

SHARING OUR HOPE



**Lent**

DEVOTIONALS | 2020

## INTRODUCTION

As we enter into the Lenten season, I am excited to be led in my thoughts and prayers by my church family. The pages of this devotional are filled with the experiences and inspiration of different members of the Derbyshire family, as God speaks in varying ways through them.

I would like to thank each person who took the time to share their thoughts and experiences. Your submission is a great gift, because we get to experience God at work through you. Additionally, I would like to recognize and thank Kendra Copeland, because she is the energy behind this devotional. If not for her commitment and passion, this devotional would have never come together.

Each day of Lent, as we prepare for Easter, you are encouraged to read a devotional and its companion scripture with each corresponding day. Spend time with God, and open your heart and mind to the ways God wants to direct you in your faith. I am looking forward to watching as God continues His work in our lives and the life of our church, as we corporately pray over the same thoughts and scriptures.

May this season sharpen our focus, as God uses these days to deepen our faith, to strengthen our fellowship, and to illumine our way together.

Jeff Raymond





## ASH WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 26

*Joel 2:1-2, 12-17*

*Isaiah 58:1-12*

*2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10*

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

*Psalms 103 or 103:8-14*

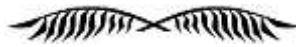
Our family recently watched the movie "Click." The main character, Michael, is overwhelmed with his job, his family, and finding balance between the two. Soon he receives a universal remote that gives him the power to control his life. Michael can mute unpleasant conversations and fast-forward through difficult situations. There's even a picture-in-picture option he can use to ignore what is happening around him and watch sports instead! Michael believes this magical remote is the solution to all of his issues, but he eventually realizes that he has missed out on much of his life by avoiding everyday events, arguments, and illnesses, and skipping to the "good parts" like promotions, parties, and weddings. Michael is given a second chance at life, and this time around, he is ready to embrace all of the parts!

We may be tempted to fast-forward through Lent and skip straight to Easter. Lent can seem so tough as we reflect on Jesus walking through the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan and relying fully on God. There are physical and emotional challenges to face as we are called to remember this time: "'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'" (Joel 2:12) We must humble ourselves (Isaiah 58:3) by serving those that are difficult to love and by serving without receiving any kind of recognition (Matthew 6:1-6). We are called to face hardships as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10. "As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great

endurance; in troubles, hardships, and distresses; ...in hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger.”

It would be easy to put ourselves on auto-pilot and skip through scenes we don’t want to experience. But, just like Jesus, we are especially called at this time of Lent to rely fully on God. As we humble ourselves, serve others, sacrifice, forgive, and remember; we are learning; we are growing; we are becoming more of who we were meant to be. When we embrace the hard stuff and the good stuff of life, it ultimately leads us to the best stuff – eternal life with our Savior, Jesus Christ!

Elizabeth Tuck



## **FEBRUARY 27**

*Deuteronomy 30:15-20*

*Luke 9:18-25*

*Psalm 1*

The celebrations of Christmas are fading in our memories and the sometimes cold and dreary days of winter are ahead. As we enter the time of Lent, we reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and some of us may make an attempt to “sacrifice” something that gives us pleasure or enjoyment as a way to remind ourselves of what has been done for us. As I read these verses from Luke about gaining the world but in the process losing ourselves, I was reminded of an experience at a youth retreat many years ago. I was an adult chaperone on the trip, so my perspective was a bit different from the youth attending. We were given stacks of magazines and told to cut out pictures of things that we wanted to have. As I leafed through the pages, I was struck by the thought of what a lucky man I am and that even though there were things that might be nice to have, I didn’t really need any of them. God has already

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supplied me with everything I need, and honestly, probably more than I deserve. I have been blessed with a wonderful wife, a loving family and an amazing circle of friends- many of whom are in my church family here at Derbyshire. I pray that I always remain mindful of and grateful for what God has done, and not covet or strive for those things that don't really matter. I already have the things that do.

Rick Ivey



## **FEBRUARY 28**

*Isaiah 58:1-9a*

*Matthew 9:10-17*

*Psalms 51:1-10*

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.  
(Psalm 51:10 ESV)

Kids are messy. For that matter, life is messy. This is no surprise (or at least I hope it's not a surprise). Turn your back, and within a SECOND fingernail polish is on the floor, glitter has managed to find its way into every crevice, and chocolate ice cream has turned into body paint. Children are also fully dependent upon their mothers and fathers to provide shelter, food, and safety. To teach them, lead and counsel, and protect them. As children grow, they know when they've done something wrong and made "the MESS", and often hide from the truth. But don't we as adults do the same thing? In today's passage, we read of King David. A "courageous man" after "God's own heart." However, he certainly had his share of messes and sin: lust, adultery, murder, traitor, just to name a few. As children, regardless of age, when we create the big mess, when we think our sin is too great and have blown our opportunity we often pull away. We withdraw from God, our Heavenly Father, in an attempt to hide our

shame. Regardless of our sin or what mess we've made, our response should always be:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Rather than running from our troubles, our sin, or our messes we should run to Him; as children run to their father.

James Moss



## **FEBRUARY 29**

*Isaiah 58:9b-14*

*Luke 5:27-32*

*Psalm 86:1-11*

### **But Why?**

We've all been there, waiting for that phone call or email with the news. Whether it's the doctor with test results, word about the job interview, an admissions decision, or the score and result of a test or exam. Anxiously waiting...bracing ourselves...and so many times we end up scared, disappointed and confused. In the past few years, I've been no stranger to the doctors' phone calls, with results I didn't want to hear. That instant where everything suddenly sounded muffled and quiet, except my heart that was beating so loudly inside, and yet, I couldn't react at all. And then after I would hang up, it suddenly came out, "But *why?*". And then, "*why God?*".

David's prayer in Psalm 86 transports me to these moments. Even more so, it reminds me to see past the surface of the struggles and difficulties that David is experiencing, which we will inevitably experience throughout our lifetimes, and to change focus toward praise and glory to

the God who is in control of it all. That simple shift in focus to praying first in praise, and then asking for God's help, mercy, and redirection away from sin -- of our own pride and will to control or fix it all on our own -- we allow ourselves to be open to His way, no matter what we face.

And when that phone call or email happens, and the words aren't what we hope to read or hear, there is power in knowing that we don't have to understand why, but begin to see and understand why we need God in every moment. Our eyes can be fixed on seeing that the only way we will have the strength and endurance to get through the discomfort and inner turmoil is by leaning on and praying with praise to God. He uses these moments in ways we cannot imagine to propel our hearts closer to Him in order to fulfill His plans. We can move forward with faith and confidence, each and every day, when we fully submit our experiences and life to God's plan.

*Father, we thank you and praise you for the opportunity to serve you with our lives. Help us to be faithful to your call, and to allow our lives to be used for Your glory. Teach us to depend on you more fully, especially on the toughest days, knowing that you are leading us. Amen.*

Abby Marshall





## MARCH 1

### Repentance

During Lent, we reflect on our sins and the meaning of repentance.

Repentance is our response to God's boundless grace.

We look for clear direction and firm guidance from God.

Repentance is turning from darkness and walking in the light.

We strive to become people who are more loving, and less self-serving.

Repentance is taking responsibility for our actions.

We seek forgiveness and place our faith in God's mercy.

Repentance is trusting God's eternal grace and steadfast love.

*Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you, both in our deeds and in our inaction. We have forgotten your teachings and have loved ourselves more than our neighbor. Through your Holy Spirit, come and work repentance into our hearts. Open us to change and growth. Give to us an experience of grace that lifts our burdens from us and enables us to live rich, joyful lives for the good of others, and for your kingdom.*

*Amen.*



## MARCH 2

*Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18*

*Matthew 25:31-46*

*Psalms 19:7-14*

As I read Leviticus, it seemed to be a paraphrasing of the Ten Commandments. God's rules for us to live by. I realized that the Ten Commandments were such simple rules for us to live by. How often do we find ourselves judging someone for how they are dressed, how they look, how they talk? Have you ever twisted the truth to get something you wanted or so that you would look good to others? Have you ever been disrespectful of your parents because you didn't like their rules?

I don't think any of us like rules, but rules are how we live in our world. Speeding down a street may get us a ticket. Did we break a rule? Yes- and we were penalized. The same is true with the rules that our parents gave us. Did we feel like we were confined or did we just follow the rules to keep our parental relationship calm?

God gave us rules and all we have to do is read them and remember them. These rules tell us how to treat others, how to help others, and how to respect others; but most of all how to love others.

In our diverse society, it is easy to turn away from things that make us uncomfortable. A homeless person, someone who is disfigured, a person who has memory issues, someone that isn't like us.

But my interpretation of all these passages is God telling us to love each other, to be kind to each other, and help each other no matter how different this person is from us.

God made us all different but he gave us rules to bind us together. During this Lenten season, stop and give the person on the street corner a dollar; help an elder if they are having difficulty. Give a smile to someone you encounter on the street.

Every morning as I drive down Glenside Drive and pull up to the stop light at Broad and Glenside, there is a gentleman who you might think is asking for a handout. Instead, he has a sign that says "Be Positive" and "Have a Great Day. " I don't know if he is homeless or not. He doesn't look like me, he doesn't dress like me, but his message cheers me up and makes me want to help him.

The passages above tell me to love my neighbor, to be kind to others; when someone has no clothes give them some; when they are hungry feed them; when they are sick or in prison visit them.

These are God's rules. I will try to follow them to make myself the person that God wants me to be. Am I perfect? Not at all. Do I love my fellow man because God put them in my life? Yes.

Jesus doesn't turn His back on us. He gave his life to us to save our sins. The least I can do is follow the rules.

Prayer:

God, help me to remember to love others, to reach out and help those less fortunate. Be with us each day and guide us in your ways. You gave us your Son to help us understand how to live. Let us not forget the sacrifice. Amen

Mary Ann Johnson



## MARCH 3

*Isaiah 55:6-11*

*Matthew 6:7-15*

*Psalms 34:15-22*

As the scripture reads, God protects those who follow in his light. But how does one follow in the light of the Lord? What can we do to show our love and devotion to the Almighty God? As I read these scriptures and reflect on these questions, the first thing that comes to my mind are my children. It is my hope and prayer that my children grow up knowing the love of Jesus and all the glory He gives to us.

I grew up right here at Derbyshire! I learned all about how to live a life that would glorify God. I gained friendships that have and will last a lifetime. These things have helped me see the light and spread that light to others. People always say, "Kayleigh, you are always so perky and happy! How do you do it?" When I think about that question, I realize it is because of those around me who spread the love of the Lord. When experiencing hardships, it is always peaceful to know that while you may be struggling, others around you are always there to support and love you.

It is my wish and prayer that my children get to experience these same things. As an example, Charlie (3 years old) loves and has loved music since he was born! I feel blessed that he has been able to express this love through his music class on Wednesday night at Derbyshire! He wakes up every Wednesday morning and says, "Tonight is music class at church with my friends!" Having others in the church who share his passion and can teach him how to use his talents to glorify God makes me smile from ear to ear!

Surrounding ourselves with those who believe and follow in the light of the Lord helps us grow, learn, and feel supported in our faith. By protecting and supporting one another and our children, the light will shine bright. I thank the Lord and pray that our children grow in their faith as they learn and experience God's wisdom and power.

Deihr Family



## **MARCH 4**

*Jonah 3:1-10*

*Luke 11:29-32*

*Psalms 51:11-18*

### **In Which Direction Are You Headed**

Have there ever been times in your life in which you felt that you wanted to do your own thing, to take a different direction and not have God's presence in your life? In the Book of Jonah, there were three groups of people that were headed in the wrong direction; however, as their situation worsened they realized the importance of having God in their life and they repented.

**First Group:** Jonah had been chosen by God to be a messenger to the people of Nineveh and to preach a message of repentance due to their wickedness. But instead of Jonah fulfilling this mission, he found a ship going to Tarshish to escape the presence of God.

Jonah was heading in the wrong direction to avoid God by doing his own thing.

**Second Group:** The crew of a merchant ship heading to Tarshish encountered a severe storm that was created by the Lord. Being afraid, they threw Jonah overboard blaming him for their bad luck. They knew that Jonah was a man of faith, but instead of being thankful for God standing

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alongside them they threw God out. They were on a course where God was a harm to them rather than a savior. It was here that Jonah was saved by a whale and spent three days in his belly which was a crisis for him. During this time Jonah prayed to the Lord out of distress and asked for release, vowing he would pay deliverance to the Lord. This brought Jonah to do what God had asked.

**Third Group:** They were the people of Nineveh who were evil, wicked, and offensive to God. They did not believe in God and God wanted them to change. They were headed in the direction of self-destruction. So again, for the second time, God spoke to Jonah telling him to get up and go to Nineveh and proclaim his message that in “forty days more Nineveh would be overthrown.” The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed fasting in which everyone great and small, and even the King, put on a sackcloth. (Note: the sackcloth was made of black goat’s hair, coarse, rough and thick, used for sacks and also worn by mourners, and as a sign of repentance. It was also put upon the animals by the people of Nineveh. It was worn in mourning, distress, or modification.) God saw that they had turned from their evil ways. God turned from his fierce anger and did not bring calamity upon them.

In the scripture of Luke, reference is made to the Sign of Jonah, because at the proclamation of Jonah, the people of Nineveh repented. In the scripture of Psalm, Jonah is praying for help and is willing to repent if brought out of the belly of the whale in fear of his life.

On a personal note, this past week as I was preparing to cook frozen broccoli and looking over the three options given me on the bag, there was a scripture at the bottom from Isaiah 41:10, that read **“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

This scripture stayed with me all week; and as I prepared this devotion, I realized that no matter which direction we are headed, God is there with us in our fears and will give us the strength to repent and ask for forgiveness.

Joy Painter



## **MARCH 5**

*Matthew 7:7-12*

*Psalms 138*

### **Some People Just Drain the “Nice” Right Out of You**

That was a humorous little post I saw on Facebook that brought on an immediate chuckle. Throughout the day, the more I thought about it, the more I realized there is more truth in that quote than I had first imagined. How many people do we encounter each day whom we “love” –

Christian love, familial love, marital love, brotherly love, or other instances where “love” is the foundation of our relationship, yet we angrily confront or avoid them because they have so offended and frustrated us that whatever emotion we possessed that was “nice” has been replaced by dislike and resentment?

Sometimes those who are the hardest to love need love the most. Sometimes those we love the most are very hard to like; their actions get in the way. Annoying habits and personal behavior that doesn’t meet our expectations, the music we don’t understand that blasts on full volume interrupting our thoughts or conversation, political differences, resentment over small hurts and slights, lack of attention from those we have nurtured and supported as children, and adults who have taken advantage of our

generosity and ignored our sacrifice for them. “Nice” can disappear like cigarette smoke in a windstorm with little provocation from someone whose actions we genuinely dislike. Can we love someone and not like them? I believe we often do. If hardship or tragedy struck the offender, what would be our response? Would it be offers of help and support from a loving heart or would our reservoir of “nice” be so completely drained that we couldn’t respond?

It’s a decision each of us must make on our own. It is human to feel justified with our displeasure, resentment, and hurt. Can I love you but not like your actions, your habits, your politics, and your disregard of things that are of the utmost importance to me? It’s not an easy thing to love and like someone who offends us with little or no regard for our feelings or even the honesty of our ideas. And it’s hard to feign “nice” under those conditions.

I believe there is forgiveness of our dark thoughts as long as we strive to love. I can try to love as Christ loves, and acknowledge that He probably doesn’t like a myriad of things about me. The key, I suppose, is not to let dislike get in the way of love and not let differences, whether they be petty or huge, separate us from each other and the reality of God’s love for all of us. We can try to be kind. We can try to be patient. We can resist the temptation to criticize and find fault. Consider that those who drain us emotionally are probably drained themselves. It’s hard. It’s really hard, and only by the grace of God can we ever hope to attain even a small measure of the grace He has shown us. But He expects us to try.

I am reminded of a song from the 1950s entitled simply, “He”. If you’re old enough to remember, or young and curious enough to look it up - the closing line:



*Though it makes Him sad to see the way we live, He'll always say, I forgive.\**

\*Al Hibbler, author

Sandi Bassett



## **MARCH 6**

*Ezekiel 18:21-28*

*Matthew 5:20-26*

*Psalm 130*

### **Finding Inspiration in Different Place**

As a Christian I often look for signs from God wherever I can find them. As a music lover and someone who grew up primarily influenced by the music of the 80's, I would listen to and often be surprised by the lyrics from some unusual characters. Yes, there was the rock anthem "Stairway to Heaven", but there were many more examples where inspirational lyrics were woven into a song.

Triumph is a great band from Canada who penned the song "Fight the Good Fight" where the lyrics read "The good book says it's better to give than to receive, I do my best to do my part...fight the good fight every moment every day...it's your only way"

The Red Rocker, Sammy Hagar, wrote the melodic "Give to Live" which went "If you want faith, you just believe a little, if you want love, if you want peace.....you've got to give to live".

Perhaps one of the greatest guitar players ever is Joe Satriani and in between creating his incredible guitar licks he wrote the song "I Believe"

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which goes something like this: “I believe we can change anything, I believe we can rise above it, I believe there’s a reason for everything, I believe in my dream”.

Finally, Peter Gabriel wrote the inspirational song “Don’t Give Up”, and along with Kate Bush produced these haunting but encouraging lyrics: “Rest your head, you worry too much, it’s gonna be alright, when times get rough, you can fall back on us, don’t give up, please don’t give up”.

Perhaps it’s just me wanting to hear inspiration from God when I hear these songs (and many others that I could think of) but isn’t that what it’s all about? Listening to hear God speak to you, encourage you, equip you, and let you know that He’s there. Keep your ears open; He’s all around you.

Johnny Butler



## **MARCH 7**

*Deuteronomy 26:16-19*

*Matthew 5:43-48*

*Psalms 119:1-8*

I was quite relieved to hear my high school Algebra teacher announce that he would be grading the test we took the day before “on a curve.” That meant his students, myself among them, scored lower than he expected on the exam. So he would be raising everyone’s grades to compensate. I sometimes find myself wishing God would grade us on a curve, since I fall so short of his commands.

Then I remember that His standards have always been high. Even though I can’t meet them on my own, He’s simply not going to lower them to my level. In fact, I’m admonished to be as “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). He wants me to be “perfectly complete”

in the ways I love Him and my neighbors. He knows I can't do it on my own and that's why He offers the gift of His righteousness.

Lent affords the opportunity to examine my life, put away those things which hold me back from following Him completely, and find purpose to concentrate on seeking him with all of my heart (Psalm 119:2). Practically, that means paying attention to His instructions for daily living, found in the Bible. When we listen with an attitude of prayer, He speaks His directions.

In a world where morals and the standard of truth itself are changing, I'm glad He doesn't grade on a curve. His precepts are faithful and we can depend on them to be the same today, tomorrow, and forever. What a blessing!

Randy Davis



**MARCH 8**

## **Humility**

During Lent, we reflect on the meaning of humility.

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less.

The Son of Man came not to gain, but to give up all He had.

Humility is forsaking selfish ambition, and seeking unity with others.

The Son of Man came not to be loved, but to love.

Humility is trusting that God will meet our needs if we seek His righteousness.

The Son of Man became poor so that we could become rich.

*Merciful God, we confess that our constant striving for approval leaves us empty and unfulfilled. We ask that you humble our hearts and replenish us with gifts of the spirit. Help us serve as Jesus served and love as Jesus loved. Deliver us from pride, ambition and jealousy, and fill us with mercy, willing to serve one another in humility and love.*

*Amen.*

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## **MARCH 9**

*Daniel 9:3-10*

*Luke 6:27-38*

*Psalm 79:1-9*

As we leave the celebratory season of our beloved Christ's birth and tread into His journey of the ultimate sacrifice for us, let's slow down, pause, and reflect for a few minutes. In Luke's version of Jesus's plea to love our enemies, his words are clear...."Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you." What, really?? When I picture the Roman soldiers nailing Christ's hands and feet into the heavy planks, I grimace at the thought of even an ounce of this blunt brutality. It's incomprehensible to think of how He hung there for many hours in the relentless heat in pure agony. Our Christ endured more physical pain than our minds can even fathom for a brief second....so my mind has to leave that gruesome bloody scene. Then I think of Luke's passage of "loving our enemies" and see that within Jesus's crucifixion and how He forgave the men who nailed him to the cross He is the most profound example of forgiveness and love of all mankind. Jesus asked his Father, our omniscient God, to forgive them, as he took his last breaths. How can we emulate even a fraction of this divine love? I was recently involved in a Bible study challenge by Justin Laruso and he suggested that loving our enemies was perhaps the most difficult task for us to overcome. I am a bit naive when I think of who my enemies really are- surely I can't have many of them, right? Maybe I am someone's enemy and I need to be forgiven; I shudder to think that I have hurt someone even if unintentionally. Asking for forgiveness is a very humbling experience; my self-reflection hasn't been easy as I lay all my cards out on the table for God to see. But He already knows me, actually knows each

hair on my head, so why go through this? Because God being our most entrusted parent wants and has commanded ALL of His children to love one another- period. Jesus scolds us gently by pointing out, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?" As I read Luke's gospel again, I see that this was not a question but rather a commandment from Jesus; to love and forgive our enemies. My prayer for you and myself this Lenten season is for us to become more intentional in our love for God by showing mercy and extending forgiveness to all of His children, no matter who they are.

I pray that our journey will give us a pure peace in our hearts that only God can provide for His seeking, fallible children.

Diane Forte



## **MARCH 10**

*Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20*

*Matthew 23:1-12*

*Psalms 50:7-15, 22-24*

<sup>2</sup> *Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."* <sup>3</sup> *The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."* <sup>4</sup> *Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.* <sup>16</sup> *Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong.* <sup>17</sup> *Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.<sup>[a]</sup> Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.*

*Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-17*

Unlike the season of Advent, during which we read the hopeful words of the prophets foretelling the birth of a Savior, here in the season of Lent we focus our attention on some of the more uncomfortable prophecies: the ones calling Israel out on their destructive and selfish tendencies.

And if we want to adopt the prophecies about a Savior that is indeed for *us*, then we need to consider that the ones expressing God's anger have something to say to us, too.

Digging into the prophets Isaiah, Micah, and Amos, it seems that again and again God gets pretty angry, rejecting our worship when it is empty or self-seeking. And again and again, the prophets reveal to us that the root cause of our empty, self-serving worship is a failure to do what is just; a failure to stand up for those who are systemically oppressed and mistreated. How can we possibly engage in authentic worship as we willfully fail to care for God's children in need?

This Lenten season, as we spend time in self-examination, let's try not to gloss over the hard truths of the prophets of old. Here are a few questions for us to meditate on today and throughout the season:

1. Am I joyfully sharing what I have with others, especially those whose needs are great?
2. Do I speak up for the maligned and oppressed, or do I remain silent so as not to risk upsetting my peers?
3. Does my faith inform my perspective on other areas of my life, or do other areas of my life inform the way I live out my faith?
4. Am I gracious and patient with others, even (and especially) those who irritate me?
5. Which of my shortcomings have I accepted as just a part of who I am, and how do I need to address them?

As we live and breathe, may each breath, each step, each word and each action be an act of justice, and therefore, an act of worship.

Alice Cates Clarke



## **MARCH 11**

*Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20*

*Matthew 20:17-28*

*Psalms 31:9-16*

### **Go Into the Mission Field and Make Disciples of All Men**

In Matthew Chapter 28, Jesus' last direction to his Disciples was to "Go and make disciples of all men." That was not a request, but an order, and it applies to us as well.

In Exodus Chapter 3, God told Moses to go to Egypt and free his people. Moses put several stumbling blocks in the way as to why he was not the person to do it. God told him to do it anyway and that He would be with him.

In Acts Chapter 8, God's angel spoke to Philip to walk down a road where he would meet an Ethiopian eunuch. The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah about the killing of a prophet, and asked Philip to explain it to him. After telling the Ethiopian about Jesus, the Ethiopian asked to be baptized. Afterward, the Spirit of the Lord whisked Philip away.

What does any of this mean to us?

Several years ago I heard a Medical Professor from VCU testify as to how this one story of Philip led him to Christ. The professor was Ethiopian and came to the United States to avoid persecution in his country as a Christian. He has shared his story many times since



then. These three stories are a directive to us that when we leave our house, we are entering the mission field. God does not want us to find excuses as to why we shouldn't share the Gospel. He has heard all of that before. He wants us to be reminded during the Lenten season that Jesus died for us and that He came to save mankind. Our command is to share that with others and to lead others to Him.

Neil Stevenson



## **MARCH 12**

*Jeremiah 17:5-10*

*Luke 16:19-31*

*Psalm 1*

### **One Step at a Time**

Zig Ziglar once said, "Whatever happens, do not lose hold of the two main ropes of life: Hope and Faith"

Although Mr. Ziglar is known as a motivational speaker and has inspired millions with his wit and encouraging speeches, the foundation of almost all of his "quotes" are based on Christ's teachings, and are rooted in the promise that there is Hope in Christ, and in this Hope, we learn to trust, believe and lean on the truth of this promise.

Jeremiah 17:5-10 reminds us to put our hope and faith in God, not in man. "Cursed is the one who's trust is in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and who's heart turns away from the Lord" "But Blessed is the

man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him, they will be like a tree planted by the water, that sends out its roots by the stream."

In Luke 16: 19-31 we learned of the rich man who had all things of this world, while a beggar lived at his gates, begging and dying of starvation. The rich man ignored him and lived his life of luxury. Upon the death of both men, the beggar, Lazarus, sat at Abraham's side, while the rich man was cast to Hades, seeing Lazarus at Abraham's side, pleading for relief from his torment. Abraham said to the rich man, "Son, remember that in your life time you received your good things, Lazarus received his bad, but now he is comforted and you are in agony."

Each of us, although surrounded by a community of believers, walks this journey to God through Christ alone. It is an individual journey that we must chose. It takes strength, confidence, faith and hope. As we grow in Christ and surround ourselves with His word, His truth and His love, we find peace that surpasses all human understanding. Step by step, we move closer to that point where we find our faith and belief enriched, allowing us to shine a light far enough ahead to light the path for one more step, and just enough to allow anyone behind us to follow. Eventually we find that the path leads to eternal salvation as we fall into the warm embrace of a fulfilled promise. "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly will perish" Psalm 1:6.

Gerald Hemphill



## **MARCH 13**

*Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28*

*Matthew 21:33-43*

*Psalm 105:16-22*

### **The Sound of Music**

Jeff recently preached about the rainbow sent by God when waters from the great flood receded. It was a covenant with Noah. My rainbow began several years ago when I awakened with a song playing in my mind. I could not understand the reason it was happening. The songs remained, but not every night. However, it happened often enough for me to wonder why this was continuing to occur and what, if anything, it was meant to convey to me. Time went by and it expanded to additional daytime hours. I then realized it made my day with a peace that I still didn't fully comprehend.

One subsequent night, the hymn *The Old Rugged Cross*, was with me and in the morning, and I realized it must be God speaking to me through that song – one of my favorites. Now when I hear it, it has become my rainbow, and it carries me through the day. I sense the presence of God and his nearness to me.

So now, more than ever, I'll cherish the Old Rugged Cross 'til my trophies at last I lay down – you already know the remainder of the verse.

During this Lenten season let's resolve to keep our eyes upon the cross and meditate on how much the Easter season means to all of us. God bless.

*My prayer:*

*DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER - and lifter of our souls, enable us to experience this most holy season of Lent as a time of spiritual renewal. Let us not view it as a period of being deprived.*

*Teach us how we may achieve a higher level of faith as we seek your bounteous GRACE.*

*Amen and Amen*

Carol Young



## **MARCH 14**

*Micah 7:14-15, 18-20*

*Luke 15:11-32*

*Psalm 103:1-4 (5-8) 9-12*

## **Routines**

As the daughter of a very organized, retired teacher, I have learned that routines are a must in our household. Most of our mornings consist of the same ol', same ol' morning habits. Clothes are picked out the night before and set aside; backpacks are packed and ready to go; car keys are placed on the desk next to our bags and ready so that we can scamper out quickly. So, in the morning, we can almost get ready with our eyes closed. Everyone gets dressed before heading downstairs for breakfast. Breakfast is quickly eaten, backpacks are picked up, and we all scoot out the door for the day. The bus comes, we drop off Ben at school, and then head to work. It's the same routine every day, until "something" happens. That something can be the smallest thing like a lost hair brush, keys that were not in their "normal" spot or even an argument about the days sock color

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**NOTES:**

choice. That something can also be something larger, like a flat tire, a car that doesn't start, a late bus or a fever or illness.

On the mornings when my routine falls apart, my mood changes instantly. We all know how that one "something" or even someone can instantly change our mood and set the tone for the day. I am honestly guilty of taking out my frustrations on others and those who haven't done anything wrong. It is in these times that I need to remind myself to take a step back and breathe. I must remember that Jesus' routine was often interrupted. He is proof that in all of the interruptions in life, He continued to love everyone. Psalm 103:9-12 reminds us to not hold onto anger and that Jesus always loves us. As our daily routines can quickly change, we should try our best to keep our moods in a Godly manner and focus on his love.

- <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;  
<sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.  
<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;  
<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Dear God, please continue to remind me that even in times of broken routines, we should always be loving to those around us. Amen.

Kendra Copeland



## MARCH 15

### Suffering

During Lent, we reflect on the meaning of suffering.

Through suffering, we become aware of God's presence.

All around us we see sorrow, brokenness and pain.

Through suffering, we become aware of God's power.

We struggle with our own trials and search in vain for answers.

Through suffering, we learn to trust God's promises.

We think of the magnitude of Christ's suffering on the cross.

Through suffering, we deepen our faith.

We cry out helplessly when our burdens seem unbearable.

Through suffering, we learn to comfort others.

*Merciful God, grant us strength and courage to face the trials in our lives, and keep us grateful for all the joys. Cheer us in our sorrow and sustain us through our suffering. Keep us aware of our weakness and dependent upon your strength. Remind us of Christ's suffering on the cross, and renew us by your Holy Spirit that we may follow your commands and proclaim your love to a suffering world.*

*Amen.*



## MARCH 16

*2 Kings 5:1-15b*

*Luke 4:23-30*

*Psalm 42:1-7*

### Morning Epiphany

They were all filled with awe and praised God. "'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help His people.'" Luke 7:16

There's a morning jam on the sidewalk in front of a music store in downtown Galax during the Fiddlers' Convention every year that is one of the highlights of the weekend for Meda and me. A dozen or so musicians playing guitars, fiddles, mandolins, banjos, slap bass, and spoons gather to play some bluegrass and gospel. The small crowd sings along and some take over from the regulars for a song or 2. It always ends with a version of *Amazing Grace* with a few dozen street corner singers that never fails to put a lump in my throat.

During one of the jams this past August there was a man, maybe 50 or so, with a condition that caused his head to shake constantly. He came alone and appeared to be clean and dressed appropriately for the occasion. He sat on one of the weathered benches outside the store listening to the music, alone, weakly applauding at the end of each song. A young beagle laid at his feet, looking at his master occasionally. After about 30 minutes, he struggled to stand and then left, crossing the street cane in hand with his beagle, alone.

I felt pity for the man and began imagining Jesus walking by incognito. What would He do? Would Jesus feel the man's disease and

loneliness? Would He feel the pain and loneliness of everyone else in the crowd? Would He stop and speak to the man -- offer encouragement, forgiveness, healing? What would it be like to actually hear His voice instead of just reading His words? For a few terribly brief moments I had an inkling of the nature of Jesus and what it may have been like to walk with the crowds and then see Jesus respond to cries for help or a touch on His robe. All the power and all the love and all the grace consolidated into that one man. And that one man, God incarnate, loves me. That amazing, wonderful, gracious God stoops to offer me wholeness.

Ed Sterrett



## **MARCH 17**

*Matthew 18:21-35*

*Psalm 25:3-10*

### **Don't Be Like Natalie!**

It's been 539 days since Aaron left me after a six-year relationship.

It's been 2,775 days since my old church family told me they didn't need me anymore.

Years have come and gone. Better people and places have entered my life. And still, not a week goes by without a resentful thought coming into my head about either event. I am most *definitely* the "wicked servant" who gets called out by his master in Matthew 18:32.

The servant wanted a second chance to fix his wrong-doings. It was granted, but he could not show this same mercy to a fellow servant. Why not? Maybe it gave him a power trip. Finally, he had a little bit of



control over his menial life. Maybe anger at his own shortcomings was relieved if he aimed it at someone else.

With each good thing that has happened to me in 2019 and so far in 2020, God has been trying to “call me out.” No matter what awesome thing He threw at me, it hasn’t been enough to wipe the anger and resentment from my heart.

It is SO much easier to be unforgiving. It comes naturally to us as flawed human beings, so there’s really no effort needed. It means we are tough and unbreakable. No weakness! But what does it truly do to us? It creates a grudge that just festers in our hearts until it’s nearly impossible to crack.

The true sign of strength and resolve is in forgiving and letting go of the past. It means taking the example of our own Master and adopting it unto ourselves. How many times has He forgiven us? Countless. How many more times will He forgive us in the future? Again, countless.

So, to reiterate the title of today’s meditation: don’t be like me! Don’t let your resentments overtake your heart. If we truly love and do unto others as we’d have them do unto us, then there really is no option except to forgive.

Natalie Thomas



## MARCH 18

*Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9*

*Matthew 5:17-19*

*Psalms 78:1-6*

### **Focal Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:1-2**

"And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. <sup>2</sup>You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

### **Devotion:**

If you are like me, you feel a sense of security in knowing you are doing the right thing. When driving you look for the speed limit signs, so you know how fast to drive. When you start a project at work, you want to know exactly what is expected for an outcome and all the parameters such as the length of the project and what tools can be used, so you have a measuring stick to judge your work. You read the rules first when you receive a new board game. You have a peace knowing that you are doing the right thing.

Last Christmas, I received a new board game, "Say Anything." The game is designed to be played by four or more people to stimulate an open discussion among the players. After reading the rules of the game, I realized that each player would have an opportunity to ask an open-ended question such as "What is the best store or service would you want to receive a \$100 gift card"? Each person would then write down his or her answer, and the player asking the question would determine which was

best. Then the other players would also choose the best answer. Each player then would receive a point for every answer which match the question giver's best answer and the user selection. After reading the rules, I envisioned how the game would be played and mapped out a strategy to succeed.

The people of Israel had a similar experience. God had used his prophets to provide them how they should live with the promise that they would be rewarded with blessings and possession of the promised land. The rules were simple, seek God and follow his guidance and not seek to live outside the rules and statutes. We know that history shows that the people did not always follow God's teaching. Can we learn from their example? Can we seek to follow how Jesus showed us to live our lives. If we love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves, God will bless us and we will live as his family.

**Prayer:**

*Our Heavenly Father help us to examine how you showed us to live and help us to live each day as your faithful child. Let us be a blessing to all those we meet and have our lives point other to you. Amen.*

Carl Brown



## **MARCH 19**

*2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16*

*Romans 4:13-18*

*Luke 2:41-52*

*Psalm 89:1-29 or 89:1-4, 26-29*

### **He is Never Lost**

Have you ever had something and then lost it? Like your glasses or keys? Maybe you've seen other people lose things, too? And when one of those things was lost, there was a lot of frantic searching until it was found. While the searching happened, were there feelings of concern and worry? Maybe even some sadness or fear that the lost thing wouldn't ever be found again?

I ask because in Luke 2: 41-52, we hear that Joseph and Mary have lost something very important...their 12 year old son, Jesus. They can't find him anywhere. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. It turns out that he's been there the whole time. Once they find him, Joseph and Mary tell Jesus that they've been very worried about him. Because they couldn't find Jesus, his parents had been worried that Jesus was lost and missing. But it turns out that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing, where he was, and was not scared at all. We know this because that's what he tells Mary and Joseph. He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

What we see in 12 year-old Jesus in this story is something we also see in Jesus in other Bible stories. Jesus is never lost or at a loss of what to

do or say. He always knows where he is and where he's going. This is a very good quality in a person who then invites others to *follow* him, don't you think? When we follow Jesus, who is never lost, then we will not be lost either. In a world where things and people so often feel lost, this is a very nice gift for us to receive. And, when we are living into this gift of knowing where we are, and where we belong, then we can share that gift of belonging with those around us.

Valerie Williamson



## **MARCH 20**

*Hosea 14:1-9*

*Mark 12:28-34*

*Psalms 81:8-14*

### **Standing Right in Front of You**

As a pharmacist, my job is filled with an everyday routine. It's easy to get caught up in the moment, focusing on what I'm doing, and not seeing what's going on around me. Sometimes I need to look up and help that person who is standing right in front of me that I didn't even see.

God is telling us to do the same thing. In Hosea 14, the Lord said if Israel would look to Him for safety and security, He would shower them with blessings. Other countries Israel counts as allies won't save them from destruction like He will.

In Psalms 81:8-14, God laments that Israel refuses to listen to Him, even though He has saved them in the past. The psalmist cries, "O Israel, if you would but listen to me!" (ESV). It pains Him to see them continuing down the wrong path when He has shown them the way so many times.

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**NOTES:**

Christ shares with us in Mark 12:28-34 the two greatest commandments. The first is the Shema – “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” This tenet is so crucial the Israelites recite this twice daily and teach their children to pray this at night to this day. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself. In Mark, the scholar agreed with Jesus and said these two commandments were more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices one could make. This prompted Jesus to assert he was not far from the kingdom of God.

God wants each of us to live the life He has chosen for us -- not because He wants to restrict or confine us, but instead fill us with the immense joy it will give us. He pleads for wholehearted love from all of us. When we know that God is the center of our life, we naturally know that our neighbor is more important than ourselves – because that's how God sees our neighbor.

It's terribly easy to get caught up in the mundane details of everyday life regardless of their importance, but it's more important to stop, look around, and help that person standing right in front of you.

Leigh Hester



## **MARCH 21**

*Hosea 6:1-6*

*Luke 18:9-14*

*Psalms 51:15-20*

As we continue through Lent in preparation for Easter, our tradition includes repentance and awareness of sins as part of our preparation. As I read through the passage in Luke, there is a striking contrast between misguided confidence in our righteousness versus the

acknowledgment of our identity as sinners that is called for in Lent. As I reflect on my life, I imagine there have been many times where I have had a blind spot to such misguided confidence. I would guess that's part of the problem - lack of awareness of our misguided confidence. I also know for certain, though, that I have knowingly behaved in ways that indicate misguided confidence. I have spoken about others' sins and shortcomings in an effort to prop myself up. Though I may not have been fully conscious of such intentions, I was aware that my behavior was wrong. What stands out more in my emotional memory, however, are the times I have figuratively beaten myself up for my sins. I have wondered if I was worthy of God's love and forgiveness. Such self-criticism has kept me down and sapped motivation to passionately follow God.

I wish we could know more about what happens in the life of this tax collector in Jesus's story. Did acknowledgment of his sin prompt greater devotion and obedience? From what we can see, though, I like how the tax collector acknowledges his sin but also turns it over to God's mercy rather than lambasting himself. I pray that as we prepare for Lent, we will acknowledge our sin and need for a Savior, endeavor to go forward and 'sin no more', but also turn our sinning ways over to the Lord's mercy. Amen.

David Guion



## MARCH 22

### Lament

During the season of Lent, we ponder the frail, fallen condition of our world.

The Lord is near the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.  
We feel a deep sorrow and awareness that something is not right.

The Lord is near the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.  
We wonder if God's hand has been removed from our lives.

The Lord is near the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.  
We recall the words of Jesus: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The Lord is near the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

*Merciful God, we are bewildered by the chaos of our world. We sometimes wonder where you are, and how you could allow so much pain and sorrow. Draw near us, Lord, and grant us a sense of your steadfast love. Restore us through your grace. We bring our anxieties to you, and trust in your Holy Spirit's guidance.*

*Amen.*





## MARCH 23

*Isaiah 65:17-25*

*John 4:43-54*

*Psalms 30:1-6, 11-13*

I suffer from the winter blues. At best, I hunker down and survive the interminable months of cold and darkness, with the hope and promise that longer days and sunshine will return *eventually* if I can Just. Hang. On. I suspect you have had those days as well. It might be tied to *circumstances* rather than *seasons*, but we all have days when we just “fake it ‘til we make it,” right?

Since Lent is a time for introspection and reflection, it’s interesting to think about what contributes to those feelings. What are the “joy thieves” in your life?

Do you have unrealistic expectations of yourself, others, or situations?

Do you fall into the comparison trap? Social media is a huge factor in this, I believe.

Do you drag around a sack of regrets behind you every day?

Do you worry about things you can’t control?

The two Old Testament passages for today were written for days just like these, when patience is thin and hope is thinner, and we are just going through the motions. The two passages mention *joy*, *rejoice*, *enjoy*, and *gladness* a collective 7 times!

For example, Psalm 30:5 promises, “Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

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### NOTES:

And Isaiah 65:17 promises a “new heavens and a new earth” where “the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.”

In short, they point to hope. And in hope, there is joy.

Today and for the remaining days of Lent, I am going to ask God to help me identify the things that are stealing my joy. I am going to hand those things to him, with the assurance that he will turn them into something new. Would you join me in that? He’s in the restoration business, thanks be to God!

LeJeanna Raymond



## **MARCH 24**

*Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12*

*John 5:1-18*

*Psalms 46:1-8*

What I found interesting is that all three of these Scriptures use the imagery of water.

In Ezekiel, the angel showed Ezekiel the temple, flowing with water and flourishing with trees, creatures, fruit and fish.

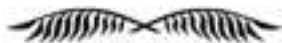
In Psalms, where there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.

In John, Jesus healed the invalid of 38 years by the pool. Jesus told him to pick up his mat and walk! This happened in Jerusalem. It is interesting that Jerusalem has no river. Here the “river” is a metaphor for the continual outpouring of the sustaining and refreshing blessings of God which makes the city of God (Jerusalem) like the Garden of Eden.

And as I reflect (and sometimes feel); God is giving blessings to me of all the things that have made life rich beyond measure.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, We thank you for all the blessings that you enrich our lives with each day. Help us always be worthy and appreciative of all that you do for us. We ask this prayer in your Son's name. Amen.

Botsey Johnson



### **March 25**

*Isaiah 7:10-14*

*Psalms 45 or Psalm 40:5-11*

*Hebrews 10:4-10*

*Luke 1:26-38*

### **The Song of Laura and Laurie**

I've checked this box on my driver's license for as long as I can remember. I even remember the conversation with mom when I told her I had checked the box to be an organ donor. I have never really thought about "*Why*" until this past year.

911

*December 2018*

The past few years had been a challenge as I watched my Mom, who is the strongest woman I know, undergo dialysis and it wasn't going as planned. One night in December she had a scary episode and I had to call 911. The EMTs and firefighters arrived to take Mom to the hospital. A veteran firefighter came back to check on me because he saw the fear in my face. He told me to breathe deep it was going to be okay.

*"... Fear not... for thou has found favour in God." Luke 1:30 (KJV)*

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**NOTES:**

*The Interview for a Transplant*  
*May 2019*

Mom's surgeon suggested she consider getting a kidney transplant. Mom, my brother and I spent all day with the Hume-Lee Transplant Team at VCU (MCV) Health in May 2019. Mom was 100% sure this is what she wanted. I didn't know what to expect. We met each member of the team and we were interviewed. The transplant coordinator, doctor, pharmacist, nutritionist, social worker, and donor advocate revolved in and out of our assigned room. I don't really remember when the question came but it came. "Do you know anyone who would be willing to be your donor?". After my brother and I both said yes, (Mom had a shocked look on her face), I was taken to meet with a living donor coordinator and interviewed. I felt like one of my students at one point and wasn't sure if I was answering the questions right. I passed one test that day, my blood type was universal, so I could begin testing as a possible donor. We left that day awed by the professionalism and kindness of the transplant team.

*"For nothing is impossible with God." Luke 1:37 (NIV)*

*Tests & Meetings*

*May to September 2019*

Great News! We received the call that Mom was on the kidney transplant list. However, they wanted to proceed with a living donor versus waiting for a deceased donor. This required weekly testing for myself and/or my Mom. We formed a close relationship with the transplant team because we continued to meet with them throughout the process.

*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Canticle 15*

*Meeting with the Surgeon*

*September 2019*

Once I was approved to be the living donor, we met with the surgeon. We had to be in separate rooms to sign the consent. After Mom left the room, he let me know that my surgical plan was to use a robot and advised me of the risks. He told me I could watch him performing the procedure on YouTube. I told him I would pass and just trust him.

*“...We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...” Romans 8:28 (NIV)*

### *The Big Day*

*Tuesday, October 1, 2019*

The day arrived a week earlier than expected. My school family surprised me and prayed for me that Friday afternoon as I was leaving. I knew I was going to be alright when a co-worker hugged me goodbye and said, “She hoped her daughter would love her as much and do the same for her if needed”. We had a Deacons Retreat where my fellow Deacons prayed for me and another deacon.

The morning of surgery started off kind of chaotic (5:00 a.m. came early). My brother, Len, drove us and helped us get checked in. I was scheduled to go back first but they took Mom back first. My cousin, Juanita went back and sat with Mom. My friend Karen, who is a nurse at MCV, came to see me off.

Mom and I were in different areas of the pre-op so I felt fearful as the nurses, anesthesiologist team and surgeon came in and out. Then, walked in David, Len, and Coy. They had just left Mom where David had led them in prayer. So, David asked Coy if he would lead us in prayer. Even though I was afraid, all the prayers gave me a sense of peace. Lastly, an excited medical student came in to stay with me. She introduced herself and told me she was going to observe my surgery. She was so excited because my surgeon was the best.

After surgery, I had quite an experience in recovery too. I was anxious to see Mom. They told me they would take me around to see her on the way to my room, but Mom was taken to her room first. Then, they

had to use the freight elevator to take me up. After several containers of trash were removed from the elevator, my nurse told them she needed to get me to my room. I'm still not sure how the nurse maneuvered me around those trash bags. Finally, I was happy and relieved to arrive to my room and see family, friends, and especially Dr. Raymond. I also found out Mom was doing well and in the room next to me.

In conclusion, I never dreamed I would be a living donor. The "Why" was my Mom needed something I could give out of love. Our God and faith had provided.

*"...If ye have faith as small as a mustard seed...nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20 (NIV)*

*Dear God,*

*Mom and I would like to express our gratitude to You.*

*In addition please bless the following:*

*Hume-Lee Transplant Team, DBC Church Family, Family, Friends,*

*Cumberland County Elementary School Family.*

*Amen.*

Laurie Shelton



## March 26

*Exodus 32:7-14*

*John 5:30-47*

*Psalms 106:6-7, 19-23*

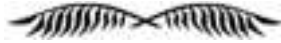
The scriptures above tell of the Israelites turning their backs on God when Moses was leading them to the Promised Land. Moses had gone up on the mountain to meet with God and, feeling he had been gone too long, the Israelites resorted back to their pagan gods. After witnessing God part the waters of the Red Sea and raining manna down from heaven, they still did not believe. In John 5, we see the Jews, who knew of the prophecy of God sending the Messiah, yet did not accept Jesus, even though he walked among them and performed many miracles. I cannot understand why, after all the visual signs God had sent to his people, they still would not believe.

So many times I have wished that I could hear God whisper in my ear what He wants me to do, or show me a sign that I would know only God could do, but I know that is not what faith is. Faith is believing without seeing.

Eight years ago I was involved in a terrible accident, one I thought I would never be able to recover from. I could not understand how God could have allowed this to happen. I was so lost and afraid. A couple of nights later, I was lying in bed praying for God to show me how I was going to get through this horrible experience. I looked up in the corner of the room and there was a shining light with little rays coming out along the ceiling, kind of like a star. It could have been a reflection from something or a shadow from outside, but I chose to believe that it was God sending me a sign that He was with me and He would get me through this terrible time. He did give me a miracle, and I have recovered, and I will be forever changed by that experience, but I still believe that faith is believing without

seeing, and now I take every chance to always look for God. I see Him in my family, my church family, the beautiful sky, the falling snow, and even simple things like finding a parking space that I can pull all the way through so I don't have to back out. I am so blessed because somehow, as only He can do, He turned my darkness into light.

Ann Key



## **March 27**

*John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30*

*Psalms 34:15-22*

### **Common Ground**

For the last eighteen-and-a-half years, I have had the privilege of serving those experiencing homelessness in the Richmond area. In order to prepare me for such work, God had much to teach me. My instruction included a youth mission trip many years ago. Reflecting on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ often reminds me of lessons learned from that experience.

Our team was headed to an inner city to serve those who were homeless. In preparation for the trip, we focused our Bible study on Matthew 25:31-46. I thought I understood and had the answers regarding service, salvation, and a faithful relationship with God; what I actually had were arrogant assumptions.

Once on location, we wound around and around through back streets and passed by bleak, deteriorating buildings and forgotten people. The missionary supervising our group was leading us into the decaying bowels of the city, an area most people would never give a second thought and certainly would never dare to venture. There was a heaviness in the



air, not only from the summer humidity, but from the burden, oppression and despair that permeated every aspect of life.

Our destination was a small concrete park, a desolate, squalid plot called home by approximately thirty men. Parks were areas where children played, neighbors visited, and kites were flown on bright spring days, but such was not the case in this forlorn place. Scattered about were one-person shelters fashioned from cardboard boxes, wet, smelly blankets, and discarded sleeping bags. The few benches could not provide enough bed space for all who resided there so many simply slept on the ground sharing their sleeping quarters with old bottles, shards of glass, and trash. The lingering odor attested to the fact that there were no restrooms or showers nearby. Life here was about survival, plain and simple. It appeared that survival often meant exploitation and humiliation; it meant dulling the senses so as not to feel the ever-present pain; it meant merely existing from one day to the next.

We were a youth mission team with bright, shining faces, dressed in fancy jeans, matching T-shirts and expensive sneakers. Our vehicles, clothing and attitudes announced to all that we had come from a privileged, middle-class background. We had arrived with high hopes and great expectations, believing the meal and worship service we would share could really make a difference. But enthusiasm began to wane as we stood in disbelief, gazing into the faces of people society had cast aside. There was no way our few sandwiches and cookies could make any appreciable difference in this level of deprivation and why would these people possibly want to worship? They had nothing; no food, no shelter, inadequate clothing and shoes, no support system. Why would they be interested in hearing about a loving God, about forgiveness and abundant life? I judgmentally assumed that worship under these conditions may be an intrusion, an invasion of their privacy.

Doubt poured over me as we unloaded and prepared for the meal and for worship. Church had never been like this! Soon, our church family back home would be sitting comfortably in the sanctuary on clean, padded

pews. They would be well-rested from a good night's sleep, decked out in their Sunday best, with full bellies and cool air conditioning to make worship more pleasant. I remembered how often we had griped because the air conditioning or heat was not working; how many times we had grumbled about the color of the hymnals or the style of the draperies. It all seemed so ridiculously trivial at this point.

The mission team began passing out sandwiches, cookies, cups of hot coffee and cold water. I was still a bit apprehensive and wondered how my teens felt. Were they frightened, challenged, intimidated or empowered? I was amazed as I watched them move about, striking up conversations and offering respect and dignity to those around them. They were not condescending, but affirming; not afraid, but emboldened.

Another group arrived to help lead the worship service. A young, female, African American preacher and several gospel singers soon had everyone lifting our voices in praise to God. The young people appeared relaxed and intrigued as they learned some new praise choruses and readily participated in the singing. Then, it happened. We learned what it meant to *really* worship. The tables turned when rather than being “the servants,” we became “the served.”

My earlier, elitist assumption had been wrong. As we sang and prayed it was obvious that these homeless folks were thoroughly immersed in the worship of a God they loved and trusted, a God they knew intimately, a God who offered them hope. Far from being an intrusion or an invasion of privacy, worship was their special time. We were visitors in their church and for a few moments, every societal force that sought to hold them down was overcome by a God who had come to lift them up. Some rendered heart-wrenching prayers of gratitude, thanking God for the meal they had just received. They thanked the Lord for keeping them safe, for loving them and forgiving them. They thanked God for waking them up that morning and giving them the opportunity to live another day.

As the minister began to share scripture passages, numerous individuals scurried off to find their meager belongings, returning with tattered old Bibles. The young preacher would call out a scriptural reference, intending for the rest of us to look it up, but before we could find it, many of our homeless friends were already reciting it from memory. One man in particular displayed voluminous knowledge of scripture. I listened intently as he helped explain the meaning and the application of each verse. Not only was it clear that he could recite more scripture than I could, it was also clear that the depth of his faith and his utter reliance on God's goodness far out-measured my own.

Wisdom, insight and a peculiar grace emanated from him. He had not bathed in a while, the sole of one shoe was all but gone, and his green T-shirt had so many holes in it I could not understand how it stayed on his body, but my soul resonated with his, for I knew this was a fellow believer, a brother in Christ. Standing side by side before our Lord, we were on common ground. We were all God's people, God's church, celebrating God's love. On this Lord's Day, we stood as brothers and sisters before the Almighty; each one created, loved, forgiven, and offered salvation by the same God.

Life-changing worship continued with more singing, praising and sharing. The young mission team had been transformed and their faces beamed with new life. They had come to serve and had done a commendable job, but they had also been served, receiving bountiful spiritual gifts from homeless men who freely shared the only thing they had to give - their faith.

I had been so wrong! I had pompously assumed that because they were so poor, they also had no relationship with God, but God had not forgotten these folks; God had sustained them. They were not hopeless or helpless; they were heirs to the kingdom.

As our time together came to a close, we joined hands in one last chorus. The wise, gentle man in the green T-shirt reached out and I

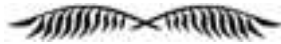
grasped his hand. The Lord smiled upon us and I knew that in many ways that day, I had been touched by God.

“As you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.” The words resounded within my spirit and the passage was indelibly imprinted on my heart.

“Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” We find joy when we truly realize that we all stand on common ground before God and that the Easter gifts of love, forgiveness, and salvation are not reserved for the few or the privileged, but for all who will receive them. Joy comes in seeing others as God sees all of us, as fragile creatures of great value, potential, and worth.

Got it, Lord, lessons learned.

Teresa Major



### **March 28**

*Jeremiah 11:18-20*

*John 7:37-52*

*Psalms 7:6-11*

In our daily walks of life, we are often faced with dilemmas; some good and some not so good. Like Jeremiah, we often face challenges for many of the same reasons – economic, religious, political or personal. From John, we understand that anyone who is thirsty can come to Him and anyone who believes in Him may come and drink. And, in Psalms, we are reminded that God knows our minds and hearts. When we truly follow Him, He rewards our efforts.

As I pondered and meditated on the scriptures, I realized the root cause of my daily dilemmas typically revolve around the four stated reasons. As a Christian, I sincerely believe that God knows what is on my mind and heart and that He will reward me if I rely on Him.

Also, during this time of pondering and meditating, I was continually reminded of the hymn, “I Surrender All”. Often, we want to handle matters ourselves when in fact we should rely on the Lord. We must communicate with Him, seek His guidance and follow Him.

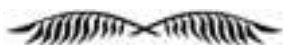
As I walked through my neighborhood one early morning recently, listening to the Bible on my iPhone, He provided me some meaningful thoughts of wisdom. I could not wait to return home to pen and paper to note the message placed on my heart:

- Life is an opportunity
- The Lord has a plan
- Follow His guidance
- Don’t try to do it yourself

In good and bad times, we are to seek the Lord. We must refrain from trying to take care of issues on our own. In trying times, we should not react in an angry way, but instead seek His guidance, bite our tongues, put a lid on it, and most importantly, pray to Him.

I pray today that you will join me in seeking Him. Like the words of the hymn, “All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all”. During this Lenten season and throughout the year, continue to be with us Lord as we take our daily walks of life.

Mike Ligon



**March 29**

**Sacrifice**

During the season of Lent, we look at the cost of our redemption.

Through the sacrifice of Christ, we are reconciled with God.

We acknowledge that our money, our bodies, and our time belong to God.

Through the sacrifice of Christ we are reconciled with God.

We relinquish our desire to cover up our own unrighteousness.

Through the sacrifice of Christ we are reconciled with God.

We humbly and joyfully claim God's promise of eternal life.

Through the sacrifice of Christ we are reconciled with God.

*Merciful God, we thank you for your supreme sacrifice, and for welcoming us into the fellowship of believers. We bow in gratitude, awed by the magnitude of your love and grace. Teach us to give back to you all that we are and all that we have, that we may praise you with our whole lives, and that we may become living sacrifices to you, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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**NOTES:**



## March 30

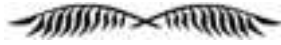
*John 8:1-11 or John 8:12-20*  
*Psalm 23*

2018 and 2019 were two of the most emotionally erratic years that Rob and I have ever experienced. We rejoiced at the birth of a granddaughter and at the thought of all those little girl clothes I could now buy. (I admit, I was happier than Rob was about constantly buying baby clothes.) We were saddened at the loss of our beloved dog, Dawn, and cat, Bella, within a few months of each other, and devastated at the sudden loss of Rob's brother, Barry, one of the most learned people on the Revelation that I have known. We enjoy watching as our grandbaby, Clare, grows and laughs and learns, and we mourned as my dad, Ollie, lost the ability to do any of those things. We embarked on the exciting adventure of buying a new house with more land in Powhatan, and experienced the terror of the "purge" as we decided what to take with us and what to leave behind after more than 30 years in our home. Rob and I both retired and are attempting to figure out new schedules.

One of the suggested passages for the devotional for today was Psalm 23. The Twenty-Third Psalm...I have heard it, read it, recited it, and prayed it. But none of that matters if I don't believe it, does it? But I do believe it, and I have seen God's hand in all of the events of the last two years. He was with us through the valley of the shadow of death multiple times and comforted us each time. He led us to green pastures, literally, via obvious God moments, such as our neighbors coming over to meet us while we were visiting the new house and JUST as I was praying for guidance in buying the house. She's a retired speech/language pathologist too! What are the chances?! The chances are great if God is preparing the table and filling those cups until they really are running over.

He has promised to restore our souls, lead us, comfort us, anoint us, and be with us every single day of our lives and beyond until we dwell in His house with Him forever.

Denise Dysert



### March 31

*Numbers 21:4-9*

*John 8:21-30*

*Psalm 102:15-22*

*You're missing God in this and headed for a dead end.*

*You're tied down to the mundane.*

*(John 8:21-24, The Message)*

Jesus was speaking to God's chosen people in these verses from John. Do you ever feel like he's saying the same to you? In all three of these passages, God's people are questioning and doubting what's going on in their lives, whether it be a long journey with just manna to eat or in the midst of rebuilding a city. How often do we get bogged down in the daily grind of life – wondering when the hurting will stop or journey will end? Maybe we even get a little whiney like the wandering people of Israel? In the passage of John – Jesus is trying to let God's people know that he will be leaving them soon and is explaining the importance of believing in who he is, but they just don't get it and are unable to see beyond their human situation.

But in each of these situations and with us today, God is always working. He's working to remind His people that he loves them and has compassion for them. Even in their doubt and distrust of what's to come, God is sovereign and "won't dismiss their prayers" (Psalm 102:17, The Message). All we have to do keep our eyes on Him and trust his faithfulness.



Lord, help us each day to not be 'tied down to the mundane' and not to lose sight of you and your faithfulness to us.

Jen Payne



**April 1**

*Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28*

*John 8:31-42*

This weekend I watched the movie “Harriet”. It’s about the courage and determination of an enslaved woman in Maryland, Araminta Ross, or “Minty” – later known as Harriet Tubman. This passage in John, interestingly enough, refers to a life of slavery. As descendants of Abraham, Jesus’ audience rebuts his statement that if they hold to his teachings, they will know the truth, and the truth will set them free. They had never been slaves and didn’t need to be set free. Jesus came back at them claiming we are ALL slaves to sin. As an enslaved person, we cannot free ourselves as we are not rightful members of the family. However, if a son of the family sets you free, you are indeed free.

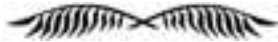
I’m not sure this passage would have been this crystal clear had I not just watched this movie – a perfect representation of the analogy Jesus is making. Enslaved persons could not free themselves, only the family who “owned” them could accomplish this. After a serious head injury as a child, Minty suffered from seizures where she claimed to see visions from God. Given her success in guiding so many to freedom, I would not argue this claim. In spite of the danger to herself and others, she continued to pursue her mission throughout her entire life, placing her fate completely in God’s hands.

In Daniel, when Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s golden idol, they, too, placed their fate in

God's hands as they were forced into the fiery furnace. Like Minty, they were protected by God. Like Minty, they would rather die a physical death than be enslaved by sin and evil.

As a citizen of this great country, I am free. Free to voice my opinion publicly, free to come and go as I please, free to vote, free to worship my God, or not if I choose, free to sin. But, as Jesus said, apart from Him, I am a slave to sin. Harriet Tubman has been credited with saying "I could have saved thousands, if only I had been able to convince them they were slaves". This credit is disputed as being false – but isn't it true? Don't we first have to recognize that we are enslaved to sin before we will agree that we need to be freed? And that, as slaves to sin, we are incapable of freeing ourselves?

Susan Butler



## April 2

*Genesis 17:1-8*

*John 8:51-59*

*Psalm 105:4-11*

"No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations." – Genesis 17:5

I've been Daniel Clarke my whole life. But there have been other names bestowed upon me that have helped define who Daniel Clarke really is:

Musician

Confidant

Husband

Daddy

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**NOTES:**

Some names change us. Challenge us. Some names we ask for, and some we don't ever want.

Play through the meditation below as slow or as fast as you like. Repeat it as many times as you want to,

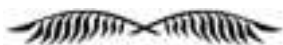
As you listen, consider your names. Which names have defined you, challenged you, changed you?

Take a pause.

Listen again, and this time consider the name, "Child of God". What does this name mean to you, and what does it mean about your relationship to all humankind?



Daniel Clarke



## **April 3**

*Jeremiah 20:7-13*

*John 10:31-42*

*Psalm 18:1-7*

### **Sing to the Lord**

“I will sing out in thanks to the Lord! Praise Him! For He has delivered me, poor and needy, from my oppression.”

These are the words of Jeremiah. God had given him a huge responsibility, the job of being his spokesman to the world. Jeremiah was to share God’s message to the people: because they had disobeyed Him, rejected Him and had begun worshipping idols, He would destroy them! BUT, God said, I will offer forgiveness to them if they confess their sins and change. Before Jeremiah’s ministry ended more than 40 years later, he had been jeered as a traitor, jailed several times, and had been deported to Egypt.

God had told Jeremiah that he would be a testimony to the nations of the world, that through his messages and his example, nations would come to God and glorify Him. Jeremiah was asked to be a light unto the world.

This thought reminds me of that song we all love so much, “This Little Light of Mine”! Remember when Betty Robertson and David Hill so magnificently performed that duet in the chapel? That was a sermon for sure! God speaks to us today, expecting us to let our lights shine so others may see our good works and glorify the Father! To God be the glory!

How blessed we are to be able to hear God’s word through our Bible studies, through our worship time together, through the hymns we sing and through the interactions we share with all the world around us?

Jeremiah sang to the Lord! He sang out his emotions of praise and thanksgiving to God for guiding him through the journey he had been assigned. The music we sing together each Sunday inspires us, encourages us, and offers us a wonderful opportunity to praise God with gratitude and joy!

Great and wondrous God,

Thank you for speaking to us, for guiding us along the journey of life, for forgiving us when we stray, and for giving us the gift of praise and joy through song.

Judy Harned



### **April 4**

*Ezekiel 37:21-28*

*John 11:45-53*

*Psalms 85:1-7*

### **Choices**

Kendra and I recently went to Washington DC for a quick adult getaway to celebrate my birthday. We had been anticipating this trip for weeks and talked about how excited we were to be having some time together. We have not been away without children in over two years so this was a big deal. We had tickets to see a hockey game, but that was as much of the planning as we had done. We were going to play it by ear and see where the wind took us.

We took the train and arrived in DC around lunchtime. We explored the area and checked into our hotel. It was cold, really cold so our restaurant of choice was the closest one to our hotel. It was a sports type of restaurant with TVs everywhere and all kinds of games on. As we sat down to eat, I noticed a man, a homeless man holding a sign that said, "anything will work".

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**NOTES:**

I decided right then to order him some chili and cornbread. As we left the restaurant, I handed the man the bag of food and a water. He immediately took the food and placed it behind him, along with a stack of other food containers that we had not seen from our seats inside the restaurant. We got a little upset and had felt played and used. Was he really homeless? Did he just want money? Was he even hungry?

I have always struggled with whether to give to the homeless. The ones standing on the corner. I wonder and think to myself, what if they go buy drugs, or alcohol. Maybe I am just enabling them? But then it hit me, whether he eats his chili or not, he has to answer for his character, and I can only answer for mine. God has instilled in me to share what I have because of what he has given me.

Rob Copeland



**April 5**

**Death**

During the final week of Lent

we look to the cross and contemplate death.

Nothing will separate us from the love of God.

We see death and are reminded that life is frail and fleeting.

Nothing will separate us from the love of God.

We rejoice that because of the cross, death has forever lost its power.

Nothing will separate us from the love of God.

For it is through death that we enter into eternal life.

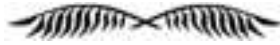
Nothing will separate us from the love of God.

*Merciful God, it is through pain and death that you provided the path for us to joy and life. You plunged yourself into darkness so that we may live in the light. Be with us as we journey through the darkness of Good Friday in order to arrive at the light of Easter. All glory, honor, and thanks be to God who gives us victory over death through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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**NOTES:**



## April 6

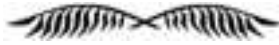
*Isaiah 42:1-9*  
*Hebrews 9:11-15*  
*John 12:1-11*  
*Psalms 36:5-11*

### God Is Love

Psalms 36: 5-11 talks about how God's love reaches everywhere. How God's love is unfailing. Obviously, we sometimes have trouble seeing God around us. One thing I always think of when I feel this way is the song, "Praise Him, Praise Him, All ye Little Children". I think this song truly sums up God's love, and helps us to see God all around. The lyrics, childish as they may seem, have gotten me through hard times. "Praise Him, praise Him, all ye little children, God is love, God is love." This reminds me that God is in everything because God is love. Whenever we feel love, that is God speaking to us. We may not understand why God is doing the things He is, but we know He is there and cares because God IS love. We might not understand what God's plan or will for our life is, but the verses of the song instruct us, saying "Praise Him", "Love Him", and "Thank Him". I believe through these actions, we can understand so much about the Lord. "Praise Him". Sing, worship, and pray because through these things, God reveals Himself. "Love Him". Do what God asks of us, which is to love and serve others. "Thank Him". God loves us unconditionally and eternally, which is astonishing because we don't deserve it. We should thank Him for loving us, caring for us, allowing us to have eternal life with him. I believe that by doing these things and remembering that God IS love, we can get through any hard time of struggling or doubt. Remember to look for God. Remember to look for love.

Pender Raymond





## April 7

*1 Corinthians 1:18-31*

*John 12:20-36*

*Psalms 71:1-14*

Mondays – the beginning of another work week for many people. Honestly, there are those Monday mornings when I would rather roll over than roll out of bed. Then I think about the students and co-workers that are depending on me to be there for them, and I am motivated to press on.

I wonder what Jesus was thinking about in the pre-dawn hours on the Monday morning of Holy Week. He knew the culmination of His ministry was beginning. He knew that without his sacrificial death on the cross, there could be no salvation for all mankind. So, He arose and followed God's plan. He thought about you and I. Personally, I am so glad he made that choice!

The Prophet Isaiah reveals God plan by saying, "Before I was born the Lord called me. He said you are my servant, Israel in whom I will display my splendor. And now the Lord says he who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the Earth. "

Following God's plan for our lives can be scary and is often contradicting the wisdom of the world. The apostle Paul understood this when he wrote to the church in Corinth. The wisdom of God is Christ Jesus, our Redeemer. It is through Christ's sacrificial death that we can be redeemed and accept the righteousness and holiness that cannot be obtained by our own human efforts.

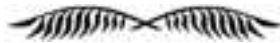
When I think about the word *REDEEM*, I think of coupons. When I redeem a coupon, I receive something I didn't have to pay for, like a free biscuit. In the same way, through Christ we have been given the gift of eternal life and we don't have to pay for, it's been taken care of. Isn't that amazing?

So, as Christ was facing that Monday morning, knowing what trials, disappointments and challenges lay ahead of Him that week, I think he had a conversation with God much as King David did in Psalm 71.

“ In you Lord, I have taken refuge, let me never be put to shame. Be my rock of refuge to which I can always go. Deliver me, my God, from the hands of the wicked, from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel. For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.....I will ever praise you. “

Thank you Jesus for redeeming us and giving us hope and refuge from the trials of the day.

Sue Lawrence



### **April 8**

*Isaiah 50:4-9a*  
*Hebrews 12:1-3*  
*John 13:21-32*  
*Psalms 70*

Our scripture passages today focus on a theme we all know a little about from personal experiences: life struggles result in pain, evil and shame. The suffering servant motif is clear in each of today's passages; our struggle to trust God in the face of difficulties is a challenge to our hope and faith. There certainly are days (or at least moments) when I am inclined to lament, "Woe is me!". When we have those experiences in life, we need to regain the perspective that comes from God.

In Isaiah, the prophet presents a word of hope in the face of the shame of opposition and antagonism. The people of Israel have been in the pains of Babylonian captivity. What the prophet offers must sound naïve and ridiculous under the circumstances-- the hope for being freed, for returning to their own land, and even for rebuilding Jerusalem. But there is a genuine basis for that hope: a compassionate, caring and faithful God.

The prophet describes himself as both learner and teacher. Every educator knows there is nothing to teach that we didn't first learn. The prophet indicates that he listens every morning to God's instruction, willingly, persistently, and eagerly. That is where our hope comes from; that is where our strength comes from; that is where wisdom for dealing with life's tough challenges comes from.

The Hebrews 12 passage reminds us that much of our adversity is the result of our own sins and shortcomings; some of the difficulties we face are our own struggles with falling short of God's will. Personalizing that fact reminds us of the daily need for God's grace.

Possibly one of the hardest things to do is to identify with Judas, who betrayed Christ. Like the disciples, we are eager to deny any accusation that we might not be faithful or loyal to God. We long for God to stand alongside us and exonerate us when life is cruel or unjust. Indeed, God promises to be with us in those moments. But, as with Judas (as well as Peter and the other disciples), our troubles and doubts often hinder us.

Psalm 70 is a perfect summary of the struggle we all face. We encounter a harsh world that seems to hurt and confuse us. We want to trust in God, but we even struggle with that. We recognize our own shortcomings as well (Psalm 70:5), and we are aware that we need God's strength and deliverance.

As I am writing this devotional, my wife is at a handbell festival with other Derbyshire handbell folk; my older son (Mark) is recuperating from the rigors of an animation assignment he completed late last night;

my younger son (Aaron) is en route from the New River Valley area to spend a couple days with us as we celebrate his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday; and I am preparing to switch gears to correct assignments from Richard Bland College classes. Meanwhile, our two cats (Cinza and Garf) don't seem traumatized by any of that. As we consider how to maintain perspective in life, here are a few questions.

When life seems to do me harm, am I still able to listen carefully for God's voice?

Am I consciously aware of God providing me strength and encouragement each day?

Do I acknowledge when God helps me overcome my struggles of pain, evil and shame?

Do I share the strength of my hope and faith with those who are weary?

David Hill



**April 9**

*Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14*

*1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

*John 13:1-17, 31b-35*

*Psalms 116:1, 10-17*

## **The Servant Messiah**

In Jesus' day the Jews were anxiously hoping for the promised Messiah to appear and rule as heavenly king forever. They thought His coming would be dramatic and accompanied by the removal of all earthly kingdoms and the establishment of God's kingdom unending. The religious leaders saw Jesus as a commoner and a fraud. There was no way he could be the promised Messiah. So when Jesus met with His disciples for a Passover meal in the upper room, they were totally shocked when, according to John's gospel, Jesus took a towel and a wash basin and began to wash their feet. In Jesus' day, everyone walked everywhere they went. Their bodies might be clean from washing, but their feet quickly became dirty from walking the dusty roads of Palestine. It was considered a sign of hospitality to greet guests at the door with a servant who would wash the feet of those visiting in the home. On the social scale this servant ranked along with shepherds near the bottom in acceptance and respect. So we can understand why, when Jesus reached Simon Peter, he was appalled and exclaimed, "Lord, you shall never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "If I do not wash your feet, you have no part in me." Peter, to demonstrate the high regard he had for Jesus, then replied in essence, "Then Lord, give me a shower!" After he had completed this servant task, he asked the disciples, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Lord and Teacher, and you are right. But if I, as your Lord and

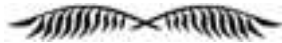
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**NOTES:**

Teacher, have washed your feet, then you should do the same, for I have given you an example that you should do the same.”

Remember it was the same Peter, who, after the resurrection, was asked by Jesus, “Peter, do you love me?” And the answer came from Jesus, “Then feed my sheep.” Jesus, as the promised Messiah was not looking for someone to worship Him, He was looking for someone to feed His sheep – to serve the needs of those He came to save. The next time we observe the Lord’s Supper, let’s focus on what Jesus said was important: “In as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me.” Grab a towel and wash some feet!

Bob Turner



### April 10

*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*  
*Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9*  
*John 18:1-19, 42*  
*Psalm 22*

On this Good Friday as we remember Christ’s crucifixion, we read these verses from the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah.

- 4 Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

The Lenten journey has brought us to the foot of the Cross. We are told through the Gospel of John in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> chapters about what happened to Jesus leading up to the Cross. He was betrayed, bound, arrested, denied by one of his closest friends and followers three times, interrogated by religious and civil authorities, retained while a notorious criminal was released through a Passover custom, had a crown of thorns placed and twisted on his head, mocked, humiliated, slapped, ridiculed, handed over for judgment by religious leaders, forced to carry the instrument of his death, and finally, crucified.

John 18:36 tells us that in response to Pilate, Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” It is difficult to understand a kingdom in the context of what the Apostle Paul tells us about Jesus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Philippians: “who being in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in the appearance of man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” A kingdom in which the innocent one is punished for the transgressions of others so that they may have peace while he – the innocent one – dies, is difficult to comprehend. But that is what happened. The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled. The question for me is whether I recognize that I am like a sheep that has gone astray and that Jesus was punished for my transgressions.

Christina Rossetti was a 19<sup>th</sup> century English poet and wrote the words for some of the Christmas hymns that we sing. One of her other poems, “Good Friday”, was written in 1862, and puts the question about whether I recognize that I am like a sheep, another way. The first verse reads as follows:

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,  
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy Cross,  
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow loss,  
And yet not weep?

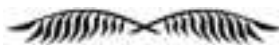
If I am a “stone,” then I am unmoved by the drops of Christ’s blood. If stone-hearted, Christ’s humbling himself and becoming obedient unto death to bear my transgressions has no meaning. However, if I am a “sheep,” even a lost one, there is something that resonates within me because of those drops of Jesus blood. For me, it is what Psalm 51:17 describes as “a broken and contrite heart.” There is a feeling of true sorrow when I realize that the transgressions for which Christ suffered and died are mine.

Prayer (From Psalm 51):

On this Good Friday and every day, have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness. Cleanse me from my sin. I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Paul Haynes





**April 11**

*Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24*

*1 Peter 4:1-8*

*Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42*

*Psalms 31:1-4, 15-16*

## **Literature and My Faith**

*‘I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys,’*

### **Song of Solomon 2:1**

When we are fortunate enough to have found a career that is both fulfilling and enjoyable, we are blessed. Such was I when I became a high school English teacher. One of the most satisfying parts of my life as English teacher was the ability to help students understand literature on a deeper level, for them to move beyond the literal to the interpretive level. For many, this was a difficult task. However, with the aid of various techniques, such as drawing the symbols and creating a visual of the interpretative level of the work, students gained a deeper understanding of the piece. Even more satisfying for me was the opportunity to interpret the Biblical symbols to help students understand how those symbols added depth to the overall meaning of the text.

In **The Grapes of Wrath**, written by John Steinbeck, the reader follows the Joad family, who are migrant workers searching for work and security during the Dust Bowl amid the Great Depression. Religious symbolism is central to the interpretation of the work and can be seen through various events.

The **Dust Bowl** itself is symbolic of the desert to which the Israelites are taken by Moses to escape slavery. The Joads and many others move in hopes of finding work. Their journey on **Route 66** is a parallel to the Exodus of the Israelites in search of freedom from slavery. Finally, at the end of the novel, the Joads are living in a train car and Rose

of Sharon is in labor during a heavy rain storm, which floods the river. This is a reference to the **flood** in the Bible that cleansed the land of sin, similar to a cleansing of the Joad's lives and providing hope for the future.

In addition to events, Steinbeck used characters to deepen the religious theme. Most important is **Jim Casy**, a preacher who was in shame with sin and left his role as a minister. However, he brings the story of God and Jesus to the Joads and others that he meets on his journey. He has the same initials as Jesus Christ and he spent a great time in the wilderness like Jesus. His death is full of symbolism and his Christ-like development is complete when he says to his murderers " You don't know what you are doing."

**Rose of Sharon's** baby is stillborn. Symbolically, Casy puts the baby in an apple box in the stream to float down to the town. A clear message evolves as the baby is compared to Moses, who was put in a basket in the river as a baby. Finally, at the end of the novel, Steinbeck has her say "Thine will be done" as she saves an old man's life.

Finally, the **Joad family** symbolizes Job whose faith is tested as well. Both endure unending trials, losing family, getting ill, and experiencing poverty. And yet both share the ability to stay faithful to God and generous to others.

Biblical symbolism is fundamental to understanding and appreciating this novel. I have only shared a bit. Yet, God gave me the knowledge, the courage, and the techniques to teach this work. I left every class fulfilled and grateful that I could do so.

Carolee Hall