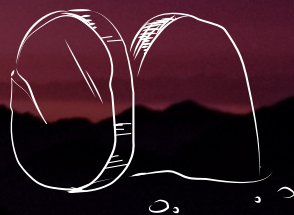


Glenkirk Church Lent Devotionals

FEB 24 - APR 11, 2020



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The word “Lent” is taken from Middle English “Lente,” which means springtime.

What a great picture! The season of Epiphany (the season when we celebrate the revealing of Jesus as God’s son and gift to the world, when we open our eyes and our hearts to how God might want to show up in our lives) is followed by the season of Lent. The gift of Jesus is that we might move from death into life, from winter into spring. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we can now experience a new birth filled with the empowering fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit.

The Lenten season comprises the 40 days leading up to Easter. It commemorates Jesus time of fasting and temptation in the wilderness. (Moses and Elijah also fasted for 40 days, and the Israelites were 40 years in the wilderness.) In a way, Jesus in the wilderness did what Adam and Eve were unable to do in the Garden; He withstood the temptation of Satan. The Lenten period allows us time to recall the events of Easter and absorb their significance in our lives. Lent is a season of reflection, repentance and renewal. Sundays are always considered celebrations of the resurrection and so are not included in counting back 40 days before Easter; thus, Lent always begins on Ash Wednesday.

Historically, Lenten practices have ranged from:

FASTING

Giving up one meal a day, or not eating until sunset, or giving up a particular food for the purpose of learning self-discipline and freeing oneself up for extended times of meditation and reflection.

GOOD DEEDS AND ALMSGIVING

As Jesus gave up the comforts of heaven, we give up our comforts to benefit others (the sick, friendless, afflicted). These practices strengthen our ability to live as Jesus lived, encourage compassion and charity in our daily lives, ease our dependence on money

and our ability to provide for ourselves, and ease the emotional and physical pain of others. You might give some of the money you save from not eating or not going to Starbucks to alleviate hunger or poverty. You might look for ways to do something practical for a neighbor.

GIVING UP SOMETHING FOR A GREATER GOOD

Foregoing some secular activity (television, social media) to make time for reading, studying, meditation. The purpose of this is to strengthen self-discipline and self-control, to help give meaning and direction to life, and to increase time available to be with Jesus.

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Scheduling extra time to examine our lives seriously and thoughtfully. Withdrawing from the business of our lives in order to focus on God and His works, will, purposes. You might pray one of the Psalms each day or ask God to reveal an attitude or behavior you need to change. You might be intentional about journaling and confession.

These practices overlap. The point is not that we take on one over the other. The point is that we become more intentional about what we do on a daily basis in order to position ourselves to receive from God and prepare ourselves for Easter.

Heidelberg Catechism

Throughout the centuries the church has used various “catechisms” to teach the basics of the Christian faith. One such catechism is the *Heidelberg Catechism*. It is a series of 129 questions and answers. The original catechism was divided into 52 sections with each section intended to be used as a preaching theme for each of the 52 weeks in the year. Each week is labeled as “Lord’s Day” (see page 34-37 for sections on the Lord’s Prayer). The *Heidelberg Catechism* has three main parts. The first part discusses the “misery” of man. It then moves to discussing our deliverance in Jesus and how our gratitude for what Jesus did impacts the way we live, thus discussing our conversion, the Ten Commandments, and concluding with the Lord’s Prayer.

Lord's Prayer

This Lenten season we are going to reflect on the Lord's Prayer.

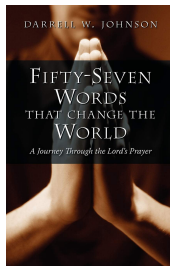
Each week we will look at a different petition and what it teaches us about how we should pray. Rather than suggesting that we all take on one big Lenten practice, each day (beginning with Ash Wednesday) we have included some practice you might do for that day. The hope is that the variety of practices will not only present some new opportunities to position yourself before the Spirit, opening up yourself for His work in your life, but will keep this season fresh and alive and not turn it into a “dead work” of sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice.

If you want to read more on the Lord's Prayer, perhaps taking some time on Sunday afternoons, you might read one of the books listed below. Each has seven or eight short chapters (one chapter a week) that will further enhance your Lenten experience. Both books can be found on Amazon.

If you want me to order one or both of these with the church's Prime account, just email me at bstraeter@glenkirkchurch.org:



The Lord's Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father
by Wesley Hill



Fifty-Seven Words That Change the World: A Journey Through the Lord's Prayer
by Darrell W. Johnson

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen.

Monday

PSALM 139:1-18; EXODUS 32:11-14

A common complaint I've heard, sometimes, even from Christians: "If God already knows everything, including what you want and will ask for, why pray?" The implications: either God does not know everything and/or prayer is fruitless.

"When we read the Bible, God speaks to us. When we pray, we speak to God. ... We long to hear God's voice. But ... remember [also] that God desires to hear our voices ... [and] invites us into His presence to speak to Him and to share with Him all that is on our hearts. ... Prayer is one way in which we can glorify and enjoy God. ... Prayer is ... a time of asking of God and receiving from God. It is also an exercise of faith—knowing and believing that God hears and answers according to His good will and love for us.

"Prayer returns our focus to Jesus and enables us to turn from the world. ... [It] is not only an act of obedience, [but] also an act of honor given to the One who gave His all for us. ... Prayer was a regular part of the Lord's daily life and it is to be part of ours also. ... [There] is a power [in prayer] that flows from the One to whom we pray." (Shari Abbott)¹

Many mistakenly view prayer as "Going to God with my list." For others—including me during pre-Christian years—it is a dutiful routine aimed at "fulfilling God's requirement." Both perspectives ignore prayer's core purpose and God's motivation in creating us: intimate relationship. Prayer is talking to God. As God chooses to work with and through His children, prayer changes things—in particular, it changes us as we seek and align with God's will. It's also our means for seeking forgiveness, for honoring and thanking God for His goodness and provision, and for appealing on behalf of others.

Are you satisfied with your prayer life? If so, congratulations—I know no one else who is. God is eager to forgive and heal, longing to receive and respond to our prayers (2 Chronicles 7:14). Go to Him with anything on your heart—He wants to help you and comfort you (Psalm 86:17).

QUESTIONS

If God knows everything already, including your needs and wants, why pray? What are some of the best reasons to pray?

¹ Shari Abbott's quotes can be found at <https://reasonsforhopejesus.com/why-is-prayer-important/>

Tuesday

DANIEL 9:3-19; PSALM 139:23-24

My 91-year-old mother is a maturing believer, but not one to attract attention nor impose herself. I've encouraged her to lead us in prayer. One time she agreed, beginning, "God, thank you for ..." until closing, "OK, God, that's all—bye-bye!" Was this righteous? Daniel's prayer, featured today, was very different—somewhat formal, detailed and lengthy. Is God more impressed and moved by elaborate prose? I think not; He's heard it all. I believe God received Daniel's prayer (and Mom's) because of their sincerity, faithfulness and humility in seeking Him.

Peter's fervent prayer, upon sinking while joining Jesus in walking on the water—"Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30)—was short while highly effective. Jonah's prayer from within the great fish (Jonah 2:2-9) also successfully sought God's intervention, though more expansively than Peter's. As Assyria threatened Jerusalem in 701 BC, King Hezekiah pleaded for God's protection (2 Kings 19:14-19); God responded by killing 185,000 Assyrian attackers, ending their campaign. King David earlier appealed for God's protection from enemies in Psalm 3.

Hannah's prayer thanked God for ending her barrenness in giving her Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10), Israel's king-anointing prophet, beginning, "My heart exults in the LORD ..."

Jesus, having issued His final teaching to the disciples and facing the cross, appealed to the Father for strength and prayed on behalf of His followers, "*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify You ...*" (John 17).

One of the Bible's most contrite and effective prayers was the tax collector's prayer in the temple, beginning, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*" (Luke 18:13)—Jesus commended him for this prayer. My personal favorite, however, is a cleansing prayer that closes Psalm 139, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Test me and know my anxious thoughts! See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*" (Psalm 139:23-24).

You can pray about almost anything—in gratitude, even for "small things"; for forgiveness; praising God for His love and works; for others' salvation; for healing or safety, yours and/or others'; for God's guidance, etc. What's keeping you from more frequent prayer?

QUESTIONS

Is there a "right way" to pray? What was Peter's prayer, the shortest in the Bible, which he exclaimed when he began sinking in the Sea of Galilee while trying to walk upon it with Jesus? Why did Jesus commend the tax collector for his prayer in the temple?

Ash Wednesday

ISAIAH 58

Sack cloth and ashes have historically been a sign of mourning and penitence. On Ash Wednesday we receive the sign of the cross with ashes, declaring that we are sorry for our sin and declaring our need for the cross.

For years the tradition was to keep the palm branches used on Palm Sunday the year before and burn them to make the ashes. Ashes are a striking picture of insignificance and worthlessness. In Scripture idols are compared with ashes to describe their powerlessness and futility; likewise are our actions to try to “save” ourselves or even provide for ourselves. Though we can never perform significant penitence or give adequate repayment for our sins, have we ever been so mournful that we would do anything to set things right? In Numbers 19 ashes are a symbol of purification and renewal, pointing to the gifts of the cross.

In connection with “covered with ashes,” we often see the term “wrapped in sackcloth,” a rough course material someone might wear as a sign of deep sorrow or proof of mortification and humiliation. In the early church, it was a custom for everyone who had committed a grievous sin to appear in a meeting of the congregation wrapped in sackcloth and covered with ashes as proof of their penitence and contrition.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

- Make plans to attend the Ash Wednesday service this evening at 6:30pm.
- Today skip a meal and spend the time prayerfully reflecting and journaling on Isaiah 58, use the blank pages at the end of this booklet:
 1. *If this is the type of “fast” activity God desires, how might it inform your decisions as to what to give up or take on for Lent?*
 2. *What specifically might you need to confess?*
 3. *If Isaiah were declaring this to us, what might he specifically be referring to?*

ISAIAH 58 NIV

Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
Raise your voice like a trumpet.
Declare to my people their rebellion
and to the descendants of Jacob
their sins.

² For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does
what is right and has not forsaken
the commands of its God. They ask
me for just decisions and seem eager
for God to come near them.

³ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and
you have not seen it? Why have we
humbled ourselves, and you have not
noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting,
you do as you please and exploit all
your workers.

⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and
strife, and in striking each other with
wicked fists. You cannot fast as you
do today and expect your voice to be
heard on high.

⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble
themselves? Is it only for bowing
one’s head like a reed and for lying in
sackcloth and ashes? Is that what
you call a fast, a day acceptable to
the LORD?

⁶ “Is not this the kind of fasting
I have chosen: to loose the chains
of injustice and untie the cords of
the yoke, to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with
the hungry and to provide the poor
wanderer with shelter—when you
see the naked, to clothe them, and
not to turn away from your own
flesh and blood?

⁸ Then your light will break forth like
the dawn, and your healing will quickly
appear; then your righteousness will
go before you, and the glory of the
LORD will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the
LORD will answer; you will cry
for help, and he will say: Here am I.
“If you do away with the yoke
of oppression, with the pointing
finger and malicious talk,

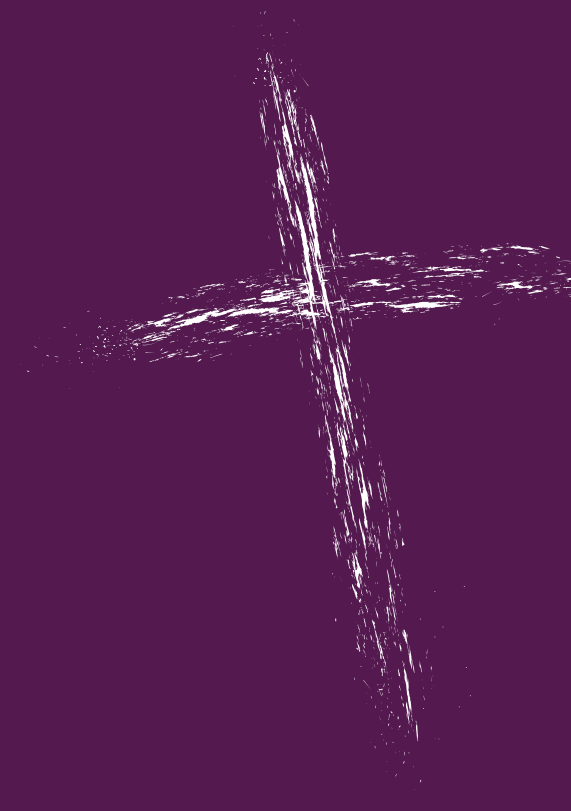
¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in
behalf of the hungry and satisfy
the needs of the oppressed, then
your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like
the noonday.

¹¹ The LORD will guide you
always; he will satisfy your needs
in a sun-scorched land and will
strengthen your frame. You will
be like a well-watered garden, like
a spring whose waters never fail.

¹² Your people will rebuild the
ancient ruins and will raise up
the age-old foundations; you
will be called Repairer of Broken
Walls, Restorer of Streets
with Dwellings.

¹³ “If you keep your feet from breaking
the Sabbath and from doing as you
please on my holy day, if you call the
Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s
holy day honorable, and if you honor
it by not going your own way and
not doing as you please or speaking
idle words,

¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the
LORD, and I will cause you to ride
in triumph on the heights of the
land and to feast on the inheritance
of your father Jacob.” For the
mouth of the LORD has spoken.



Thursday

PSALM 5:3

“In the morning, LORD, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You and wait expectantly.”

As we enter the season of Lent, a time of reflection and preparation, a focus on repenting of sin and consecrating oneself to God before the celebrations of Easter, let's look at the importance of prayer.

Connection with God in prayer to start our day allows Him to be present in our thoughts and activities. It sets our hearts right and gives us divine perspective, humility, thankfulness, and strength for what lies ahead. Martin Luther said, “Work, work, from morning until late at night. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer.”¹

God is omnipresent; we can pray anywhere at any time. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we read that we should “pray continually.” Prayer should not be an act, but how we live—in relationship with our Father.

To say “prayer changes things” is an understatement! Asking God to intervene in our circumstances allows us to open our eyes and see what God is doing around us and through us. When we pray for those who are difficult in our lives, God gives us strength and grace to deal with them. He changes us. In turn, our relationships and circumstances improve and change. C.S. Lewis said it like this: “I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.”²

Have you ever prayed over something and the answer knocks your socks off? It's not just “coincidence,” but our faithful God doing “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20).

The Bible teaches us to pray with humility and repentance, a forgiving spirit, purity of heart, thanksgiving, and in Christ's name. “*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us*” (1 John 5:14).

So now as we continue to examine ourselves and our habits, let's follow Paul's teaching in Colossians 4:2: “*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*”

“Avail yourself of the greatest privilege this side of heaven. Jesus Christ died to make this communion and communication with the Father possible.” —Billy Graham

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Fixed Hour of Prayer

Scripture tells us that David prayed 7 times a day, Daniel prayed 3, and Jesus and the Jews of His day prayed at set hours. During Jesus' day a devout Jew would go to the temple at noon and at 3:00 p.m. each day. The disciples continued this practice as we see in the first chapters of the book of Acts.

Today why not set your alarm to go off every hour on the hour and spend 5 minutes interrupting whatever you are doing and turning your focus to God. Give Him what is on your mind at that minute; be aware and turn your emotions over to Him. Release your compulsiveness to be dependent upon your efforts rather than God's giftings. Ask for His presence, guidance and wisdom for the things of the next hour.

At least once during the day, you might spend 5 minutes praying with a friend or co-worker.

¹Martin Luther, https://www.allchristianquotes.org/quotes/Martin_Luther/1688/

²C. S. Lewis, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1005539-i-pray-because-i-can-t-help-myself-i-pray-because>

Friday

PSALM 145:18

“The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.”

“The essence of meditation is a period of time set aside to contemplate the Lord, listen to Him, and allow Him to permeate our spirits.” —Charles Stanley

Reading the Psalms, meditating on them, then praying them back to God is a rich and edifying practice. The Psalms are a divinely inspired hymnbook to be sung, read and prayed. Luther called them a “mini Bible” as they give an overview of salvation history from creation to the renewal of all things, and they lead us to Jesus. The Psalms help us see God more holy, wise, tender, loving, fearsome and magnificent than we could imagine. Every situation, emotion or trouble is found in this book, along with a way to handle life properly.

Praying is powerful, and if you choose to infuse your prayer life over the next 40 days, you will find praying the Psalms will ignite your enthusiasm for prayer.

I have always prayed for our boys, but God grew my faith and love for Him during the season when our oldest two sons went off to college, one to a military academy. Prayer was everything. God proved during those years that He had them in His care and protection. I prayed detailed prayers over them and He answered back in

conversations with my boys as they shared stories, using the very words to describe their walk with God or connection with friends that I used to pray. In awe, tears would fill my eyes as I listened on the phone.

I know prayers are powerful and God hears us when we pray.

What baffles me is why I sometimes wait to bring things to God! He is waiting to listen and intervene on our behalf, to show Himself trustworthy and faithful. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

“Don’t ever hesitate to take to God whatever is on your heart. He already knows it anyway, but He doesn’t want you to bear its pain or celebrate its joy alone.” —Billy Graham

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Praying Scripture

Praying Scripture allows God to direct the content of prayer. It connects us to the mind and heart of God, aids in memorization, and aids in enabling us to be open and attentive to God, laying aside our own agendas and opening ourselves up to His. The book of Psalms brings the totality of life to God: the fears, joys, sorrows, anger, dryness and joy. The psalms invite us to come to God honestly as we are. Scripture also contains the prayers of Jesus, Paul, Daniel, Mary, Moses and Hannah. These prayers can provide the framework for our prayers. Take a Psalm or one of Paul’s prayers (i.e., Ephesians 1:15-21 or 3:14-21, Philippians 1:3-11 or Colossians 1:3-14), slowly read each phrase, and then pray that phrase back to God personalizing it for yourself and your circumstance. Be sure to allow the Spirit to guide what you pray; listen to and heed what comes to mind.

Saturday

MATTHEW 6:1-18

Most of the world prays at some time and in some way during their lifetime. Often these prayers are either cries of help (in one form or another) or performed in some ritualistic way. The disciples prayed. They fasted. They gave to the poor. What Jesus is referencing here was already a part of their lives, so why the teaching. Simply, these activities in many ways were often ritualistic. The hope was to please God in order to receive from God. When Jesus prayed, the disciples noticed something different, and so Luke records them approaching Jesus: *“Lord, teach us to pray”* (Luke 11:1).

So what is the difference? How is what Jesus teaches about prayer different than the ways they had prayed before? Over the next few weeks, we will be looking at the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. During Lent we will be practicing the spiritual disciplines of fasting and giving, amongst other disciplines, and the question will constantly be: Are we doing these things in the way Jesus taught or from a place of trying to “earn” God’s favor.

Spiritual activities are not meant to impress God or to draw God’s attention; we already have His attention. He doesn’t need our prayers; He doesn’t need to be

bargained with or manipulated. God is our Father; He already is disposed favorably toward us. This prayer is not meant to be prayed word for word as much as it is a model, a window into Jesus’ own life of prayer. “The Lord’s Prayer is a portrait of Jesus ... the One who addresses God as Father, who sanctifies God’s name, who announces and bears God’s healing reign, who submits to God’s will, who gives His flesh as daily bread for the life of the world, who provides the forgiveness of sins through His death on the cross and thus inducts His followers into a lifestyle of forgiveness, and who ultimately delivers believers from the power of death and the devil.”¹

The Lord’s Prayer is a gift because it frees us from the anxiety of needing to “get it right.” It is a gift because it reveals the heart of God. It shows us what God is concerned about, what God is up to. Finally, it is a gift because we are granted the unspeakable privilege of partnering with God in fulfilling His purposes in the world.

In Revelation 8:1 the worship of heaven goes silent as the prayers of God’s people are offered to God. Darrell Johnson, quoting George Beasley-Murray, remarks that the point of this episode is that prayer, from the human side of things, moves history. “The significance of the picture can hardly be overestimated. No one was more aware than John of the limitations to what individual men and women can do to change the course of history and to bring in the kingdom of heaven, particularly in the face of the cosmic forces against them and the transcendent

character of the kingdom itself ... But we can pray to Him who has almighty power, and it would seem that God has willed that the prayers of His people should be part of the process by which the kingdom comes. The interaction between the sovereignty of God and the prayers of the saints is part of the ultimate mystery of existence. Faith is called on to take both seriously.”²

The prayers and spiritual practices that please God are those that get us out of the center. They are the practices that position us to be filled with the Spirit such that the Spirit might flow through us to bless others and partner with God in bringing in His kingdom and bringing us into a closer loving relationship with our Father.

Why do you pray? Why do you keep Lent?

¹ Wesley Hill, *The Lord's Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father* (Bellington, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 5.

² Darrell W. Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words That Change the World: A Journey Through the Lord's Prayer* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 15.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Set aside one hour today or tomorrow to pray.

Does one hour seem like a long time? Try spending 5 minutes on each of the following:

- **PRAISE:** Recognize God's nature.
- **WAIT:** Silently surrender to God your anxieties, needs, plans and desires.
- **CONFESSION:** Ask God how you have brought Him sorrow or hurt others.
- **SCRIPTURE PRAYING:** Pray a word of Scripture to God, one of the Psalms back to God.
- **WATCHING:** Ask God what He might want you to see.
- **INTERCESSION:** Pray for those you know who are in need.
- **PETITION:** Give to God what is on your heart.
- **THANKSGIVING:** Be specific about how God has shown up in your life, how He has blessed you.
- **SINGING:** Spend five minutes expressing joy in worship to God.
- **MEDITATION:** Chose an attribute of God and ponder its implications for your life.
- **LISTEN:** Ask God if He wants to say anything to you.
- **PRAISE:** Conclude praising God for who He is.

Monday

MATTHEW 6:9

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.”

—Jesus (Matthew 6:9)

Father God would have our lead prayer to be “Hallowed be His name.” But what does “hallowed” mean? Hallowed means untarnished. But how can God’s name be untarnished in a world gone haywire? For this devotional we will substitute the word “honor” for “hallow,” for the sake of a more modern sounding usage. However, with “honor” we lose the idea of “sanctify,” “to make (or keep) holy,” or “to make/keep righteous.”

The salvation of our Savior Jesus is much bigger than we ever could imagine. Jesus came with the express purpose of honoring His Father’s name. And Jesus did honor His Father’s name. And He is still doing it. Crazy as it seems, Jesus was born as a baby to die on the cross to honor His Father’s name. And He did it—it is finished! But we are to keep praying this prayer, because why? Because something is not finished. It may be as good as finished, but honoring our Father God’s name continues. The Holy Spirit is our Leader in our participation in honoring His name.

Jesus was and is the greatest One to honor our Father’s name. Specifically, how did He do it? Jesus always did only what His Father told Him (John 5:19). Jesus lived

in obedience to His Father (John 15:10). After He died on a Roman cross, He was resurrected on the third day (Philippians 2:6-10).

All this happened for our sakes—that we might believe and, in believing, have life in His name (John 20:21). It happened in order that we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who loved us, who died for us, and who rose again for us (2 Corinthians 5:15). He did it to honor (hallow) our Father’s name. The redemption of our lives from lost to found, from purposeless to meaningful, from wasted to fruitful, from unloved to beloved honors our Father in heaven.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Gratitude

“Carl Jung discovered (and popularized) this statement among the Latin writings of Erasmus: *vocatus atque non vocatus, deus aderit*. Gratitude is rooted in this reality that ‘bidden or unbidden, God is present.’ Thanksgiving is possible not because everything goes perfectly but because God is present ... It is a discipline to choose to stitch our days together with the thread of gratitude.”

Use some of the blank pages at the back of this booklet to keep a gratitude journal. Note all the “abundances” God has given you. Say “thank you” to God every hour today for at least one thing, telling God what it has meant to you. Write a thank you note to someone who has touched your life this past year.

¹Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, Revised and Expanded Edition, 2015), 32.

Tuesday

MATTHEW 6:9

*“For we are created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”
—Paul (Ephesians 2:10)*

Perhaps the greatest thing we can do to honor our Father in heaven is to follow His Son Jesus. Saint Patrick of Ireland, whose birthday/death we celebrate March 17, comes to mind. Patrick was not born in Ireland, but in England. He was kidnapped and enslaved by Irish pirates who raided British shores. Patrick grew up as a slave to Irish farmers. He learned the Irish language and culture. After some years he escaped and served in the galley as a rower on a Roman boat. Returning to his homeland of England, he came to faith in Jesus and Christianity. Realizing he had been redeemed for a purpose, he asked God what that purpose was. Return to Ireland? Yes, he knew their customs and manner of speaking.

And now Patrick knew their destiny. He would forgive their sins against him, even as our Father had forgiven Patrick his sins. The Irish would experience Father God in Jesus, even as he, Patrick, had experienced Him. And that is what happened. And it happened in a big way! Read about it in *How the Irish Saved Christianity* by Thomas Cahill. It makes sense that God would send Patrick back to Ireland. Like Patrick, God directs our steps and fashions our experiences in such a way that we are suited for the tasks He calls us to do.

Sure, like me, you may feel inadequate for the task. But at the close of the Lord’s Prayer, we pray: “Yours is the

power.” And it’s true—His is the power to do this. It is in His strength and His mercy and His grace that we honor God by the decisions we make and the life we live in Him. In *Encountering the Trinity*, author Darrell W. Johnson writes about his discovery that we become co-lovers with the Trinity of God Himself, of fellow believers, and of the world. Likewise, let me suggest we become “co-honorers” of our Father in heaven with His Son Jesus and with the Holy Spirit.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Service

“God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. ... I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall love as Christ loved; I shall do his work.”¹

“Jesus is God with us. And He calls us to serve ... The Christian discipline of service is the way the world discovers the love of God. We are the way God blesses the earth ... When we are preoccupied with our own concerns, much of the world is simply invisible to us. Service is rooted in seeing—in seeing others as God does.”²

Today ask someone at work, a neighbor, someone you come across, or a family member: “What can I do for you today?” Notice a need and meet it. Using one of the pages in the back, make three columns. Above one column write “For Me.” Above the second write “For Others.” Above the third write “For God.” Review the past week or month. Jot down in each column the things you have bought and done for yourself, for others, and for God. What does this inventory reveal about your life?

¹ Quote by John Henry Newman can be found at www.johnhenrynewmancatholiccollege.org.uk/john-henry-newman-prayers/or at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/408029-god-has-created-me-to-do-him-some-definite-service>

² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, Revised and Expanded Edition, 2015), 168.

Wednesday

JOHN 14:8-11

*“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”
—Phillip (John 14:8)*

Parenting can be difficult. For one year I went weekly to a Christian counseling session to learn how to do it (better). The advice given and received boiled down to loving my son, praying for him, not getting angry, and presenting a united front with his mother (my wife).

Jesus’ real father is Father God. How did He father His Son? He oversaw His birth and protected Him from King Herod by giving His adoptive father Joseph a dream, warning him to take his family and flee to Egypt. Later, Jesus’ Father God told Him He was pleased with Him, while telling onlookers to listen to Him. He showed His Son everything He was doing (John 5:20). All the Father gave His Son came to His Son (John 6:37).

But what is God the Father like really? Phillip wanted to know. Jesus was a little offended by the question. “Have I been so long with you that you don’t know me, Phillip?” (John 14:9).

In John 14:8-11 and other passages, Jesus is saying He and the Father are One. The best way to know our Father in heaven is to get close to Jesus—to follow Him and walk with Him. Even as far back as the Old Testament where

a Son is promised, one of the names Isaiah says the Son will be known as is “*the Everlasting Father*” (Isaiah 9:6). The Apostle John says Jesus has made God known (John 1:18). The writer of Hebrews says that in the last days, God has spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus is not only the key to knowing God, He is God.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Breath Prayer

Breath prayers remind us that God is the oxygen of our souls, that each breath is a gift from God, that we need to breathe Him in all day long. In *The Way of the Pilgrim*, the breath prayer is described: “Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bend your head, close your eyes and breathing softly, in your imagination, look into your own heart. Let your mind, or rather, your thoughts flow from your head down to your heart and say, while breathing: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.’ Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts. Be serene persevering and repeat them over and over again.”¹

Or you might say “Jesus, Son of David” as you breathe in and “Have mercy upon me a sinner” as you breathe out. This short repetitive prayer frees you from linear thought and allows you to begin to pray in your body, not just your mind. It is meant to be a lived, breathing rhythm of surrender. And it is a constant reminder of the one in whose presence you stand.

Today you might pray as you breathe in “Abba Father” and as you breathe out “I belong to you.” Or as you breathe in “Holy Father” and as you breathe out “May I be holy for you.”

¹ Gleb Pokrovsky, *The Way of a Pilgrim: Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2001).

Thursday

MATTHEW 6:9

*“For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”
—Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:14-15)*

When Thomas saw the scars in Jesus’ hands and side, he declared, “My Lord and My God” (John 20:28), which makes perfect sense—this personal declaration. But he could also have said, “Our Lord and Our God” because He belongs to all of us. And we are in God’s family and we are Jesus’ brothers and sisters if we do God’s will (Mark 3:35).

Sometimes we don’t remember this. I remember talking to God in prayer about my wife. I had the impression He was telling me, “Things will go better if you treat her as My daughter and your sister, and drop the sibling rivalry with her.” Things went better.

Church is full of God’s family—brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus—with whom we have yet to become acquainted. What Jesus claimed of His Father applies to us as well: “All who the Father gives us will come to us, and those who come to us we will not turn away” (John 6:37 modified). In the gospels, we see Jesus is alert to be on the lookout for those whom the Father sent to Him.

During this season of Lent, be on the lookout for those whom God is giving to you and make a point not to turn them away. “Hi, my name is _____.” Asking the person to tell you his or her story can be an overwhelming question, but often it leads to realizing something you share in common. Lent can be a good time to meet someone in the “family” you have not met before.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Compassion

Our calling is to become the healing presence of Jesus to others. Compassion means feeling with and for others, as well as extending mercy and help to them in extravagantly practical ways. Daily we rub shoulders with the “walking wounded.” The early church took Jesus’ example of compassion very seriously—in the midst of plagues, war and persecution—with the result that Christianity replaced the religious systems of Rome within 300 years.

Jesus is still longing to touch this suffering, lonely world through the compassion of His people. Ask God to show you someone you might take time to listen to or meet today. Maybe buy a Starbucks or McDonald’s gift card and give it to a homeless person.

Friday

MATTHEW 6:9

“Therefore God has exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every other name.”

—Paul (Philippians 2:9)

Today we are thinking of our Heavenly Father’s name as His brand. Where do we see God’s brand? We see God’s brand in His handiwork—His creation. Nature declares the glory of God. We see it in mankind who is created in God’s image. We see it in the kingdom of God; that is, in Jesus, in the Word of God—the Scriptures, in the Holy Spirit. Satan has sullied God’s name, and he continues to drag it down. It has been stained.

However, “God is acting to preserve His reputation: ‘For My own sake, for My own sake, I do it, for why should My name be profaned?’ (Isaiah 48:11).”¹ Jesus has de-stained the name of His Father. Jesus has taken out the stains, washing it white as snow by His blood.

But let us understand that God’s name is more than a brand. There is power in His name. We say at the end of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thine is the power.” His is the power, and His power will accomplish all His will and purposes.

There is power in the name of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, the lame leap for joy. At the name of Jesus, demons flee. Do everything in the name of Jesus, the Bible says. The

name of Jesus is synonymous with the name of the Father, and with the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Today live in God’s name. Be God’s brand. Pray in His name. Exercise His power and authority, like Jesus, in partnership with the Holy Spirit and in total submission to God our Father.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Prayer Walking

“Prayer walking is a way of saturating a particular place and people with prayer. This discipline draws us out of prayers that are limited to our immediate concerns and into a larger circle of God’s loving attention. It involves walking by yourself or with others through a neighborhood, maybe around the church, or at your place of work or school.”²

Walk up and down your block in the company of Jesus. Pray, in His name, for the people who live in each house. Ask Him to tell you what to pray for. You might take time to walk around the outer edges of Glenkirk, asking God for His Spirit to be present and asking His Spirit to empower the services and activities that occur on Glenkirk’s campus. Or you might take time to walk by the desks and offices of those you work with, taking time to pray for each individual as God leads.

¹ Wesley Hill, *The Lord’s Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father* (Bellington: Lexham Press, 2019), 24.

² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, Revised and Expanded Edition, 2015), 285.

Saturday

MATTHEW 6:9

“God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” —Paul (Galatians 4:6)

Early in my Christian walk, about a week into it, I had a meltdown with God. I was upset with Him because I had upset my mom again. I had given my life to Him, and He had allowed this to happen.

When I calmed down, it was like He put His arm around me and asked, “Are you finished? Let Me tell you something. You cannot change yourself. You will never be able to do that. Only I can do it, and I cannot do it unless you keep your eyes on Me, and then I will keep My eyes on you. That’s how it is.”

Here we are camped on the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer for the Lenten season. We could camp here for a whole lifetime. This verse Matthew 6:9 gives us our focus—our heavenly Father. And it gives us our work to do—to pray, to pray certain things starting with “hallowed be His name.”

The Hebrews author writes, “*Let us run the race that is before us ... keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Today (and every day) is a good day to keep our eyes on our Father in heaven, on Jesus, and on the Spirit. Brother Lawrence did it while he worked in the kitchen in 14th century France (*Practicing the Presence of God*). Frank Laubach learned to do it while teaching literacy as a missionary to the world, especially the Philippines. The rigor of such an intentional exercise can be daunting if we do not remember that He is our *Abba* (Daddy) Father and that intimacy is the goal, not some legal requirement.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Half Day of Prayer

Today is devoted to a half day of prayer. Join us at Glenkirk from 9:00am – 1:00pm.

Heidelberg Catechism

LORD'S DAY 45*

Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

Because it is the chief part of the gratitude which God requires of us, and because God will only give his grace and Holy Spirit to those who sincerely seek him in prayer without ceasing, and who thank him for these gifts.

What is contained in a prayer which pleases God and is heard by him?

First, that we sincerely call upon the one true God, who has revealed himself to us in his word, for all that he has commanded us to ask of him. Then, we thoroughly acknowledge our need and evil condition so that we may humble ourselves in the presence of his majesty. Third, we rest assured that, in spite of our unworthiness, he will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord, as he has promised us in his word.

What has God commanded us to ask of him?

All things necessary for soul and body which Christ the Lord has included in the prayer which he himself taught us.

What is the Lord's Prayer?

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matthew 5:9-13, with traditional ending).

LORD'S DAY 46*

Why has Christ commanded us to address God: "Our Father"?

At the very beginning of our prayer he may awaken in us the childlike reverence and trust in God which should be the motivation of our prayer. God has become our Father through Christ and will much less deny us what we ask him in faith than our human fathers will refuse us earthly things.

Why is there added: "in heaven"?

That we may have no earthly conception of the heavenly majesty of God, but that we may expect from his almighty power all things that are needed for body and soul.

LORD'S DAY 47*

What is the first petition?

"Hallowed be your name." That is: help us first of all to know you rightly, and to respect, glorify, and praise you in all your works through which there shine your almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth. And so order our whole life in thought, word, and deed that your name may never be blasphemed on our account, but may always be honored and praised.

LORD'S DAY 48*

What is the second petition?

"Your kingdom come." That is, govern us by your word and Spirit that we may more and more submit ourselves unto you. Sustain and grow your church. Destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against you, and all wicked schemes thought up against your holy word, until the full coming of your kingdom in which you will be all in all.

LORD'S DAY 49***What is the third petition?**

"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." That is, grant that all people may renounce their own wills and obey your will, which alone is good, without grumbling, so that everyone may carry out his or her office and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.

LORD'S DAY 50***What is the fourth petition?**

"Give us this day our daily bread." That is, please provide for all our bodily needs so that we may recognize that you are the only source of all that is good, and that without your blessing neither our care and labor nor your gifts can do us any good. So, we should stop trusting in all other creatures and trust in you alone.

LORD'S DAY 51***What is the fifth petition?**

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." That is, for the sake of Christ's blood, please do not charge to us our many transgressions as miserable sinners, nor the evil which still clings to us. We also find this witness of your grace in us, that we want to forgive our neighbor with all our hearts.

LORD'S DAY 52***What is the sixth petition?**

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." That is, please preserve and strengthen us through the power of thy Holy Spirit since we are so weak that we cannot stand by ourselves for one moment, since our sworn enemies, the devil, the world, and our own sin, ceaselessly assail us. Preserve us so that we may stand firm against them, and not be defeated in this spiritual warfare, until at last we obtain complete victory.

How do you close this prayer?

"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." That is, we ask all this of you because, as our King, you are willing and able to give us all that is good since you have power over all things. By this your holy name should be glorified forever, not ours.

What is the meaning of the little word "Amen"?

Amen means, "this shall truly and certainly be." For my prayer is much more certainly heard by God than I am persuaded in my heart that I desire such things from him.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—Ephesians 3:20–21

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Monday

MATTHEW 6:10

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

God’s kingdom. God’s will. All belongs to God. But He shares it with us. He wants us to long for His kingdom AND His will to be done here on earth. This prayer calls for a response from us, though. If we want God’s kingdom to be with us, then we must be willing to accept His will for our lives. Remember this is the prayer that Jesus taught to His disciples. *“Pray then in this way ...”* The Lord’s Prayer, as we tend to call it, is a model for us. We should want to be living in God’s kingdom as His children and fellow heirs. But do we consciously live each day as kingdom inhabitants, keenly aware that we are living under the watchful gaze of our benevolent King?

Unfortunately, we choose to go our own way like the sheep we are and stray far from the Shepherd and His will. And He lets us go. “There is nothing more terrible than the man who is left to himself. For all the instincts and energies which were previously directed toward God are now turned in upon himself ...”¹ (Helmut Thielicke) If we would only stick by God’s side, we would know His will and live daily in His kingdom. The Garden of Eden was our first glimpse of His kingdom; but, like us, Adam

and Eve chose themselves over God and lost their chance to live and walk and talk with Him daily and intimately. God knew they would and so, too, knew He would send His Son to save us from sin and ourselves.

In a cry from the depths of our hearts comes “Thy will be done.” Our own will is the thing that really makes us unhappy. We screw up, make huge mistakes, or get stuck trying to make the right decisions. “Is it not our own will that we want to be freed from ...?” (Thielicke) This is why Jesus came down to us in the depths of our lives and why we cannot but help respond to Him in repentance and look to Him for salvation. May we long for His will to be done here as it is in Heaven among the angels who are constantly doing the good pleasure of the Father.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Breath Prayer

Note the “Breath Prayer” discussed on March 4. Spend five minutes, three times today practicing this prayer, saying as you breathe in “Your kingdom come” and as you breathe out “Thy will be done.” Listen to God. What is He saying to you about His will being done through you?

¹ Helmut Thielicke. *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1974).

Tuesday

MATTHEW 6:10

“Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14-15, NASB)

After Jesus’ baptism and the 40-day fast in the wilderness where Satan tempted Him, Jesus enters Galilee preaching the gospel. The first thing He says, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* The time is still fulfilled. We are living in the time of God’s kingdom with us now. Jesus is presenting Himself as the fulfillment of the kingdom. He wants us to turn away from sin and turn toward Him to believe in the Good News—that Immanuel, God with us, Christ Jesus is come to save!

The kingdom of God is where Christ is. And where is Christ? Everywhere. He wants us to be a part of His kingdom, has prepared a place for us, and wants so desperately to share His life with us. But this may not always look the way we would like it. Christ came willing to go to the depths and heights with us. He came not as a political or conquering king as the people of that time had hoped and expected. “No cosmic revolution sprang up in lurid flames from the footsteps of this figure. He went His way like all the rest. And the dark, demonic powers were still lurking in their hiding places—or even openly erupting in sores and pains, in death and suffering, in wars and disasters ...” (Thielicke)

However, Jesus is now the answer to all this darkness. He entered in to be with us. The kingdom of God is the light that

was now shining into all these areas of the earth where people were sitting in darkness. God came down to all those who were burdened with guilt and sadness, and He freely squandered all His love upon those who would have it!

The kingdom of God, where Christ is, “for one man is the very foundation of life and for another a stone of stumbling.” (Thielicke) This is where we should want to live, abiding in Christ Jesus as He abides in us. Until that time when we shall meet Him face to face and live in His kingdom where freedom, love, and salvation abound.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Fasting

Today give up a meal and spend time in prayer for others.

“A fast is the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer. The physical awareness of emptiness is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy.”¹ Fasting reminds us that Jesus gave up everything for us. One can abstain from food, media, habits, anything that will both remind you to turn to Jesus and free up time to spend with Jesus in prayer. It is not meant to be manipulative or for physical reasons as much as it is to enable us to open ourselves up to seek God’s will and grace. It is an act of self-denial that enables us to see what controls us other than God. It reminds us to feed on God, that He is our true nourishment and provider. If fasting from food is not possible, try fasting from a particular favorite food, or eat simply. When you fast, have your Bible and water continuously at hand. Relax and breathe deeply. Place yourself in the presence of God. Offer yourself and your time to God. You might simply pray: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” Take time to worship God for His faithfulness.

¹Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, Revised and Expanded Edition, 2015), 245.

Wednesday

JOHN 6:38; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (John 6:38, NASB)

Our perfect example of how to live this life is Jesus. Jesus tells us in His own words that He came down from heaven to live among men as a man, not to do His own will, but to do the will of the Father who sent Him. He didn't become a man just for the experience. He was on a mission. He submitted Himself to His Father's will.

Paul says this about Christ Jesus: *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”* (Philippians 2:5-8). Fully God and fully man, Christ Jesus showed us how to be obedient and live a life doing the will of the Father.

Is God your Father? Is His will worthy of your attention and obedience? Do you just love “Buddy Jesus” but aren't so hip on doing the Will of God the Father who seems distant? Then you do not really know Jesus. In this you aren't alone. Even the disciples had a hard time with their faith. Jesus had to explain to them, *“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the*

Father is in Me?” (John 14:10). So, do you only want “Buddy Jesus” or do you want obedient Jesus who is one with His Father?

We must trust Jesus and obey Him. He placed His trust and obedience in God the Father, and so must we. This is why we can identify with Jesus so readily. He went through the same trials and temptations that we do, but He consistently and completely had the will of His Father ever in front of Him. He wanted the Father's will done over His own. He even says this at the most trying time of His life on earth in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed, *“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done”* (Luke 22:42). Like Jesus, we, too, cry out, “Our Father ... Your Will be done.”

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Humility

Avoid any vanity or self-seeking today. Ask someone close to you how you show obedience to the Father. Then ask them how you don't show obedience to the Father. Ouch!

The spiritual discipline of humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. It is letting go of image management and self-promotion. It is taking time to honor others by making others' needs as real and important as your own. This includes deliberately keeping silent about accomplishments and talents, refusing the impulse to name drop, drawing others out, avoiding favoritism, and choosing downward mobility so others have more. Because we find our identity and value in Jesus, we are free to be who we are, no more and no less. We are free to let Him manage our lives, resources and image. We can let Him be our defender in His time and His way. Besides the above challenge, you might also write a resume of character, not your expertise, on one of the blank pages in the back. What does this reveal about who you are becoming?

Thursday

MATTHEW 6:10

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33, NASB)

The context that this verse comes out of is one of prayer, not actions. We are to seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness first and foremost in our prayer life. His kingdom and His righteousness would be His gift to us as we can do nothing in and of ourselves to attain it. Jesus is saying that when we ask for heavenly things, earthly things will be added; or when we seek great things, little things will also be added. He wants to see that our heart’s intent is for Him first.

There’s a Lauren Daigle song called “First,”¹ which captures this idea:

*Before I bring my need
I will bring my heart
Before I lift my cares
I will lift my arms
I wanna know You
I wanna find You
In every season
In every moment
Before I bring my need
I will bring my heart
And seek You
First...*

If you have never listened to this song, you might want to listen and watch Lauren sing it on YouTube. The lyrics are based on Matthew 6:33. Jesus again models this for us when He gets time alone to pray with the Father or asks the Father to bless the loaves and fish. He seeks His Father’s will in all things.

In all that we do, we think we do not have the time to spend with God. We think we need to *do* things *for* Him. But this verse is asking you to do one thing: make your first thoughts be those about Him. He wants your heart! He wants to hear you keep Him as your first priority. He knows how we fill our days with busyness. But will you keep Him on the first line of your Day-Timer, your calendar, your schedule? Will you teach your children the importance of this by your example? It’s simple. We are the ones who make it a task instead of a privilege.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Fixed Hour of Prayer

Say grace before every meal today, whether with others or by yourself. If you are with others, offer to say it for everybody. Pray every time you get in the car to go somewhere. Practice the “fixed hour of prayer” discipline. (See February 27)

¹Laura Daigle. “First,” written in 2015 for Laura’s debut album, *How Can It Be*.

Friday

MATTHEW 6:10

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

There is a deep sense within us to be known and to find commonality with others around us. The world tells us to be ourselves, but to do that by looking and acting just like one another. It is quite the paradox. Paul says not to be conformed to this world. Our plans for happiness should not lie in the things of this world that will soon pass away. John says, *“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world”* (1 John 2:15). When our love of the world surpasses our love and devotion to the Father, this is when our transformation by the renewing of our mind stalls.

Transformation is what God wants for us. He wants us to know His will, and He tells us how we can. We must align our will with His by not being conformed to the world. It’s not so much an outward transformation but an inward one, allowing the Spirit to renew our mind. “The meaning [of Romans 12:2] is, do not cherish a spirit devoted to the world, following its vain fashions and pleasures, but cultivate a spirit attached to God, and His kingdom and cause.”¹ The way in which we cultivate this kind of spirit is by spending time with God, reading His Word, and praying regularly. Building spiritual disciplines

into our daily life by dedicating time to be with God. He wants our time. He deserves our attention and devotion.

We are selfish people. Even the most giving people still struggle with selfishness in their heart. We need the Lord to transform us and give us a new mindset that is dedicated to Him. He does this for us. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. So seek Him.

When you have the overwhelming urge to choose something worldly over the Lord and what He would have you do, then it’s time to reevaluate priorities. We should be the Lord’s biggest fan (coming from the word fanatic); but we, too often, cheer louder for our favorite team than we do praising God in church. Want to know His will for your life? Then align yours to His.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Unplugging

The spiritual discipline of “unplugging” calls us to leave the virtual world of technology (computers, emails, cell phones, iPads, iPods, etc.) in order to become present to God and others. This discipline recognizes that we are personal beings created for personal interaction by a personal God.

Today refrain as much as possible from emails, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. Turn off the radio and other sources of music. Instead, in the silence talk with God, listen for His voice, seek to be fully present with others, and enjoy God’s creation.²

¹Albert Barnes. Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistle to the Romans (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857) <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/bnb/romans-12.html>.

²Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, Revised and Expanded Edition, 2015), 95.

Saturday

MATTHEW 6:5-9A

When did you first learn the Lord's Prayer? Was it as a child, a youth, an adult, or just now? What have you learned about this model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples and to us? Notice in Luke 11:1, Jesus' disciples ask Him: "Lord teach us to pray." In Matthew 6:6-9, Jesus says: "*When you pray, do not keep babbling like pagans ... Do not be like them, for your Father knows your need before you ask ... This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father ...'*"

Jesus gave His disciples and us the privilege of calling personally on the God of Creation, whom the Jews knew as YHWH (I AM WHO I AM). It was a name so sacred that it was never said aloud. Jesus was teaching the disciples and us that we can speak directly to God our *Father*. We don't have to go through anyone else. The prayer Jesus taught His disciples and us is a model for all of our prayers and conversations with God.

Too often this sacred prayer that can be said in 30 seconds, if prayed slowly by a congregation, is misused. It is a prayer that may be recited, but how many pray it? The Lord's Prayer has sometimes been used as a mantra, repeated over and over for "good luck." Sometimes it is used as penitence: repeat the "Our Father" a number of

times, and you will be forgiven. It is like telling a student to write on the whiteboard 100 times, "I will not talk in class."

I have heard the Lord's Prayer abused by witchdoctors in Guatemala. This model prayer, taught by Jesus, is thrown in with a bunch of other prayers, repeated over and over again before continuing with the pagan sacrifice.

The Lord's Prayer can pattern our thoughts so that we may more meaningfully converse with God. Jesus, God's Son, regularly spent time alone in prayer with His Father. If Jesus felt it was necessary to remain in communication with God, how more importantly is it for us to stay in touch with God.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Say the Lord's Prayer

Make a copy of the Lord's Prayer. Read it every day this next week. As you read the prayer, underline the phrase that impacts you that day. Use a different pen color each day. You may have multiple phrases underlined by next Saturday or you may have the same phrase underlined multiple times. Today focus on using the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for your prayers. Pray one petition at a time, using each petition as a springboard to guide your prayers.

Monday

LUKE 11:3

In this week's Lenten devos, we consider part of the Lord's Prayer" per Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3: "Give us each day our daily bread." We will unpack this appeal throughout the week, but first let's consider the liberty afforded in stewardship.

As one who is "terminally Scottish" (thrifty), I can get knocked off-balance when an unexpected, meaningful expense surfaces—a major auto or appliance repair, etc. I have found comfort in remembering that nothing I have is truly mine, even my children—that I am merely a steward (overseer) of God's excellent, ongoing provision. When an unplanned cost surfaces, I do well when my attitude is one of, "OK, Lord, You're not surprised by any of this; You've allowed it. Help me to be wise in managing the resources You've given to me and to be grateful for all that You provide." I have found relief and peace in such a perspective, one reinforced by Scripture.

Remember: it's all God's (Psalm 24:1). He "owns the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10); that is, everything is His to do with per His sovereign will. Fortunately—given God's goodness and love—He delights in giving His children good things, withholding nothing virtuous and needful (Psalm 84:11).

The "rich young ruler" of Luke 18, unfortunately, didn't seem to grasp his own mere stewardship. He approached Jesus religiously, seeking the keys to "earning salvation." When the Lord reminded him to keep the commandments, he self-righteously responded, (paraphrased) "Check—done that!" Then Jesus' zinger: "*Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*" (Luke 18:22). Jesus recognized this man's idolatrous wealth-worshipping and inability to see that God provided his circumstances and corresponding wealth. The man departed downcast, likely feeling that Jesus "had asked too much" of him.

Do you see yourself as simply a caretaker for what God has provided? Can you appreciate the peace in such recognition? Ask God where He wants you to invest His provision faithfully and cheerfully, for His kingdom and His glory.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Morning and Evening Prayers

Use page 62 - 63 as your morning and evening prayer guides.

Tuesday

MATTHEW 6:11

One of the best definitions I've heard for maturity is Sigmund Freud's: "the ability to delay gratification." As a "recovered humanist" and former psychology major, I'm familiar with Freud's theories and am not among his fans. However, I think he nailed it with this observation. I believe Freud likewise and unwittingly highlighted one of sin's key underpinnings—temptation as a precursor to sin—with his understanding of maturity. Moreover, and ironically, this self-described atheist also unintentionally underscored a key element of a faithful, effective prayer life.

For many, particularly less mature believers and pre-Christians, much of prayer entails appealing to God with what amounts to a laundry list of wants, addressing Him almost like a heavenly short-order cook. More seasoned prayer, however, supplants wants with needs, frequently interceding on behalf of others' interests as did Jesus Christ Himself.

Virtuous prayer focuses upon God and His will; the one praying is aiming to "show up for joyful duty" in engaging the Commander-in-Chief of the universe. Temporary, selfish interests and self-perceived "needs" give way to God's eternal plans and the wonder of serving our loving Creator and Redeemer.

Mature prayer delays gratification, subordinating shorter-term worldly wants to an eternal perspective. The Apostle Paul, Spirit-inspired, penned it well: "We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Elsewhere Paul characterized this as contentedness despite one's circumstances, as he had learned

to keep his eyes on the One who provides, strengthens and redeems (Philippians 4:11-13). Paul grasped the wisdom of an attitude of gratitude—his joy was in Jesus and His salvation—regardless of external conditions.

Let's close today with a simple, contentment-oriented prayer from the Proverbs. "[LORD, please] give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny You and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God" (Proverbs 30:8-9). Amen!

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Scripture Memorization

For centuries memorization was the foundation of the educational instruction. Memorized matter was known to have staying power. With the advent of the printing press and more recently the internet and google, there is less of a need to memorize. But a mind so overwhelmed with information can leave the soul at the mercy of the last mental image that took our fancy.

Memorization allows us to choose words and images that shape our minds and hearts. It allows the Holy Spirit to bring to mind God's Word that we have hidden in our heart. A good practice is to write a portion of Scripture on a card and tape it to your mirror or have it handy in your car as you sit at a stop light. Read and re-read the verse, rehearsing it in your mind and heart until you know it by heart. As you practice this discipline, you might try memorizing a whole chapter of Scripture or the prayers Paul prayed in Ephesians and Colossians. Let's start by memorizing Romans 8:26-27 in the *New American Standard Bible (NASB)*.

"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Wednesday

LUKE 11:3; MALACHI 3:10

Is it “more blessed to give than to receive”? The answer is an emphatic “Yes!”—because, per Paul, our Lord said so (Acts 20:35). However, receiving is also extremely important. An unopened gift benefits no one. A pardon is effective only if the one pardoned acts, choosing to walk free. Sometimes other things keep us from being able to receive God’s best: hands already filled with something less, unconfessed sin temporarily breaking fellowship with God, a prideful “I don’t need anybody’s help” attitude, etc.

In this week’s featured “*Give us each day our daily bread*” theme, today’s emphasis is “give.” The appeal here is for God to give what’s needed; in parallel, however, in such a petition we also confirm our need and readiness to receive from Him. I believe this is, in part, what Jesus addressed when teaching on receiving “*the kingdom of God like a child*” (Mark 10:15). Children are open, aware of their complete dependence upon parents for provision and safety, instinctively loving and revering parents, inquisitive and eager to learn. These are some dynamics of saving faith, swapping God for earthly parents in this example.

When Jesus encountered the invalid at Bethesda’s pool, He famously asked, “*Do you want to be healed?*” (John 5:6). That question might seem naïve; however, though Jesus

willingly healed, He would not foist it on one unwilling or unready to receive healing. This also applies to spiritual healing, the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in Christ—God does not impose His salvation; one has to be willing and ready to receive in order for it to happen.

One of the wonderful aspects of giving and sacrificing for God’s glory is that we cannot out-give Him (Luke 6:38). As Jesus took five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand (John 6), God can multiply gifts faithfully and cheerfully offered. And God delights in giving good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11).

Do you receive God’s provision like a child? How’s your giving? Anything you’re clinging to which might prevent you from receiving God’s best?

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Giving to Others

Ask God to show you someone you might give a gift to today. Maybe it is to buy a Starbucks for the person behind you in line. Maybe it is to give money or a gift card to someone you see in the street. Maybe God will bring someone else to mind that is in need of something you are not even aware of. Maybe it is to give the gift of time to someone, inviting someone you normally would not spend time with to coffee or lunch.

Thursday

DANIEL 9:4-19

“Give **us** each day **our** daily bread” (emphasis added)—notice the plural usages here. Why the relational, community-oriented “us” and “our” in this prayer? Isn’t prayer supposed to be personal, a private conversation with God? Prayer can be private, but also corporate and public. We are not to make a “show” of prayer, as the ancient Pharisees often did (Matthew 23:5-7), but we are called to pray—both publicly and privately—for the individual and collective needs of God’s people.

Other than the Lord Himself, perhaps no other biblical character is portrayed as positively as the prophet Daniel. Yet, when appealing to God for forgiveness and forbearance regarding Israel’s waywardness, Daniel associates himself with his countrymen—“We have sinned” (Daniel 9:5), “We have not listened” (9:6), “To us, O LORD, belongs the shame ... we have sinned against You” (9:8), etc. Daniel understood that, while salvation is individual and personal, God calls His own to care for one another and stand together.

“Give us each day our daily bread” reminds us, as Daniel did, that we are not to stand off and aloof while Christian brothers and sisters go without or misstep. In parallel, we are called to rejoice in blessings and provision coming to others in the church, not to default to envy as others might. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Consider two highly convicting examples of leaders who identified so strongly with others that they would have willingly sacrificed their own salvation. Paul wrote, “I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen (the Jews)” (Romans 9:3). Moses, following the Jews’ golden calf idol incident at Mt. Sinai, appealed to God, “[Please] forgive their (the Israelites’) sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book.” (Exodus 32:32).

Do you feel strong affinity for fellow believers? Does this show up in your regular prayer life? Ask God for a stronger heart for the Body of Christ.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Worship

Take time today in worship. The heart of worship is to seek to know and love God in our own unique way. True worship happens when we put God first in our lives. When we ascribe all worth to Him. When what God says matters more than what others say. When loving God matters more than being loved. When we value God above all else. Consider the many names God uses to reveal Himself. Talk to God about what these names reveal. Write a letter to God expressing your love for Him. Go to GlenkirkChurch.org/music and listen to the weekend worship songs.

Friday

GENESIS 11:1-4; EXODUS 16:4-5

“Give us **each day** our **daily** bread” (emphasis added). Today’s bolded words underscore a particular challenge in contemporary America. Our abundance can dull us to reality that all we need comes from God, day by day and moment by moment. The desire for and delusion of self-sufficiency drove the construction of the Tower of Babel. Grasping this, Proverbs penman Augur wisely appealed, “*Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’*” (Proverbs 30:8-9).

God, knowing our tendency to take His ongoing provision for granted, instructed the ancient Israelites to gather only enough heaven-provided manna for that day’s need. On Fridays He allowed them to gather a double-portion in order to cover their Sabbath needs. The message: I supply you daily; trust Me—not yourselves nor your own ingenuity—to provide for you.

Our self-absorbed, fallen tendency is to consider security in what we’ve stockpiled instead of trusting God. Jesus addressed this in His “Parable of the Rich Fool.” “*And he said ... ‘I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’*” (Luke 12:18-20).

The message here is not, “Don’t plan for the future”—“*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and ... members of his*

household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). The message is, however, “Trust God to provide and thank Him for His loving, daily provision.”

As a natural planner and saver, I need to embrace this message evermore—one of many areas needing increasing surrender. Do you trust God to provide daily, or is your “security” in investments, savings, insurance and possessions? Do you thank God daily for His provision?

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Silence

The spiritual discipline of silence is a regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking, as well as from listening to words or music. It is difficult to find silence in our age of technology. Silence challenges our cultural addiction to amusement, words, music, noise, and voices. It asks for patience and waiting. In quietness we often notice things we would rather not notice or feel. Our own agendas often loom larger than our desire to be with God in silence.

When practicing the discipline of silence, we wrestle with a sense of wasting time, and we are challenged to remember again that all we need is in God. Silence opens up the contents of our heart, allowing us deeper access to God. There is nothing you need to do here but rest in God. Lean into God, trusting that being with Him in silence will loosen your rootedness in the world and plant you by streams of living water.

If silence is new for you, begin with ten minutes, setting a timer will help you forget the time and settle into the quiet. As you become quiet, what do you hear—voices, traffic, your breath, wind, your heart, distracting thoughts? Let the noise go and be with God; simply breathe “Here I am.” After ten minutes reflect on what it was like for you to simply become still and know that He is God. Try this several times today.

Saturday

MATTHEW 6:11; JOHN 6:31-40

*“Give us each day our daily **bread**”* (emphasis added).

In this appeal, bread represents God’s provision, whether food, protection, or other needs of ours. As we considered yesterday, God fed the Israelites throughout their trek to the Promised Land with daily bread that He rained down from heaven, along with the quail He provided each evening (Exodus 16:13).

Jesus reminded His followers that the manna God supplied to the Hebrews was a picture of Christ Himself: *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh”* (John 6:51). The Lord called Himself *“the bread of life”* (John 6:35). He redefined the Jews’ Passover meal at the Last Supper, revealing its symbolism regarding the New Covenant in His atoning sacrifice: *“This (bread) is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me”* (Luke 22:19).

Even the birthplace of Jesus of Nazareth reinforces the imagery of bread pertaining to His first coming mission and role as our Sustainer: Bethlehem means “house of bread.”

Though the Israelites’ exodus was nearly 3,500 years ago and Jesus’ return to heaven almost 2,000, God continues to provide for us daily. The “bread” He gives is tangible, while also spiritual and eternal when we follow Christ. Jesus promised, *“I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20).

Reflect back upon this week’s themes. Do you see yourself as a steward for God’s provision, embracing the rest that comes with this? Have you learned to be content with God’s loving, daily provision, grateful for what He provides and allows? Do you receive what He gives willingly and gratefully? Does such gratitude show up in your giving? Are you active in and loving toward the church, your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you thank God daily for the Bread of Life, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Father God, give us each day our daily bread. Amen!

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Fast

Fast a meal today and use the time to spend an hour in prayer. (See February 29)

Morning Prayer

15 minutes total / 1-2 minutes each

BE STILL. Find a quiet place. Get seated comfortably. Relax. Take a few deep breaths. Remind yourself: “I am here to meet God. No other appointment competes in importance.”

SIT WITH A VERSE. Choose a line of Scripture and repeat it slowly.

ADORATION. Think on the greatness of God. How incredible it is that God knows you and desires to have fellowship with you. God is eager to encounter you! Adore Him.

THANKSGIVING. Name the things that God has given you for which you are grateful: family, friends, health, work, fun ... and be thankful for Christ’s death on the cross, salvation, life in him now, and the promise of eternal life.

DEDICATION. Review the significant vows you have taken ... those you’ve taken as a Christian, as a church member, as an employee, those you’ve taken as a spouse, parent, and even as a son or a daughter. Reaffirm these vows, but also focus intently on this day. Offer your life to God for joyful service today!

GUIDANCE. Envision your day with God. Foresee God in each task, each relationship, each opportunity, in each member of your family ... and in every unscheduled event or encounter that will happen today. Ask for God’s guidance in each aspect of your day.

INTERCESSION. Make a list of the names of people who are in need of your prayers. Contemplate each one and lift up their individual needs to God. Love them.

PETITION. Now ... after you have done these things ... lift up your own needs to God. Tell Him what you most deeply desire in your own life. As you spend time in God’s presence, your desires will change and mature; your true wants get crystallized by the Spirit. So, persist in asking for what you really want until you know what it is.

ACT OF TRUST. Intentionally release your prayers to God ... and trust God to answer them.

WAIT. “Speak, Lord ... your child listens.” In the ensuing silence, wait to hear what God wishes to say to you.

Evening Prayer

5 minutes total

REVIEW THE DAY. Identify the places that God has been at work in your life today ... and give thanks to Him for His consistent presence.

CONFESSION. Note the feelings, thoughts, words, actions, and choices throughout the day which have been contrary to God’s will for your life

IN CHRIST. Be specific. Acknowledge them, confess them ... and accept God’s forgiveness. Christ has already paid the price for these sins. Harboring guilt robs Christ of His gift to you.

COMMITMENT. Release yourself to God for the night. Pray that you may drift into sleep; conscious of God’s loving presence.

Monday

LUKE 11:4, 18:9-14; 1 JOHN 1:8-10

Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and publican demonstrated stark contrast between a smug legalist—making a boastful speech versus truly praying—and one desperately seeking God's forgiveness. The Pharisee felt no need for repentance; likewise, he didn't feel need for a Savior. The tax collector's surrendered appeal, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*" (Luke 18:13) revealed a heart laid bare before God.

Jesus shared this story with "*some who trusted in themselves... and treated others with contempt*" (Luke 18:9). In closing, He advised His self-righteous listeners that the broken, humble tax collector left the temple justified. There was no further comment on the story's Pharisee, but it's implied that his delusion of personal worthiness persisted.

In America we are inclined to compare ourselves with others, including self-perceived "goodness" and the "rights" we cling to. The enemy loves when we focus like this—it takes our eyes off of God and His standard of holiness and perfection. Such horizontal perspective fosters the deception that "God grades on a curve," that "being better than most" is the pathway toward heaven. This entitled, anti-biblical attitude repels the Savior and the Holy Spirit's efforts to draw us toward Him.

Does every prayer require the sort of crushed spirit exhibited by the lowly publican? Not necessarily, but prayers of confession and repentance should be far from a dispassionate listing of missteps. Know that "*God opposes the proud but gives grace*

to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5-6) There is no more appropriate time for brokenness than when approaching the perfect, all-knowing Creator and seeking His forgiveness.

I doubt that many of us pray like the haughty Pharisee in Jesus' parable. However, how often do you, or I, pray like the chastened tax collector? Do we truly grasp the severity of our sin and its cost? Our need for forgiveness is so extreme that God came to earth to deal with it, subjecting Himself to the unimaginably humiliating, agonizing death our sin deserves. Lord, please forgive us our sins and be merciful to me, a sinner!

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Self-examination

The spiritual discipline of self-examination is the process whereby the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to what is true about us. This is not a shame-inducing inventory; instead it is opening myself to God within the safety of His love so I can authentically seek transformation. Confession embraces Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on a path to renewal and change. Today we will be inviting God to bring to light the wrong in our lives without rationalization, denial or blame.

Imagine you are in a safe place, surrounded by the love of God. Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you. Remember he sees you absolutely and with love. Using the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) as a guide, journal your sins. Take special note of any envy, lust, greed, gluttony, deceit, lying exaggeration, pretense or avoidance of responsibility. When you have finished, go through each commandment one at a time, asking God to forgive you and help you to change. Then burn your list in a symbolic act of what it means to have God remove your sins from you.

Tuesday

**MATTHEW 6:12; EPHESIANS 4:30-32;
COLOSSIANS 1:20-22**

Perhaps you have heard this faithful saying, “How can we be unforgiving when God has forgiven us so much in Christ?” “*As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*” (Colossians 3:13), a fruit of our relationship with and gratitude toward Jesus. Does that mean “forgive and forget”? Is mere forgiveness a stumbling block for many, sufficient among believers?

There are many misunderstandings regarding forgiveness. Simply stated, forgiving entails seeking no restitution from another despite their wronging you, forgoing your claim to “justice.” Letting go here frees you from potential bitterness. And though “*love keeps no record of wrongs*” (1 Corinthians 13:5; NIV), this does not necessitate your condoning the other’s offense.

Forgiveness is necessary for reconciliation—restored, healthy relationship—but this is not enough. In order to reconcile, *both* sides must be willing, the wrongdoer(s) owning their problem(s) and repenting. A faithful believer, if wronged, should have forgiven the other already, enabling reconciliation. Jesus took our place, paying for our sins and thereby making reconciliation with God possible. But we still must sincerely confess our sinfulness and ask God’s forgiveness, thereby restoring a right relationship with Him.

The Bible teaches that we are to do all that we can to make peace with fellow believers (Matthew 5:23-25). Truly loving others, however, includes caring also about *their* relationship with God. Thus, though having forgiven them earlier, we’re called to *lovingly* share truth—not self-righteously judge like yesterday’s pompous Pharisee—so that our brother or sister can own the problem (2 Timothy 2:25) and reconcile with God. This can be uncomfortable and there are certainly wrong ways to attempt this. However, agápē love calls us to seek nothing but the best for the other, including “*speaking the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15).

Are you holding onto any unforgiveness, particularly toward another believer? Have you done all that you can to reconcile with fellow Christ followers? When wronged by another Christian, do you lovingly advise them, enabling God’s best for them? If you’re anything like me, there remains significant potential for your continuing growth.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Confession

Much of Jesus teachings and at least a third of His parables are about forgiveness. Over and over again he modeled what it looked like to bless when you are cursed and to forgive when people don’t deserve to be forgiven. Today ask some of your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots. Ask questions like, What do I do that hurts you? How could I better love you? What is it like to be with me? Do I show interest in others or talk mostly about myself? Let their answers guide your time of confession.

Wednesday

MATTHEW 6:12, 18:21-35; MICAH 6:8

Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant is a fascinating study in forgiveness. It's setup—with Peter smugly asking about repetitive forgiveness—includes the Lord's reminder that our mercifulness, like God's, must be inexhaustible. It also reinforces lessons from Monday and Tuesday: we, like the unforgiving servant, need great mercy for our debts; unforgiveness is a blight and obstacle to joy; unrepentance preempts reconciliation, etc. But I believe there is even more going on here.

The servant's debt, ten thousand talents, equaled about 150,000 years' wages.¹ (Answers) However, his master mercifully forgave this amount (Matthew 18:27). His liability, totaling about \$4 billion at California's current minimum wage, was eliminated and forgotten. Despite this, the unmerciful servant later demanded repayment of what another owed, an amount equaling 100 days' wages.² (Answers) The point: he was forgiven something he could never repay—as we are in Christ—while unforgiving regarding a relative pittance.

But wait! Matthew 18:34 tells us *“his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.”* He had already been forgiven the ten thousand talents; his master could not renege on this. What, then, was *“all his debt”* at this point in the story?

The king, master and “lender” in this parable portrays God. We are the servant owing an unrepayable debt, the consequence of our sins. And we, in Christ, are forgiven this debt just as the servant had his canceled. What, then, do we continue to “owe” God upon our forgiveness in Christ? For what will He continue to hold us accountable? If this parable had an epilog, the servant would have been jailed until sincerely and wholly forgiving his debtors. We must forgive likewise, lest we be imprisoned by mercilessness and settle for less than God's best.

Do we take unforgiveness as gravely as we should, as seriously as God Himself does? Do you and I *“love mercy (forgiveness) and walk humbly with [our] God,”* as Micah 6:8 (NIV) teaches? Lord God, please *“forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors.”*

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Confession

Note February 28 (Praying Scripture). Turn to Psalm 32 or Psalm 51. Use the psalm as a way of bringing your own sins before God. Today be aware of what brings about strong emotions, defensiveness, anger, a desire to withdraw. What is motivating your emotions? What are the triggers? Practice noticing your internal world and begin to develop a habit of immediate confession.

¹https://www.answers.com/Q/How_much_is_10000_talents_worth and

²https://www.answers.com/Q/How_much_was_100_denarii_in_the_Bible

Thursday

MATTHEW 4:1-13, EPHESIANS 6:10-24

There are times when we intentionally put ourselves to severe tests. It may be climbing a rock cliff as Pastor Tim does. Sometimes we simply want to get away and be alone. We may get so involved in an activity that we forget to eat or are too busy to stop. It is rare that we deny ourselves food for a long period of time. That is what Jesus did as He began His ministry.

It's difficult comprehending Jesus, the Son of God, God in human flesh (incarnate) being tempted. The word for tempted in Greek is *περασμεν*, which means "tested." Jesus told His disciples of His preparation in the wilderness. No one else, except the Holy Spirit, was present. He may have told them about this when He was teaching His disciples how to pray.

Lead us not into temptation (*περασμεν*) but deliver us from evil (one). The last petition in the Lord's Prayer affirms the evil one (Satan) will seek to draw us away from God. Evil surrounds us. If we are prepared and trust God, we need not be afraid.

It is because Jesus spent 40 days in preparing for His ministry that He understands temptation and can help us through our struggles and *περασμεν*. The English translation of verse 1 (Jesus was led by the Spirit into

the desert) misses the impact of the verse. The Greek stresses that the Spirit not only led Jesus into the desert, but also led Him in it. Jesus was not left alone any more than we are. Jesus' method of answering Satan is the same method we can use when we are *περασμεν*.

Paul in Ephesians instructs us how to use the "Armor of God" in preparation for the *περασμεν* that will come from the evil one. We will look at this tomorrow.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Armor of God

Write out Ephesians 6:10-17. Begin the process of memorizing this passage. You might begin by listing out the separate pieces of the armor.

1. Belt of Truth
2. Breastplate of Righteousness
3. Shoes of Peace
4. Shield of Faith
5. Helmet of Salvation
6. Sword of the Word

Friday

LUKE 11:2-4, 1 PETER 5:6-11

What causes you worry or anxiety? Is it daily provision, finances, health, future, crime or family? Someone said to me: “I cannot take another crisis in my life. It seems like one thing after another is occurring in my life.” Unexpected medical diagnosis, job loss, automobile accident, marital problems, arrest of a friend and financial difficulties were concerns that have been raised. Add your own.

Jesus was tested/tempted by Satan during His 40 days in the wilderness. Satan said, “*If you are the Son of God, tell these stones (little white sand stones likely looking like bread loafs) to become bread*” (Matthew 4:3). The tempter was trying to get Jesus to use His power to satisfy His physical need and meet the physical desires of those He came to save. Read the other temptations Jesus faced in Matthew 4:5-11.

The devil, Satan (Father of Lies) comes to us in our most vulnerable moments saying: “If you are a child of God, why would God allow you to experience _____?” (Add whatever you are facing) Read 1 Peter 5:7-9. Lions attack the young, weak, sick or staggering animals. During difficult times let us meet with Christian sisters and brothers rather than trying to face our difficulties alone, where we are vulnerable to attacks by Satan: “If God _____, why?”

There are times when I feel attacked by people, circumstances or challenges that are trying to keep me from doing what God has called me to do. That is when my wife and I begin the day in prayer asking for wisdom, protection and boldness. Then she helps me to “visualize” putting on the Armor of God.

We read Ephesians 6:10-24. I visualize tying on the “Belt of Truth,” holding everything in its place. Jesus said: “*I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life*” (John 14:6). What a contrast to the Belt of Lies coming from the Father of Lies. Next I put on a “Breastplate of Righteousness,” which is a right relationship with God. (A breastplate was a mail, chain-link shirt worn by Roman soldiers. Today soldiers wear a bullet-proof vest.) When our relationship with God is right, nothing can penetrate our hearts.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Armor of God

Write out Ephesians 6:10-17. Begin the process of memorizing this passage. You might begin by listing out the separate pieces of the armor.

1. Belt of Truth
2. Breastplate of Righteousness
3. Shoes of Peace
4. Shield of Faith
5. Helmet of Salvation
6. Sword of the Word

Saturday

MATTHEW 4:11-13, 17; MATTHEW 6:9-13

Today we mark Jesus' last day in the wilderness where He spent 40 days without eating. He was tested/tempted by Satan to take an easier path for His reason of coming to earth. Each test offered an alternative to His dying on a cross. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and remained with Him through the 40 days. Jesus' preparation for His future was a transition from His 30 years as a regular human to proclaiming "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 4:17). During these 40 days of Lent, we have studied the Lord's Prayer. We have learned and used spiritual disciplines that hopefully we will continue using into our future.

Jesus now teaches His disciples and us to pray: "*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one*" (Matthew 6:13). We are asking for God's discernment, guidance and protection as we move forward.

The evil one will seek to dissuade us from following Jesus and His teachings and encourage us to take the easier path of compromise. We are in a spiritual warfare. Satan interferes and attacks when the "Good News" (Gospel) is proclaimed and people respond. It seems that whenever "spiritual growth" within individuals and the Body of Christ (Church) occurs, Satan finds ways of undermining

that effort. That is the time to "*put on the armor of God*" (Ephesians 6:10-24) and to pray the Lord's Prayer, especially "*deliver us from evil.*" This prayer will give us discernment and protection from spiritual warfare.

The Lord's Prayer was used in the early church and continues today as the one prayer uniting all Christians. It is used as a personal prayer and corporate prayer. There are various versions, adapted as language changes. You may notice the NIV is different from the form you likely learned. That is because the King James Version was used up until new versions were translated.

(Have you noticed something missing from these Scriptures? Note the footnote on Matthew 6:13 regarding "Thine is the Kingdom, and power and the glory, forever. Amen.")

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Praying Scripture

Review the Lenten Practice on February 28 and the instructions on Praying Scripture. Pray through the Ephesians 6:10-21 passage. Go slowly. Where do you need God's truth in your life? What might you need to change in order to be above reproach? What does God's peace look like for you now? Is there a relationship that needs work? Is there some concern you need to release to God? Where do you need God's protection from the accusations of the evil one? As you pray, visualize yourself putting on each piece of the armor.

Monday

**MATTHEW 6:13; HEBREWS 4:14-16,
ROMANS 8:31-32**

Do you ever think you are not good enough for God?
Do you ever feel God's forgiveness is for everyone
but you? Then Romans 8:31-32 is for you: *"If God ... put
everything on the line for us, embracing our condition
and exposing Himself to the worst by sending His own,
is there anything God won't gladly and freely give us?"*
(The Message)

If Jesus Christ did this for you, He isn't going to turn
around and condemn you. He will not withhold anything
you need to live for God, including defeating temptation
and protecting you from evil (one).

The Lord's Prayer reminds us of God's grace, provision
and confidence. As we seek God's forgiveness, we are to
forgive those who have hurt us. This may mean asking
forgiveness of people, even when we think we have done
nothing wrong.

As a follow-up to God's forgiveness, Jesus teaches that
we may ask God to *"Lead us not into temptation but
deliver us from evil"* (Matthew 6:11). Temptation is not
designed to make us fall; temptation is designed to make
us stronger.

When God told Adam and Eve they could eat of every plant and
tree except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God
was giving them freedom, choice and consequences. God didn't
want them to know evil. Yet, today it seems that evil is all we
know. The Evening News is "Murder News." Often we hear that
synagogues and churches experience the horror of death.

Curiosity is what leads us into "trying something." Satan, appearing
as a serpent, asks: *"Did God say you could not eat from any
tree is the Garden?"* Response: *"Any tree except the one in the
middle."* Satan: *"God knows when you eat of it your eyes will be
open and you be like God, knowing good from evil."*

Hebrews 4:14-16 states clearly that God doesn't tempt anyone.
Jesus has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without
sinning. We can draw strength from Jesus who experienced
everything you or I will. He shows us how to defeat temptation.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Take 10-15 minutes twice today. Sit comfortably with both feet
on the floor and your hands on your lap. Breathe deeply and
relax. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of Jesus. Turn
your palms down and begin to drop your cares, worries, agendas
and expectations into Jesus' hands. Let go of all that is heavy or
burdensome. Relax. Breathe deeply. When you have given your
cares to Jesus, turn your palms up on your knees. Open your
hands to receive God's presence, Word and love. Listen. When
you feel prompted to end, tell the Lord what it is like for you to
simply be with Him.

Tuesday

**MATTHEW 6:13; HEBREWS 4:14-16,
ROMANS 8:31-32**

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11)

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Resisting temptation is not easy, but it is far easier than deliverance from bondage. Jesus is our Savior on both counts—going through temptation and delivering us from evil/the evil one.

Jesus saves His people from their sins by keeping us from temptation, by getting us through trials of temptation, or by rescuing us from having yielded to temptation (Matthew 1:21).

Our heavenly Father does not actually tempt us or even lead us into temptation (James 1:13-15), but the Holy Spirit did lead Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Notice how Jesus used Scripture to resist the devil’s temptation. Psalm 119:9 and 11 asks and answers, *“How can a young man stay on the path of purity? By living according to Your word I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”* This worked for Jesus, and it will work for us, too. If we memorize

Scripture and meditate upon it, it will be held in reserve to be activated by the Holy Spirit when we need it—in case of temptation, for example.

When we receive the Word of God by hearing it and believing it in our hearts, that Word is “alive and active” and “at work” in us (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12). James 4:7 says: *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Scripture Memorization

Today pick a Scripture verse (maybe one of these we’ve been talking about) and memorize it. Store this verse in your heart so that when the devil tempts you, you will be ready for him.

Wednesday

MATTHEW 6:13

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast”
—Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:8-10).

During seasons of distress in my life, the above passage has encouraged me, as it has others. At one time it was reported that Billy Graham’s favorite verse (“life verse”) was 1 Corinthians 10:13, a similar verse to the above passage: *“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”*

Like the Muslim Ramadan, the Christian Lent is a time of fasting, of giving up something we like to do; for example, eating, especially when we are hungry. At such times, we are tempted to do what we are denying ourselves to do. We fast for a purpose: to give God space to work in our

lives and in our world, and to receive the reward He has for us (Matthew 6:16-18). Fasting is like a temptation simulator. It takes faith—faith in God’s Word—that good will come of it as God has promised.

Catherine Marshall, author of *Christy* and *A Man Called Peter*, also wrote *Something More* in which she tells the story of her friend who tried without success to kick the habit of smoking. She was invited to go to a church very different than her own, where the pastor had an altar call for any who sought God’s help. Almost against her will, she went forward. The pastor spoke first: “You are struggling with an addiction to nicotine. The Lord says that if you will abstain from smoking for three days, He will “completely take away your desire for it.” She did, and He did. No doubt, those three days were hard, but so worth it!¹

Today and every day, it’s appropriate to pray, “Keep me from temptation; see me through the time of trial; deliver me from evil.”

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Breath Prayer

Use the “Breath Prayer discussed on March 4. Spend five minutes, three times today, as you breathe in pray “Keep me from temptation,” and as you breathe out pray “Deliver me from evil.”

¹Catherine Marshall. *Something More: In Search of a Deeper Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1996).

Thursday

MATTHEW 6:9

“All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
—Apostle Paul quoting the Prophet Joel (Romans 10:13)

The Gaither Trio sang “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus—There’s Just Something About That Name.” God’s name has a reputation.

I was on a short-term missionary trip to Sri Lanka in 1993. One evening we arrived late for a house church meeting on a tea plantation in the central highlands of that nation. I asked if anyone had a story to tell. A woman shared how her second daughter had become deathly ill as a baby. She took her to her Hindu priest and to a shaman priest, but there was no change. She had heard that the “church God” had the power to heal (Psalm 103:3). So she surreptitiously crept into the church building when it was empty and lifted her child up toward the ceiling. She reported her daughter was healed; and now her daughter was at the house church, eight years old, standing next to her. And over there was her oldest daughter, now the pastor of that house church.

For me, the point of the story is that God has not made it difficult to call on His name. In fact, the story she told

had another wrinkle. When she wanted to become a part of that church, she was told it would take a year of doctrinal studies. She didn’t want to wait that long, so she prayed to the God who healed her daughter for Him to send someone to explain a more immediate solution. Almost immediately, there was a knock on her door. Members of Every Home for Christ Crusade were visiting in her neighborhood, and Yesuraza, our interpreter that evening, was able to tell her the way of salvation more precisely.

Such stories are in the Bible, too—lots of them. The woman with the issue of blood was healed when she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment. Jesus had a reputation. The Syrophoenician woman’s daughter was healed of a tormenting demon when she answered Jesus with, *“Even the dogs can eat the scraps that fall from the table of the children”* (Mark 7:25-30). Word had gotten around.

“This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). We serve a God with a name that is renowned. Today call on His name for the things that concern you.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Unplugging

Today practice the discipline of unplugging (see March 13). At some point today spend time outside taking a walk or sitting on a bench. Look at the nature around you. Enjoy God’s creation. What do you learn of God as you sit with Him?

Friday

MATTHEW 6:13

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God.”
—Apostle Paul (Romans 8:38-39)

What is the devil up to anyway? It’s a mystery, for sure. But recently the curtain was pulled back for me a little bit as I was reading *Our Heavenly Father* by Helmut Thielicke. These sermons on the Lord’s Prayer were given in Germany near the close of World War II. According to Pastor Thielicke, “The tempter ... made nothing but grand and captivating proposals to Jesus [when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness]. He did not forget to appeal to Jesus’ idealism, to His piety, and even to the Word of God. Satan suggested to Him the fantastic idea of controlling all humanity by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world; and still there was only one thing he wanted, and that was to separate Jesus from the Father.” Thielicke continues, “When we succumb to the temptation to do something without God, this may result at first in great success.”¹

The devil tempted Jesus with “quick success,” by by-passing the Father’s plan. The devil tempts us with short-cuts to success, too. The devil’s way is tempting, but it leads to disaster—separation from God. But what does it profit a man or even the Messiah/Savior to gain

the whole world but lose his own soul (Mark 8:36)? Nothing—no profit at all—in fact, it is an unfathomable loss. Jesus came to save the world (John 3:17), but not at the cost of His connection with His Father. And so, Jesus took His Father’s way—the way of the Cross. And that is the route we are still traveling today.

No short cuts. The devil’s efforts to separate Jesus from His heavenly Father did not work. They failed, so now he is working on us, to separate us from Jesus (John 15:4-5). That will not work either, but it is no fun to be the object of the devil’s trickery. That is why we pray, “Save us from/in our time of trial.”

That is why Paul wrote: “*Nothing can separate us from the love of God—not angels, not future, not anything—will even be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:38-39). Today take your God-given authority over the devil and tell him, in Jesus’ name, to leave you and your loved ones alone and to stay away.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Morning and Evening Prayers

Use page 62 - 63 as your morning and evening prayer guides.

¹Helmut Thielicke. *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1974), 122-123.

Saturday

MATTHEW 6:13

“Grasp how ... deep is the love of Christ ...”

—Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:18)

Some have helped (or tried to help) people who feel they are beyond hope. Some of us have felt that way ourselves. We live among homeless, or drug-addicted, or mentally challenged people. In a *New Life Devotional Journal* by Ron Brown, several tell their story. “I was so comfortable being broken,” Michelle recalls. She didn’t think she was valuable enough to live a normal life. ... ‘I didn’t think I was worth it. I didn’t think I deserved to be prayed over.’ But one of the women volunteers thought otherwise ... Michelle rediscovered the truth of God’s love.”

Elizabeth said, “I was in and out of jail and I knew I couldn’t take care of my kids any longer. ... Another identity was stripped from me. Now I wasn’t a mom. I was just a drug addict.’ Today, Elizabeth is married, ... has both of her children living back with her again ... Elizabeth gets to be a mom again.”

In *Experiencing the Trinity*, Darrell W. Johnson writes, “God’s love is deep enough to make the ever-downward journey. The second person of the Trinity becoming one of us, a real flesh and blood man. And choosing to take on our sin, to become sin. Deep enough to find me [and

Michelle and Elizabeth]! Deep enough to reach inside of me and grab my rebellious heart and win me to Himself.”

God delivers us from evil/the evil one. “We will call His name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). It pleases God to honor His name by redeeming lost mankind. And we honor God’s name when we accept the testimony of His Son (John 3:33).

Whatever the circumstances of your life, believe that God’s love is deep enough to include you. And believe that God’s love is deep enough to include your neighbor, and even the person you struggle to love.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Lord’s Prayer

Schedule three different times today to use the Lord’s Prayer as a pattern for praying. Slowly pray each petition, allowing the Spirit to guide your prayer as you elaborate on each phrase.

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

Be sure to schedule a time to go through the Journey to the Cross next week, starting tomorrow.

¹Ron Brown. *New Life with Ron Brown Devotional Journal* (Riverside: Teen Challenge, 2019), 115.

²Brown, 95.

³Darrell W. Johnson. *Experiencing the Trinity* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 99.

Monday

MATTHEW 21:18-22

People praising Jesus with singing and tree branches on the road was over, and what a day it had been. This was indeed the Son of David entering the most holy of cities, Jerusalem. It seemed it could not have been better—but after Sunday came Monday, and how different a Monday it was to be! Jesus—returning after a night in Bethany, a place of friendship and joy with some of His best friends—is hungry and goes to a fig tree and finds no fruit, just bunches of leaves. What a strange thing for Jesus to do. It was not a long walk from Bethany to Jerusalem (about 2 miles) and surely Jesus would have enjoyed the hospitality of His host before the journey. Why did Jesus go to this particular tree if there was no fruit? Why on this day? Of course, we enjoy the perspective of having complete Bibles today, and we can interpret this action in the context of the entirety of Scripture.

Throughout the Bible, the fig tree is used as a metaphor for the Jewish nation. It is thought that this action was symbolic of the Jewish nation rejecting Jesus as the Son of God. Just a few verses later (Matthew 21:43), we read, *“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”* Jesus was reminding the nation of

Israel, as He reminds us today, that a relationship with Him is a living relationship. A relationship that goes beyond just looking good. A relationship that is expected to bear fruit. A relationship that is not limited to the laws of nature, but grows a faith and belief beyond what we could know or expect. A relationship that is not one of doubt, but beyond what we could even imagine if we could be in constant communion through prayer with our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we ponder this Holy Week, and especially this first day after celebrating Palm Sunday, what could we change in our spiritual lives that would cause us to bear fruit? What distractions in our busy lives hinder a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior? As we reflect on what Jesus did for us this particular week in the Christian calendar, what should we be doing to strengthen our faith in Jesus? If Jesus was to pass you on the road today, would He see fruit?

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Silence

Practice the discipline of silence (see March 20). There is nothing you need to do here but rest in God. Lean into God, trusting that being with Him in silence will loosen your rootedness in the world and plant you by streams of living water. Setting a timer will help you forget the time and settle into the quiet. As you become quiet, what do you hear—voices, traffic, your breath, wind, your heart, distracting thoughts. Let the noise go and be with God. Simply breathe “Here I am.” After ten minutes reflect on what it was like for you to simply become still and know that He is God. Try this several times today.

Tuesday

MARK 14:1-9

Two days before the feast of the Passover, the Tuesday of that week, we find this unusual story of Jesus relaxing with friends and this woman bringing an alabaster jar of nard that was broken and then poured over Jesus' head. This was a significant act for a woman in those times. Historically, an alabaster jar would have been saved for at least a generation as a marriage dowry of a woman yet to be wed. In ancient times and in the Jewish culture, this was often considered the "worth" of their daughter to the prospective groom. In many cases this might be held again for the next generation—what we might consider a family heirloom. Nard was a type of herb, rich in oil, which was only grown in India. This was an imported and scarce product that would have been carried thousands of miles by caravan and thus was of great value.

Then there was the aloe perfume and the value of the very ornate "marble-like" jar. So it would not be a stretch to understand that this was a major sacrifice; this woman was giving her future to Jesus. And then there was the act of anointing Jesus. Anointing was an ancient custom usually performed by shepherds who poured oil on their sheep's heads to protect them from lice and other insects. How appropriate it is then for this woman to pour oil on the Chief Shepherd's head.

The reactions were quick and powerful. Some considered it a waste; their perspective was that this was a material waste. Why couldn't it be sold and given to the poor? Easy to criticize these voices as we know what Jesus' reaction was. But how many of us would have thought the same? Giving to the poor isn't a bad thing, right? And then we read of Jesus' response. Tender and loving, "*Leave her alone ... she has done a beautiful thing.*" This woman was a precious child of Christ; she had given her all to her Lord.

So where are you today in your relationship with Christ? Are you giving Him your all? Do you value what He values, or do you align more with the values of the world? If you died today, would He say of your short life that it was a beautiful thing—you did all you could?

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Prayer Walk

At some point today do a prayer walk around your neighborhood or stop by Glenkirk and do a prayer walk around the campus praying for the activities of Easter week.

Wednesday

MATTHEW 24:3-51

Today's passage, commonly called the "Olivet Discourse," is often overlooked in the many events of that Passover week. However, with only a few days to Christ's crucifixion (and resurrection), this "last lecture" had to be significant and an important message for the disciples then, and for us today.

This week in history had "book ends" that were quite different. The week started with the people welcoming Jesus with shouts of "Hosanna," a welcome of the people fit for an earthly king. The week ended with whom we assume are the same crowds shouting in unison to "crucify him." A caution worth noting for us on how easy it is to wander or be persuaded from the faith when being a Christ-follower begins to get tough.

In the many significant statements that Jesus states of the end times, two might help us to be encouraged today as we reflect on Christ's journey in this last week of His earthly life. Matthew 24:12-13 states that before the end of time (and no one knows the time), "*the love of most will grow cold.*" A stern warning to each of us. Not "some" will lose their faith, or "a few," but "most." As we pause to reflect on His Word in the midst of this Holy Week, may we be intentionally encouraging and supportive of

one another, praying that we may never be the one who loses or causes someone to lose his/her love for the Lord. Instead, may we with joy and praise be "*the one who stands firm to the end.*" Do something active to make this happen today. Call or meet with someone walking in the faith to encourage them and perhaps pray with them for a strengthening of his/her walk and your walk with the Lord.

Secondly, be encouraged with these words from our Lord in verse 35: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.*" Even in the dark days that Christ's disciples were to face that week, and the Lord knowing His death was eminent, He encourages them (and us) that His word is not bounded by time or death. Everything that we are familiar with on this earth may go "upside down," but His words are eternal promises. Let that thought be a constant companion today; go back to it over and over again: "... but My words will never pass away."

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Sacrifice Personal Time

Identify a person who may not be able to attend church this week (a shut-in, a hospital patient, a retirement home resident, etc.). Spend 30 minutes visiting and encouraging him/her, and close in prayer.

Maundy Thursday

MARK 14:12-42

Maundy Thursday is the day in Holy Week where we reflect on commands of the Last Supper, the evening arrest of Jesus, and the myriad of events leading to Jesus' last hours before His crucifixion. The day started for the disciples with a simple question by the disciples to Jesus as to the preparations for the Passover feast. Jesus' precise instructions and the fact that *"The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them"* (v. 16) is a reminder that even in the smallest details, Jesus has prepared the way. When we obey Him explicitly, the future is sure.

We are then drawn into the events of the meal, many of which we are reminded through the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Each moment of the evening is a time of learning and Jesus showing His deep love for us as He eats and converses with His disciples. A sometimes-missed question in the events of the evening is from Jesus as recorded in Luke 22:35: *"Then Jesus asked them, 'When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' 'Nothing,' they answered."* Why would Jesus ask that question in the last few hours He was to share with His disciples? Jesus knew then, as we should be reminded today, that when He sends,

we lack for nothing. Are you where Jesus has sent you? Do you sometimes feel that He wants you to do something, but the resources are not there? When He sends, we lack for nothing.

The evening continues to the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus asks His disciples to stay and keep watch while He prayed. Three times He returns and finds them asleep. The disciples are forlorn and we read in Mark 14:40, *"When He came back, He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to Him."* For many of us this makes us angry. This was Jesus. Did the disciples not know the anguish He was going through? Three times John, three times Peter! And they were speechless: *"They did not know what to say to Him."* Then we sit back and realize that many times we are no different. How often Jesus asks us to do one small thing, and then our busy lives takes over. *"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matthew 26:41). When He asks, we must obey.

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Maundy Thursday

Attend the Maundy Thursday service at 7:00pm at Glenkirk.

Good Friday

MARK 15:1-41

The day started very early in the morning and it was to be a day that would impact many lives in many ways. The chief priests, the elders, and the Sanhedrin were to hand Jesus to Pilate, thinking they had stopped Jesus. Wrong! Pilate plays his political game to avoid a decision, but he ultimately sends Jesus to His death, thinking it was the end of a simple civil unrest matter. Wrong! Jesus died a human death with all the anguish, pain, and suffering as a substitute for you and me so that we might be reconciled with God. For this we are forever different!

This is a real day in history that had to happen so that we might be reconciled with Father God. A day that had to happen so that the fall of Adam and Eve would no longer be a barrier to being in a perfect relationship with God. A day that had to happen so that even the most hard-hearted would have an opportunity to know Jesus. In Mark 15:39 we read, *“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how He died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’”* This was a warrior, a disciplined military man changed forever through Jesus dying on the cross.

Every Sunday we have the opportunity to stand in front of the “cross” in our place of worship. Every moment of each day we have the opportunity to stand in front of the “cross” as the cornerstone of our belief in Jesus Christ. This is a cross that is more than a symbol on our Bibles or around our necks, but a cross that changes hearts and minds, just like this centurion. Let’s remember today the sacrifice that was made so that

we have the privilege of standing before a cross, an empty cross, as we love, worship, and serve a risen Lord.

As terrible as this day was, the cross had to happen so that you and I could have an eternal relationship with God. Without Friday, there is no Sunday; this really is a “Good Friday.” Use this day to reflect on what Jesus did for you and then find an opportunity to share this love with someone who may not have made the proclamation of the centurion that this *“surely was the Son of God!”*

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Fast One Meal and Pray One Hour

Set aside one hour today or tomorrow to pray. Spend five minutes on each of the following:

Praise: Recognize God’s nature.

Wait: Silently surrender to God your anxieties, needs, plans and desires.

Confession: Ask God how you have brought Him sorrow or hurt others.

Scripture Praying: Pray a word of Scripture or one of the Psalms back to God.

Watching: Ask God what He might want you to see.

Intercession: Pray for those you know in need.

Petition: Give to God what is on your heart.

Thanksgiving: How has God shown up in your life? How has He blessed you?

Singing: Spend five minutes expressing joy in worship to God.

Meditation: Chose an attribute of God and ponder the implications for your life.

Listen: Ask God if He wants to say anything to you.

Praise: Conclude praising God for who He is.

Holy Saturday

1 PETER 1:18-19; MARK 15:42-47

It was the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathea had “boldly” asked Pilate for the body of Christ. He and Nicodemus (John 19:39), using strips of linen and seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes, embalmed Jesus. The tomb was sealed by placing a large stone over the entrance. We read in Matthew 27:62-67 that the tomb was then to be sealed and a guard placed at the entrance so that the possibility of a “stolen corpse” could not support the prophecy of Jesus rising on the third day. The promise of God paying a ransom, the life of His only Son, was now fulfilled. The world waited. Was this a hoax? Was this really the Messiah?

It is easy for us today to skip over Saturday because we know the ending. We have this day as a short “interlude” to the real story. But—think about what it might have been like for those in Jerusalem at that time. How did Mary, Jesus’ mother feel? Was her son really the “Son of God” whom the angel had promised her (Luke 2:29-33)? Where was Peter, the “rock” who could not get out of his mind his denial of knowing Christ the previous evening. Was it all over, as we read later in Mark as the two men on the road to Emmaus recount to Jesus the events of that weekend?

For many this is sometimes the place where we find our crossroads in life. We know the story; we see the facts; but we are in the time of life of not fully understanding the power of tomorrow, the day we will celebrate the “Risen Lord”!

In the Garden Tomb (a garden museum of remembrance in Jerusalem) there is a rock tomb that is believed to be one of the possible burial sites that might have been the tomb of Jesus. After entering the tomb and viewing the possible place where Jesus lay, you turn to exit. Above your head inscribed on the rock are these words: “He is not here—For He is risen.”

The tomb had to be occupied on Saturday for us to have eternal life through what was to happen on Sunday. Like Joseph and Nicodemus, does the sacrifice of Christ/ransom paid cause us to be more public with our belief in the risen Christ? What could we be doing to be public witnesses of Christ’s resurrection?

LENTEN ACTIVITY

Scripture Memorization

“For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom He paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.”
(1 Peter 1:18-19, NLT)

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[GlenkirkChurch.org/lent](https://www.glenkirkchurch.org/lent)

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