prayed: "Lord, I don't even know what it means to follow You yet. What am I supposed to do?"

I can't exactly explain the answer I received as I lifted my head. It seemed as if the words were floating in mid-air right in front of me and simultaneously on the tip of my own tongue, bursting out from inside me: CHOOSE ME TODAY.

Suddenly the Lord put my family circumstances into the eternal perspective I'd been lacking. The Christmas Eve service wasn't about spending time away from my dad but rather a valuable chance to honor my Heavenly Father for what He'd given us and accomplished in Jesus.

I went to that church service after all. No thundering voices or cloud of smoke waited for me, but I had a sudden understanding that the journey God was calling me into involved a daily choice over whatever I was encountering in my family or anywhere else. He was calling me to choose Him each day with an urgency for His kingdom and an eternal hope that only He provides.

Following Jesus means choosing Him each day with an urgency for His Kingdom that demands your attention. Will you choose Jesus today?

Personal Reflection:

What commonly holds you back from following Christ fully?

From a worldly perspective, many would completely understand and even expect these answers. But how would your answers change if you looked at these circumstances through an eternal lens?



Art by Shane Park

MARCH 15

HALLELUJAH! WHAT A SAVIOR!

Man of Sorrows! what a name
For the Son of God, Who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;
"It is finished!" was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew His song we'll sing:
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Philip Bliss (1875)

ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR ROLE AS A HARVEST WORKER?

MARCH 16 | READ LUKE 10:1-24

WRITTEN BY WARREN ETHRIDGE

I've always seen Luke 10 as one of the most pivotal and exciting chapters in the Book of Luke. In this snapshot of the ministry of Jesus, we see our Savior commissioning and sending out His initial group of 72 disciples to carry on His work in all different directions. The Son of God was bestowing His authority on these ordinary men to do miraculous things in His name.

Every day at 10:02 a.m., I pray this key section of Scripture: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2, ESV). Jesus begins by stating the obvious: the harvest does not have enough laborers. The crop has taken time and a specific set of circumstances to grow, but the number of people ready to fulfill their role as harvesters limits the ability to bring it into the storehouses. Fruit cannot bring itself in off the vine. God is the Lord of the harvest. He is sovereign over its growth and harvest time. The best way to know when the crop needs harvesting comes by listening carefully for the Lord of the harvest to say so. Are we listening to the Lord of the harvest? If not, we might miss the moment when He calls for us to gather the harvest. We might miss the blessing of joining in what He is doing!

We see the disciples return from their mission, celebrating what they could do because of God working through them. "Even the demons are subject to us in your name!" they excitedly tell Jesus. (Luke 10:17) Jesus celebrates with them as He describes Satan's loss of power over the world because of His coming. Then, He asks the disciples not to celebrate "that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20)

Christ's presence and power were exciting during this time period as He began restoring the brokenness of the world, but the invitation to become heirs with Christ through His death and resurrection is the true power worth celebrating!

Following Jesus means fulfilling your role as a harvest worker by listening to the call of the Lord of the harvest to gather His crop.

Personal Reflection:

As you celebrate the invitation into the Kingdom of God that Jesus' death and resurrection provide, ask yourself these questions: are you fulfilling your role as a harvest worker?

Are you attuned to the voice of the Lord of the harvest?

Are you celebrating and telling stories about what God is doing through you when you gather with fellow believers?

#KeyConvictions
#GospelCentered
#DiscipleshipFocused

WHAT IS THE BETTER PART?

MARCH 17 | READ LUKE 10:38-42

WRITTEN BY RISA PAYNE

As the master teacher, Jesus quickly recognized the different learning styles of His followers. In today's passage, Mary learned by sitting and listening at Jesus' feet. Martha learned through tackling challenges.

Modern theologians now understand that Martha's role included a full ministry of serving. The high expectations for this ministry involved providing for the physical, emotional and social needs of everyone in the believers' community.

New Testament followers of Christ most frequently met in houses. When Jesus arrived, all the seekers from the region arrived too. As the lady of the house who welcomed Jesus in Bethany, Martha's ministry of service most likely extended to dozens upon dozens of people that day. No wonder Martha felt frustrated by Mary's desertion of duties!

Martha, a follower, presented her need directly to the authority of Jesus. She challenged Him with the tough question, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?" (Luke 10:40, NRSV) Martha's tone shouted, "This is too much for me to handle alone. It's not fair."

The Lord gently responded, ". . . there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42) In this teaching moment, Jesus challenged Martha to grow as a disciple. He elevated the ministry of knowing and sharing the Word to be the better part of discipleship. Jesus also elevated the status of women, giving them the right to be disciples at His feet.

By using the word "better," the Lord established that discipleship includes several parts. But, only one part is necessary. Only one part lasts through eternity. The one better part in following Jesus comes through knowing and sharing Him as a personal Savior.

Luke 10 ends with a cliffhanger. Martha's immediate reaction to Jesus' answer remains unknown to us. However, a later incident reveals a new understanding. Martha stands as one of the few individuals recorded in the Bible declaring the words each follower of Jesus must be ready to declare, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." (John 11:27)

Have you chosen the better part? Following Jesus means knowing and sharing Him as your personal Savior.

Personal
Reflection:
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In what situation have you felt that the Lord wasn't treating you fairly?

What tough question are you wanting to ask the Lord?

How do you handle a tough answer from the Lord?

How can you use the Lord's answer to Martha to grow as a follower of Jesus today?

WHAT DOES JESUS TEACH YOU ABOUT PRAYER?

MARCH 18 | READ LUKE 11:1-28

WRITTEN BY CAITLYN HAYTER

A year into our marriage, baby fever hit me and my husband hard. As time passed and still no baby, I had a devastating thought: How can God be good in this situation? I felt alone. I didn't know how I should pray.

The disciples walked with Jesus daily but still wondered how to approach God. So, they asked Him. Jesus taught them to pray like this:

“Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:2-4, ESV)

Jesus teaches us to praise God and cry out for the salvation of the lost. He teaches us to ask for the things we need including both the forgiveness of our sins and the ability to forgive those who have sinned against us. Finally, He warns us of our tendency to stray from God's path and instructs us to ask for protection against it.

Jesus' teaching about prayer has a beautiful feature—we don't have to pray these things alone. He directs us as Christ's followers to pray in a community effort. Give us our daily bread. Forgive us our sins. Lead us not into temptation. Prayer draws believers closer to the Father in a communal act of confession and supplication.

When Jesus invites us to ask, He assures us that He'll give. When He instructs

us to seek, He promises we'll find. And when He tells us to knock, He says He'll open the door — not reluctantly or out of any obligation to us — but because of our insistent knocking. Like the man knocking on his neighbor's door, an audacious, shameless asking marks the life of the believer.

When we ask and don't receive in the way we expect, we often doubt God's goodness. Yet, we must learn to understand the character of God. If an earthly, flawed father knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more will the perfect heavenly Father give? Sometimes, because we can only see a tiny part of the tapestry God is working, we ask for a stone or serpent, unaware of the bread or the fish He wants to give. I'm learning to ask God for the fish.

Following Jesus means learning to pray in community and learning to pray boldly.

Personal Reflection:

What challenges you to doubt that God is a good Father?

When was the last time you prayed through the Lord's prayer with a community of other believers?

How often do you pray with fellow believers?

How are you shamelessly approaching God?

WHAT DOES GOD DESIRE FROM YOU?

MARCH 19 | READ LUKE 11:29-54

WRITTEN BY MATT BOWEN

In an age of self-promotion, we find it far too easy to get caught up in others' perception of us rather than developing our Christian character in private. Getting likes, mentions, tweets and retweets satisfy us too much compared to quiet humility that goes unnoticed. What is on the outside seems to mean more than what is on the inside. Yet, our Savior does not desire this focus from us.

In Luke 11, while Jesus was dining with a Pharisee, He neglected to wash up before dinner. This astonished the Pharisee. Even in our 21st-century American culture, where everyone carries around hand sanitizer, we would consider this a social no-no. The Jewish culture viewed such neglect an offense because Jesus was not abiding by the tradition of cleanliness.

In response to the Pharisee's amazement, Jesus said, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not He who

made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you." (Luke 11:39-41, ESV)

Do you think this surprised the Pharisee? Jesus was turning the whole system upside down. Similar to His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus once again reiterates that it is not what is on the outside that matters, but what is on the inside. Once the heart is right, then everything else becomes clean — not the other way around.

The passage does not say how that Pharisee responded, but it does say that a lawyer took Jesus' words as an insult (Luke 11:45). I can certainly understand why. It hurts being told that you focus on the wrong priorities. It hurts when confronted with the reality that you have built your life upon things that do not matter. You find it easier to take up a defensive position and justify your beliefs and practices, rather than submit them to Jesus' authority. Yet, Christ calls all of us to submit to Him daily and build our life upon what truly matters.

What does God desire of you? Following Jesus means making the inside pure by submitting to Him daily and building your life upon what truly matters. Your outside will reflect that inward purity.

Personal Reflection:

Are you spending too much time working on the outward aspect of your life to the neglect of the inward?

Are you resisting God's call to submit everything in your life to him?

What actions can you take to continue to keep Christ as the center of your life?

HOW CAN YOU BE OVERWHELMINGLY GENEROUS?

MARCH 20 | READ LUKE 12:1-34

WRITTEN BY KEVIN LINTZ

When my brother got married, I had the honor of serving as his best man. I coordinated tuxedo rentals and returns, gave a stirring toast, helped out-of-town guests know where things were and handled the very important job of making sure people got tipped properly.

During the reception, one of the guests pulled me to the side and slipped some money into my hand. "A gift for the couple," he said. I thanked him and put the money in my pocket.

My brother and his bride left the reception in a horse-drawn carriage. As people crowded out of the venue to line the sidewalk, I remembered the cash gift I had been handed and I pressed it into my brother's hand. He boarded the carriage and rode away into their new married life.

Only afterwards did my brother tell me that he didn't know that I was passing along a wedding gift. He assumed that the cash I gave him was a tip for the carriage driver, and he had given him the entire amount. I'm sure the driver was quite pleased with the very generous tip he received.

Jesus calls us to be generous. In Luke 12, Jesus tells us that we worry too much about chasing things we think we need. He reminds us that birds and flowers do not worry about how they look or how they will live. God cares for them. Jesus asks us to relax and trust that God will provide for us also.

He asks us to be generous and keep our focus on God. When we give too much thought to our possessions, they consume us and become the thing that steal focus away from God. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:34, KJV)

No matter what we have in life, it is a gift from God. All that we have comes from Him. It is foolish and selfish to think: "This is mine and mine alone!" When we can relax and open our tightly clutched hands, we can release the things we have and let generosity flow from God through us to others.

Following Jesus means releasing the things you have and allowing generosity to flow from God through you to others.

Personal
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Reflection:
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What possessions are you clutching on to?

How can you use what God has given you to generously serve others?

When you give, what keeps you from giving cheerfully and generously?

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE? ARE YOU?

MARCH 21 | READ LUKE 12:35-59

WRITTEN BY KEVIN LINTZ

I love comic books. I have more than 4,500 of them lining shelves and boxes in my house. I have read comics, written comics, lettered comics, talked about comics and attended multiple comic conventions. I have enjoyed them as a child, as a teenager and as an adult. It is exciting to watch my son read comics voraciously.

One of the most enduring comic book characters is Spider-Man. Stan Lee and Steve Ditko created him in 1962, and from his first appearance he was wildly popular. Spider-Man's secret identity is Peter Parker, an awkward teenager who struggles with having amazing powers and trying to figure out how to best use them.

In his first appearance in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, Peter Parker is wearing his Spider-Man costume but has not yet fully embraced the fact that he is a superhero. Peter Parker chooses not to stop a fleeing burglar. He snarkily remarks to a security guard, "That's your job! I'm through being pushed around—by anyone. From now on I just look out for number one—that means—me!"

Later, Peter is devastated when the burglar he let escape commits a new crime and kills Peter's Uncle Ben. At the end of the issue, Stan Lee writes one of the greatest lines in all of comic books: "With great power there must also come great responsibility."

The original story of Spider-Man is powerful, but its core message is not original to Stan Lee. Jesus tells His disciples that because they are the ones who know about Him, they have an obligation to be ready for His return. Jesus tells them, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required." (Luke 12:48, NASB)

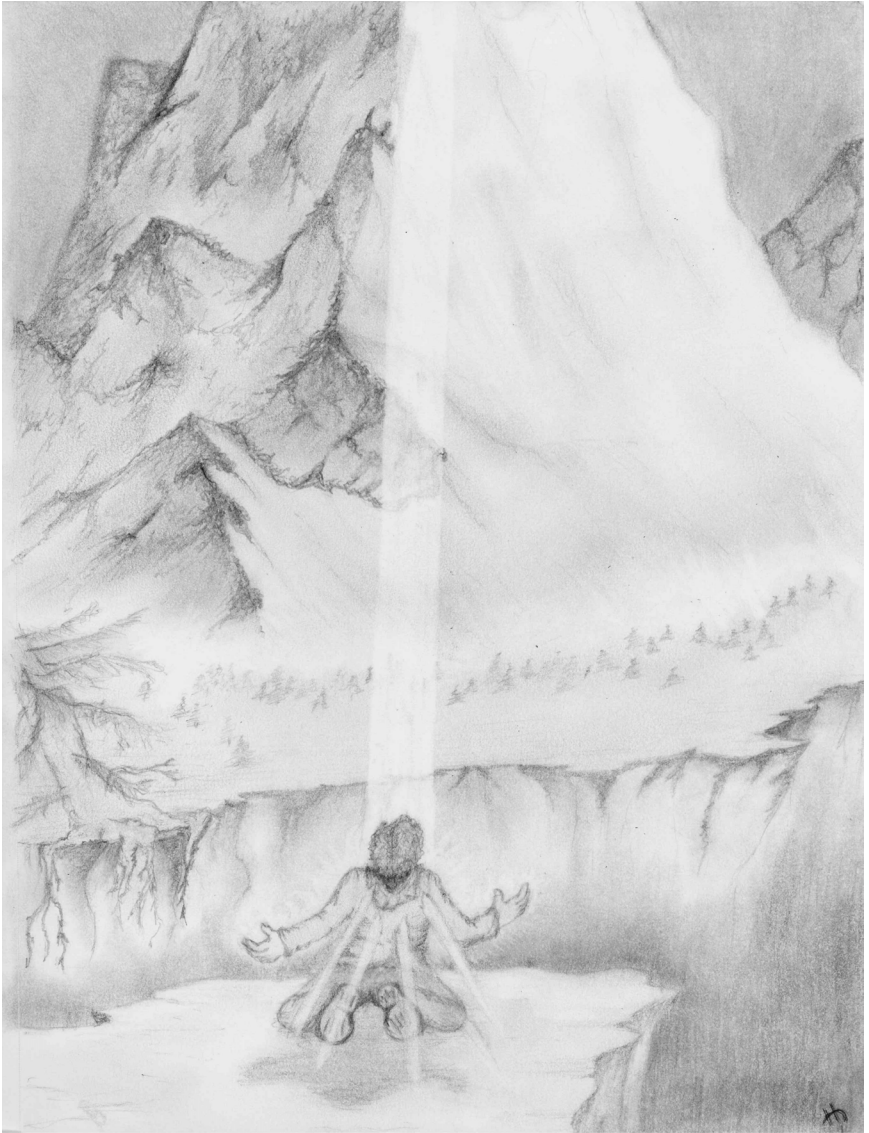
God has given those of us who know Christ an amazing gift. We have the knowledge that God loves us, has a plan for us and sent His Son to save us. The Lord has also given us the blessing of salvation and an obligation to share that blessing with others. We have been given much, and much is required of us. In other words, with great power comes great responsibility.

Following Jesus means recognizing your responsibility to share what God has given you.

Personal Reflection:

How often have you seen someone who is missing Christ and thought, "That's not my responsibility!"?

What are you doing with the gifts God has given you?



Art by Jennea Pilcher

MARCH 22

LIVING HOPE

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke Your name into the night
Then through the darkness, Your loving-kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The King of kings calls me His own
Beautiful Savior, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

CHORUS

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the Roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the Roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Jesus, Yours is the victory, whoa!

Jesus Christ, my living hope
Oh God, You are my living hope

Phil Wickham and Brian Mark Johnson (2018)

WILL YOU EMBRACE ALL OF JESUS?

MARCH 23 | READ LUKE 13:1-35

WRITTEN BY KYLE JOHNSON

What do we do when part of Jesus' life and teachings encourage us, while the rest makes us awkwardly uncomfortable?

Look at how the synagogue ruler tried to take over and undermine Jesus when He did something widely forbidden at the time. (Luke 13:14) Jesus "worked" by healing on the Sabbath, pressing those in power to re-examine what they had understood about the Law all their lives. He repeated this often and received the same reaction everywhere. We face the same temptation as the synagogue ruler. Will we reject parts of what Jesus taught simply because we prefer it another way or because someone else taught us a different view?

The parable of the unfruitful fig tree narrowly escaping the axe makes many people uncomfortable. (Luke 13:6-9) Even worse, the story finishes without a resolution. Did the tree produce fruit in the extra year it was granted? We're left with uncomfortable suspense!

Equally troubling is the metaphor of the Narrow Door (Luke 13:22-30). What did Jesus mean when He said many will try to enter but not be able to and ultimately be flat-out rejected? What do we do with uncomfortable teachings like this? How do they fit with the encouraging and comforting ones?

For answers, we must look higher than ourselves and our own expectations. In these difficult teachings, Jesus confirms He has all authority. He is showing us His commitment to perfect justice, which, unfortunately for us, includes justice against our own fruitlessness and sinful nature. Aren't you glad our Lord's work wasn't finished after a lesson on the Narrow Door? At the end of this chapter, we see an amazing glimpse of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. (Luke 13:33)

God's perfect justice, unapproachable holiness and unattainable expectations confirm our inability to save ourselves. Worship and adoration of Him starts in this utter despair of total unworthiness—an uncomfortable place—but soon discovers an eternal relief, joy and gratitude in His radical willingness to suffer on our behalf, completing our rescue and redemption. The total authority of the One who offered this sacrifice also illuminates its undefeatable power and our complete security in Him. Without His authority, we would have none of this.

Following Jesus means embracing all of Him, including the tensions and challenges presented by His life and teachings.

*Personal
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Reflection:*

Which of Jesus' teachings make you most uncomfortable?

How do you wrestle with the elements of the Christian faith that you wish weren't true?

How does this tension affect the way you represent your faith to others and point to something higher than your preferences?

#KeyConvictions
#DiscipleshipFocused
#BiblicallyGuided

WHOM ARE YOU INVITING TO THE TABLE?

MARCH 24 | READ LUKE 14:1-34

WRITTEN BY CAROLINE POE

"I don't want to invite him to my party. He isn't really my friend," my 9-year-old son protested. Planning a birthday party for a fourth grader isn't always easy. A fine line exists between who does and does not fit in the "friend" category. For both my boys, their idea of the perfect gathering was one where their best buddies were present and no one else.

In today's passage, Jesus addresses the kingdom values that blossom when we seek to please God with all our heart. Our passage begins with one of the rulers of the Pharisees inviting Jesus to come eat bread with him. The host witnessed a miracle. He heard a parable of the importance of humility in the kingdom of God. Then, Jesus singled out the host to challenge him to show hospitality to the outsider.

"... when you make a feast, ask the poor, the maimed, the lame, or the blind; and you will be blessed, because they don't have the resources to repay you. For you will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous."
(Luke 14:12-14, NIV)

Jesus points out that the way of the kingdom of heaven is to host and

provide for "the poor, crippled, lame and blind." We should invite outsiders into our home, recognizing that we, too, are outsiders invited into the kingdom of God. Moreover, we begin to recognize that in Christ no one is an outsider. Christ invites all of humanity in. He loves and accepts all people who come to Him.

Jesus challenges the tendency to stick with comfortable friendships. Christ stepped into our world to invite us into friendship. Because of that friendship, we invite others into our world, introducing them to the Savior of the world that they might also sit at the banquet table of heaven.

The blessing for hosting others comes when God fully realizes His kingdom. No longer do we look to those who could easily afford it to bless us. Instead, we look to God, the Creator of the universe, Who freely gives to all. Blessing originates in God. Jesus fulfills that blessing.

Whom do you invite to your table, into your home and friendship? Following Jesus means we seek to love everyone no matter their gender, race, age, ethnicity or any other definition.

Following Jesus means we welcome all people into our lives and into our family of faith, sharing the hope of Christ that we have within us.

Personal Reflection:

Who are the "outsiders" that God is guiding you to befriend?

What makes that invitation seem scary or awkward?

How is God challenging you to consider the kingdom perspective in your relationships?

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PAST LOSTNESS?

MARCH 25 | READ LUKE 15.1-32

WRITTEN BY CLINT YOUNG

Many call Luke 15 “the gospel within the Gospels.” Jesus shows us two things in these three parables: a picture of our heavenly Father and a picture of our past lostness. The three stories have the same message. In His great love, God seeks all people and rejoices when one lost sinner is found.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep depicts the shepherd, a familiar figure. He would call his sheep by name (John 10:3). The shepherd led his sheep in front rather than driving them from the back (John 10:4). In the pasture, the sheep fold had no gate, only an open space. At night, the shepherd would lay across that space so that no sheep could get out and no enemies could get in (John 10:9). The shepherd’s equipment consisted of a rod and a staff. In this parable, the sheep was lost because of carelessness. The shepherd kept searching for his sheep until he found it.

In the Parable of the Lost Coin, a woman lost a drachma, the daily wage for a working man. This loss would mean financial disaster for those who were “living on the edge.” In this parable, the coin was lost because of no fault of its own. The woman kept searching for her coin until she found it.

In the Parable of the Loving Father, Jesus told about a man who had two sons. The younger son was incredibly callous. He said effect to his dad, “Father, when you are dead, I’ll get this share anyway. Give it to me now!” Jesus described the depths of degradation to which the son fell — a Jew, feeding pigs! Finally, the son thought about going back home. He shows how we all must come to God — in humble repentance of our sins. Jesus also described the kind of reception the son received from his father. The wronged father ran to him, “filled with compassion” for his son! (Luke 15:20) He celebrated the lost-but-now-found son with a robe, a ring and shoes. In this parable, the son was lost because he deliberately chose the wrong path. The father kept looking for his son’s return.

Following Jesus means sharing your own testimony of former lostness with others to lead them to the loving Heavenly Father.

Personal Reflection:

How would you describe your past lostness?

Were you lost through carelessness, like the sheep, or through no real fault of your own, like the coin? Or perhaps through rebelliousness, like the son?

How can you use your own past experiences to lead the lost to our loving Father?

#KeyConvictions
#GospelCentered
#DiscipleshipFocused

WHAT DOES A SHREWD MANAGER, JESUS AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE HAVE IN COMMON?

MARCH 26 | READ LUKE 16:1-16

WRITTEN BY JENNEA PILCHER

Knock. Knock. You open your door to reveal a servant of the man to whom you're indebted, summoning you to his home. Concern, stress, and panic overcome you as you approach the man's door.

You step inside the manager's office. He questions, "How much do you owe my master?" Your voice breaks despite your best efforts, "Nine hundred gallons of olive oil." Your mind is already racing, formulating the best explanation to avoid what you know will come next. Before you can speak, the manager answers, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty." (Luke 16:5-6, NIV)

You look quizzically at the manager, but he is holding out your contract, waiting not-so-patiently for your signature. Relief and gratitude manifest as tears in your eyes. He has forgiven half your debts.

It would seem fitting for Jesus to commend the manager's beautiful act of forgiveness. However, Jesus' parable does not focus on a kind-hearted man seeking to bless others through a selfless deed. Instead, it involves a shifty character. It appears that Jesus tells us to imitate his shifty behavior.

The manager has two options after he calls the debtors to his master's door: demand what they owe and pocket the cash or forgive part of their debts to win their favor. He goes with option two. He makes friends so that he can use them later.

Through the shrewd manager's impure motives, Jesus teaches us about proper investment in this life. The wealth we have in this world will fade. The shrewd manager would have run out of money eventually, even if he pocketed half of all due his master. He made a lasting investment by forging friendships with people he could rely on for the long haul.

Our God values the things which people do not. We "cannot serve both God and money." (Luke 16:13) To serve God means to love others, to live in relationship with them, to truly invest in their lives. Though the manager had impure motives, he made a wise choice that fits the Christian life nicely.

Our worldly wealth confronts us with a choice. We can invest it in temporary worldly things, or we can invest it in people who have eternal value.

Following Jesus means serving God, not money, by investing in people instead of worldly wealth.

Personal Reflection:

In which individuals in your life might God be calling you to invest?

In what ways might you further God's Kingdom in that relationship?

If no one comes to mind, where might God be calling you to seek out a Kingdom investment?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

MARCH 27 | READ LUKE 17:1-37

WRITTEN BY WILL MCDONALD

The Pharisees, who collectively and individually were quite concerned about the ministry of Jesus, asked Him when the Kingdom of God was going to come. We can think of the Kingdom of God as the realm of God's authority where things are done on earth as they are in the heavens. We enter into the Kingdom when we enter into the life of Christ.

Like many of us, the Pharisees looked for dramatic signs that God was at work. Jesus performed undeniable miracles, but He also taught things that went against some of their core assumptions about God. Some Pharisees had become followers of Jesus, while some were hostile. Most were just perplexed.

Jesus answered their question about the coming of the Kingdom directly. They would not see the signs they expected, nor would the Kingdom be objectively tangible at that time, where someone could say "it is here" or "it is there." Instead, the Kingdom of God was where they stood—in their midst—within the Person and ministry of Jesus. Unfortunately, their exposure to God's Kingdom had not penetrated their hearts and minds.

A powerful scene in the movie, *Godfather III*, depicted Michael

Corleone in conversation with Cardinal Lamberto in an Italian abbey. Corleone told the Cardinal of the scandal that threatens to engulf him and the Vatican. As Corleone finished explaining the situation, the Cardinal reached into an ancient fountain and pulled out a small wet stone. "Look at this stone. It has been lying in the water for a very long time, but the water has not penetrated it." The Cardinal slapped the stone against the rim of the fountain, breaking it in his hand. "Look. Perfectly dry. The same thing has happened to men in Europe. For centuries they have been surrounded by Christianity, but Christ has not penetrated. Christ doesn't breathe within them."

A great danger for those of us who are part of a religious community is to confuse religious activity with the Kingdom of God. We will not discern the Kingdom of God until we are willing to see it. If we are willing, God will make it known to us, where we can participate in its life and work until the fullness of the Kingdom comes with Christ's return.

Following Jesus means entering into the Kingdom of God. That includes taking up your cross (considering your old identity as essentially dead), becoming Jesus' apprentice and living according to His example (Luke 9:23).

Personal Reflection:

How does one to enter into the Kingdom?

What difference will it make for me to live in the power and authority of the Kingdom of God?

#KeyConvictions
#GospelCentered
#BiblicallyGuided
#PrayerDriven
#DiscipleshipFocused

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO GIVE UP?

MARCH 28 | READ LUKE 18:1-30

WRITTEN BY PAUL GRITZ

When my wife asked me, "What are you giving up for Lent?" I answered, "Facebook." She replied, "You aren't on Facebook!" Obviously, I did not grasp the purpose of Lent or the practice of fasting itself. I needed to give up something important to me to understand the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. What does He want me to give up so I can follow Him?

Luke 18: 18-30 records Jesus' challenge to a rich young ruler, forcing him to face such a question. This man asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18, NIV) Evidently, he saw himself as a good person who obeyed God's law. He simply wanted to know what else he should do to for eternal life. Jesus' response must have surprised him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Luke 18: 23)

Rather than comply, the man went away depressed. Holding onto his material possessions had priority over dependence on, obedience and loyalty to God. He did not love the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus used the rich man's reaction to teach His disciples a lesson. "What is impossible with man is possible with God." (Luke 18:27)

Some individuals have responded positively and literally to Jesus' command, and it changed their life. In the late A.D. 300s, Ambrose of Milan, a young, wealthy, Roman aristocrat, served as the city's chief magistrate. He declared that to follow Christ he had to sell all his property, donate it to the poor and resign his civil post. After baptism, he became the preacher and bishop of the church. When he let the Lord have control, he found a greater spiritual purpose than anything this world could offer.

Even churchgoers can allow material things — jobs, social status, recreational activities, the desire for recognition, friendships and even family ties — to interfere with a whole-hearted commitment to live for Jesus. As He promised, the Holy Spirit will come alongside a believer and make what appears impossible possible. As the missionary martyr Jim Elliot wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose!"

Following Jesus means giving up everything that prevents you from loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself.

Personal Reflection:

Have you allowed the blessings of this life to become barriers to following the Lord Jesus along the glorious path He has charted for you?

What do you need to give up?



Art by Shannon DaSilva

MARCH 29

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Isaac Watts (1707)

DO YOU TRUST THAT JESUS UNDERSTANDS?

MARCH 30 | READ LUKE 18:31-19:10

WRITTEN BY TRICIA RYAN

“The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.” (Luke 18:34, NIV)

In college, I took an American Sign Language class taught by a deaf professor. Students could communicate with the professor and each other only through sign language. The first few weeks were difficult for the students. We were so lost. We did not understand the professor. Yet, as each class came to an end, we began to understand what the professor was saying, and we began to understand sign language.

Luke 18:31-34 speaks of a lack of understanding. It wasn't Jesus who didn't understand, but the disciples. Jesus had predicted His death again to the disciples. Once more, they did not understand what He was talking about. They were lost. They had traveled with Jesus. They had witnessed His miracles. They had “done life” with Jesus. They knew Him. Yet, Jesus' message “was hidden from them.”

I relate to the disciples' lack of understanding regarding Jesus' death. I do not understand the things Jesus tells me at times: those hard things like a daughter's difficult-to-treat illness, a friend's terminal disease, meanness, abuse, the death of a child. I do not understand these things. I am lost.

Then, I think of Jesus' understanding. He understood what was going to happen in Jerusalem. He understood a blind beggar would desperately need healing on his way into Jericho. He understood that the cheating Zacchaeus would need salvation. Jesus understood these things because He came to this earth for that reason. He came to “seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10, NIV)

I know that if Jesus understood the needs of the people in His day, then He understands my needs. Jesus understands my daughter's illness, my friend's terminal disease, all the meanness and abuse in this world, the death of a child. He understands how desperate I am for a Savior and how lost I am. Jesus understands me, and I don't have to understand His ways. I only have to believe Him. I have to believe that He saves the lost and He redeems ALL of the sickness, ALL of the hurt and ALL of death. I don't have to understand. I have to trust that Jesus is who He says He is.

“I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick.” (Ezekiel 34:16, NASB)

Following Jesus means trusting Him even when you don't understand everything.

Personal Reflection:

Thank You, Jesus, for understanding me — my hurts, frustrations and lack of understanding. Give me grace to trust You when I least understand.

IN WHAT SHOULD YOU INVEST?

MARCH 31 | READ LUKE 19:11-48

WRITTEN BY BRIAN BRISCO

We have finally reached Jerusalem! By Luke 19, Jesus' disciples had been following Him for three years. They had given up families, careers and homes to follow Jesus as their Rabbi as He ministered throughout Galilee. That cost must have at first seemed substantial, but surely paled as they heard the Sermon on the Mount, observed miracles and healings—and, for a select few of them, experienced the transfiguration. Their initial investment was paying off as it became clear that Jesus was Someone extraordinary.

Just before Jesus and the disciples began the final journey into Jerusalem, He tells a parable about investment. A nobleman embarks on a journey to become king of a distant country. Prior to leaving, the nobleman entrusts valuable coins to his servants and asks them to “do business” with the coins until he returns. Upon his return, the nobleman learns that some servants have increased the value of the coins through investment. He rewards those servants richly. He also learns that one of the servants preserved his coin without increase. The nobleman condemns this servant.

Jesus gave the disciples their own “coins” during His ministry. They had learned directly from His teachings, witnessed His miraculous healings and had their lives transformed by Him. Although they did not yet understand, they would soon see their leader become king in the least likely way possible—via death and resurrection. Following the resurrection, Jesus would ascend to heaven, leaving the work of spreading His message to His disciples.

Jesus trusted His disciples to invest their coins wisely. He expected them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to tell all they encountered about who Jesus is, what He did and how He transformed their lives. Jesus knew the most powerful story they would have was the story of His death and resurrection. He expected them to share that message, not hide it. The disciples made that investment, passing on Jesus's message in the face of certain persecution and death.

We all have our own “coins” entrusted to us by Jesus. Whether it is a miraculous healing, a restored relationship or a broken addiction, Jesus calls us to share those stories with our community so that they may experience His life-changing love. Those stories do not belong to us alone. We must share them for the glory of the Kingdom of God.

Following Jesus means investing your “coins” in your community by sharing your stories with others.

Personal Reflection:

What coins has God given you to invest in your community?

Whom do you know that needs to hear a story of transformation or healing?

What holds you back from sharing your story with others?

WHO WILL HAVE AUTHORITY OVER YOUR LIFE?

APRIL 1 | READ LUKE 20:1-26

WRITTEN BY JASON SIMON

This passage depicts the God of the universe, Designer of all things good and Redeemer of all things that once were, having His authority questioned by men who only speak because He has given them breath. Going back as far as the Garden of Eden, all of us struggle with the same essential question: who will have authority over our lives?

The elders, teachers and chief priests of that day struggled with Jesus' teaching authority. They boldly and directly questioned Him, "Who gave you this authority?" (Luke 20:2, NIV) As a true rabbi, Jesus answered their question with His own regarding John the Baptist. (Luke 20:3-4) These religious leaders could not answer. However, their silence was not for a lack of knowledge. They could not answer for fear of losing their authority. If they affirmed John's ministry (Luke 20:5), then they affirmed Jesus' own authority—which they were opposed to. If they denied John's ministry (Luke 20:6), the people would riot against them. They needed the approval of the people.

Even after Jesus' parable on authority (Luke 20:9-19), the religious leaders' fear still reigned. Their spies attempted to trap Jesus in hopes of giving Him over "to the power and authority of the governor." (Luke 20:20) This Roman authority recognized the Jewish priests and teachers of the law as being authoritative. These leaders would go to great lengths to preserve their sense of control. Jesus saw through such veiled attempts at challenging Him, though. (Luke 20:23) His answers astonished them, and their many deceitful words fell to silence. (Luke 20:26)

What lengths do we go to in order to preserve our own sense of authority and control? What areas of our lives are we unwilling to allow Jesus true authority over? The Lord calls us to live lives fully submitted to God. Not my will, but Yours. Not my finances, relationships, self-image, plans, anger, fears, gifts, desires, thoughts, ways, or anything else—not mine, but Yours.

Submission to the authority of God is the only place where we find true life and freedom. Philippians 2 tells us this plainly. Jesus' whole purpose was to do the will of the One who sent Him. Is that your whole purpose?

Following Jesus means submitting to His authority in your life.

Personal Reflection:

Examine your life in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to make known where in your life you have not submitted to the authority of Christ as Lord. Repent of these things now and rejoice in that Jesus, in His own authority, no longer calls you servant but friend.

HOW SHOULD YOU LIVE EACH DAY, KNOWING YOU WILL LIVE FOREVER?

APRIL 2 | READ LUKE 20:27-21:4

WRITTEN BY WILL MCDONALD

Religious leaders who wanted to discredit Jesus often confronted Him. This time the Sadducees thought they had a question that would perplex Jesus and discredit Him before the crowds. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, since they did not believe the written Scriptures had explicit evidence for it.

The questioner cited Deuteronomy 25:5-6, where the brother of a man that dies childless was required to marry his brother's widow to produce heirs for his dead brother. With that setup, they created a scenario where a woman was married to a succession of seven brothers. Then, springing the trap, they asked which marriage was legitimate, since she could be only married to one man.

But the way Jesus responded surprised everyone. Life in the resurrection will be a very different than it was then, or today.

First, all who are in Christ will be raised to life again, never to die.

Personal Reflection:

What changes do I need to make to reorder my daily life, knowing I will live forever?

Second, human marriage will not exist anymore. The Scriptures teach marriage ends at physical death. We find in other parts of the New Testament that we, collectively, will be presented as a "bride" to Christ, a union between God and His people. Our imagination and human language fail us here, but in this future state we will live in intimate relationship with persons "from every tribe, language, people and nation" (Rev. 5:9, 7:9, 13:7, 14:6) and with God. We will know as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12) in a way that is deeper and more profound than marriage.

Third, all who have entered into the life of God, yet have died physically, are still very much alive. God "is not the God of the dead but the living; for all live to Him" (Luke 20:38, NASB).

We should note here that Jesus drew the conclusion that God is the "God of the living" from Exodus 3:2-6, where Moses famously encountered God in a burning bush. Jesus proved the Sadducees wrong from one of the most well-known passages in the Jewish Scriptures!

Jesus demolished their trick question with the revelation of the true nature of the resurrection in the everlasting fullness of the Kingdom of God. For those who grieve over family and friends who have died, as well as persons currently facing death, this teaching provides enormous comfort.

Those who are in Christ will have fulfilling and creative lives that will not end. Therefore, we should prioritize the parts of our lives with eternal significance and forgo things that will undermine our eternal goals.

HAVE YOU READ THE SIGNS?

APRIL 3 | READ LUKE 21:5-38

WRITTEN BY SHANE PARK

One of my prized treasures from childhood was a t-shirt that read, “Survivor, Mt. Saint Helens, 1980!” We lived a good 285 miles from the explosive volcano, but even at that distance the ash-filled sky blanketed out the sun. Everything was covered in fine grey dust: trees, cars, homes. While we were certainly affected, the area around the blast site had a much more devastating impact. Geologists had been aware of the impending threat and sent out warnings. Some locals and travelers heeded the caution. Others chose to ignore the signs, resulting in their demise.

The setting of today’s reading took place in the Jerusalem temple. Some of the disciples were admiring its fine architecture when Jesus burst their bubble with some alarming news. “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another.” (Luke 21:6, NIV)

Eager to know when and how this fateful day would play out, Jesus warned His band of followers that many will come falsely declaring to be the Christ and that “the time is near.” (Luke 21:8) He went on to warn them not to have anything to do with such deceivers.

The passage unfolds a future time of great wars, natural disasters and persecution — precursors to the coming of God’s kingdom. During this period, even the “heavenly bodies will be shaken.” (Luke 21:26) If this doesn’t grab your attention, I don’t know what will! This is alarming stuff.

We, however, have an assuring hope. All these events will culminate in the grand return of Jesus. “They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” to bring about our redemption. (Luke 21:27) What wonderful news — our Savior will return for us!

But leading us to this majestic day of the Lord, the unnerving reality of the times will rock all the earth to the core. Jesus leaves us with a poignant warning: stay alert and sober-minded. Neither pursue things that numb us to the gravity of the situation, nor be anxious. “Be always on the watch and pray” so “that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:36)

Following Jesus means remaining steadfast and alert as you await the coming of your Deliverer!

Personal Reflection:

What current events in the world cause you alarm?

When life’s stresses and turmoil weigh upon you, what do you turn to—anxiety, control, substances, entertainment?

In expectation of Christ’s return, how would you like to grow in the area of watchfulness and prayer?

#KeyConvictions
#PrayerDriven
#BiblicallyGuided

HAVE YOU ACCEPTED JESUS' INVITATION TO EAT AT HIS TABLE?

APRIL 4 | READ LUKE 22:1-30

WRITTEN BY TAYLOR WHITLEY

Can you recall a meal that you will never forget? I remember sitting across from my future in-laws at their kitchen table. Normally their daughter would join us for dinner, but this evening I ate with them alone. I did not eat a drop of soup, because during dinner I asked for their blessing before proposing to their daughter.

Just like we do, Jesus used the table to share important moments with His followers. In Luke 22, we read about a Passover meal, the last meal Jesus ate before His death.

Passover celebrates Israel's exodus from Egyptian slavery. God delivered His people by sending ten plagues on Egypt, culminating in the death of every Egyptian firstborn son. To protect His people, God allowed each household to spread the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorpost of their homes (Exod. 12:12-14). That night, God "passed over" the homes covered by the blood, sparing their firstborns from death.

About 1,500 years later, Jesus introduced a new meal during Passover. He broke bread with His disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you." (Luke 22:19 NLT) He shared a cup with them, declaring, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people, an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you." (Luke 22:20) Jesus promised Himself as the final Passover lamb, sacrificed to pay the price for our sins.

We know this meal today as the Lord's Supper or Communion. The bread and the cup remind us how Jesus died for our sins. This meal also encourages us to celebrate with hope, looking forward to Jesus' return. Jesus promised, "Just as my Father has granted me a Kingdom, I now grant you the right to eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom." (Luke 22:29-30) What a special meal!

By confessing our sins to God and putting our faith in Jesus, we become citizens of His heavenly kingdom. As citizens of His kingdom, we gain the right to sit at the table with Jesus. Have you accepted Jesus' invitation to eat at His table?

Following Jesus begins with accepting His invitation to eat His table by putting your faith in Him as your Savior and Lord.

Personal Reflection:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus as the final Passover lamb. Thank You that through faith in Jesus, I have a seat at Your table. Teach me to celebrate Your goodness toward me today as a citizen of Your kingdom! Amen.



Art by Shane Park

APRIL 5 | PALM SUNDAY

JERUSALEM

See Him in Jerusalem
Walking where the crowds are
Once these streets had sung to Him
Now they cry for murder

Such a frail and lonely Man
Holding up the heavy cross
See Him walking in Jerusalem
On the road to save us

See Him there upon the hill
Hear the scorn and laughter
Silent as a lamb He waits
Praying to the Father

See the King who made the sun
And the moon and shining stars
Let the soldiers hold and nail Him down
So that He could save them

See Him there upon the cross
Now no longer breathing
Dust that formed the watching crowds
Takes the blood of Jesus

Feel the earth is shaking now
See the veil is split in two
And He stood before the wrath of God
Shielding sinners with His blood

See the empty tomb today
Death could not contain Him

Once the Servant of the world
Now in vict'ry reigning

Lift your voices to the One
Who is seated on the throne
See Him in the New Jerusalem
Praise the One who saved us

CityAlight (2014)

HAVE YOU FELT THE PIERCING GAZE OF GOD?

APRIL 6 | READ LUKE 22:31-62

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL KOCH

The year 2015 was hard for me. At the end of 2014, my wife and I felt certain that God had called us to adopt. We began the adoption process in Colombia where we serve as missionaries. In February 2015, we discovered Rachael was pregnant, but within two weeks we lost the baby. Then we learned that Americans cannot adopt from Colombia.

Ministry also seemed fruitless to me. I began to question seriously whether God had called me to the mission field or had any purpose for me. At the end of the year, an opportunity arose making it very easy to return to the states — we were halfway out the door. But as I was praying one morning, I sensed God saying to me, “You may not be able to see me now, but run the race.”

For three years, Peter talked with Jesus, learned from Him and saw what He did. When Jesus told Peter of Satan’s request, he boldly exclaimed, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!” (Luke 22:33, NIV) Jesus replied that before the rooster crowed, Peter would deny Him three times. Peter argued, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” (Matt. 26:35) Yet when three strangers suggested Peter was an associate of Jesus, he adamantly cried, “No!” The rooster crowed, and “the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.” (Luke 22:61) That gaze caused Peter to go outside and weep bitterly!

Sometimes we desperately want the Lord to fix His gaze on us to let us know that He’s there and cares for us. But what would happen if He transfixed us with the same stare Peter experienced after his betrayal? Would the Lord’s gaze fill you with joy because you know that you have “run the race” with every ounce of energy that you have? Or, would you wilt in shame, knowing that you have been found out and your secrets laid bare and that you have lived your commitment to Christ half-heartedly? “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Heb. 4:13)

Following Jesus means recognizing that God sees and knows everything about you. What does He see in you?

Personal
Reflection

Imagine being in Peter’s place, and the Lord turns and looks straight at you. What would He see?

How would you respond to His piercing gaze?

Is He encouraging you to “not become weary in doing good?”

Is He telling you to “turn back and strengthen your brothers?”

#KeyConvictions
#SpiritualWorship
#DiscipleshipFocused

HOW WILL YOU

RESPOND?

APRIL 7 | READ LUKE 22:63-23:25

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY GARTNER

How do you respond when you feel criticized or treated unfairly? All too often, if I am honest, I complain or seek to defend myself in such situations.

Jesus endured brutal beating and mocking as He awaited trial. He could have demanded the respect and honor of which He was worthy. Yet, He responded to such brutality and taunting with humility and complete submission.

When the crowd shouted at Him asking, "Are you then the Son of God?" Jesus replied, "You say that I am." (Luke 22:70, NIV) When Pilate asked him "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." (Luke 23:3) He did not defend Himself or assert His authority as He rightfully could have. He willingly and with the utmost of humility endured

the pain and humiliation. He willingly submitted to the crucifixion and death that He knew would follow because of His unspeakable love for us and His surrender to God's plan.

May we never lose sight of the indescribable, undeserved gift of Jesus' sacrifice. May we remember that He made that sacrifice with complete willingness and humility.

As I read this passage, I am struck by the similarities between myself and the assembled crowd mocking Jesus. Many people of Jesus' day saw Him as a troublemaker, a leader of insurrection. They saw Him as one who was making revolutionary changes to their laws, their government and their way of life. As I reflect on this, I ask myself, "How willing am I to let Jesus create revolutionary changes in my life and heart? Am I willing to allow Him to undo my life and way of thinking completely to bring them in line with His will, or do I have resistance in my heart? Am I willing to let Him tear down the me that was and create a new me for His glory?"

How will you respond? Following Jesus means surrendering completely to Him.

Personal Reflection:

Lord, thank You for Your humility. Thank You for enduring mocking, beating and even death for me. You are worthy of my complete submission and reverence. Please prune away any resistance in my heart. Forgive me when my response to You parallels the responses of those in the crowd who beat and mocked You. May I receive with joy the changes You want to make in my life and heart.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE THIEF ON THE CROSS KNEW?

APRIL 8 | READ LUKE 23:26-49

WRITTEN BY WILL MCDONALD

In Luke 9:23, Jesus called His followers to take up their crosses and follow Him, to consider themselves as good as dead — in the language of prison movies, a “dead man/woman walking”— and follow Jesus to learn how to live one’s life.

In today’s reading, two men literally walked with Jesus, carrying their crosses. They were as good as dead, since the Romans were experienced executioners. Soldiers nailed them to their own crosses beside the cross of Jesus. The three shared their last hours together in torturous pain and shame, naked, slowly losing blood and their lives, losing the ability to breathe.

The two men, condemned as thieves, handled their fates quite differently. One lashed out at the Miracle Worker, Jesus. He demanded that Jesus rescue all three of them, which seemed to be a perfectly reasonable request. The other, recognizing his own nature and guilt, defended Jesus. He reminded the other thief of their guilt and the innocence of Jesus.

Somewhere in the midst of those words, gasping for his next breath, he called out, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom.” Jesus promised, “. . . today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 22:43, NASB)

The word Paradise appears only three times in the New Testament. Besides this reference in Luke, Paul used the term in 2 Corinthians 12:4, describing a vision or perhaps an out-of-body experience where he was in the presence of God. John used Paradise in Revelation 2:7, describing it as a place where one may eat from the tree of life—the tree depicted in Eden. From the context of this passage and the teaching of Jesus in John 14:2-3, I believe we can say Paradise is a place prepared for God’s people to live in His presence until the resurrection and final judgement, after which He will reunite heaven and earth (see Rev. 20:11-21:7).

The call of Jesus to take up our crosses easily intimidates us. However, we can learn from what the thief on the cross knew:

He knew that he had made a mess of his life and was under judgment, not only from human authorities, but especially from God. He also knew he was helpless to change his situation by his own power. He had confidence in Jesus, a man who was dying along with him. In his last hours, he turned to Jesus, and Jesus generously received him into His life. In that moment, his grisly death turned into life.

Following Jesus means He loves and accepts you even if you have ruined your life, shamed your family and destroyed your reputation.

Personal Reflection:

Have you trusted in Jesus?

#KeyConvictions
#GospelCentered
#DiscipleshipFocused

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO GOD'S INVITATION TO LOOK AND SEE?

APRIL 9 | READ LUKE 23:50—24:12

WRITTEN BY RYAN RAINES

One of my favorite songs we've sung in worship recently is "Look and See." The lyrics to the chorus echo perfectly the story in today's passage:

*Oh, look and see our God
And celebrate the power of the cross
And the empty grave
And now we're free
Let the redeemed lift up your heads
Oh, look and see our God*

I can imagine the three main individuals or groups of people in today's passage as they had the opportunity to "look and see" when they took action after Jesus' crucifixion.

"... the power of the cross..."

As the one who removed Jesus' body, Joseph of Arimathea literally saw the "power of the cross." According to various sources, Joseph was a highly respected leader in the Jewish community. He disapproved of the Council's decision and action regarding Jesus, but he did more than complain. He risked running afoul of the religious leaders by taking Jesus' body and providing an honorable burial for his Savior. (Jewish law allowed only

disgraceful burials for the executed.)

"... and the empty grave..."

The women who went to the tomb early on the third day saw some of the most surprising images portrayed in the Bible. The rolled-away stone, the empty grave, the angels—all of these would lead anyone to fall to the ground in confusion. When the angels reminded the women of Jesus' words, I imagine it all fell into place and prompted them to become the first messengers of the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

"... and now we're free, let the redeemed lift up your heads..."

Perhaps no one in the story of Jesus' trial, death and resurrection needed to have his head lifted up more than Peter. Grieving in a way the other disciples couldn't imagine, Peter heard the women's news and had to "look and see" for himself. He ran, saw and went away wondering. I have to believe he also went away encouraged, with his head raised high.

Following Jesus means inviting others to know the power of the cross and the empty grave — to look and see.

Personal Reflection:

What are ways you can testify to the power of the cross and the empty grave?

To whom can you share the Good News of Jesus?

Whom do you know who needs to be encouraged with the promise fulfilled in the resurrection?

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

APRIL 10 | READ LUKE 24:13-35

WRITTEN BY STEPHEN POE

Times occur when I think I have a firm grasp on who God is and what His plan is for me. I sense the Spirit working, and I'm walking squarely in Jesus' footsteps.

Then life happens. In an instant, clarity gives way to confusion and assurance to heartbreak. What made sense at dawn now makes little sense at dusk. His presence eludes me.

Luke describes two characters in that second state. Cleopas and his companion were acquainted with Jesus — included in "all the rest" (Luke 24:9, NASB) — and believed they had a solid understanding of what He was about. But the events of the weekend belied that. Just three days prior, their longed-for Messiah was executed, and hopes were dashed.

On this day, a smattering of reports reached them about an empty tomb and angels, words rejected as "nonsense" (Luke 24:11) and only adding to their bewilderment and melancholy. Jesus' promised resurrection was reality, but they had doubts. The time had come to return home.

Though momentous, the resurrection was not the day's end. Approximately nine hours after shedding His burial cloths, Jesus intercepted the two travelers along the dusty road. Not recognizing Him, they were astonished this Stranger demonstrated no knowledge of Jerusalem's events. They, like us, asked: "Where have you been?"

Jesus patiently listened as they walked on. They did seem to know about Him, but they also seemed to know little of His true purpose and plan. Jesus utilized Scripture — and the last miles of the journey — to enlighten them. The Stranger later broke bread at dinner and shared it with them. At once, they finally recognized Jesus. He is alive! Now everything makes sense! Excited, they rushed back to Jerusalem and reported their encounter.

Jesus, then and now, would say: "Where have I been? Fulfilling My promises of saving the world from sin and death, restoring hope and always being with you ... that's where."

In a day of quirky twists and turns, this truth emerges: Jesus had a perfect plan to reveal His resurrected self, confirm His purpose and show He is ever present with us. By grace, He included these two in it.

Following Jesus means trusting Him when you are uncertain and heartbroken, knowing Jesus will never leave you.

Personal Reflection:

Do you have times when you understand God and His plan for you?

Do you have other times when you cannot make sense of anything and wonder where God went?

Where do you turn for guidance?

Are you honest with God and trust Him when you are uncertain and heartbroken?

Do you long to know God better and have Him reveal Himself in a new way?

HAVE YOU OPENED YOUR LIFE AS A WITNESS FOR JESUS CHRIST?

APRIL 11 | LUKE 24:36-53

WRITTEN BY JOHN FORSYTHE

A Sunday School teacher asked her class if they knew about Easter and why it was important. One little girl said, "Easter is when the whole family gets together, eats turkey and sings about the pilgrims."

"No, that's not it," said the teacher.

A second student responded, "Easter is when you get a tree, decorate it, give gifts to everybody and sing lots of songs."

"Nope, that's not it either," replied the teacher.

Finally, a third child said, "Easter is when Jesus was killed, put in a tomb and left for three days."

"Thank goodness someone knows!" the teacher thought.

The student continued, "Then everybody gathers at the tomb and waits to see if Jesus comes out. If He sees his shadow, He has to go back inside, and we have six more weeks of winter."

We have a deeper understanding of what Jesus accomplished on the cross and through His resurrection than these children. Jesus appeared to many people after the resurrection and opened their eyes to the reality that He did exactly what He said He would do. During that

forty-day period after the resurrection Jesus continued to teach His followers and point them to God's mission.

Jesus opened the minds of His followers to "understand the Scripture." (Luke 24:45, NIV) He enabled them to understand in great depth the Old Testament passages concerning the Christ. Jesus "connected the dots" so that they understood the context of the crucifixion and the resurrection. All of it became real to them as they considered the great blessing of meeting Jesus, the One who had died for the sins of humanity and through Whom we all have eternal life.

Jesus challenged His followers to move beyond head knowledge. He called them "witnesses." (Luke 24: 48). What daunting task if witnessing depended entirely on the power of human action! Witnessing, though, is a Holy Spirit-empowered act enabling us personally to carry the good news and share it with a world in need, a world seeking answers to great problems. When witnesses live out, through word and deed, what God's grace has opened to them, they open for others abundant life now and an eternity with Jesus Christ.

Will you live out the blessing of life in Christ and join God in His mission? Following Jesus means opening your life as a witness for Him.

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Personal Reflection:
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Are you the witness Jesus has called you to be?

How are you living out your faith in front of your family and friends?

How have you responded to God's call in your life to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to your community and the world?



Art by April Lintz

CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY

Christ, the Lord, is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heav'ns, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died, our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Charles Wesley (1739)

Church family,

He is risen! He is risen indeed! This proclamation is the greatest news the world has ever heard. It is our hope that your journey to Easter Sunday through this Lenten devotional has helped you meaningfully reflect upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We hope the words you've heard from your brothers and sisters have encouraged you and challenged you in many ways. We hope that your faithful reading of Luke's Gospel has reminded you of the power of God's Word and the Gospel that is being shared all over the world.

The question we must ask ourselves when we encounter this life-changing message is, "how will I respond?" There is no question the Gospel demands a response. As we can see through the examples in Scripture, the response is not just a simple yes or no, do you believe or don't you. It's actually an invitation into a new life. A new way of living and seeing the world. An invitation into purpose, meaning and adventure. The Gospel invites you to serve the hurting and fight for the oppressed. It's an invitation to surrender, to healing, to forgiveness. It's an invitation to a radical and unyielding love for the neighbor. The Gospel changes everything. It takes just one thing for this invitation to be received and accepted. It takes commitment. It is not enough to merely reflect, meditate and consider. We must commit ourselves, each and every day to this Gospel. Is that the response you are willing to make?

Commitment is a daily practice to ensure we experience this new life that is found in Christ. Something powerful happens when we take the time to renew this commitment before God, to ourselves and to others. We take our personal relationship with Christ to new depths. We challenge ourselves to greater devotion, and we encourage one another when we do this in the context of community. With all this said, we encourage you to give careful consideration to how you will demonstrate this commitment to Christ in your life. We encourage you to evaluate how you will live out such a commitment in the context of this faith community. How will the key convictions that we hold so dear as a church family encourage you in this commitment? Read through these convictions that follow and commit the questions to prayer. Prepare your heart to renew your commitment to this Gospel. Prepare your heart to respond by walking in the newness of life. In so doing, as individuals and as a community of faith, we will declare with word and deed this Good News that changes everything. May we commit ourselves once again to this life-changing truth. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

IN HIS GRACE,



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.



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



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. UBC is a missional church. We seek to be witnesses of the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. Over time our goal would be for UBC to be a launching pad for missional endeavors in our immediate community and around the world.

MATTHEW 28:18-20; PSALM 67; ACTS 2:41, 47

- 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

Complements and accentuates prayer. Fasting 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?
- 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

- Am I investing in those closest to me this year?
- In what ways can I go deeper with my family and spend more intentional time with them this year?



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?

Thank You

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