

Says the  
LORD,



return to me  
with all your heart....

**JOEL 2:12, NRSV**

**A LENTEN JOURNEY**

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In Jesus' death and resurrection, the gap between us and God has been bridged forever. God sent Jesus into the world so that we could have life and have it abundantly.

This devotional booklet, offered for your *Lenten* journey, was written by the faith community of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. We thank God for planting the seed of faith in the writers and readers of these daily devotionals. To God be the glory!

Although each writer may reflect on only one or two verses, devotions are based on the entire Scripture passage, which is noted in the top right corner of each page. To gain the most understanding of the context of the writer's comments you are encouraged to read the entire passage (or the entire chapter) during your devotional time. The Bible translation, or paraphrase, used by the writer follows the annotated Scripture verses used for the writing. Abbreviations are listed below.

**Bible Translation Abbreviations:**

CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
NCV	New Century Version
NASV	New American Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
NirV	New International Reader's Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version

**Bible Paraphrase Abbreviations:**

GNB	Good News Bible
LB	The Living Bible
MSG	The Message (Eugene Peterson)

# Upcoming Events and Worship Schedule

## Hours of Weekend Worship Services:

Saturday 5:30pm	Traditional Worship
Sunday 8:00 and 9:30am	Contemporary Worship
Sunday 11:00am	Traditional Worship

**Sunday School**                      Sunday 9:30am (ages 4 through adult)

*Childcare is available for the 9:30 and 11:00 Sunday services (infant to 5 years old)*

## Lenten and Holy Week Worship Schedule

**Ash Wednesday**                      February 13                      7:00pm

### Midweek Lenten Service

Wednesday	February 20	6:45pm
	February 27	6:45pm
	March 6	6:45pm
	March 13	6:45pm
	March 20	6:45pm



Come at 5:45pm for a Soup & Bread Supper. **Food will be served until 6:15pm.** A children's Lenten program for preschool through 5<sup>th</sup> grade will be held at 6:45pm.



**Maundy Thursday**                      March 28                      7:00pm

**Good Friday**                              March 29                      7:00pm

**Easter Vigil Service**                      March 30                      watch for the time (sundown)  
Vigil Party                      Come and celebrate in the Fellowship Hall after the service!

**Easter Celebration**  
March 31                      8:00, 9:30, and 11:00am

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (v 21) NRSV*

When I first interviewed for an advertising sales position at a local radio station, I was so excited to get the job, I forgot to ask how much I would be paid. I just assumed that if I closed deals, earned new clients, and helped my customers, it all would fall into place. Some of my co-workers who came and went were motivated by money and would compete to gain bonuses, incentives, and rewards that were heaped into their paychecks. Some would sign short-term deals in order to reach a quota that was never going to help their client. The sales contests were fun at times, but I found that what made me successful in the position was not seeking easy rewards, but building strong relationships and a reputation for helping clients accomplish their goals.

Relationships matter! In Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus' sermon on the mount and are invited to see what it looks like to live life in God's Kingdom here and now – where the things of this world are no longer the measures for success, where power and money are no longer the most important things, and where relationship with God, caring for others, and a longing for eternal life in heaven characterize our daily lives. During Lent, we take time to focus on spiritual practices that take us deeper in our relationships with Christ and each other: prayer, fasting, giving to the poor, repentance, and self-denial. Some of these might be more difficult than others for us, but it's these practices that help us to reframe our lives in relation to God, to put God first each day, and to find our identity in loving relationship with Christ and one another. Our time on this earth is brief. It is in relationship with God and with all of God's people that we find true treasure that lasts forever.

**Ever-living God – you form us for relationships with you and with each other. Teach us to treasure your presence among us and to seek out the good in everyone we meet. Turn our eyes from ourselves, and fix them on you each day. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

*Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (v 13) NIV*

At the beginning of the year, most of us look for change. We want to change our habits, change our diet or maybe even change our ways. This year, I decided to make some changes in our diet. As the main cook in our family, I started thinking about using healthier foods, going out less and being more thoughtful about portion control. It sure sounded good!

In real time, it all sounds or smells so good—those fresh baked bread smells from the bakery, the melt-in-your-mouth Valentine's candy beckoning with their bright wrappers, and all the great looking steaks in the meat section of the grocery store just waiting for a hot grill. My mouth is watering as I walk the grocery aisles—my early intentions of “change” are quickly fading into the sunset. As I reach for some Reese’s Peanut Butter cups, my pocket rattles. It's a text from Stuart—he wants me to pick up some Granny Smith apples. Thanks Stuart. I take a last and longing look at all the pretty wrappers. I leave the peanut butter cups behind as I head to the produce section. Change is hard!

**Dear Lord, thank you for being the change in my heart, Lord. Thank you for rattling us with your forever love and showing us your unending patience as our hearts are slowly molded to your plan. Be with us today and everyday. Amen.**

Michele Anderson

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not away your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (vv 10-12) RSV*

Psalm 51 is King David's prayer of confession. David asks for forgiveness because he had committed great sins against the Lord: the sin of adultery, the sin of killing, sin of greed, and the sin of wanting to be a god himself.

An innocent encounter—seeing a beautiful neighboring woman, Bathsheba, bathing, led David to manipulate a plot to possess her by killing her husband, Uriah. David not only abused his kingship power but also committed a deadly sin (see 2 Samuel 11). From **the innocent encounter**, to a **thought of possessing** another man's wife, to **a real action taken** is a common process of our own sinning. Jesus says in Matthew 5:27: "...everyone who looks at a woman (man) lustfully has already committed adultery with her (him) in his (her) heart." Here Jesus gives us an unreachable standard, that is, *thought vs. action!* This is to say that God dictates your **thought** and **heart** not only your **action!** It is for this reason that David prays: *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love... Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."*

Like King David, we Christians know for sure that we are unable to be sinless and accepted by God by using our own power, but we confess our sin and ask for forgiveness in Jesus' name. This is why we come together to worship as Christ's church each week and pray: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not away your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."*

**O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth should show forth your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (vv 15-17). In Jesus' name, Amen.**

*In the Scriptures God says, "When the time came, I listened to you, and when you needed help, I came to save you." That time has come. This is the day for you to be saved. (v 2) CEV*

The Apostle Paul is speaking urgently to the Corinthians, concerned that their hesitant behavior concerning their salvation must stop NOW! Paul says *"This is the day for you to be saved."* He is implying that you can't wait any longer! Paul says that they must deal with Christ's death and resurrection NOW. He goes on to tell them that God gave his precious Son, Jesus, to save us. God loved us that much to provide us a way out of our sin and darkness in order to bring us light, peace, and salvation.

I am sure you can see that God has this same urgency for us. He is telling us the same. DON'T WAIT to believe. I gave you Christ to take away your sin and darkness. Take joy in the fact that I love you and want you as my own daughter or son.

God wants me to talk to him. God wants me to say I love him. That's all he wants. My love!

It's wonderful to know I am loved without conditions!

**Our loving God, thank you for your provision of Christ as the way to salvation. May we learn to talk to you daily and become aware of your unconditional love. May we share your love for us with our family, friends, and acquaintances. Amen.**

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry...When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

(vv 1-2,13) NIV

After being in the desert for forty days, Jesus was hungry. The devil saw this as an opportune time to tempt him. Even though Jesus was physically weak, he did not succumb to the devil's temptation.

Jesus' temptation lasted forty days, but each person's time is different. For me, my time in the desert lasted over twenty years. I was raised, baptized and confirmed in the German Reformed Church. I was even the interim organist when I was a senior in high school. When I left for college, I also left the church. I wish I could say I was able to resist temptation but that wasn't the case. I was tempted many times. The devil knew I didn't know Jesus.

For two decades after high school, I felt an emptiness which I kept trying to fill. I know now it was spiritual hunger. Jesus was physically weak from hunger; I was spiritually weak. Satan seems to know when we're not strong enough to resist him. In my spiritual weakness, I gave in to temptation.

How many times are we tempted in our daily lives? Sometimes it's hard to be a Christian in this world and follow our beliefs. Or, we may think that God isn't watching. If we are still children on our spiritual journey, we may not even know what Jesus would do.

God drew me back to church. Now I feed that spiritual hunger with God's Word and serving God's people. It's harder for the devil to get a foothold in my life. I can resist temptation a little easier now that I have Jesus in my life.

**Dear Lord, thank you for being in my life; you fill me with all your goodness. With you in my life I can fight temptation. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.**

Faye Bastarache

*...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. (v 10) NIV*

Last Tuesday was Mardi Gras, a day to indulge before the ritual fasting of the Lenten season, which begins each year on Ash Wednesday. In Old Testament times, fasting was done to “*afflict the soul.*” People fasted because they felt that by humbling themselves, they would be more likely to gain God’s favor and blessings. In these verses from Isaiah, the people had turned this fast into an empty ritual. They were fasting for all the wrong reasons!

The "fast" that God chooses for them is not a fast at all in any traditional sense of the term. It is religious devotion expressed in action. It shifts the emphasis from what the people expect to be done for them to what they should be doing for the world.

God wanted his people to perform specific acts of grace toward the needs of others (food, clothing, shelter) and to oppose the larger issues of oppression and injustice. In these verses, we are also reminded that these acts of grace aren’t only for strangers in need, but to be applied to the closest of relationships with family. God says fast to free others from their sins, to intercede with God for their healing, to help provide for their needs, and to understand God’s will.

Fasting is a tool of godly love to use for the good of others, and any benefits we derive from it are wonderful blessings!

**Dearest Lord God, thank you for your continued blessings. Help me to rise out of the darkness through acts of grace for my family, the community, and those in need. Amen.**

Maxine Harju

*For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (v 13)*  
NRSV

I have a necklace with a tiny mustard seed in it. Years ago I was told that if I had faith the size of a mustard seed I could move mountains. Now, although I have faith, I just don't think that I would ever be able to move a mountain. I suppose I need to trust a bit more and believe a bit more, and who knows...

Now, imagine that you were one of the thieves hanging on a cross next to Jesus. You thought you knew everything about everything. You had faith in yourself and figured that was all that you needed. Suddenly you realize you can't save yourself; you're going to die; your life is going to be over. You hadn't been a faithful follower of Jesus and his teachings. Now you wished you had been. You speak to Jesus. You ask him to remember you when he enters into God's kingdom. Jesus, in pain and agony, speaks to you. Jesus says that today you will be with him in Paradise! You would be **SAVED!** Wow! Can you imagine?

This man, this thief who had believed only in himself, now realized that he was wrong and he called on the Lord's name. He asked to be remembered. He had a tiny bit of faith in God. He was saved.

We, too, need to have faith in the Lord, and not in ourselves. We, too, need to call upon his name in each and every circumstance. We, too, will be saved.

**Gracious Lord Jesus, thank you for saving the thief on the cross. Help me to always remember the tiny mustard seed in my necklace. Help me increase my faith in you. Be with me as I go about doing your work here on earth. In your holy name I pray, Amen.**

Ruth Ann Isaacs

*The Lord says, "Whoever loves me, I will save. I will protect those who know me. They will call to me and I will answer them. I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue them and honor them. I will give them a long, full life, and they will see how I can save."* (vv 14-16) NCV

**CHECK IT OUT!** Look at all the promises (verbs) the Lord offers in the verses above. The Lord will save, protect, answer, be with, rescue, honor and give us long life.

Psalm 91 is all about protection and safety. Who doesn't want that? The key seems to be that we must initiate the relationship. Verse 15 states, "*They will call to me and I will answer them.*" Our action to "call" to the Lord comes first.

As I contemplated this reading I was reminded of a time when I sought the Lord in a mighty way. I was introduced to Jesus as a child and grew up in the Christian church in one form or another. In my senior year of high school, I prayed sincerely for wisdom and guidance. I ended up spending a year in Brazil as a foreign exchange student. I was placed with a couple different families. The first three months were especially lonely. I wept often. I "called out" to the Lord for help and protection. You see, I did not know Portuguese and my families did not know English. I poured over the Bible in English and Portuguese as never before. I shared my fears with God. I began to learn the language and appreciate my host families. In fact, I eventually shared my love of Jesus with one family. Many of the members of that family are now Christians. I spent a year alone in Brazil when I was only 18 years old! From my life's vantage point, that was just crazy but God heard my prayer and protected me.

No matter what is going on in your life, Psalm 91 urges you to call out, seek the Lord and see what happens!

**Dear Holy Lord, as we journey through this Lenten season and the uncertainties in life, give us wisdom to call out to you, our protector and Savior. Amen.**

Elaine Hansen

*You shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you*  
(v 11) NIV

“Enough is enough!” is usually said in a stern tone when my children have repeatedly been told to stop doing whatever mischief they are getting into. The definition of “enough” according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary is: ‘occurring in such quantity, quality, or scope as to fully meet demands, needs, or expectations’. However that definition doesn’t quite match the context when dealing with energy-filled children.

Earlier in this text God led the people to the Promised Land, where their needs would be met. God did not ask much from the Israelites regarding the law. They only needed to bring a basket of the first things they harvested in the land. God was satisfied with just that one act of thanksgiving, and the Israelites were satisfied with where God had brought them, to a land flowing with milk and honey.

In this day and age, are we satisfied? Do we have enough? Do we thank God for all that is provided? The world we live in makes us unsatisfied. Television, movies, magazines and celebrities make us feel like we are not enough. We never have enough, but we have more than we need! God asks for the first, the best, not what we have leftover. God gives more than enough. God gives in abundance!

**Amazing and abundant God, thank you for all that you provide for us. Thank you for your love, grace, and mercy. Thank you for loving us! In your precious name, we pray. Amen.**

Ivy Adams

*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (v 6) NIV*

Superman. Batman. The Incredible Hulk. The Amazing Spiderman. Captain America. All these are fascinating characters with superhuman abilities that we encounter in our Bible reading. Well, not exactly. But in the pages of Scripture we do discover numerous real people who accomplished things well beyond the realms of human possibilities, people such as Noah, Abraham, David, Mary, Peter and Paul, to name just a few.

We may have a tendency to view the extraordinary people in the Bible as “superheroes,” but in reality they were just human beings such as you and me, individuals with human flaws and moments of doubt and confusion. What set them apart as extraordinary were not so much the innate abilities they possessed, but rather what God accomplished through them. And this only happened because each person trusted and followed God.

In today’s reading we are reminded of one such person, Abram, later to be called Abraham. Though as an old man he initially questioned God’s plan to bring forth a nation from him, he trusted God’s voice and remained obedient to fulfilling God’s plan. Abram’s faith stands as a model for us all.

In our modern world we continue to be surrounded by “superheroes” of faith. Many can be found in our own ministry here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. In my 20 years at this church I have been inspired on numerous occasions by people whose faith resembles that of Abram in today’s reading, people who believe and trust that God can and will accomplish great things through them and through the community of believers that surround them. Very likely, if you are reading this, you may be one of those people who have inspired me. My hope is that at various times I, too, have modeled that level of faith and trust in God which encouraged you.

In this Lenten journey let us remind each other of the many great things God has accomplished through us in this ministry over the past several years: proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel to our local community, providing a sanctuary of support and encouragement for our family of believers, and reaching out to both our local community and the world by sharing hope and providing resources to a hurting world. Let us move forward with the faith of Abram, expecting that God will continue to use us for his purposes, both now and in the future. Let us rejoice together on Easter Sunday as we celebrate God’s greatest accomplishment, victory over death through our Savior, Jesus.

**Heavenly Father, we pray that you send your Holy Spirit to encourage and strengthen us so that your will may be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Forgive our doubts, renew our energy, and help us stay focused on you and the purpose you have for our lives. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Barry Clayton

*For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. (vv 18-19) NRSV*

In this passage Paul exhorts the Philippians to focus on Jesus Christ instead of earthly things. Those whose *“minds are set on earthly things”* are *“enemies of the cross of Christ.”*

Today, this problem remains for us and for all Christians. We are frequently tempted by earthly things. If we give in to our temptations we become enemies of the cross of Christ. For me it is a daily battle.

On my first reading of this passage a phrase from verse 19 jumped out at me! That phrase is *“their god is the belly.”* For me, in my high school and college years, I thought of food as a “necessary evil.” It seemed to me that we spent so much time cooking and eating that could be better spent in some other way. I thought a better alternative would be to just take a food pill once a day.

Today I see cooking and food-related reality shows on television and I sometimes wonder of the participants if *“their god is the belly.”* One of those reality shows, Man vs. Food, is about a man who goes to various types of restaurants around the country and tries to eat whatever giant-sized dish/portion that particular establishment offers as the enticement for some kind of reward, like a t-shirt. He doesn't always win. Sometimes the food wins! I think this show glorifies gluttony.

Of course, earthly temptations are infinite. It's not just food. We must be constantly vigilant to not set our minds on earthly things and by so doing exclude the cross of Christ.

**Heavenly Father, give me wisdom, strength, and self-discipline to set my mind on you instead of on earthly things. Amen.**

Dale Geiger

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (v 34) NIV*

Jerusalem was known as the city of God. Prophets and others were sent to help Jerusalem, only to be murdered and stoned. At this time in his ministry, Jesus was mourning for Jerusalem. Jesus wanted nothing more than to gather Jerusalem's people together under his protection.

Nothing has brought home the reality of God's loving protection as much as our nephew's miraculous recovery from being wounded by an IED this past summer. Chris went from a severely critical status to being able to attend the Marine Ball held here in Las Vegas at Thanksgiving time. Chris has been protected and healed by God.

The prayers of people across the country and world were and still are being answered. In fact, I just got a call from a friend in Illinois asking how Chris was doing with his ongoing surgeries and recovery.

PRAYER AND PROTECTION – WHAT MORE COULD WE ASK? God's loving protection is with each and every one of us every step of our life's journey. God is always there; where are we?

**Heavenly Father, just as Jesus surrendered to your will, may I surrender to the loving protection and guidance you so graciously offer each and every day. Please lead me to a more Christ-like life in service to and for you. I pray this through your loving Son, Jesus Christ, our amazing Lord and Savior. Amen.**

Lynne Bogner

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!* (vv 13-14) NRSV

The years come and go and just like David, I have felt closer to the Lord some days more than others. Whether this feeling has come as a result of poor choices I made, the poor choices of others, or the effects of living in this sinful world are irrelevant. During these times, I have called out to the Lord to “*hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble*” and to “*conceal me under the cover of his tent.*” God has always heard my cry and delivered me. However, the times seem so scary and dark while they are happening. Thankfully, I have never been alone. Every time, God has sent me reminders of his love and omnipotence either through God’s Word or through the body of Christ (the church).

One thing I am learning as I go through these times is that when I feel overwhelmed, it is usually because I have lost perspective on what is important. David remembered what really mattered in verse 4, “*One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.*” When I keep my priorities on my relationship with God and spend time with God and God’s people, life seems to simplify and become more joyful.

No matter what is happening in your life, remember that God wants to bring you joy. Waiting for the Lord and having courage will always result in goodness. Put aside the worries, be strong, and wait for the Lord. It will get better!

**Dearest Lord, thank you for protecting me and never leaving me to suffer alone. Help me to seek you above every care or distraction of this world. Amen.**

Karen Harris

*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (v 9) ESV*

Sometimes I just don't get it!

Actually, there are quite a few times where Bible stories are just beyond my comprehension. Isaiah chapter 55 starts off with a seemingly bizarre declaration that the people who have no money are to come, buy, and eat.(v 1) I'm not sure how that's supposed to work. We aren't told it's a charity give-away. And it's not cheap junk, either. We are invited to buy the best wine and milk and fine food. Without money! How does God plan to pull *that* off?

I don't get it. Or maybe I do...

Maybe God is calling us to accomplish the impossible! Maybe God is calling us to live the paradox. Maybe God is calling us to stop spending our hard-earned money on junk food, on trinkets, on *things* that do not satisfy us. God is calling us to feast at his banquet, because everything is free—for us. The price has already been paid in full, on our behalf, for our benefit. Can you guess who did that? I think I get it now.

The best is already ours for the taking. All we have to do is draw close to God and pay attention (v 2). We who are thirsty for God just need to come to him, to seek the Lord while he may be found (v 6), and to receive. To “get” it. To get his finest blessings, to get nourishment for our souls. And that will be so incredible that others will come to God, or come back to God, to get his abundant pardon. (v 7)

God is calling us today: Come. And get it!

**Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you that the price has already been paid for us to be able to receive your abundant pardon, and finest food, and perfect blessings. Thank you that we who are spiritually penniless are called to buy the best from you, and we get it. Amen.**

Jen Anderson

*The next day they began to eat from the gardens and grain fields which they invaded, and they made unleavened bread. The following day no manna fell, and it was never seen again! So from that time on they lived on the crops of Canaan. (vv 11-12) LB*

Manna was the Lord's provision during the time the Israelites were waiting for the Promised Land. Even when the people were disobedient and complained against the Lord, the manna never failed. Even when they had turned away from the covenant, and as a consequence were lost in the wilderness, the Lord remained faithful to them and provided for them. Now as they come into the land itself, there is provision in a new permanent way.

As a child of God, these verses give me hope that the Lord will remain faithful to me, even when I sin. I try hard to be patient and good in my life; however, there are times that frustration gets the better of me, and I end up failing God. This causes me great disappointment in myself. I am strengthened, though, knowing that the Lord will still love me.

Verse 12 shows me that the Lord provides so much for all of us. God gives us the tools and wisdom to enrich our lives. Instead of always asking the Lord for more things, I need to use the wisdom and knowledge he has shown me to find happiness with what I already have and learn to stand on my own two feet more, strengthened by his love.

**Dear Lord, thank you for always loving me, even when I do not deserve it, and thank you for giving me the wisdom and knowledge to enrich myself with what I already have been given and not always looking to you for more material things. Amen.**

Merna Mobley

*I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.*  
(v 4) NIV

When I first read this passage, it seemed as if David was paying lip service to God. Sort of like over-complimenting the boss to get something in exchange. But I did a little research and discovered some interesting things.

The passage notes say that David was traveling through the wilderness when he wrote this psalm and he was not in the safe comfort of his palace. The side notes in my Bible point to 2 Samuel and states that David arrived at the Jordon weary because Shimei, a representative of the family of Saul, cursed and threw stones at David and his entourage during the journey. And while members of David's entourage wanted to kill Shimei, David responded that if it was God's will to be cursed by Shimei, then so be it.

So although Shimei was making David's life miserable, David saw it as an opportunity to praise the Lord. How often in our own lives have we focused on being miserable rather than taking the opportunity to praise and thank God? I recognize that giving God the glory sounds difficult when we are having a bad day. It's easier to kick and pout like a child. But maybe by taking a moment to recognize that God provides for us on a constant basis, the difficult times may not seem so difficult.

**Dear Lord, may I lift my praise to you at all times. Remind me that you are there even when my life seems difficult. Amen.**

Allen Vaughn

*If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (vv 12-13) NLT*

There are times in our lives when we feel everything is going great. We're in control, and we are "standing strong." In this passage Paul reminds me to be careful, because the rug may be pulled out from under me and I will experience temptation. Paul reminds me how incredibly weak I am, and how much I need God.

We all may want to turn to something that we know isn't good for us. We all have temptations of differing degrees and levels, and some of us have addictions.

But the good news, the best news is that God is faithful! God will show us a way out so we will not succumb to temptation. We just have to ask him. You may feel that God is not with you, but he is. We are his beloved children. During these times, we need to pray, pray, and pray some more!

**Loving Father, thank you for not allowing temptations to be more than I can bear and for helping me to endure them. Amen.**

Denise Azbill

*The Lord says, "I will make you wise and show you where to go. I will guide you and watch over you. So don't be like a horse or donkey, that doesn't understand. They must be led with bits and reins, or they will not come near you." (vs. 8-9) NCV*

Psalm 32 is the Confession and Forgiveness Psalm. The author, King David, was no stranger to sin, but the Bible calls him "*a man after God's own heart.*" When he sinned, which was frequently, he confessed those sins to God, and God forgave him. David is the prototypical repentant sinner and a model for the modern Christian. However, I wanted to focus on these humorous couple of verses concerning God's instruction.

It is easy to view consequences of sin as God's punishment on the sinner. The truth is that the consequences are very likely the whole reason for God's Law in the first place. He didn't just create a bunch of arbitrary "*Thou shalt not's*" and then punish the people who couldn't live up to them. The Ten Commandments could justifiably be termed the Ten Suggestions for a Fulfilling Life. The purpose of instruction is to spare us trouble in this life. In these verses, God implores the listener to use reason and wisdom to walk in God's way. A human being can follow a path freely, but an animal may have to be pulled or whipped to go the right way. When we inevitably sin, God will hear our confession and forgive us. However, we will not be absolved of the natural consequences. In many cases, we will just have to endure the instruction and move on, hopefully not repeating the same mistake. This all points to God's love. God will keep us on the path to him, even if it takes a bridle.

**Lord God, I confess I am a sinner. Thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you also for your instruction, painful though it may sometimes be, keeping me on the path to peace and fulfillment, both in this life and the life to come. Amen.**

*No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did. Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" (vv 5-9) NRSV*

This passage gives me hope every day. The gardener stood up for the fig tree that did not produce fruit after he was told to cut it down. Basically, the gardener was told that the tree was useless; it's taking too long to produce. This reminds me of just how long it took me to come to Jesus my Savior, and "produce fruit."

I "repented" when I was around 30 years old. I really needed Jesus. I couldn't live without him. When I repented I was in so much pain, all I could do was hug myself and cry out "Jesus, please forgive me. It was *me* who hurt you. This pain inside, if it's *anything* like any of the pain you felt when you died for me for, *please*, forgive me and hold me tight." The tears soaked my face and clothes as I fell into a deep sleep, not even knowing if I would awaken. The next morning when I opened my eyes, it was as if someone had washed me inside with fresh air and water. The freshest most wonderful life lay ahead.

It is many years later and there are still days I come to Jesus praying, "forgive me, *again*"...and each time I am forgiven.

If God had allowed me to be "cut down" before I repented, I never would have had the chance to live, to love, to give, to care....one day at a time...and produce fruit for my God.

**Dear God, help me to always remember that Jesus died so I could live today, tomorrow and always with your grace, forgiveness, and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

Cory Schaeftges

*But Christ has been raised to Life! And he makes us certain that others will also be raised to life. Just as we will die because of Adam, we will be raised to life because of Christ. (vv 20-21) CEV*

Prior to the death of Jesus, there were those in the Christian community who believed the dead would not be raised. Although Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead, he was the first to never die again. We know that at some time in our lives we will face death, unless Jesus returns in our lifetime.

As Christians we would have no hope of life after death had it not been Jesus' resurrection from the grave. We have the assurance that because Jesus died, we might have eternal life and be with God in his Kingdom.

What an assurance this gives us. This reminds me of a song I know which goes like this: "Blessed assurance Jesus is mine O' what a foretaste of glory divine..." During this season of Lent, let us thank God for his unspeakable gift of Jesus.

**Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross that we might have eternal life and spend eternity with you. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.**

Mary West

*I love the Lord for he heard my voice, he heard me cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. (vv 1-2) NIV*

I grew up in an unchurched Christian home. My mother was raised (but no longer practiced) Christian Science. My father was a non-practicing Lutheran. My mother did read to us regularly from the Bible, as was her faith's practice. There were also a few years where my brother and I were dropped off at a Methodist Church for Sunday School, and one year we attended church as a family, with my cousin's family. (Uncle Jim, my father's brother, eventually became a pastor.) I did have faith, but I didn't have "community."

As happens with many in their 20's, I didn't feel a need to be close to God. As I entered my 30's, with the turmoil that comes with life, I felt something missing from my life. As I was talking with a close friend of mine, who was an active Christian, he asked me if I wanted God in my life. After much thought and discussion, I finally answered yes. My friend (who became a pastor in his 50's) laid his hands on my shoulders and asked me, "Bryan, do you want Jesus in your life?" As I answered yes, I could feel the Holy Spirit enter through his hands and fill my entire being.

I started going to church the next Sunday, and was baptized a few months later.

**Lord, I thank you that you listened as I asked for you to enter my life. I thank you even more that you answered so loudly, that I could not be mistaken as to who was answering. For the future, I pray that I continue to recognize your answers to my prayers, be it what I want to hear, or not. Amen.**

Bryan Petersen

*Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. (v 1) NIV*

God sent his son to this earth to show again how people should treat one another and to whom they should pray and put their trust. Although Jesus was on the earth for such a short time, he taught the people of his time how they should live their lives as he foretold what was to happen to him. Jesus was a custodian of God's word and a light to the Gentiles. He was to fulfill that mission on earth. He trained his disciples to continue after him because he knew he didn't have the time to do it himself.

I think that is also what God wants us to be doing. Maybe not like they did after the resurrection, but by giving justice to the poor and to those who are unable to help themselves and to spread God's word to our neighbor next door or across the street or to someone we are visiting with at the airport or in a restaurant. We are to continue Christ's work on earth that he was unable to do but which he taught us how to do.

As a church, we help support various groups involved with correcting social ills (such as Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth, the Millers, and LSSN, etc.), helping others, and spreading God's word. As individuals, we invite our neighbors to share in our worship. Praise God for those who are helping others.

**Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you for sending your Son to teach us and to guide us and to take the burden of sin from us when we fall short. Help us to continue Christ's mission on earth to be a light to those in darkness and to give justice to those in need. In the name of the Holy One we pray. Amen.**

Dean Chapman

*Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new. God has done it all! (vv 17-18a) CEV*

I'd been using the same old washrags and towels for years and years. They still worked so why get new ones? Finally I did buy new ones and I could not wait to wash my face or take a shower. They are so soft and fresh. Out with the old, in with the new.

Recently, it rained. When I walked out of the door, the air smelled so clean and fresh. Then, as I sat in my office and looked outside, I saw that the solar panels were clean and no longer dusty. I love clean, fresh, new things (especially the rain).

God sent Jesus Christ for us, so that we may be clean, fresh, and new. Everyday is a new beginning. We confess and are forgiven our past mistakes and faults, our old ways, from 10 years ago or just yesterday. How lucky we Christians are to wake up every morning with a new beginning.

Why hang on to the old? Why dwell in the past? Get up, move on, today is a new day, a bright, new, clean beginning! Live everyday like it's a new start. Christ was sent to us, giving us forgiveness and peace. Let's spread that word. It's our duty to share this good news with others.

**Good and Gracious God, thank you for Jesus Christ, for our forgiveness and new beginnings. Thank you for the closeness we have to you through Jesus. Amen.**

Loretta Block

*Bring rains to our drought stricken lives...So those who went out with heavy hearts will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing. (vv 4b, 6) MSG*

I recall a time, recently, when our family had hit rock bottom. The car had been repossessed; the electricity had been shut off. We were out of options. No money, no credit. There was nothing that we could do for ourselves. I was numb to the blows that had hit us. I had given up on anything good happening to us. It had gotten to the point that instead of praying to God, I was blaming him for our problems. My thoughts were that if God had given up on us, I was giving up on God. I sat at home and stared sightlessly at the wall. The phone rang and I picked it up, fearing it would be yet more bad news. My wife told me that an anonymous donor had agreed to lend us the money to get the car back and turn the power back on. I felt a lifting of weight such as I had never experienced in my life. I said "O thank you God," and I realized the truth of that statement. God had saved us.

I spent the balance of that day in contemplation of the many blessings God had showered on us. I had taken many of those blessings for granted, thinking it was my due. In the time since those days, I have come to realize that God was always there with me, waiting for me to be receptive to his loving presence in my life. I had become so hardened by the storms of life that I had shut him out. As I stood singing in the sanctuary the next Sunday I thought about the lyrics of "Amazing Grace" and how God had saved a wretch like me. I realized that I needed to keep room in my heart for God when things were going good and when they were going bad. God's love transcends our earthly problems through the grace that ensures our eternal life. That is the greatest blessing of all.

**Dear God, help me to remember that you are with me in both good times and bad. Help me to keep a hymn of praise within my heart at all times and to keep my heart open to you. Amen.**

*And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion... (v 20) NKJV*

There is a song that says, "You don't know what you got 'til it's gone!" The young son, after much hardship, was reminded that he had lost the roof over his head, the food for his belly, to say nothing of the love of his family (or so he thought!) He was willing to return to his father as a servant, hoping that he would be treated as well as they were treated.

What met him was a loving, compassionate father, who prepared a great welcome; because his son "*was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*" (v 24).

In this reaction to the younger son, the father set an example for the older one as well. He demonstrated caring concern, compassion and forgiveness, and wisdom—a role model for earthly fathers who are blessed with the gift and responsibility of raising children to be honorable and godly men and women. This can be a struggle at times, in a world where young people are expected to make difficult choices, while establishing their own identity and independence. A parent needs to offer guidance and support, and be willing to allow for mistakes and experiences that will encourage growth, while being there to catch the youth should they fall. I believe this task requires God's hand, Jesus' example, and much prayer!

**Heavenly Father, you have given us the task of raising our children to know and honor you. Help us be examples of mercy and grace. Through your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.**

Sandy Hughes

*Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. (v 6) NIV*

One day, when I was 5 or 6 years old, my family and I went on a trip to the beach. The beach we went to was "Coney Island." Coney Island is a beach located in New York. Coney Island is also a very fun amusement park. We all packed our towels, clothes, and food. We took a train to get to New York. There were quite a few people on the train. I remember that I took a little nap while we were on the train.

When we arrived at the beach, we found a spot on the sand. I remember the sand being really hot between my toes. I was afraid to get in the ocean because I thought I was going to get eaten by sharks. I did get my feet wet, and the water was extremely salty. I kind of choked on the water when it splashed in my face quite a few times. I ran back to my mom when the water splashed in my face and sat and ate onion ring chips. I made a few sand castles and I buried my sister in the sand. It was a great day.

When it was time to leave the beach, my mom noticed one of my sisters was missing. We looked all over the beach. And I remember Amyyah and I told my mom that the sharks ate her. My mom panicked and told us to stop saying that. The people at the beach announced that they had a child at the lifeguard station. So we ran to the lifeguard station and there was my sister. Once we found her, Amyyah went missing. We looked everywhere for her and my mom prayed we'd find her. When we found Amyyah, we discovered she went looking for her pacifier that she loved so much. My mom was relieved that she had found both girls!

**Dear Lord, I just want to thank you again for everything that you've done in my life for the past 15 years and I hope you continue to bring wonderful things in my life. Amen.**

K'Lyra Bell

*They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart! Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the evildoers lie prostrate; they are thrust down, unable to rise. (vv 8-11) NRSV*

Throughout this psalm the author tells me not to look into myself to see where my path leads, but to look to God, for only his light shall guide me with mercy, kindness and love. If you think of the person writing this psalm (David) and how God speaks to us through his words at that point in time, it would relate to all of us, comparing life to a continuous river that flows with delight, a never ending feeling of love and satisfaction.

David had felt this rush of electricity of God's love that flowed through him. Of course, the only thing he could compare it to at the time were the rivers of life themselves. We would think of it as an electric current of pure bliss and happiness. It shows me that God wants us to ask him for help. He is our Father and we should set our pride aside for him. To be arrogant is also to have ignorance. God is all righteous and the only one who can pass judgment, so it would make sense to ask God for guidance. He speaks to us in many ways. All we have to do is open our eyes, heart, mind, and soul to God's light and then we shall see.

**Dear God, I thank you for your Word and your steadfast love! Grant me open eyes, heart and mind to see your goodness. Amen.**

Justin Heinrich

**Tuesday March 12**

**Hebrews 9:11-15**

*[Christ] entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. (v 12) NRSV*

The author of the book of Hebrews assures us of the superiority of the new covenant established by God through Christ.

As part of the old covenant, one day each year (The Day of Atonement) Israel's High Priest was to enter into that part of the tabernacle or Temple that was otherwise never entered by humans. It was considered the place of God's holy presence. But on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest served as a mediator between people and God by entering that holiest place and sprinkling the blood of sacrificial goats and calves on the "Mercy Seat" as a way of cleansing the Israelites from their ceremonial defilement. Why blood? References like Lev. 17:11 and Deut. 12:23 tell us that offering blood was offering life!

But in Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, he entered into the presence of the Father with his own blood, poured out on the cross for me and for you. This was done once for all; it doesn't need to be repeated each year. And in this new covenant, Christ has obtained an eternal redemption! Once purchased by Christ's offering of his own life, we are set free from slavery to sin once and for all!

How easily we forget that Jesus has paid the whole price once and for all! How easily we think we have to behave our way into God's good favor! I conclude with this wonderful quote from Lutheran scholar Warren Quanbeck: "In the cross God provided the sacrifice and showed what sacrifice really means. It is not a human attempt to placate a threatening deity but God's provision of a means by which rebellious and runaway children may be restored to the father's house."

**Dear Heavenly Father, too often I am a rebellious and runaway child. Thank you for calling out to me—through Jesus, through your proclaimed word, and through your written word—so that I may be restored into your house and family of grace. May my life be an offering in your service. I pray in the name of our mediator and High Priest—Jesus. Amen.**

Pastor Paul Hansen

*...he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor...(v 3) NIV*

For many of us—certainly for me—the word servant has always had a negative connotation, such as being a maid. I am reminded about a day of frustration as I struggled to raise a 5-year-old boy with a husband who did not believe in doing “women’s work.” I was going to university for my nursing degree, tutoring, and working 32-40 hours a week at LAC-USC hospital. I needed help and voiced that thought as “we need a maid.” Poor Joshua unwisely said, “No, we don’t. We already have one.” My head whipped around to face him where he was making yet another mess for me to clean up and said, “And who would that be?” “You are Mommy,” he innocently stated the obvious. (Yes, he is still alive and well today).

None of us wants to be the maid, but that isn’t what God has asked us to be. God calls us to be a servant and show his love through service to others. Service such as a smile, kind word, prayer, or simply being there to lean on. God calls us to serve with love so that others may know of his love.

**Dear Lord, please make me a willing servant and let your love shine forth through me. Amen.**

Alison Rodriguez

*Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also...For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life...Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*  
(vv 9, 13, 16) NRSV

There are so many situations in my life that are in conflict with who I am. It happens every day. I see, hear, or I am told something that doesn't seem right to me. Beliefs I have are in conflict with the church and within me. There are times when I do something and then I realize it wasn't quite right and I ask forgiveness. There are times when a situation arises that I need to walk away from, and people around me seem confused when I do.

Things happen in life. I have the ability, through God's grace, to stand strong in my belief. It is sometimes difficult for me and I do not always make the right choice. People around me may condemn me for what I know to be right and those are the times when it is hard for me to stand up for my convictions. My strength in God has grown as I returned to church and began to attend church, FaithWalk, and Bible studies regularly.

I realize more and more that God is always with me and my life is better and happier when I do what is right. If someone makes the decision not to be around me then that is their decision. I pray God continues to make me a better person and the light of God's grace shines around me so that in the future those people will want to be around me and see my peace.

My saving grace is that I know God is with me always and forgiveness and grace are never far away.

**Dear God, thank you for always standing with me in times of conflict. Please help me to be stronger in faith when those times arise and do what is right. Amen.**

Susan Stone

*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (vv 12-14) NASV*

Good musicians practice a lot. Some of the more difficult pieces of music can take months to prepare. I remember that during my college days I studied one of Johann Sebastian Bach's trio sonatas for organ. It required six months of daily practice to perfect. The goal was to perform it flawlessly and with feeling, to recreate the piece in its original beauty of sound. The performance went well enough, but it still was not perfect.

We've all heard the phrase, "Practice makes perfect." According to [phrases.org](http://phrases.org), it's actually an old proverb from the sixteenth century which first appeared in eighteenth century America in the writings of John Adams. The proverb applies to any practice, not only musical practice, and perhaps could apply to our spiritual practices as well.

But then we need to come to terms with what Paul is writing about when he speaks of perfection. I believe we are made perfect through the blood of Jesus, through his death and resurrection and through the faith he gives us to believe that he truly is God.

I heard someone recently say, "The goal is to be alive in Christ." Jesus brings us eternal life, so I want my spiritual practicing to be focused on that goal. I want to let go of that which holds me back from being "alive in Christ." I want to reach forward to what lies ahead through the spiritual practices of worship, prayer, Bible study, and loving my neighbor.

Just like my organ piece was never perfect, I will never achieve perfection on my own in this life. But, with my eyes and practice on the "prize of the upward call," I can be assured of a place in heaven. We are made perfect through the love of Jesus.

**Dear Lord and Savior, thank you for showing me the way to eternal life by your death and resurrection. Thank you for making me whole through your love. Help me to always reach forward to what lies ahead. Amen.**

Tim Beasley

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*  
(vv 18-19) NSRV

This passage comes at a time when the people of God are in the process of re-establishing their identities as a “free people.” They have spent seventy years in servitude and slavery. They are now told to forget what was before, and look forward to what God is and will be providing for them.

It wasn't that long ago that I was chained to the past. I fell deeply into the mire of the “could have, would have, should have” way of thinking. I struggled daily to see the dawning day as something other than bleak. I had lost my purpose in life. I needed to change my way of thinking. It was then that I realized that by focusing on the past, I was keeping myself from experiencing the love that was all around me.

I began to re-dedicate my life to look forward in order to see God's glorious light. God knows my needs better than I do. God alone is our future.

**Gracious God, help me to remember to forget. Let me always move forward in your glorious light. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.**

Terri Veach-Geiger

*You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.*

(v 8) NIV

Cost or value? “I’ll pray after I check my email.” “I’ll exercise after I do the laundry.” “I’ll put my credit cards away after I take advantage of my 30% off coupon.”

Who among us has not rationalized our use of either time or money with one of these plausible sounding excuses? These trade-offs, at one level, make perfect sense. Certainly if your business requires you to respond to questions and issues via email it’s wise to handle them. Likewise the pressing daily chores that **MUST** be done can crowd out the intention to do important but not urgent things like exercise. And who among us has not succumbed to the lure of a great **bargain** offered by a savvy retailer because the deal is too good to pass up?

Judas fell prey to similar self-deceit (justifying his own dishonesty) by protesting the tremendous wastefulness of Mary’s lavish anointment of Jesus’ feet. On the surface it made sense not to waste such costly perfume.

But Jesus makes a powerful distinction that I want to remember: **there is a huge difference between price and value.** Judas knew the price of everything but the value of nothing. Likewise, it’s a temptation for us to fixate on the cost of something without considering its value in the big picture. The time we “spend” in prayer with the Lord may not make sense on the world’s scale of value. It seems like a waste considering how much we all have to do! But in terms of eternal value and daily peace, we can make no wiser investment.

**Dear wise and gracious God, please forgive my human tendency to trade the eternal for the temporal; to be deceived in thinking that cost equals value. Guide me in making wise choices about how to invest the time, resources, talents, and gifts you give me. Amen.**

Betty Mahalik

*Be to me a rock of refuge, to which I may continually come; you have given the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.*

(v 3) ESV

These days, there are many hardships facing people. It can be easy to feel isolated, hopeless, and helpless. With the economy in crisis, so many people in dire financial circumstances, the endless fighting around the globe, people going hungry, medical costs skyrocketing, who hasn't been touched by one or more of these problems? When faced with all this suffering it can seem easier to just give up.

When I'm feeling like this I'm tempted to withdraw from everything, including God. But this is just when I need God the most. God wants to hear my problems and worries in addition to my thanks and praise. God not only expects but desires to be leaned on when the concerns of life seem too much to bear. God wants to give us all the strength to bear whatever troubles cross our paths. He wants to be turned to when we think we have nothing left.

**Dear Lord, in my dark hours, please help me to realize that I am not alone. You are always with me, fighting for me, uplifting me. Help me never to forget that all-important truth. Amen.**

Heather Ambos

**Tuesday, March 19**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

*It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.*

(v 30) NIV

I love reading Scripture. I didn't always love it because I didn't understand most of it, or how it applied to my life. But one day the switch turned on and I saw the Bible as one big storybook about God, God's people, and God's great plan of salvation. I had glimpses of how stories in the Bible connected to my story. I became fascinated by Scripture and how the stories in the Old and New Testament were connected. I also discovered that there are some passages in Scripture where understanding, for me, doesn't come quickly. This passage, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, is one of them. I just don't get it! So I did a little research and I feel like I need to continue my study of this passage in order to fully understand the meaning of this passage.

Just as there are Scriptures I don't understand, there is much about faith, or God's plan that make me realize that I just don't understand God's ways. I mean if you were God, would you have thought to climb down off your throne and enter the human experience as a baby? Would you have thought to choose a criminal's death, crucifixion, for yourself in order to bring about salvation for mankind? Would you choose fishermen and tax collectors to be your closest friends and then mentor them to take over the family business when you were gone? I wouldn't.

And then I think about *The Story* and how before time began, God had a plan and that God used people just like me, and you, throughout history to accomplish God's great plan. I don't usually understand God's plan—unless it is in hindsight. But I know that I don't have to have it all figured out. I just trust the one who does. I am grateful that God had a plan for me and for you to be in *Christ Jesus, who has become for all of us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.*

**Holy God, forgive me for the times I think I know best, when I put my own personal desire before the desires of your heart. Open my heart and my eyes so that I may see your wisdom through Jesus Christ, my redeemer and Lord. Amen.**

Devra Betts

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?* (v 1) NIV

Psalm 22 is one of the most powerful chapters in the entire Bible. Not only does it contain words that Jesus spoke on the cross, but the psalmist, David, prophetically declares the Lord's deity in stunning detail. Written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, David foretells the crucifixion.

Some of the most powerful passages come in verses 16 and 18: *"...a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet,"* (v 16 b). *"They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing,"* (v 18).

Is there any doubt God is in control and that he has a master plan for this people? Through the Holy Spirit speaking to David's heart, the Lord revealed what Jesus had to endure, long before it happened and long before the Romans adopted the terrifying act of crucifixion. Thankfully Psalm 22 doesn't end there.

Jesus' suffering was the path to our salvation. In a similar way, Psalm 22 goes from a message of despair to one of hope and promise. In writing about the person suffering in these verses, called *"the afflicted one,"* the psalmist says God *"has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help"* (v 24 b). David's cry of anguish turns to a song of praise. The same holds true for us today. Even though we may feel distant from the Lord at times, he is never really far away and always willing to help us.

Perhaps the best news comes at the end of Psalm 22: *"They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it"* (v 31). This means hope for every generation and for all times. Praise God!

**Dear Lord, thank you for revealing yourself to us through your Holy Scripture. Please don't let our hearts feel cut off from you, and always remind us you are as close as our breath and always ready to help us. Amen.**

David Riggelman

*This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. (v 11) NIV*

All verses of this Scripture are packed full of directions from God. They cover changing the Jewish religious calendar for posterity to starting with Nisan, March–April and ending with Adar, February-March, how to choose and cook the lambs and goats for sacrifice, disposal, survival, how to dress, etc. What a plethora of directions!

Let's choose to take a bird's-eye view of how to dress. Cloaks were to be tucked into belts, sandals on feet, and staff in hand. In other words—be ready! We're being delivered from the Egyptian empire so you'd better be prepared for the journey of a lifetime. Today we would say, "Put your jeans on, get your hiking boots, and don't forget a walking stick."

We can't take the walk with Moses today, but we can embark on our personal lifetime journey with Christ. Christ was the sacrificial lamb, without defect, who died on behalf of each of us to atone for our sins. Believing in God is the starting line toward a new life that can be both wonderful and difficult at the same time. God has a journey for each of us. Tuck in your cloak of devotion, don your sandals of determination, and pick up your staff of grace. Be ready! God's calling!

The road to salvation is often strewn with rocks and it is sometimes narrow and dangerously curved, but is always the most rewarding and wondrous of all roads to travel. HEAR GOD CALLING? IT'S TIME TO ANSWER!

**Dear Lord, we hear you calling! Clothed with the strength of the Holy Spirit and supported by your gift of grace, we are ready for our journey to the cross. Grant us the strength, insight, and steadfast determination to faithfully reach our goal. Amen.**

Norma Kesling

*He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me.*  
(vv 4b-5, 9a) NIV

The third of the Servant Songs predicts Jesus' coming long before his birth. The Messiah is shown to be a teacher and follower of God's commandments despite the sorrow, grief, torment, and pain he will experience. Jesus is steadfast in his duty and listens to God his Father.

As Christians, we are charged to follow Christ's example. We are to listen, be faithful servants and follow the path God has chosen for us. It is difficult. It is much simpler to not listen, to go our own way and to do what we want.

Recently after asking God for guidance in my work life, I was compelled to change my job. I literally woke up in the middle of the night and could not sleep or rest until I had answered an employment ad. It is not what I imagined and not even what I had asked for. I did not want to leave my current job or my work family and friends. My husband was questioning what I was doing—and I was perplexed too! A career change is NOT what I had planned! But, I was being called to alter my path in an unexpected and surprising way. I decided to follow this new and challenging work even though I could have stayed with the comfortable and old. Although the change was mostly scary and sad, now I am happy to have made this difficult decision. I did not (and do not) understand the why; but God has told me to trust him and his plan for me.

God is there for all of us. God answers our prayer. We only need to ask and then listen—even if it is something we don't want to hear. God will guide us, help us, and give us his grace. Jesus is our example and comfort.

**Dear Father in heaven, help me hear you, to follow your way and help me not dismiss your bidding. I know you are my support in all things. I am grateful for my salvation through the suffering and death and resurrection of your only Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Paula Perez

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!*  
(vv 5-8) NIV

I have learned to be totally dependent on God. Every breath I take is a gift from him! And I strive daily for an attitude *the same as that of Christ Jesus*.

As I strive to take on the attitude of Christ, I know that I cannot do it alone. In my job as a mailman, I say my prayers—I talk to God on the way to my first delivery. I thank God for being with me, for giving me life and for opportunities to serve with a Christ-like attitude.

As I go about my day delivering mail, many times I am able to be of service to complete strangers. I have been blessed by the opportunity to give my lunch away, give directions, offer encouragement, give money to those in need and even give up a break to change a tire. I do not say this to toot my own horn. I prefer to serve in the background. I say this in gratitude to God for allowing me to be the hands and feet of Christ.

My simple acts of service do not compare to the sacrifice Jesus made on my behalf.

**Thank you Lord for giving me life and help me remember that you indeed are in charge of all things. You are the source of all goodness—all glory to you! Amen.**

Ray Betts

*But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!* (vv 21-22) NRSV

In the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, we find out that Judas, one of his disciples, turned Jesus over to the authorities. It is difficult to comprehend that someone could betray his teacher, someone he has followed for years. Furthermore, it is strange that Jesus was able to predict his own death and that he did not do anything to try and stop it. I know that I certainly would, wouldn't you?

But Jesus knew that only through his own death could the world be saved. Even though Judas made Jesus' death possible, Judas could later be saved because of that same act. It is a little mind-boggling. What would happen if Judas had turned down the money and stood by his teacher? Would Jesus never have been killed? Or would Satan, who had entered into Judas, have found another way?

The really odd thing is that the Bible indicates that the Devil was at work in setting up Jesus' death. But the early prophets knew this would happen and it was God who made the promise to his people. So who really won? It sort of brings me back to the question, "Why do bad things happen?" Sometimes we comfort people by saying, "It was meant to be," or "God must have something else planned." While I know all that is true, I wonder if some bad things happen because bad things just need to happen sometimes. The Devil wins some battles, but God always finds a way to turn it around.

God gave his only Son, not only to save the world through his teaching, but through his death and resurrection. The Devil probably walked away thinking that he beat God, but God in turn found a way to make his Son's death a good thing for the world. In the end, God always wins!

**Dear God, thank you for sacrificing your Son to save me. I am reminded every Sunday of this sacrifice through the communion of bread and wine. Help me to stay focused on you, even when the Devil seems to be winning. Amen.**

Karen Dahlke

*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. "Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ...And I, when I am lifted up<sup>[a]</sup> from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (vv 27-28, 32) NIV*

Jesus knew the end of his time on Earth was coming soon. This was not a coincidence. It was meant to happen. Jesus knew even though he would die a horrible death, all would be good in the end. Because of Jesus' sacrifice and love for us, future generations would be drawn to him and they would know how much God truly loves them.

I think some of the experiences God has helped me through were meant to happen. Through my experiences, I can help others with their problems and let them know that even though it looks hopeless, God will be there to help, if we just ask him. I am able to glorify God by letting others know how much I trust and love God. We are God's children and God loves us very much and wants the best for us. I am a big believer in prayer, and I share with people that God is my best friend. I encourage them in their faith. No matter what their struggles might be, in the end all will be good.

It is so cool to have a best friend who knows all my thoughts, all my mistakes and all the things I have said that were not nice, yet Jesus still loves me for me and will stay by my side. Jesus will always forgive me, no grudges held. Jesus died to make this relationship possible.

**Heavenly Father, I thank you for being my best friend and always loving and forgiving me. I also thank you for the thorns in my life because in the end, it all works out for good. Please help me to continue to glorify you and to share your words with others so they will have faith to know that all will be good. I love you, Father. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.**

Kim Heinrich

**Tuesday, March 26**

**John 13:21-32**

*After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."...As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. ...When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him." (vv 21, 27, 31) NIV*

I always enjoy writing these devotionals; however, this time my first reaction was different. After I read the verses, I thought to myself, "Ah, I don't want to do this one!" In this passage, Jesus reveals at the Last Supper that Judas will betray him. Satan passes into Judas and Jesus tells him to do what he is going to do quickly. This chain of events leads to Jesus suffering death on the cross for our sins and the promise of ever-lasting life. A few years ago, I watched *The Passion of Christ* once and only once. After I saw it, I cried and felt a deep ache inside. What happens to Jesus is horrendous and almost unbearable to think about, much less watch. Afterwards, I began to think about why Jesus made this sacrifice for humankind. I also began to question if I was worthy. I feel like I am a good person and a good Christian. But there is no doubt that at times I do make bad choices, could be more involved in my church and faith, and be a better Christian overall.

After much thought, what I have come to realize is that I am not perfect nor will I ever be. From time to time, I will make poor choices and can always do a little better in many aspects of my life. Jesus made this sacrifice because he loves me no matter what. Jesus' strength gives me the desire to believe in him with all my heart, resist Satan, and try to make the best choices possible. It also gives me the strength to realize I will make mistakes, I should accept it, make things right, and move on. In all of Jesus' glory, we get to live in his shining light, receive God's forgiveness, and have eternal life. Now that really gives me something to cry about. Tears of joy that is!

**Dear Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice and your pain and suffering. Thank you for your love and the promise of eternal life. You help me strive to be a better person and to love everyone around me like you have loved me. Please continue to guide me and strengthen me as I move forward in your glory. Amen.**

Jennifer Klimek

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..., (vv 1-2) NKJV*

Looking unto Jesus! As Christians we are told that nothing that we experience here on earth must be allowed to stand in the way of keeping our focus on Jesus. This includes all life throws at us, good or bad, no exceptions.

Often life does seem like a race, a race which seems to go faster every year leaving us feeling, at best, so far behind we think it is impossible to catch up. Our good intentions of spending more time getting to know Jesus better so that we have a clear vision of the course of the race he wants us to run invariably seem to be interrupted. However, many times, we know we allow ourselves to get distracted, sidetracked, or making things of this world our priority.

After having read this passage several times, I realized how Jesus' behavior, both when he was younger and then later in his ministry, was focused solely on accomplishing his mission here on earth. Remember, Jesus was only twelve when he stayed behind at the temple and was surprised his mother Mary would chastise him when he expected she would have known he was doing his Father's work. Later on, when one of his disciples wanted to stay behind and bury his father, Jesus commanded the man to follow him and told him to let the dead bury the dead. Jesus allowed no circumstance and no one to divert his focus.

As Jesus' followers, we are called to keep our focus on him and run the race Jesus wants us to run. Only by getting to know him better will we know which course for our life's race each of us was meant to follow. For some of us this may mean we will have to reorganize priorities, perhaps make some hard decisions or choices or even reject those worldly things which cause us personally to lose sight of or have blurred our view of Jesus. However, we also know it is never too late. The race for each of us was planned long before we were born. Even if we are way off our course, Jesus is waiting to get us back on track so that we can run the race we were meant to run. However, we have to take that first step which is to begin looking unto Jesus with everything we do.

**Dear Father, we do not want the things in this world to prevent us from having a clear vision of you and the race you have planned for us. We know that focusing on you will bring us far more joy and peace than anything this world has to offer. We ask your forgiveness for putting our worldly thoughts and desires ahead of you and the great plan you have intended for each of us. We want to go through the rest of our lives looking at this world only through you, Jesus. Amen.**

Marsha Stephenson

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "Then Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (vv 6-9) NIV*

Jesus was coming to the end of his earthly, human life. He was demonstrating two supreme lessons to his disciples in the act of washing their feet. To be Jesus' disciple, one must be willing to humble oneself as a servant and above all, love one's fellow man.

Good ol' Peter didn't seem to be getting it though. Was he embarrassed thinking Jesus was demeaning himself? Did he still have a lack of faith in Jesus and his teachings? Who knows! But I think Peter was trying desperately to control the situation.

I really relate to Peter. I like to be in control. At foot washings, I'd rather be the one washing or, more likely, not participating at all. When things are going wrong in my life, I often forget to turn to God and try to go it alone.

Jesus knows this about us. He told Peter that Peter would betray him. Peter was shocked that Jesus could think this of him, but later that night he did just that, not even realizing he was betraying Jesus until that cock crowed.

Isn't it amazing though, that with Jesus' love and forgiveness, Peter later became "the rock" on which Jesus built his church? Peter obviously finally "got it."

It's such a comfort to me that I can deny Jesus and try to control my life without him and he still always watches over me, forgives me, and most of all loves me more than I can ever comprehend.

**God of love, thank you for loving me even in the times I doubt and even forget that you are love. Amen.**

Barbara Butler



*After he [Pilate] had said this, he went out to the Jews and told them, "I find no case against him."... Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him."... From then on Pilate tried to release him [Jesus], but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." (vv 18:38b, 19:6b, 12) NIV*

Peter denied knowing Jesus three times on the night of Jesus' arrest. Three times in this Scripture reading, Pilate wanted to release Jesus because he didn't think Jesus was guilty of any wrongdoing. Joseph of Arimathea was a "secret disciple" of Jesus. Why did these men act contrary to the truth?

If the guards or slaves in the courtyard of the high priest found out that Peter was a follower of Jesus, they might tell the priests. Peter could be arrested, too. Pilate told the Jews several times that he could "*find no case against him [Jesus]*," and tried to release Jesus. But Pilate's position might be threatened by the Jews twisting words to mean that Jesus wanted to overthrow the emperor. Scripture says that Joseph of Arimathea kept his relationship with Jesus a secret "*because of his fear of the Jews.*"

I have the same problem. Fear. What would I have done if I were in the same situation as these men? Probing for an answer makes me uncomfortable. If I really believed that my life or my livelihood was at stake, would I be willing to pay that price for Jesus? While such occasions haven't come up for me, that doesn't stop me from thinking about lesser consequences.

In fact, I often invent or exaggerate my fears rather than live in the truth of God's promises. Jesus' death and resurrection secured my future. Only by refocusing my attention on that fact can I be a bold messenger, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ in a world where fear can be given too much influence.

**Loving Jesus, thank you for going to the cross to give me a future in heaven for all eternity. May the Holy Spirit continue to grow my courage so I live boldly in God's promises. Amen.**

*Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (v 8) TNIV*

Simon Peter was “the other disciple;” the same Simon Peter who denied Jesus just a few days earlier. Despite this, he was still a leader among the apostles, beloved by Jesus. When Peter entered the tomb, he witnessed the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head lying undisturbed in its place. Peter believed in the Messiah's resurrection, not yet understanding that from Scripture, that Jesus would rise from the dead according to the Word of God.

Many times I have felt like Peter, denying Jesus by thought, word, and deed. Often the struggles of daily life end in denials: dashing in front of others get to the front of the line, not helping those in need of food and shelter and love, feeling anger towards people whose religious or political views differ from mine. Each time I put myself before others is a denial of Jesus. And yet, I still yearn to believe, just like Peter. And just like Peter, I am still loved by Jesus despite my failures and disbelief. How wondrous is God!

**Dear Lord, please help me to better follow your Word, to believe more clearly in your promises, and to better love you as you love me. Amen.**

Kathleen Cloutier



**Sunday, March 31**

**He is Risen**

**Luke 24:1-12**

*They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb, so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of the Master Jesus. They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then, out of nowhere it seemed, two men, light cascading over them, stood there. The women were awestruck and bowed down in worship. The men said, "Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here, but raised up. Remember how he told you when you were still back in Galilee that he had to be handed over to sinners, be killed on a cross, and in three days rise up?" Then they remembered Jesus' words. (vv 2-8) MSG*

The words that jumped out at me in this reading were "remember" and "the Living One". I cannot begin to imagine how the women felt when they arrived at the tomb to anoint Jesus' body and found his body gone. I think I would have felt a great sense of loss and then I would have become angry with the "people" who had taken his body.

Then the blessing of the angels' words—"Remember how he told you..." Remember—what a powerful word. The women remembered Jesus' words—he had risen to be with his Father, just as he had told them! I believe that if I had been there with these women, remembering Jesus' words would have brought me a great sense of relief and awe.

For me, Holy Week brings gut-level sadness that Jesus, the man, willingly suffered for me and for the forgiveness of my sins and I am overwhelmed by grief and Jesus' words escape me. Then I read the words, "Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery?" and I remember what Jesus said about his death and having to ascend to be with his Father.

When I remember Jesus' words about his life and death and reading the words "the Living One" my grief is transformed to gratitude. We have a living God; a God that actively blesses us with forgiveness, compassion, joy, and unconditional love. Our living God lives within each of us and is for each of us. WOW!! Our living God is the direct opposite of the "dead" gods of this world (materialism, status-seeking, money, etc.)—the "dead" god only takes from us—our active living God gives to us so we can give to others. When I remember his words, I am fueled by the power of the Living One to do God's will joyfully.

Today let's celebrate the resurrection of our Lord—our living God. How will you remember Jesus' words and express his unconditional love in the world?

**Dear Heavenly Father, may I always remember your Son's words and sacrifice for the forgiveness of my sins and joyfully share your forgiveness, compassion, joy, and unconditional love with all whom I come into contact with in my life. Thank you for a grateful heart! Amen.**

Debbie Marshall