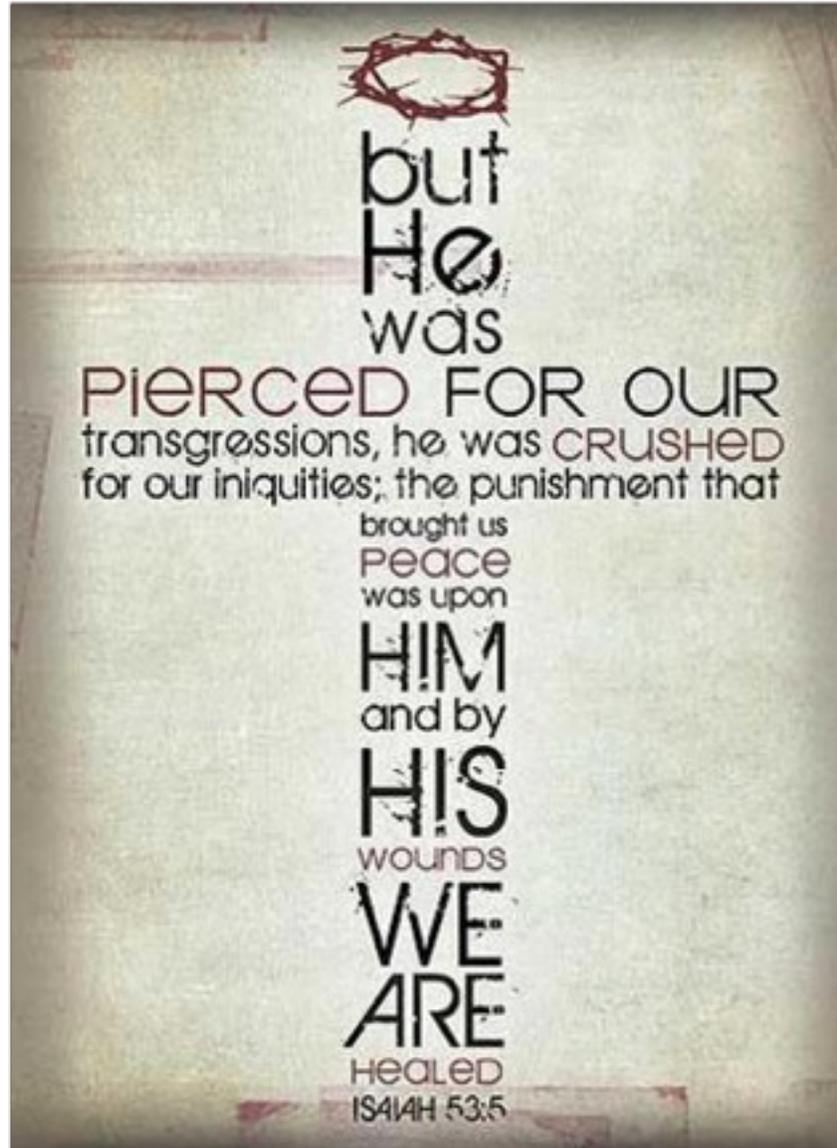


# A LENTEN JOURNEY

from Ash Wednesday to the Resurrection



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God sent Jesus into the world to accomplish redemption for God's people. In Jesus' death and resurrection, the gap between us and God has been bridged forever.

May your Lenten journey be blessed by the devotional offerings included in this booklet. These devotionals were written by the faith community of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church.

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
ERV	Easy-to-Read 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
VOICE	The Voice

**Bible Paraphrase Abbreviations:**

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

# WORSHIP SCHEDULE

## Regular Weekend Worship Services:

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

**Sunday School**                      Sunday 10:15am (ages 4 through adult)

*Childcare is available Sunday from 9am to 12:30pm (infant to 5 years old)*

## Lenten and Holy Week Worship Schedule:

**Ash Wednesday**                      February 18                      7:00pm

### Midweek Lenten Service

Wednesday	February 25	6:45pm
	March 4	6:45pm
	March 11	6:45pm
	March 18	6:45pm
	March 25	6:45pm



Come early to share in a Soup and Bread Supper from 5:45pm to 6:30pm.

**Maundy Thursday**                      April 2                      7:00pm

**Good Friday**                      April 3                      7:00pm

**Easter Vigil Service**                      April 4                      Sundown



*The Easter Vigil Party follows the Easter Vigil Service.  
Join the celebration in the Fellowship Hall!*

**Easter Celebration**                      April 5                      8:00, 9:30, 11:00am

*Youth & Family will serve breakfast from 8:30am–11am.*



*But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (v. 6) NIV*

Here is another take on verse 6: *Here's what I want you to do. Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. (MSG)*

Why two different translations? I simply couldn't separate them. The NIV translation seemed easier to understand until I found that—at the time this was written—the only interior door in the house was usually on the storeroom, dark, dank, and populated by critters. Even then privacy and quiet came at a sacrifice.

The Message more aptly describes our lives today, until you get to “*a quiet, secluded place*”. Thanks to electronics and cyber-space, all rooms have doors constantly open to the world at large. The knocks on those doors are demanding and immediate. This is where I have a huge problem—turning off! I pray to God and Savior many times each day, but it's usually enroute, during an activity, and, of course, at meals and before bed. It's not just the two of us (me and God) with no distraction. I need to take back my quiet God-time. I know that's when I strongly feel the warmth and security of his grace. He doesn't ask much, just that we be there as simply and honestly as we can manage.

His requests—simple, his rewards to us—huge!

**Dear Lord, thank you for your grace through quiet prayer and the blessings of your presence. Amen.**

Norma Kesling

*Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. “Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart” (vv. 1-2, 12) NIV*

This text is about the day of the Lord’s coming and how we as his people should prepare. I find it particularly troubling that the day of the Lord’s coming is described as a day of darkness and gloom, clouds and blackness. This stuck out to me because it shows the changing of time and perception. As a Christian today, I could never see the day of our Lord’s coming as a day to be fearful or gloomy and I would never expect it to be cloudy and dark. The world we are living in now can be dark, gloomy, cloudy and black. However, if my faith has taught me anything, it is that the Lord brings joy, happiness, and comfort. I fully expect the day of the Lord’s coming to bring about those same emotions and to wipe away the negative emotions that can be associated with our world today. That is why I love Easter so much. We celebrate with family and friends and we celebrate the risen Christ. To me, Lent and Easter both represent our patience as we await the coming of Christ. This is something to be happy about!

In verse 12, God calls us to *“return to me with all your heart”*. This really speaks to the purpose of Lent. For me, Lent is a time to reflect on what makes me human, how I can better follow Jesus, and how I can better serve God. I use Lent as a time to improve myself, a time to remember how blessed I am, and a time for me to become closer to God. I could choose to wait patiently, to weep, or to mourn, or I can use Lent as a time to work towards a better self, a better community, and a better world. I believe this is what this passage speaks about when it says *“return to me with all your heart”*.

**Dear Father, thank you for blessing me and loving me. May Lent be a time to grow spiritually, help others, and become closer with you. There is so much pain and suffering in this world; as we return to you with all our hearts, let us use our gifts to serve you and make this world a better place. Amen.**

Matt Mordini

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to you steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. (vv. 1-2) NRSV*

We are born broken. About this there can be no debate. We are from birth selfish, vain and given to sin. Nature is cruel and the fact that something's natural does not mean it's good for you.

Chase money and you'll always feel empty. You'll never have enough to fill the God-shaped hole in your soul. Worship beauty and as you age you'll die a thousand deaths before you're put in the ground. Seek power and you'll find if you achieve it you've done nothing more than paint a target on your back. You'll be locked in a contest with other like-minded individuals who lay awake at night thinking about how to knock you off your perch.

But God gives us a solution for every problem. Step out of yourself and love God and others and you'll find yourself delivered from the prison of self and nature. You'll be renewed, and free from the distractions that only subtract from life rather than add to it. When God asks you to think of the welfare of your neighbors, he is not telling you to forget yourself. He is inviting you to discover your better self, and a life richer than that burdened by petty pursuits.

**Good and gracious God, let me live a life that pleases you and blesses others. Amen**

Michael Harris

*Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God....In our work together with God, then, we beg you who have received God's grace not to let it be wasted. Hear what God says: "When the time came for me to show you favor, I heard you; when the day arrived for me to save you, I helped you." Listen! This is the hour to receive God's favor; today is the day to be saved! (ww. 5:21–6:2) GNT*

Recently, I met a new friend I believe to be a genuine disciple of Christ. When you meet this man, it is easy to think, why is he not a professor; a consultant or making the most of his gifts; why is he living so humbly? But, Greg truly knows his path is the one God has chosen for him. God speaks to him constantly; and although he might question God, it is without apology or hesitation.

Greg does what God asks. As a follower of Christ, Greg says his work is to "share the love of God and to help others". This simple nine word mission statement (as he calls it) guides his life. He has heard and continues to hear God. Greg listens. He knows he has been saved. He does not waste his knowledge—he shares it with whomever will hear it. He is using his gifts as God wants, not as he or anyone else wants, and he is happy.

I want to be a disciple. I want to follow the life-road God has chosen for me. I want to be informed and be an informer of my faith, touch people, see the world and live. I want to commune with God - his will be done. I want to be happy knowing God loves me. I can (and will) and you can too!

**Heavenly Father, may our lives and our accomplishments follow you and the plans you have made for us. May we realize the joy and grace that can be ours by simply believing Jesus Christ your only Son, who died for us, so that we may be saved. In faith, your loving servant. Amen.**

Paula Perez

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased."*  
(vv. 9-11) NRSV

Close your eyes and hear your parent or parent figure in your life telling you that they are delighted with you. Just imagine heartfelt words such as, I love you, you are my heart's desire, my treasure, my beautiful child, you are just right the way you are, the apple of my eye, I am so happy that you are in my life or..... (add your own phrase you'd long to hear).

Jesus was the Son of God, yet somehow human. I suspect Jesus had feelings and maybe the need for approval from the Father. Maybe Jesus wondered if he was pleasing to God, the Father. I can envision a drenched Jesus coming out of the waters of baptism, gasping for breath, a Spirit descending while Jesus heard the words of delight and approval from the Father. What an awesome experience that must have been. I can only imagine Jesus having a sense of confidence that he was on the right path.

(Interestingly, Jesus does not get to revel in this experience but is led into the wilderness to be tempted. That is another devotional.)

**Dear Holy God, thank you for allowing your Son Jesus to live out the Good News. Thank you for giving him wisdom and confidence to show us the way. Open our ears to hear your voice. Please give us wisdom and courage to follow. Amen.**

Elaine Hansen

*I will hang a rainbow among the clouds. It will serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. And from now on, whenever a cloud rises over the earth and a rainbow appears in the sky, I will remember my covenant—my promise I have made between me and you and all living creatures. (vv. 13-15) VOICE*

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were seeking a sign from God? I have! I just wanted God to write the answer to my question—or my request—across the sky.

I have always loved rainbows and I still feel a sense of awe every time I catch a glimpse of one. When we lived in Guam, there was a rainstorm almost daily. Often, following a storm, the most incredibly beautiful double rainbow would appear over the ocean in full arch.

God gave us (and himself) the rainbow, stretched across the sky, as a visible reminder of God's promise to never again destroy the earth with water.

The promise of God expressed in a rainbow also reminds me of God's other promises found in Scripture: God's promise to never leave me or forsake me, God's promise to give me rest, God's promise to supply my daily needs, God's promise to comfort me when I grieve, God's promise of eternal life.

In 2 Corinthians 1:20 the Apostle Paul tells us that *"In Jesus we hear a resounding "yes" to all of God's many promises."*

So, as the author of Hebrews encourages in chapter 10 verse 23, *"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful."*

**Loving and faithful God, thank you for the gift of the rainbow and for your promises fulfilled in Jesus. My hope is in you! In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Devra Betts

*Is this not the fast that I have chosen; to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you: the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard, then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry and he will say "Here I am." (vv. 6-9) NKJV*

Fasting (abstinence) from food and drink for a period of time, has been a spiritual discipline for centuries and observed on occasions of public calamities, afflictions, approaching danger, religious observances, ordination of ministers, etc. Fasting was often observed because of transgression or to ward off a present or impending trial.

I believe Isaiah is looking beyond the outward expression, to something with some substance or meaning. It is one thing to express our love of God and our reverence toward him, but "Where Do We Go From Here?" (the title of Martin Luther King's last book). What do we do with these blessings that God has bestowed upon us? As we study Christ's ministry and strive to become a talmid (true disciple), we are taught to become like Jesus and to learn to live as he lived—to reach out to the poor and hungry and downtrodden. It is through our light that others will be brought out of the darkness. In the process, the Lord lifts us up. He is our guide, our protector, our strength.

It is exciting to see the evolution of Outreach ministries at Holy Spirit reaching beyond our walls, assisting the needy, supporting social services, partnering with others to address social problems and injustices. There are many opportunities to become involved with this ministry, to become true disciples of Christ, to be that light in the darkness. Won't you consider saying "yes" to God's call to fast as Isaiah described?

**Heavenly Father, I seek your guidance and direction to become a true disciple of Christ, to say yes to God's call. Thank you for the opportunity you have placed before me. In Christ's name. Amen.**

Sandy Hughes

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. My God, I trust in you. Show me your ways, O Lord. Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me. For you are the God of my salvation. On you I wait all the day.* (vv. 1, 4-5) NKJV

William Blake wrote, “*And we are put on earth for a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love.*” There should be little doubt in our hearts and minds that the Lord is the ultimate teacher. But we as fallible beings are seldom the most faithful or dedicated students. And what makes learning to “bear the beams of love” so difficult is the requisite mixture of truth, trust, salvation, and patience.

There is a deep and mysterious part of human nature which resists all that makes us feel uncomfortable, lacking in control, vulnerable or alone. A life led toward the sacred and divine prompts us to set aside so many things of this world which are easier, seemingly more enjoyable and often times much more expedient. Facing fears and fully trusting God involves action, acceptance, and surrender. This is not a quick fix. Learning God’s ways, following God’s paths, and grasping the timeless truth of God’s nature may take a lifetime.

The one true Master of the universe—infinite source of love, wisdom and creation who slings stars and planets into galaxies and breathes life into all things on this earth is alive with us. Why should we set arbitrary limits or restrict our own divine nature? Self-imposed limitations are not God’s ways.

In his informal group talks the late instructor of Zen, Shunryu Suzuki, spoke of what he called *The Beginner’s Mind*. He suggested, “*In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.*” As we grow older and somewhat wiser, patterns of complacency may lead to thinking like experts in our own lives.

Our faith may ebb and flow over the years yet God continues to long for everlasting union with us. Patiently God knocks, waiting for the day when doors open, beginning the transformation of our restless souls. Thus begins a life of illumination. Divinely inspired and dignified, built on trust, guided by truth, and devoted to the vast potential purposefully placed within us.

**Lord of all creation, we thirst for greater insight as we strive to learn from you daily. Grant us strength of spirit and everlasting peace and joy as we live our lives and allow your will to be done. Amen.**

Michael James Rickert

*In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. (vv.1-5) NRSV*

Have you ever had a sibling who always looked after your best interests? I did and his name was Ollie. I was the youngest of three boys and Ollie, the middle son, was 2 years older than me. I looked up to Ollie and he looked after me.

Later in life, after I joined the military, Ollie continued to help others all the time—it was in his nature to help others. Six years ago I attended Ollie’s funeral. As I gave the eulogy at his service, I talked about how Ollie was always there to help others to the best of his ability. There were about sixty people there and as I talked about Ollie’s goodness, there were many tears and heads nodding in agreement.

Ollie’s talents for helping others was limited in that he could only help where he was and with the resources available. God on the other hand is unlimited. God was with me when I had cancer surgery, God has been with me in the good times and the bad times. God has blessed me even when I didn’t know God was there for me. As much as I could rely on Ollie, I am grateful knowing that I can still count on God.

**Lord, thank you for putting wonderful people in my life and most of all, thank you for being in my life. Amen.**

Ray Betts

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell face down, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations." (vv. 1-4) NIV*

Can you imagine this happening to you? I can only imagine what was going through Abram's mind. (You want me to walk before you? I'm 99 years old, I hope you're not in a hurry.) And what about becoming a father at his age? (How are the wife and I supposed to take care of babies at our age? What about diapers? Pampers are thousands of years from being invented. What about extra curricular activities at school, Cub Scouts, Brownies, and all that? Who's going to have time for all that running around?)

God gave Abram a covenant, and a new name. I as a Christian have my own covenant with God, and have been renamed "child of God."

Did you have a moment in your life when you realized you were reborn in Christ? Walking with Christ in our lives changes us, some to a greater extent than others. Our journey through life with Christ will always have its ups and downs. We are tempted constantly to walk away from Christ, and if we don't pray for ourselves and others, it can be a short walk into an abyss.

As I write this, I am working in the panhandle of Oklahoma. I went to a local church last Sunday, and it was Youth Sunday, where the church's youth group led the service. Too often, youth drift away from church as they enter college and are constantly bombarded by scientific types and naysayers. Just as I pray for Holy Spirit's youth, I prayed for the youth at this church, that they feel the Holy Spirit in their lives as they enter adulthood, and pass along the peace which surpasses all understanding.

**Heavenly Father, creator, provider of all, thank you for all the blessings you have given me. Your blessings are infinite and are there for all who ask. May I as a Christian project the love that your Son has given as an example, so that others may come to Christ and live their lives with love for all. Amen.**

Bryan Petersen

*All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.*

(vv.27-28) NIV

In one of my Bibles, Psalm 22 is entitled “The Prayer of a Suffering Man: A Psalm of David”. I wondered what had been happening to David that caused him to write this song. Was he in hiding from King Saul or had some other calamity befallen him? As I read the whole Psalm, I began to see the parallels to the last days of Jesus. The Psalm begins with “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” the same words Jesus uttered on the cross. I’ve never thought of David as a prophet, but in verses 16-18 he describes the effects of a crucifixion, a punishment not used by the Jews.

I recommend you read Psalm 22 in its entirety. Something must have happened to David to renew his faith, because in v. 22 David begins praising God and admonishing “*all you descendants of Jacob [that includes us] honor him.*” I wonder what brought about this change in David’s writing.

I especially found verses 27-28 encouraging. There is much reporting about the desire of ISIS, the Islamic State, to wipe Christianity off the face of the map. If we cling to the words in these verses, we can be confident that God is in charge and that in the end all nations will come to him and God will rule.

**Lord, may I always praise you so that I do not fall into the trap of discouragement because of the violence and terror brought by the enemies of your people seen the news reports. Amen.**

Judi Hempel

*Then calling the crowd to join his disciples he said. "If any of you wants to be my followers, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it." (vv. 34-35) NLT*

My mother used to say that when I started to walk I was an independent, stubborn child saying, "I do it myself. This attitude is definitely not what Jesus expects from his followers.

I was in a Bible study and we had to find a word in a magazine that we felt was something that we had formerly thought of as important in our lives. I chose "power". I had a job dealing with the management and at one time power was valuable to me.

I believed I was in control of my life and "I do it myself" was how I was going to succeed in my career field. I worked hard and had a great reputation in the field for over 20 years.

Along the way I learned my power was nothing compared to the power of Jesus. Jesus led me to several companies over the years and always with a purpose of learning something important in human relations. Once I chose to release the need to be in control, Jesus could then direct my destiny. I saw that the Good News could be shared in many small ways. By conveying the peace I found in Jesus through my attitude, conversations about religion often occurred.

The disciples were learning of the destiny of Jesus and of the cross that they would be carrying after his death. Their submission was as vital to the Good News then as ours is now.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son for our salvation. Please guide us in becoming more Christ-like in all areas of our lives. Let us take up our cross, follow you and spread the Good News always. Through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Lynne Bogner

*For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (v. 13) ESV*

The book of Romans is about the Good News. First and foremost it's a message about how everyone can have a right relationship with God.

Paul is fighting against exclusivism, against the Jewish claim that salvation was confined to Israel and was not to be shared with the Gentiles. But believing in God means acknowledging our unworthiness and depending entirely on God's mercy by faith, not whether we are Jews or Gentiles.

God gave the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants, because of Abraham's right relationship with God, based on faith alone. If this promise is only for those who obey the laws then faith is not necessary. But we are given a gift of the Good News, and we are all certain to receive it if we only have faith. Not just the Jews will receive this, all will receive it. God will count us as righteous if we believe in Jesus.

Abraham's faith never weakened even though at about 100 years of age he figured his body was as good as dead. But God kept his promise to him that he would be the father of many nations. God's love is not exclusive—it is for us all.

We witness this promise in the resurrection of Jesus. Salvation has been available only through faith in God who makes and keeps his promises. If God can keep his promises, should we do any less?

**Heavenly Father, guide our congregation as we seek to be faithful to you in all we do. No matter our ages, we all have something to give and can be of use to you. Amen.**

Janet Saterlie

*You shall have no other gods before me. (v. 3) NIV*

Although they were slaves the Israelites were more imprisoned by the life they lived in Egypt. Everything about their lives was controlled by Pharaoh: what they ate, where they lived, who and how they worshiped. The images of gods were designed by Pharaoh. Structures and buildings were a testimony that Pharaoh was to be revered and admired. To remove this influence, God needed to remove the Israelites from this culture and remodel his relationship with them.

About two months after being led out of Egypt, the Ten Commandments were first spoken to the Israelites. The first three commandments can be summed up as, "I am the one with whom you should be having a relationship. Don't let anything get in the way of that and don't disrespect me." Although the Israelites didn't know it, this represented a new beginning. They were to place their faith in God and not in the material things that surrounded them. To reinforce this, the Israelites wandered a hostile environment for the next forty years. During this journey, the Israelites were always reminded that God was there to protect and love them.

At the end of forty years, the Ten Commandments are repeated again in the book of Deuteronomy (see Deuteronomy 5:6-21) just before the Israelites are to enter the land promised by God. To me, this is very significant. While wandering the desert, the Israelites depended on God to survive. The relationship with God was strengthened because the desert could not provide them with anything. They had built that trust with God. But now they are entering a land that can provide food. Fruits, vegetables, and grains can be harvested. And with that comes commerce, cities, and outside cultures. The temptation to replace God has greatly increased. So the Israelites are reminded before entering the land to not forget the relationship they have forged with God. And to not let anything get in the way.

There are times I feel like an Israelite entering the new land. Where I live, what I drive, where I work, and things I want to do are possible temptations that would supplant my relationship with God. That is why I don't see the Ten Commandments as a set of rules, but as a reminder of my relationship with God and to not let anything get in the way of that.

**Dear God, I am weak when it comes to the temptations of the world. Please give me strength to stand against these temptations and let me grow closer to you. Amen.**

Allen Vaughn

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

(v. 14) NIV

The words in Psalm 19 reminds me that our Lord is perfect, forgiving, and a loving Father. Even when we are not perfect, maybe downright unlovable, God only wants the best for us. God can see the bad stuff and will still forgive us (if we ask). God loves us unconditionally.

I always tell people God is my best friend and I talk to him every day. As a child, you want to please your earthly parents by making them proud, etc. That's what I like to do for God, my best friend and my Heavenly Father. I want to please God and make God proud. Despite my best efforts I do mess up a bit. But I am grateful that God forgives me and helps me to grow and change. That is an awesome love! God's love makes me feel so warm and loved.

The Lord is indeed "*my Rock and my Redeemer*" and he is also my strength. I could not make it through the day without him. To be redeemed is icing on the cake.

Heavenly Father, thank you for blessing me in so many wonderful things and for helping me through the thorns that have been in my life. Help me to be pleasing to you and to see others through your loving eyes. I love you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Kim Heinrich

*For since in the wisdom of God the world thru its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (vv. 21-24) NIV*

It's so simple. Really. All Christians need to believe is that Christ died for our sins and was resurrected. The people of Corinth had great difficulty believing this. Corinth was a city known for its diversity, paganism and immorality. The many groups in Corinth simply couldn't grasp this "*Christ crucified*" concept. The Jews needed a sign, the Greeks tried to use their worldly wisdom, and the Gentiles thought this was foolishness. Paul really had his hands full, didn't he?

Do you know anyone who struggles with Jesus' resurrection, or even that he exists? I do. I have a friend who tries to prove to himself the existence of Jesus through logic. It's a real struggle for him. It doesn't make sense in his worldly wisdom. But God's wisdom is far greater—we just have to trust God and believe. The great hymn "Trust and Obey" is just that. It's not "Trust and Understand".

We can never understand and fully comprehend the wisdom of God—we need only believe.

**Loving God, thank you for helping me believe that Christ was crucified and died for me. Your wisdom and power are beyond measure. Amen.**

Faye Bastarache

**Friday, March 6**

**Numbers 21:4-9**

*From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” (vv. 4-5) ESV*

The Israelites spoke out against God and Moses, complaining about wandering in the wilderness, the food and water furnished by God. When God lost patience with the people and sent poisonous snakes that resulted in the death of many, the people realized their error and asked Moses to intervene. Moses prayed and God listened to Moses. God provided redemption.

I have had my own complaints and turned away from God. My husband had a low-functioning immune system, and did not like to be amidst so many people at a church service shaking hands, giving hugs, coughing or sneezing. He announced he would no longer attend church. I took this personally and being full of vanity, I was aghast that I would have to explain why my husband would no longer come to church and that I would be attending alone. So, I declared I would not go either. We were both in the wrong and should have asked for God’s help to see us through this time and trust in God to guide us in solving our problem.

Years later, my husband died and suddenly I was very alone. I turned to God in my anguish and prayed aloud to help me. God forgave me and brought me back to my church home.

We easily get led astray. God puts up with a lot of silliness from us, but if we only rely on him whatever the difficulty he will see us through it.

**Thank you, Lord, for leading me back into your grace—and out of the wilderness. Amen.**

Yvonne Drakeley

*...let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. (v. 21) NRSV*

This verse jumped out at me. Thanksgiving - sacrifices, wow. It makes me think about many things, especially how God gave us HIS Son - Jesus to save us from ourselves. Really - ourselves.

Think about this for a minute: if there wasn't a need for Easter, there would not have been a need for Christmas in the first place. It's like what came first—the chicken or the egg? Without the chicken, there would be no eggs, but without eggs, chickens would not be hatched. What a catch 22.

But we're talking about our thankfulness here aren't we? And so I wonder, how thankful are we that God did give us HIS only begotten Son? Would you do what he did? Would you as a parent give up your only child? Would you as a brother or sister die for anyone in your family? The closest I ever came was that when my sister, Helga, needed a kidney, I offered mine. Sadly, we were not a match. But would I have taken the disease, or died in her place? I'm not so sure. I love my family and friends dearly, but to give my life for them? What about you? All I can say is I'm so glad, and thankful that we have a Father and Brother in heaven that would give up anything for us, even to death!

**Father we thank you for all of your wonderful and marvelous works. for your steadfast love, oh Lord, and the greatest gift of all—your one and only Son. Thank you for saving us from our troubles. Amen.**

Linda M. Middleton

*Jesus answered them “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” (v. 19) NIV*

This passage reminds me of the many times in my life I have trusted in God’s Word because I know he is faithful and his Word has endured for thousands of years.

When I was only 15, I lost my father. I struggled with why God would take my father from us and how I could go forward in life without him. I was comforted by our church family and reminded that God would guide me through that difficult time of my life. The Lord did comfort me and I found my faith strengthened by God’s love.

Only a few years after losing my father, I was off to war in Vietnam. I was subjected to many horrible things that war produces and again wondered why my God would allow people to kill and destroy each other with very little regard for life. Through prayer and guidance and God’s Holy Word, I found temporary peace and understanding.

Returning to civilian life, I soon married and started a family. I found it very difficult to adjust to married life and my memories of Vietnam and thoughts of friends lost weighed heavily on my mind. I started going out with old friends and drank heavily. One day I returned home from work and found my wife and children had left. I was sickened and after a few days and nights of blaming my wife, I finally accepted I was the one to blame. I prayed to God to mend my soul and make me a better father to my children and a better husband to my wife. My prayers, just as in the past, were answered.

**Lord, thank you for being faithful to your Word. Every time I ask for help, you are there. When you said you would be raised up in three days, you did just that. You died for my sins and gave me life. You are my Rock! Amen.**

Michael McMahan

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (v. 10) NIV*

Paul's letter to the Ephesians gives us some eloquent words on what it means to be a follower of Christ. But sometimes I tire of the lofty religious language and heavenly images and just want things spelled out in basic ideas I can directly apply to my life. In today's reading I think it all comes down to this: the world has one way of doing things but as followers of Christ we are called to do things a different way.

We know we are human. We sometimes stumble. And sometimes we may question which path to follow. So how can we be certain we are following God's way and not the ways of the world? Well, here's a good start:

When the world teaches hate, choose love.

When the world promotes violence and wars, strive for peace.

When the world encourages self-centeredness, put others first.

When the world instills fear, offer hope.

When the world inflicts pain and suffering, be a source of healing.

When the world offers temporary pleasures, seek eternal rewards.

When the world dispenses injustice, appeal for fairness.

When the world favors the wealthy, remember the poor.

When the world is cruel, show compassion.

When the world condemns, offer forgiveness.

This world is all about the love of power. We are about the power of love.

**Dear Lord, "Change my heart Oh God, make it ever true. Change my heart Oh God, may I be like you". Amen.**

(From the song "Change My Heart Oh God" by Eddie Espinosa).

Barry Clayton

*The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.*

(v. 31) NIV

God's chosen people did not obey God's Law. They broke the old covenant. In spite of this, God still desired a relationship with humanity. God devised a "new covenant" where people would be judged righteous because their sins would be covered by Jesus' death and resurrection. (John 3:16) It's the Good News we know and proclaim. We, too, fail to follow all God's rules. On the basis of the old covenant, we would deserve only death. Yet through God's actions (nothing we do/did), we're offered a way to live eternally with God.

Now if God has given his Son Jesus so that he and I could be in relationship, what am I willing to do in response? Will I share the gospel of Jesus? And if I do, how? During my lifetime, society has changed immensely. Many of the so-called traditional ways of witnessing or sharing faith don't seem to be working anymore.

It's clear that God places a lot of value on having a relationship with us. If the "old ways" of introducing others to Jesus so that they can be included in that relationship aren't working, do we search for "new ways" to reach out? Considering what God did, I think the only answer must be YES. I'm not sure exactly what or how that might look, but I am willing to listen to God's direction and will trust God to be beside me. I hope you will, too.

**Loving LORD, you've done the hard work that makes it possible for me to be with you forever. Show me how you want me to witness and share Jesus with others. Amen.**

Janice Demaree

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (vv. 17-19b) NIV*

When I was younger I loved being involved in sports with my children. On Saturdays my sons would put on their uniforms and they were on their way to play baseball. I was their coach and I loved every minute of it. One Saturday I had to go to work. I really did not want to go! While I was at work a homeless man asked me for 25 cents. His request upset me and I told that man, "Why can't you find a job and make your own way through life?" He started yelling at me and told me I was going to hell and he said other things that *sounded* like they were in the Bible.

His words stayed with me and I could not forget what he said. I thought he was right. As I drove down the main street a short time later I noticed a church with a cross on it—I had been away from church many years. That cross somehow caught my attention. The next Sunday I went to that church and sat in the back. I listened to the pastor and he said, "All you have to do is repent and walk away from your sin and believe Christ died for your sin and you are saved". From that day, I knew that I was reconciled with God. Since then, through Christ, my life was never the same. Learning what great love God had for me and what Jesus did for all of us on the cross changed my priorities forever.

**Father in heaven, thank you for using each of us in your ministry, for reconciling the world through Christ, and for the gift of your mercy. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

Eric Morrison

*How can young people keep their way pure? I will not forget your word.* (vv. 9a, 16b) NRSV

I believe those two verses say it all. I think a lot of us live by not forgetting the Word. We read the Bible, participate in Bible studies, small groups, fellowship times and spend time with other believers. We speak of the Word, we live the Word, and we share the Word.

It is our opportunity to share this with young people: our own children, children of the church, and children in other organizations. If we live by example and do what is good and right, these children will respect and learn from us, they will see how our lives are blessed and hope for the same thing.

There is so much out there tempting children to get off track, to follow “not so good” examples, to get off the right path. It is up to us to share with these children and let them know about Jesus, let them know there is hope, forgiveness, and eternal life.

**Good and gracious God, thank you for all the children of this world. I ask you to watch over them and place people in their lives who love and follow you, that they may learn about you and believe, as I do. Amen.**

Loretta Block

*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*  
(v. 7) NIV

There is no question that we have a lot to learn about prayer and the great gift we received from Jesus. He taught us how to pray in Matthew 6:5-8 and even what to pray in vv. 9-13. Still we seldom get down on our knees literally or figuratively and PRAY.

Most of us though do pray in times of great suffering or need as the author of Hebrews describes Jesus doing in verse 7. Throughout his lifetime, Jesus prayed as he healed, fed the wedding guests and the masses. He prayed, especially at the end of his earthly life when he knew what was coming and how short we still had come on the road to belief.

I have had occasion this past year to reflect on suffering of loved ones as they anticipated death and how my prayers changed. Instead of begging for them to live, my prayers changed to ones of greater faith and understanding for my loved ones. I prayed then and do today that we all might understand the importance of prayer in easing the suffering I see around me, not just physically but emotionally. We must come to an understanding of the role that suffering plays in leading us to greater faith through prayer and remembering the suffering that Jesus went through so that we might have eternal salvation.

**Lord, fill my heart with prayer and grace and lead me in your ways. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Alison Rodriguez

*The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. (v. 4 ) NIV*

This passage tells us that God speaks to us in truth, that God is omnipresent and gives us the faith and strength that we need, when we need it the most. We need only listen and learn.

When I originally read this passage I couldn't help but laugh out loud. It seems as though God has a real sense of humor, especially with the way I have recently received his messages. Most of the messages I receive now, arrive in the middle of the night and awaken me with either rousing hymns that will not leave me all day or parts of Scripture that I end up pondering until the message or answer finally gets through to me.

God has messages for each one of us and it is our responsibility to clear our minds of distractions and listen for those precious messages. What better time is there, than now, to stop and listen to what God has to say?

**Speak to me, gracious God, through your Word. Show me your ways and help me to listen. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

Terri Veach-Geiger

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (vv. 16-18) NIV*

I rarely talked about religion and my faith when I was younger. I was worried that I'd sound crazy or that people would be annoyed by my "religious talk". Now that I am older, I talk freely about my faith and my Savior and share the Good News without worrying what others will think. I'm not afraid to tell people that I believe and that because God gave his only Son, I shall have everlasting life.

There have been times when people asked how I can believe so freely. They question how I really know that God, Jesus, and heaven exist if I haven't seen them. This was the conversation that ensued. I asked, "Do you remember when people thought the Earth was flat? Do you now believe that the Earth is round?" They responded, "Yes, of course I believe the Earth is round. I know it is."

"So you have physically traveled around the world and witnessed for yourself that the Earth is indeed round and not flat." "Well, no, but others have and they have written books about it, drawn maps, and shared their experiences. The Earth is round."

For me, this is what believing is about. True I have never seen God or talked face-to-face with Jesus. I have never been to heaven for a weekend getaway. But, I've read a book—the Bible. I've read the stories of the witnesses present when Jesus was born and when he gave his life for all people. I believe even though I haven't seen it for myself, because of what others have witnessed and shared.

Now, I talk freely of my beliefs and my faith. I'm so happy to be part of a wonderful community of believers and so grateful for Jesus' sacrifice and the promise of eternal life.

**Dear God, thank you for the promise of eternal life. Thank you for giving me hope and something to believe in. I trust in you and your plan for my life. Thank you for my church and the community of believers. Amen.**

Jennifer Klimek

*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. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ... to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. (vv. 1-3,7) NIV*

I am reminded in these verses that there are many reasons why it is good to read the Bible every day. This passage is filled with references to “*justice*” as how we have been “*chosen*” to bring about this “*justice*.” Sometimes I get weary advocating for justice. I think, “Let others take a turn. I’m tired.” I will only speak up if someone else says what I’m already thinking. Then I agree. I don’t want to alienate anyone. I don’t want conflict. I want everyone to like me. Then, I am reminded that God chose me for this job.

Here, God tells us that we can be champions of justice and still not break *a bruised reed*. No need to raise your voice. No need to get worked up. God instructs us that it’s more effective if you don’t. Just quietly go about advocating for justice. Justice for the less fortunate who may not have had the same opportunities; the prisoner who may not have had an adequate defense. Justice for those who were born different.

Everyone these days seems set in their opinions. We may say, “Oh they think one way, and I think another. No point in bringing it up.” In the end, you might change someone’s mind. Maybe not. Maybe they will change their minds much later. This will happen if enough people have the courage to speak. One person might feel they aren’t able to bring about justice. But all of us together can.

I am grateful for the reminder to stay vigilant in advocating for justice.

**Oh Heavenly Father, thank you for the Bible. Thank you for choosing me. Thank you for the Holy Spirit in me to help bring justice to the nations. I pray for strength to continue your work. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.**

*“...I am in distress.... I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.... I hear the whispering of many - terror all around - as they scheme together against me.... BUT I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’... Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.” (vv. 9-16 - in part) NRSV*

As I read the assigned verses in Psalm 31, I could parallel some of the Psalmist’s distress with one of those terror-filled nightmares that I sometimes experience. Perhaps you do, too. I feel such agony. Imagine my relief when I am suddenly jarred awake.

Now what? I lie there, and the nightmare/dream is still on my mind. Why? Why had I had that nightmare? What should I do now? Try closing my eyes—doesn’t work. The nightmare remains present on my mind. Get up; go get a drink of water. No; that doesn’t work. Turn on the lamp and read. That’s not the answer either. Is it getting light outside yet? No! When will it be morning? Go back to bed and try to go back to sleep.

WAIT A MINUTE!! How about a talk with God? Why not? Nothing else has seemed to work! “Okay God; I am putting my trust in you. Please help me to fall back to sleep ... and please let it be a peaceful, restful remainder of the night so that I may awakened to a beautiful day in order to once again be your servant. I love you, Lord. I want to thank you for sending your Son, Jesus .....” The next thing I know, it’s morning! God is good!

**Good, gracious and merciful God, love and praise to you for being with us not just during the day, but also during the night. Help each of us to remember that you are on duty 24/7! Thank you for your love. Amen.**

Ruth Ann Isaacs

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (vv. 9-11)*

I was not sure what to write that would be uplifting to someone reading this devotion. I was kind of stuck, because I had been sick for two weeks. My head was so cloudy and heavy. I battled asthma, then allergies, and then my sinuses.

Daily I screamed, “Relief, please!” I just wanted to breathe normal. Then Sunday on my way to church, “The Reason Why I Sing” by Kirk Franklin came on the radio. My daughter began hitting my arm, “Turn that up Mommy, that’s my song!” My mother turned it up a little but my daughter hit me again saying, “Mommy, turn it up.” I yelled back, “Your grandmother turned it up already. It’s her vehicle.” But, I turned it up anyway.

Then I heard the words, “someone may be wondering when we sing our song. At times we may be crying and nothing’s even wrong. I sing because I’m happy. I sing because I’m free. His eye is on the sparrow. Glory, hallelujah, you’re the reason why I sing.” I was miserable before and didn’t have a reason to sing, then I felt the words to that song and my sinuses opened up—I was breathing. My head didn’t feel heavy and cloudy. As I heard and felt those words I was reminded of Jesus who suffered and died for us. God loves us so much he gave his only Son to die for us.

“I sing because I am happy. I sing because I’m free. His eye is on the sparrow, that’s the reason why I sing. Glory, hallelujah you’re the reason why I sing”. Standup! Be a witness! Know that God loves you and he is always with you—that is my song to you.

**Father God, I pray that you continue to watch and look after my family in Christ as well as my immediate family. You have blessed me in so many ways and I sing praises to your glory. In your Son’s name Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

LaShone Manning

*The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me...in the shadow of his hand he hid me;*  
(vv. 1b, 2b) NRSV

One Sunday in January, during service, we sang the children's song "This Little Light of Mine." Children and adults enthusiastically joined in the singing, complete with hand gestures. Most of us seem to remember this beloved song with its powerful, but simple, message. However, in my day-to-day contacts I have a tendency to forget that the light we sing about and are to shine is the light that God has given us through his Son Jesus.

Accepting Jesus as our Savior brought his light into our lives. He gave us his light to shine through us to others. Having this light also places a commitment on each of us to listen to what God is telling us about shining his light and our mission as his servant.

I am not proud to admit that I am an impatient person and also have a tendency to want things done my way. In keeping with these natural human tendencies, many times I feel the urge to move forward on my own. I fail to seek God's guidance first on how he wants me to use the light he has entrusted to me or on whether what I think should be done fits into his overall plan.

I don't want to hide the light I have been given (either under a bushel or to allow Satan to blow it out). However, sometimes part of God's plan for me is to just wait patiently, in the shadow of his hand, listening with confidence, so that he can use me the way he wants to share this light he has given me. Only then can I proceed with boldness and confidence that this little light of mine is shining as brightly as it can, for the glorious message of redemption.

**Jesus, thank you for giving us the simple message that we are here to let others know about your great love and offer of redemption to all. Help me shine your light according to your great plan. I do not need to know all that you hope to accomplish through me, only that you will be my guide. I want your wishes to be mine, no matter what, as only you know best how to make my light shine the brightest for your glory. Amen.**

Marsha Stephenson

*Nothing is more precious than your loving kindness. All people can find protection close to you. (v. 7) ERV*

I found grace in a bar!

It was in the spring of 2005. I was in a bar singing karaoke with my friends as I did almost every weekend. This night was no different. I mingled with my friends but then I would leave the group and talk with complete strangers. Usually, it was just a simple, “Hi, how ya doing?” “Where ya from?” “What brought you to town?” But, tonight my simple questions led me to more, much more.

The young lady that I was speaking with was a student from the seminary and she was taking classes to be a youth pastor. Our conversation continued on quite some time when she finally asked me if I knew that I was saved by grace. Now, I grew up with a few pastors in my family (5 of them) so I felt kind of stupid saying, “I’m not really sure what you mean.” She explained to me what grace was. And, I have to admit that I really didn’t know even at that point that God could forgive me for all the mistakes that I had made and all the bad things I had done. Then she said “Remember, no matter what, God’s love is boundless. Now, that doesn’t give you the right to continue to sin. But when you do, know that God will forgive you and love you anyway. Also, don’t let others project their ill feelings onto you, be strong in your convictions. And, know that God will protect you in all things.” I have only one thing to say.... I found grace in a bar!

Verse 11 really spoke to me; “*Don’t let the proud people trap me and don’t let the wicked force me to run.*” The young lady in the bar really helped me see that the Lord is great and just. His love is boundless.

Dear God, thank you for loving me, for giving me protection, for providing all my needs. But, most of all, thank you for forgiving me. Teach me how to show others your goodness and mercy so that all may know your loving grace. Amen.

Dana Hackett

*Through the Spirit, Christ offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice, freeing us from all those dead-end efforts to make ourselves respectable, so that we can live all out for God.*

(v.15) MSG

Verse 15 in the NIV reads that *“Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.”* Reading further, the Scripture says that his death set us free from *“the sins committed under the first covenant.”* That’s a lot of theology for me to ingest.

As I struggled to put my thoughts together to write this devotion, up pops a suggested reading in Deuteronomy 12:26-32. It talks about holy-offerings and vow-offerings, the blood of the sacrificial animal to be poured on the altar of God as atonement for sins. Then I began to comprehend the unblemished sacrifice is Christ. Jesus is the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies for the atonement of my sins. *“...think how much more the blood of Christ cleans up our whole lives, inside and out.”* (v. 14). And that eliminates *“all those dead-end efforts”* we do to become respectable or free ourselves from sin. I just love the way this is worded in The Message. And Martin Luther proclaimed that *“It is by grace that we are saved”* – a free gift through the blood sacrifice of Christ Jesus is the new covenant. And this frees us to *“live all out for God”* (MSG) or *“serve the living God”* (NIV).

**Dearest Heavenly Father, I come humbly come before you and thank you for the great sacrificial love of Christ. Thank you for Scripture that directs me. Be with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that are being persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and killed because of their commitment to you. Strengthen my resolve to spread your kingdom. Help me reach out to the poor and disabled. Remind me daily to *“Love our neighbors as ourselves”*. And help us hourly to live all out for you - to serve you. Welcome us home— *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* Amen.**

Jane Wittes

*For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

(v. 3) ESV

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the apostle describes the return of Christ as a time when Christ's people will be raised to life. (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

As I read this passage, I thought of a day when I was about eleven years old. I believe I died with Christ that Sunday morning. I wanted to go to church but my mother said we needed to do laundry. Well, I was upset! I did not want to do laundry. We had one of those old wringer type washing machines, but the wringer was broken.

When I was putting the clothes in the washing machine that day, the wringer caught my shirt and it kept wringing with my shirt in it. I tried to free myself but I was unable to. My shirt kept getting tighter and tighter to the point that I felt my breath slowly being taken away from me. I was not able to yell and I knew I was about to die. Just in the nick of time, my mother came in running and screaming with a pair of scissors and cut me free.

At that moment I believed I died and was made alive in Christ. I was given a second chance in life. I felt the spirit of God with me then, now and God will be with me always.

**Lord God, thank you for giving me life to praise and worship you. Amen!**

Ann Taylor

*O Lord, you alone are my hope; I've trusted you from childhood. Yes, you have been with me from birth and have helped me constantly... I will keep on expecting you to help me. I praise you more and more. I cannot count the times when you have faithfully rescued me from danger. (vv. 5-6a, 14-15a) LB*

Even though David is speaking words before Christ's arrival on the world scene, he is filled with hope knowing God will help him.

This Scripture speaks a clear message to me. I grew up in a relatively small city in Montana far from the likes of New York, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas. God made his presence known to me some time before my teens. That statement David made about God being with him "*from childhood*" applies to me. Some of you may know that I was child terror. There were a few years early on when I thought fighting was the way of the world. I am not sure what I was trying to prove but after several years taking on the world, the Lord somehow woke me up. I decided one day to never get into a physical fight again and I never have. That was the starting point when I began to pay attention to God, realizing as the Scripture above says, "*you have helped me constantly.*" I have had to make a few life-changing decisions through the years and I have never doubted God's presence. I just had to remember God was at work.

I'm sure if you think of your life journey, you can recall instances where God has been with you. Let us praise God for God's activity in our lives and the hope we can have knowing God cares for us. God cared so much for us that he gave us the crucified and resurrected Christ.

**Lord God, I want to give you honor and praise for being with me through the good and bad times in my life. May I always recognize your presence in my life. Amen.**

Terry West

*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, (vv. 27-28) NRSV*

God works in our lives in ways that are particular to us; often the hindrances or mishaps in our lives turn out to be the best things that have affected us. When it rains, the mood is dampened but the rainbow follows as God creates situations in light of others. The rain is necessary for its darkness to contrast with the light of the rainbow, making it so beautiful. Before I came to Holy Spirit Lutheran church, I would attend a Catholic Church. We would walk into a building where no one knew each other. We would then sit down with people who would change from week to week. The pastor would cycle out every Sunday, and give a sermon that no one took to heart. This cycle went on for several years. I was distressed because I was confident in faith but weak in the ways I could express my faith. Eventually, I became apathetic to the Catholic Church, feeling no excitement to worship on Sundays, leaving me weak. But in my weakness God opened me up to positive change. My weakness opened me up to Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, and that is the best thing that happened to me in 2014, and I will forever feel one with this congregation.

But without darkness, that was my time at the Catholic Church, I would be without my experiences at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. So sometimes God acts in weird ways in our lives, sometimes seeming counter-intuitive to how we think of strengthening our faith. But in actuality God has our best interest in mind when it comes to faith and in the end those with faith will always be further fed in their hunger for more.

**Dear Lord, thank you for allowing me to be close to you, being more able to serve you. I desire to please you with all I do and to glorify you. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Brett R. McMahan

*But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who long for your saving help always say, "The LORD is great!" But as for me, I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; LORD, do not delay. (vv. 4-5) NIV*

After reading Psalm 70, I received the message that whatever or whoever is against me, I still have God! I can relate to this entire psalm, but verses 4 and 5 strongly impacted me. At this present time in my life, I am filled with stress and feeling very overwhelmed. So many things are coming at me at once. Just to name a few: two surgeries in three weeks, heartbreak and worry over my oldest daughter, moving into another home, son getting married, and health issues I am dealing with. Yes, I admit there are days I sit and feel sorry for myself.

When I feel like this, I ask for God's help! I know I can always turn to him and tell him how I am feeling. Some days I just have to turn over all my troubles to the almighty God. Day and night I am sick with worry wondering if my daughter, Tara, is ok. She has taken the wrong path in life and is not doing well. As many times and as much as I have tried to help her, I still have no control over her choices. At times I feel helpless. These are the times I run to God and put things in his hands.

I am not embarrassed to call out to God and ask him for help. I know with all my challenges, God is right there for me! He is wonderful, and is always right beside me when I call for him!

Life is not easy, but I hope that people understand that whatever or whoever is against you, ask God for help, for the LORD is great! He will come quickly.

**Dear Father, thank you for coming to my rescue when I am feeling overwhelmed. I do need your help through my daily struggles. You are my strength to get through everything. I love you LORD! Amen.**

Amy Pearce

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

*(vv. 1-3) NIV*

Recently, during FaithWalk, we talked about the difference between the “Theology of the Cross” and the “Theology of Glory.” Being a fairly new convert to Lutheranism, I had not spent too much time thinking about this foundational doctrine. However, I have loved this verse since I was in high school.

My mother left this earth while I was a ‘tween. I was comforted when I thought about a “*cloud of witnesses*” looking out for me and cheering me through the rough times in life. We have lost some of our loved ones in our congregation recently. It still comforts me to think that they are looking out for us and cheering us on.

Life doesn’t get easier when we come to Christ but it certainly becomes fuller and more meaningful. I am grateful to be a part of a community that cheers me on when I am getting weary and I feel like I am losing heart. This Easter season, I hope you are encouraged by the joy that is set before us all.

**Thank you Jesus, for showing me a better way of life which is through the cross. Help me always keep my eyes on what is truly important. Amen.**

Karen Harris

*...the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*  
(vv. 23-26) ESV

When I have a meal with friends it is a time of sharing. Sharing my hospitality, laughter, and conversation. I feel that the night that Christ shared this meal with his disciples he was also sharing. He was sharing what gift he was about to give them. The greatest gift that anyone could give.

Ever since I can remember I have felt that sacrificing one's self was not a big deal. I would sacrifice myself for many of my loved ones, maybe even strangers. When I started to think about it from God the Father's perspective, I realized the real sacrifice made on my behalf. Give up your only child? How could anyone do that? Give the child that you hoped for, you longed for, away? That's why it took God our Father to do that.

This was God's sacrifice. What can be my offering? I can only offer a life in service to him. As I take communion I am reminded of Jesus' offering and the only response that I can make. I give you, Jesus, all of me. It is not something I can do on my own. Only you, God, can help me to sacrifice and take myself out of the equation and leave just an offering for you.

**Heavenly Father, help me to give myself as an offering to you every day. Take me and let me do what you want me to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Rebekah Signoretti

*I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord. (v. 17)*

As I read this Psalm, a melody comes to mind. It's one of two options for an offertory in the traditional liturgy, setting 1 in our previous worship book, *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Most often we have used it during the season of Lent. Psalm 116 is also the assigned Psalm for Maundy Thursday. This is the text as it is set to music:

*What shall I render to the Lord  
For all his benefits to me?  
I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving  
And will call on the name of the Lord.  
I will take the cup of salvation  
And will call on the name of the Lord.  
I will pay my vows to the Lord now  
In the presence of all his people,  
In the court of the Lord's house,  
In the midst of you, O Jerusalem.*

Many years ago a friend and I decided to memorize Scripture as part of our daily Bible study. We memorized a verse and recited it to each other at some point during the day. In this way we held each other accountable for opening our Bibles and reading something. As time passed, we fell out of the habit and have lost touch. I don't know anyone today that memorizes Bible verses that way. After all, most of us have the Bible with us at all times on our smartphones.

I believe we know more Scripture from memory than we realize. This is because we often learn it through music. Just about all the music we use in worship is infused with scripture. If it's not a direct translation, it's often a paraphrase or is inspired by a specific passage. This is true of both traditional and contemporary music styles.

The next time you hear a Christian song or hymn that leaves an impression on you, find it in Scripture. It's easy to use a web search engine to do a little research. Likewise, if a particular verse or chapter speaks to you, find some music to help you remember it.

**Dear Lord, thank you for Holy Scripture that reveals you to me. Thank you for the songs that help me to remember what I have learned and help me to give you praise. Amen.**

Tim Beasley

Here is a recording of the version of Psalm 116 mentioned above here:

[www.holyspiritlasvegas.org/music/](http://www.holyspiritlasvegas.org/music/)



*Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept. (v. 14:72) NIV*

We are in a time when there is polarizing rhetoric being spewed. We can choose to join in or we can choose to remain quiet. More and more I find myself choosing to step back and remaining completely silent—especially on social media.

Jesus' grace and acceptance of Peter's upcoming denial in Mark 14:30-31, seemed so strikingly opposite to how many of us might handle a friend's betrayal. As I continued reading this Scripture and came to the passage of Peter disowning Jesus, something else struck my heart. Peter denied any relationship with Jesus, but his betrayal was of himself, not just Jesus.

Frequently, a friend will share something on social media that is sure to get many on both sides of the issue fired up. Yet, I remain silent. When a friend passionately educates others on topics that I am equally passionate about, I remain silent. Friends at times are being attacked for standing strong, and I could offer words of encouragement and comfort, even when I disagree. Yet I remain silent. In private, I have wonderful discussions, productive debates and heart-warming conversations. But in public, I remain silent. Who am I betraying? My friends? Sure. But who is hurt more? I am.

We betray ourselves and have lots of reasons: I don't have time. I'm not sure of the facts. I don't want to put myself at risk for personal attacks. Personal preservation.

Peter was scared he too would be publicly attacked, along side of Jesus. We remain silent to protect ourselves.

There are times to walk away from an argument, or to refrain from joining the conversation. I, however, pledge to speak up on matters of importance, especially if remaining silent will betray myself. I will speak up knowing Jesus is beside me.

**Dear gracious Lord, open our hearts to hear you and give us the confidence to speak up, stand strong and know you are standing beside us, no matter the outcome. Thank you for your never-ending love and grace. Amen.**

Cyndy Ryan

*Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (v. 3) ESV*

This reading is like an iceberg. On the surface, this is a familiar story of a woman who anoints Jesus with oil, there's some backlash from the disciples about giving to the poor, and Jesus' commendation that she made the right choice. Let's dig deeper.

This is the second time Mary is commended by Jesus for making the better choice in her worship and adoration of her Lord. (Martha has gone back to serving. We go back to what is familiar.) Mary is most likely performing this act because Passover is coming and observant Jews must be ritually clean before the feast. But Jesus tells us it is done to prepare him for burial. Could she have known this? Probably not, but Jesus does. It's one of those clues that we are supposed to remember later.

The oil used is some impressive stuff. A pound of fragrant oil, worth a year's wages; 300 denarii; \$20,000 or so. Where did she get it? Whose was it? Why did she use it all up? What was she thinking? Why Jesus' feet? Why her hair? All these curious questions are answerable by my guess that Ms. Mary was one audacious and passionate follower of Jesus! Just picture this—one week later, as Jesus' body is taken off the cross for burial, Mary's hair quite possibly still carried the lingering scent of this anointing fragrance. *Selah* (means pause and reflect).

The more times I read this passage, from 3 of the 4 gospels and a few different translations, I am confronted with more and more questions—and more fun! And really, it comes down to “What if?”

- What if we were truly audacious in our worship of Jesus?
- What if we were so bold that the fragrance of our worship filled the whole house?
- What if we were so extravagantly generous and intimate in our worship of Jesus that others around us (even other followers) didn't “get” it?

Be encouraged today, dear friends. Start asking curious questions. Start wondering about what worship looks like with audacity, passion, intimacy, generosity, and true love. I'm pretty sure Jesus would commend us too, for choosing the better way.

*Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. Matt.26:13*

**Dear God in heaven, thank you for this excellent example of worship. Inhabit our praises this season, as we look forward to eternity basking in your great love for us. Amen.**

Jen Anderson

*Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. (vv. 20-22) NIV*

I want to see Jesus, too. I look for him in verse, worship, prayer and song. I look for him in my church family, in the clerk at the grocery store, in people at the gym. I look for him in the homeless people I occasionally meet on the street.

The last two years I've met Jesus in an entirely new way, through 8-year-old Spencer and Emily. When they first started coming to church and Sunday school with me they had no knowledge of God and Jesus. They've learned so much in the past two years about God's love with so much of the knowledge coming through the people of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church.

I've really had to think hard about my belief to try and give answers to their many questions. I realized how much of my belief I take for granted when, last Palm Sunday, during the reading of the Passion story Spencer suddenly said, "Why are they talking about this stuff? Don't they know there are little kids listening to this?" Wow! What an eye opener for me! I'm so used to hearing the story of Jesus' suffering and death I didn't really react to it anymore. But Spencer's reaction caused me to listen and FEEL Jesus' sacrifice.

Now I often try to see God with the eyes of a child. It has been a special gift.

**Father, thank you for the blessing of seeing you with the faith of a child. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Barbara Butler

*Jesus answered, "it is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." (vv. 26-27) NRSV*

While just a piece of what happened that night, these two verses give us an answer to the question of who the foretold disciple was that would betray Jesus. I find this narrative intriguing because even though Jesus tells them without naming the disciple who would betray him, the disciples will not know who that is until Judas actually brings the army back to arrest Jesus. This is yet another way for Jesus to prove to the disciples who he really is. Even after Jesus had already proved time and time again who he was, it is interesting that he still gave the disciples signs for proof.

One way I see this applicable in my life is from a parental perspective. As a parent I tell my children that the reasons for my rules are to protect them from the consequences of their actions. But more times than not, until they see for themselves the consequences, they chose not to believe in my judgment or authority. I also feel this is applicable in my life because even though I have faith, sometimes in the face of tragedy, I still look for miraculous signs to back up my beliefs. I feel that faith in itself is almost a contradiction. Even though the definition of faith is: *complete trust or confidence in someone or something, and strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof*, aren't most people of faith looking for proof in daily prayers? When I look back on my prayers, there is usually a portion of the prayer where I am asking God for something. Whether it is asking for the healing of a person or for guidance, I am looking for answers; aka proof.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for all you have given me in my life. Thank you for answered prayers. Please give me the strength to have unwavering faith. Let me always remember that only when it is in your will that my requests will be granted. Amen.**

Amy Trunoske

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

(vv. 34-35) NKJV

A word that seems to be used incessantly is the word "like". If you spend any time on Facebook, you know what I'm talking about. There is a certain anticipation, even expectation, that whatever we post, others will "like", and vice versa. But how much depth of thinking goes into liking words and images on a screen? I would suggest, very little. Likewise, with our use (or misuse) of the word "love". We say we absolutely **love** hamburgers, or the color red, or a warm bath. But is this really love? Perhaps we should say we "prefer" hamburgers, or the color red, etc. because these are objects, not people. And it is people Jesus refers to when he says "*love one another.*"

In thinking about the difference between "like" and "love" I went to my dictionary. **Like: to feel attraction toward; to be suitable or agreeable.** Let's compare. **Love: strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties.** WOW! That's describing how Jesus loves us! He identified with every aspect of being human when he walked the earth. He had personal ties with family, friends, and all the people he talked with, traveled with, prayed with, suffered with. But then he gave us this big, difficult, headache-of-a-word LOVE to deal with! "Love as I have loved you," he says. Why do we have so much trouble with this word? I think I know! Because we've been conditioned to merely LIKE something, or someone, not actually **demonstrate strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties.**

I want to examine myself in light of the above passage, to see if I'm known as a disciple of Jesus by the true definition of the LOVE Jesus had for us as he hung on the cross for our sins! Age, race, economic standing. Those don't matter to Jesus. I should love every person around me because we're all human beings. That's our "kinship". We all breath the same air. That's our "personal tie."

**Lord, thank you for loving me and sending your Son to die for me. Help me love all people with a heart like yours and to reach out to others, because that is your plan, because you want every person on earth to be treated the same: with the LOVE of Jesus. Amen.**

Austin Bowles

*Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" ... 'The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."' (vv. 10-11, 17) NRSV*

Chapter 18 of John's Gospel tells us of Jesus' betrayal by Judas, arrest, questioning by Pilate, and further betrayal by the people of Jerusalem. This is certainly a difficult chapter for us to read, and I'm confident what we feel is nothing compared to the confusion and despair experienced by the disciples as the events unfolded.

Aside from Judas, Peter is the only disciple we get specific information on in this chapter. Initially, he draws courage from his faith, striking out violently at the Pharisees and soldiers. A short time later, though, after Jesus admonishes him and is taken into custody, Peter's courage fails him and he denies being a follower of Jesus.

Twice more on this Good Friday morning, Peter would again deny being one of Jesus' disciples. Since then, and to this very day, Christians around the world remember Good Friday as a solemn occasion, remembering how a broken humanity rejected the one sent by God. Fortunately for us, the story doesn't end with Good Friday, for Jesus or for Peter.

After Jesus' resurrection, Peter recovers his faith and is instrumental in spreading Jesus' ministry. Though Good Friday is a time to contemplate and mourn for the state of our world, past and present, we can also reflect on Peter's experience and understand that with God's help our lives can be restored, no matter what our transgressions. This is the true gift that we celebrate each Easter.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonderful gift of your Son Jesus and for the example of your servant Peter. Help me to be mournful as I remember Jesus' sacrifice and to look to your Word to guide my actions and my relationships as I strive to do your work with my life. Amen.**

Jim Clark

*Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. (vv. 14-15) NRSV*

The Jewish priests and elders bound Jesus and brought him before Pilate to be judged. Only Pilate, as the Roman Governor, could sentence someone to death. During the trial Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “You have said it.” Pilate saw no threat in Jesus and would have liked to release him. In one last attempt Pilate asked the crowd, “*What crime has he committed?*” But the people’s hearts had been hardened and so the mob roared, “*Crucify him.*”

To me this passage demonstrates God’s amazing compassion for man by giving us his only Son to die for our sins. It also shows that man, in this case Pilate, has the capacity for compassion, but he can easily give in to his human desires to save his job...his life...

All too often we give in and abandon our faith in Jesus, just as Pilate did and just as the crowd did when they were swayed by priests who were false prophets.

**Dear Lord, help us to accept Christ’s ultimate sacrifice for us and cherish that he died for our sins. Amen.**

Steven Saterlie



*Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news; "I have seen the Lord!" (v. 18) NIV*

Going to the tomb where her Lord had been buried following his crucifixion, Mary Magdalene found the tomb had been opened and the body missing. Alerting Simon Peter and others who came to witness her discovery, she was quite perplexed and saddened. It was evident by the condition of the linen strips (the burial cloth which had covered his face had been neatly folded and set to the side) that this was not the work of a grave robber. Simon Peter and the others then returned to their homes and left her alone to deal with her grief. Sensing a presence near her, she turned to face her Lord, who she did not immediately recognize. Jesus instructed her to go and tell the disciples, saying, *"I am returning to my Father"* (v.17) Now the scriptures would be fulfilled.

What a beautiful example of love and devotion. Even though her Lord had been pronounced dead, Mary Magdalene continued to devote her life to her Savior. She should have confronted the disciples following the Lord's direction and boldly announced, *"He is Risen"*!

Over the years, I have felt the presence of the Lord. Mostly, this was when life-changing incidents affected my life and the lives of those near and dear to me. Illness, accidents, unemployment, divorce, and deaths, but also good things like births, promotions, marriages, etc. I always sensed him standing alongside me to support, commend, advise, and direct my reactions and/or actions. I, for one, am exceedingly happy that he has said to me, *"Be not afraid!"*, and because of his death and resurrection those many long years ago, I will meet and be with him in heaven. Then, I also can say, *"I have seen the Lord!"*

**Dear Lord, thank you for the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus. May we always devote our time and talents to announce to the world that we have been forgiven. Amen.**

Charlie Kesling