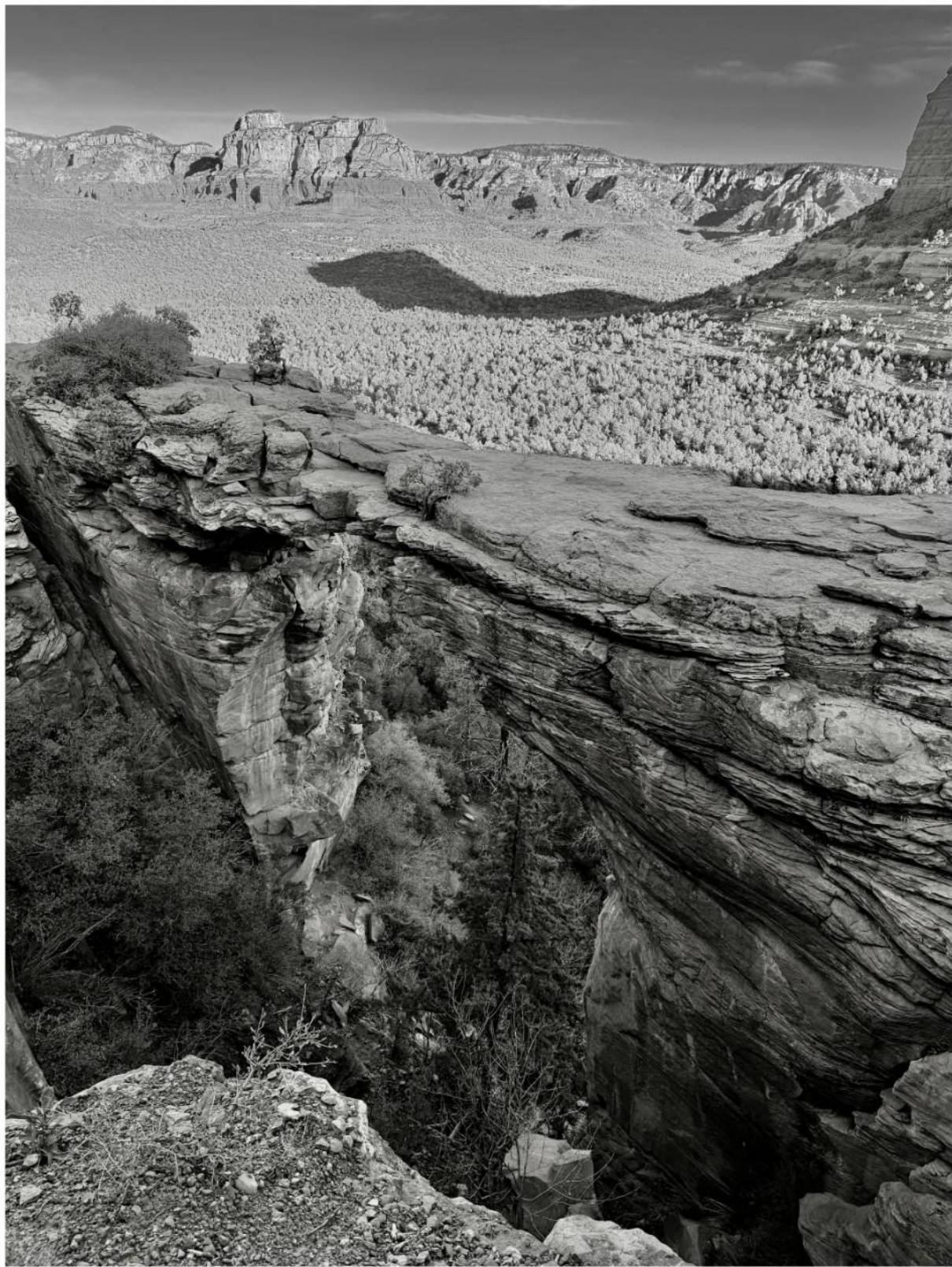


Lenten Devotionals 2026



Introduction: A Lenten Journey with Jesus in the Desert

Dear friends in Christ,

As we enter the sacred season of Lent in 2026, these daily devotions are offered as companions for your forty-day journey toward the cross and the empty tomb. Beginning on Ash Wednesday (February 18) and continuing through Holy Saturday (April 4), each day centers on the Scripture readings appointed in the Revised Common Lectionary (Year A). The reflections are written with the conviction that you, like the disciples before you, long for a deeper encounter with the living God and a closer walk with Jesus.

Lent is not primarily a season of self-improvement or grim endurance. It is an invitation to apprenticeship—to arrange our lives around Jesus so that we might live as He would live if He were in our place. These devotions seek to foster that apprenticeship by drawing us into Scripture, honest reflection, spiritual practices, and prayer.

Each day follows a simple pattern to help you engage heart, mind, and will:

- **Scripture** – The day's lectionary readings are listed for your personal reading.
- **Reflection** – A meditation rooted in the text, often weaving in insights from trusted Christian voices.
- **Local Echo** – Brief references to the beauty of our East Valley Arizona landscape—places like the Salt River wild horses, canal paths, Riparian Preserve, Desert Botanical Garden, mountain trails, and shimmering lakes—are offered as gentle parables of God's presence in our particular place.
- **Practice** – A suggested spiritual discipline to live out the day's truth in ordinary life.
- **Prayer** – A closing prayer in the first person, inviting you to make it your own.

Throughout these pages, you will meet several companions whose writings and lives have deeply shaped my own faith: Dallas Willard, Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, John Stott, N.T. Wright, Ruth Haley Barton, Amy Carmichael, and Madeleine L'Engle. I have chosen them not as authorities to be quoted for proof, but as fellow pilgrims whose insights into grace, discipleship, suffering, and joy have mentored me over many years. My prayer is that they will become helpful and insightful Lenten companions for you as well—gentle voices pointing always beyond themselves to Jesus, the true Master we follow.

May this season draw you nearer to the heart of the One who went into the wilderness for us, who loved us to the end, and who rose victorious that we might walk in newness of life.

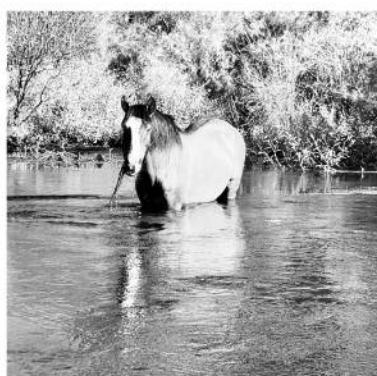
Grace and peace,
Pastor Christian

Ash Wednesday: The Invitation to Apprenticeship

Scripture: Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 or Isaiah 58:1–12; Psalm 51:1–17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

In the quiet urgency of this day, we pause amid the dust and ashes to hear the ancient call: “Return to me with all your heart,” declares the Lord through the prophet Joel. Not with mere outward gestures, but with a rending of the heart—a deep, inward turning that acknowledges our frailty and our profound longing for the divine. We are marked with ashes, a symbol not of despair but of honest humility, reminding us that we are but dust, yet dust beloved and breathed into life by the Creator Himself.

Consider, dear friend, how this Lenten journey mirrors the apprenticeship Jesus invites us into—a deliberate path of learning to live as He lived, in constant communion with the Father. Dallas Willard often spoke of the kingdom of God as readily available, not a distant realm but a reality we step into through simple, transformative practices. On this Ash Wednesday, as we fast and pray, let us not perform for others, as Jesus warns in Matthew 6, but seek the hidden place where God sees and shapes us.



In the vast East Valley landscape that surrounds us, the dry desert wind carries fine dust across canal paths and open trails—a reminder that we, too, are dust, fragile and fleeting. Yet even here, life stubbornly breaks through: a lone saguaro stands sentinel on a South Mountain ridge, the wild horses graze undisturbed along the Salt River, and unexpected green appears beside the quiet waters of the Gilbert Riparian Preserve. These are gentle parables of God’s presence in our particular place—He breathes life into arid ground and marks even the dust with promise.

Psalm 51 echoes this cry for renewal: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” This is no abstract plea; it is the starting point of true discipleship. What habits of the heart have drawn you away from Jesus? What treasures on earth—be they worries, possessions, or distractions—have eclipsed the eternal? Lent beckons us to release them, not as punishment, but as liberation, freeing us to walk more closely with the Master who endured the wilderness for our sake.

Today, embrace the discipline of reflection. Set aside a moment to journal your longings: What encounter with God do you crave? Then, in quiet prayer, invite His presence into your ordinary routines—the morning coffee, the drive through the desert valleys, the evening conversations. As apprentices to Jesus, we learn that His yoke is easy, His burden light, because He walks beside us, transforming our dust into vessels of His grace.

Prayer: Loving Father, in this season of return, stir within us a hunger for Your kingdom. Teach us to seek You in secret, that our lives may radiate Your light. Renew our spirits, that we might follow Jesus more faithfully, step by step, into the fullness of life You offer. Amen. long

Thursday after Ash Wednesday: Returning with the Whole Heart

Scripture: Jonah 3:1–10; Psalm 51:1–17; Romans 1:1–7; John 17:1–8

As we step forward from the ashes of yesterday, the story of Jonah confronts us with the profound simplicity of God's call to return. The word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time—no rebuke for his flight, only the invitation to arise and go. Nineveh, that great city steeped in ways far from God, hears the proclamation and turns: from the king on his throne to the beasts in the fields, they cover themselves in sackcloth and cry mightily to God. And God, seeing their deeds, relents—His compassion ever ready for those who reconsider their path.

This is the essence of repentance, not a fleeting emotion or a ritual act, but a thoughtful change of direction in life. Dallas Willard often reminded us that repentance is the gateway to the kingdom of God, now accessible through Jesus. It is not primarily about feeling guilty, though sorrow may accompany it; rather, it is the joyful decision to abandon our self-directed ways and apprentice ourselves to the Master who knows the way of life. In the high prayer of John 17, Jesus speaks of the glory given to Him—the eternal life that consists in knowing the Father and the Son whom He sent. This knowledge is not mere information but intimate, interactive union, the very reality into which we are called.

Dear friend, in the quiet expanses of your Arizona days—perhaps amid the saguaro silhouettes at dawn or the warm stillness of evening—pause to consider: Where have you, like Jonah, fled from the Lord's gentle leading? What "Nineveh" in your own heart resists His word? Lent invites us not to heroic striving but to graceful training: simple practices of solitude, silence, and honest conversation with God that rearrange our inner world to align with His kingdom.

Today, linger with Psalm 51's plea for a clean heart. Speak openly with Jesus about your deepest longings—the encounter you crave, the peace that eludes you amid daily demands. As an apprentice, experiment with His easy yoke: release one distraction, one resentment, and receive instead the light burden of His presence. The kingdom is at hand, not distant, but here in this moment, ready to transform ordinary lives into vessels of eternal glory.

Prayer: Father of mercies, thank You for second chances, for Your relentless compassion that pursues me. Draw me nearer to Jesus today, that I might know You truly and live in the freedom of Your kingdom. Shape my heart anew, teaching me to walk closely with the One who prays for me even now. Amen.



Friday after Ash Wednesday: The Mercy That Pursues Us

Scripture: Jonah 4:1–11; Psalm 51:1–17; Romans 1:8–17; John 17:9–19

Today the story of Jonah takes an unexpected turn. The prophet, having witnessed Nineveh's astonishing repentance and God's relenting mercy, is displeased—exceedingly displeased, even angry. He confesses his deepest grievance: "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." Jonah wanted justice, not grace; he preferred a God who would punish his enemies rather than redeem them. Yet God, in gentle patience, appoints a plant, a worm, and a scorching wind to teach Jonah about the wideness of divine compassion.

How often, dear friend, do we mirror Jonah's discomfort with mercy? We long for God's kindness toward us, yet quietly resent its extension to those we deem unworthy. Dallas Willard taught that the gospel of the kingdom is fundamentally good news of grace—unearned, undeserved favor that transforms both the receiver and the giver. In John 17, Jesus prays not only for His immediate disciples but for all who will believe through their word, that they may be kept from the evil one and sanctified in the truth. This sanctification is not a harsh scrubbing but a gentle setting apart, accomplished as we abide in the One who embodies truth and love.

In the vast Arizona landscapes that surround your days—the rugged mountains standing sentinel, the quiet bloom of desert flowers after rare rain—let these become parables of God's pursuing mercy. The same God who provided shade for sullen Jonah provides daily graces for us: breath, beauty, relationships, the quiet stirrings of His Spirit. Lent trains us to notice these, to relinquish our anger and self-righteousness, and to open our hearts wider to the kingdom way of life.

Today, as an apprentice of Jesus, practice the discipline of gratitude mingled with confession. Name one person or group toward whom you harbor resentment. Then, in honest prayer, ask the Lord to enlarge your heart to see them as He sees them—beloved, pursued, worth redeeming. Rest in the truth of Romans 1:16: the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. This power is not coercive but invitational, drawing us ever closer to the heart of Jesus, who prayed even for those who crucified Him.

Prayer: Gracious Father, forgive me for the times I have grumbled at Your mercy. Soften my heart as You softened Jonah's, that I might rejoice in Your boundless love. Sanctify me in Your truth today, and teach me to walk so near to Jesus that His compassion becomes my own. Amen.



Saturday after Ash Wednesday: The Unity That Draws Us Near

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1–12; Psalm 51:1–17; Matthew 18:1–7; John 17:20–26

On this early Saturday in Lent, the prophet Isaiah pierces our comfortable religious routines with a question that still echoes: “Is such the fast that I choose?” The people cry out, “Why have we fasted, and you see it not?” Yet the Lord replies that their fasting ends in quarreling, in oppression, in turning away from their own flesh. True fasting, He declares, loosens chains, shares bread with the hungry, covers the naked—and then light shall break forth like the dawn, healing shall spring up speedily, and the glory of the Lord shall be our rear guard.

In the tender closing words of John 17, Jesus prays for a oneness among His followers that mirrors the unity He shares with the Father: “that they may all be one...so that the world may believe.” This unity is not mere agreement of opinion but a profound communion of love, the very life of the Trinity flowing into and through ordinary lives. Henri Nouwen often wrote of this as the movement from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality—learning to make space in our hearts for God and for others, even those who wound us.



Dear friend, as the Arizona sun climbs over quiet neighborhoods or distant mesas this morning, consider how easily our spiritual practices can become private achievements rather than pathways to deeper love. We long for encounter with God, yet Isaiah reminds us that the encounter we seek is inseparable from encounter with our neighbor—the difficult colleague, the estranged family member, the stranger in need. True apprenticeship to Jesus, as both Richard Foster and Dallas Willard taught, always leads us outward in self-giving love, for the kingdom is never solitary.

Today, practice a small act of “true fasting.” Choose one way to loosen a chain: perhaps a phone call to mend a strained relationship, a generous gift to someone in need, or simply withholding a critical word. Then, in quiet prayer, rest in Jesus’ desire for your oneness with Him. Allow His prayer

to become your own: that His joy may be fulfilled in you, that His love may dwell richly within, drawing you ever closer to the heart of the Father.

Prayer: Father of boundless compassion, teach me the fast that delights Your heart. Break my isolation and fill me with the unity of Your Son, that my life may become a channel of Your healing light. Draw me nearer to Jesus today, and through me, draw others to the beauty of Your kingdom. Amen.

First Sunday in Lent: The Temptation and the Kingdom Way

Scripture: Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12–19; Matthew 4:1–11

On this First Sunday in Lent, we enter the wilderness with Jesus. Led by the Spirit into the desert, He fasts forty days and nights, and in His hunger the tempter comes: “If you are the Son of God...” Three times the invitation to grasp, to prove, to seize power on terms other than the Father’s. Three times Jesus responds not with displays of might but with quiet trust in the Word: “It is written...” In this moment, the second Adam succeeds where the first stumbled, choosing the narrow path of dependence over the wide road of self-sufficiency.

Dallas Willard often described temptation as the suggestion that we can find life apart from God—that we must secure our own well-being, significance, or pleasure on our own terms. Yet the kingdom Jesus proclaims is one of effortless reliance, where we live from the abundant resources of the Father rather than from our own frantic striving. In the garden, humanity reached for the fruit in distrust; in the wilderness, Jesus reaches only for the Scripture, trusting that His Father’s provision is enough.

Dear friend, as the Arizona light floods the sanctuary this morning or as you walk familiar paths under open sky this afternoon, hear the gentle invitation beneath the temptations you face. Where are you tempted to grasp—to control outcomes, to prove your worth, to escape discomfort rather than abide in God’s timing? Lent is not primarily a season of grim resistance but of glad reorientation: learning to live as Jesus lived, from the loving presence and provision of the Father.

Today, practice the discipline of recollection. In moments of hunger—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—pause and speak the truth Jesus spoke: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Name your longing to the One who knows it fully, and rest in the forgiveness and blessing of Psalm 32: “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven... I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” As apprentices to the Master, we discover that the wilderness is not a place of deprivation but of deepest formation, where we learn to walk ever closer to Jesus, sustained by His unbreakable union with the Father.

Prayer: Loving Father, lead me with Your Spirit into whatever wilderness will teach me trust. Strengthen me as You strengthened Jesus to choose Your word over every lesser offer. Forgive me where I have grasped, and draw me nearer to the easy yoke of Your Son, that I might live in the freedom and abundance of Your kingdom. Amen.



Monday in the First Week of Lent: Angels in the Wilderness

Scripture: Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1–8; Hebrews 2:10–18; Mark 1:1–13

The wilderness continues. After the temptations, Mark tells us simply that Jesus was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to Him. In the stark silence following battle, heaven draws near with sustenance and care. We see this echoed in Elijah, fleeing in despair, lying under a broom tree wishing for death—yet an angel touches him, provides bread baked on hot stones, and bids him arise and eat for the journey ahead.

Richard Foster often spoke of the spiritual disciplines as openings for grace, ways we position ourselves to receive what God is ever eager to give. The wilderness is not only a place of testing but of tender ministry, where our weakness becomes the very point of divine encounter. Jesus, made perfect through sufferings, becomes our merciful high priest, able to help those who are tested because He Himself was tested.



Dear friend, in the ordinary wilderness moments of your Arizona week—perhaps the fatigue of Monday's demands, the quiet ache of unmet longings—notice the angels God sends: a timely word from a friend, the beauty of light on desert stone, the strengthening presence of His Spirit in prayer. We do not endure alone; we are ministered to, that we might arise and continue the journey.

Today, practice the discipline of receiving. When weariness comes, pause and name it honestly before the Lord. Then open your hands—literally or in heart—to receive the bread He provides, trusting that His grace is sufficient. As apprentices to Jesus, we learn that strength for the road comes not from our reserves but from His endless supply.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in my wilderness places today, minister to me as You allowed angels to minister to You. Touch my exhaustion, feed my hungry soul, and strengthen me for the journey. I open my hands to receive Your grace, trusting that You understand my every testing. Draw me closer to Your heart. Amen.

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent: Proclaiming the Nearness

Scripture: Psalm 32; Genesis 4:1–16; Hebrews 4:14–5:10; Mark 1:14–28

Now Jesus comes from the wilderness proclaiming: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” With authority He teaches and casts out unclean spirits, astonishing the crowds. The kingdom is not a distant hope but a present reality breaking in—near enough to heal, to liberate, to transform.

Dallas Willard reminded us that repentance is less about groveling in guilt and more about gladly changing our mind to agree with Jesus about how life is truly lived. The same voice that silenced demons now speaks peace to stormy hearts. In Cain’s story we see the tragedy of refusing that voice—anger unchecked, warning ignored, life diminished. Yet even there, God marks Cain for protection, His mercy pursuing.

In your Arizona Tuesday—amid work rhythms, family needs, the heat of small frustrations—hear Jesus announcing the nearness. The kingdom is as close as your next choice: to speak kindly, to forgive quickly, to act justly. Apprenticeship means practicing His authority in ordinary moments, trusting that His power flows through surrendered lives.

Today, carry a simple phrase from Jesus into your hours: “The kingdom of God has come near.” When temptation or irritation rises, whisper it as invitation to repent—to change direction—and believe the good news that His rule is sufficient. Watch for where His authority wants to break in through you.

Prayer: Jesus, I hear You proclaiming the kingdom near today. Forgive where I have walked in Cain’s anger or self-reliance. Give me grace to repent gladly and believe deeply. Let Your authority flow through my words and actions, that others might encounter Your liberating power. Draw me closer in apprenticeship to You. Amen.



Wednesday in the First Week of Lent: Touching the Untouchable

Scripture: Psalm 32; Exodus 34:1–9, 27–28; Matthew 18:10–14; Mark 1:29–45

Jesus touches a leper and declares, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately the leprosy leaves, and the man is restored—not only physically but socially, relationally, humanly. In the wilderness of exclusion, Jesus crosses every boundary to bring nearness. On the mountain, Moses beholds God’s glory and hears the divine name: merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

Henri Nouwen wrote often of our shared woundedness, how the healer must first acknowledge his own need of healing. Jesus, moved with compassion, does not stand aloof but reaches out, identifying with the outcast. The same hands that will one day be pierced now bring cleansing and welcome.

Dear friend, beneath the Arizona sun today, consider the “lepers” around you—those marginalized by illness, failure, reputation, or difference. And consider the leper places in your own heart—the shame you hide, the uncleanness you fear to name. Jesus chooses to touch both. His compassion is never reluctant.

Today, practice the discipline of compassionate touch. Offer a kind word, a listening ear, an act of inclusion. Then, in quiet prayer, bring your own hidden wounds to Him, allowing His touch to cleanse what you have long concealed. As apprentices, we learn that healing received becomes healing extended.

Prayer: Compassionate Jesus, I bring to You today the places in me that feel untouchable. Touch me with Your healing love. Stir my heart to reach toward those others avoid. Make me an instrument of Your boundary-crossing mercy. Draw me ever closer to Your wounded, welcoming heart. Amen.



Thursday in the First Week of Lent: The Gaze of Mercy

Scripture: Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1–3; 2 Timothy 1:3–7; Mark 2:1–12

Friends lower a瘫痪者 through the roof, and Jesus' first words are not "Be healed" but "Son, your sins are forgiven." Only then does He say, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." The deeper paralysis was not physical but spiritual—isolation from God's forgiveness. Jesus sees faith and responds with the gift the man most truly needs.

Dallas Willard often emphasized that the gospel is not primarily about forgiveness of sins so we can go to heaven when we die, but about the availability of God's kingdom here and now—life lived in interactive union with God. Forgiveness is the doorway into that life. The瘫痪者的 friends believed Jesus could give something more than physical relief; they trusted Him with the whole person. Jesus honors that faith by addressing the heart first.

In your Arizona Thursday, beneath vast skies that lift the eyes, practice lifting your gaze to the One who keeps you. Where do you feel paralyzed—by guilt, fear, regret? Hear Jesus speaking first to that deeper need: "Child, your sins are forgiven." Freedom to walk always begins with freedom to be loved.

Today, sit quietly and name one area of inner paralysis. Receive Jesus' prior word of forgiveness, as Willard taught: not something we earn, but something we step into by simple trust. Then, strengthened by that grace, take one small step of obedience or risk that previously felt impossible. Apprentices learn to live from forgiveness received.

Prayer: Forgive me, Lord, I lift my eyes to You today. See my deepest paralysis and speak Your word of pardon over me. Thank You for forgiving me before I can even ask. Stir in me a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. Draw me closer in grateful obedience to You. Amen.



Friday in the First Week of Lent: Called to Follow

Scripture: Psalm 121; Micah 7:18–20; Romans 3:21–31; Mark 2:13–22

Jesus calls Levi from his tax booth: “Follow me.” Levi leaves everything and rises to follow. Then he throws a party, inviting other outcasts to meet Jesus. Religious leaders grumble: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus replies, “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, writes that the discipline of simplicity enables us to hear and obey the call of Jesus without the clutter of possessions or status weighing us down. Levi’s immediate response models this: one word from Jesus, and the tax booth is abandoned. The feast that follows is not excess but joyful celebration of grace received.

Dear friend, as Friday’s desert light softens toward evening, hear Jesus passing by your own “tax booth”—the place where you earn, perform, or hide—and speaking the same invitation: “Follow me.” The call is not to perfection but to nearness. The feast is already prepared; the table is set for sinners.

Today, practice the discipline of immediate response. When you sense Jesus’ gentle nudge—toward generosity, honesty, reconciliation—rise and follow without delay. Then invite someone else into the joy of His presence, perhaps with simple hospitality. Apprenticeship is learned in following and in welcoming others to the feast.



Prayer: Calling

Lord, I hear You say

“Follow me” today. Forgive my delays and excuses. I rise to walk with You. Thank You for delighting to show mercy, for casting my sins far away. Use me to invite others to Your table. Draw me closer in joyful obedience. Amen.

Saturday in the First Week of Lent: The New Way

Scripture: Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:4–8; Luke 7:1–10; Mark 2:23–3:6

Jesus' disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath, and He declares, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Then He heals a withered hand, asking, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees are outraged, but Jesus grieves their hardness of heart. A new way is breaking in—one of mercy over rigidity, life over legalism.

Henri Nouwen often reflected on how our hearts harden when we forget we are the beloved—trying to prove worth instead of resting in it. Jesus' grief over hard hearts is the sorrow of love refused. Yet even there, He chooses to do good, stretching out healing to the withered.

In your Arizona Saturday—perhaps a day of rest or needed tasks—receive the Sabbath as gift rather than burden. Jesus offers rest not only from work but for wholeness. Where religious rules have withered your hand or heart, let Him stretch it out in healing.

Today, practice the discipline of mercy over judgment. Choose one "rule" you tend to impose on yourself or others—and release it to Jesus' gentler way. Do one small good that strictness might forbid. Apprentices learn that the new wine of the kingdom requires new wineskins of grace.



Prayer: Lord of the Sabbath, I receive Your gift of rest and restoration today. Heal what has withered in me through hardness or legalism. Teach me Your way of mercy and life. Make me flexible to hold the new wine of Your Spirit. Draw me closer into the freedom of Your kingdom. Amen.

Second Sunday in Lent: The Call to Leave and Follow

Scripture: Genesis 12:1–4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1–5, 13–17; John 3:1–17 or Matthew 17:1–9

On this Second Sunday in Lent, Abram hears the astonishing call: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” At seventy-five, he obeys—not grasping the details, only trusting the Promise-Maker. Faith is credited to him as righteousness, Paul later explains, not because of works but because he believed God who “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

Dallas Willard often taught that the heart of discipleship is learning to live in the kingdom of God here and now, which begins with a simple trust that rearranges our entire life around Jesus. Abram’s departure is a picture of that: leaving the familiar securities to walk with the God who is faithfully present. Nicodemus comes by night, puzzled about new birth; Jesus invites him to the same trust—being born from above, born of the Spirit who moves like wind, unseen yet powerfully real.

Dear friend, as you gather in worship this Lord’s Day in the East Valley, or perhaps later walk the trails at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve where water draws abundant life amid the desert, hear the gentle echo of that call in your own life. Where is Jesus inviting you to “go”—to leave a comfortable habit, a cherished resentment, a self-protective way—and follow Him into unknown blessing? The kingdom is not earned by striving but entered by childlike trust.

Today, practice the discipline of obedient trust. Name one area where you sense the Spirit’s nudge to leave the familiar. Offer it to God in quiet prayer, saying simply, “I will go, Lord; show me the way.” Then take one small step of faith in that direction—perhaps a walk along the Salt River, letting the flowing water remind you of His guiding presence. Apprentices discover that blessing flows not from seeing the whole map, but from walking with the One who holds it.

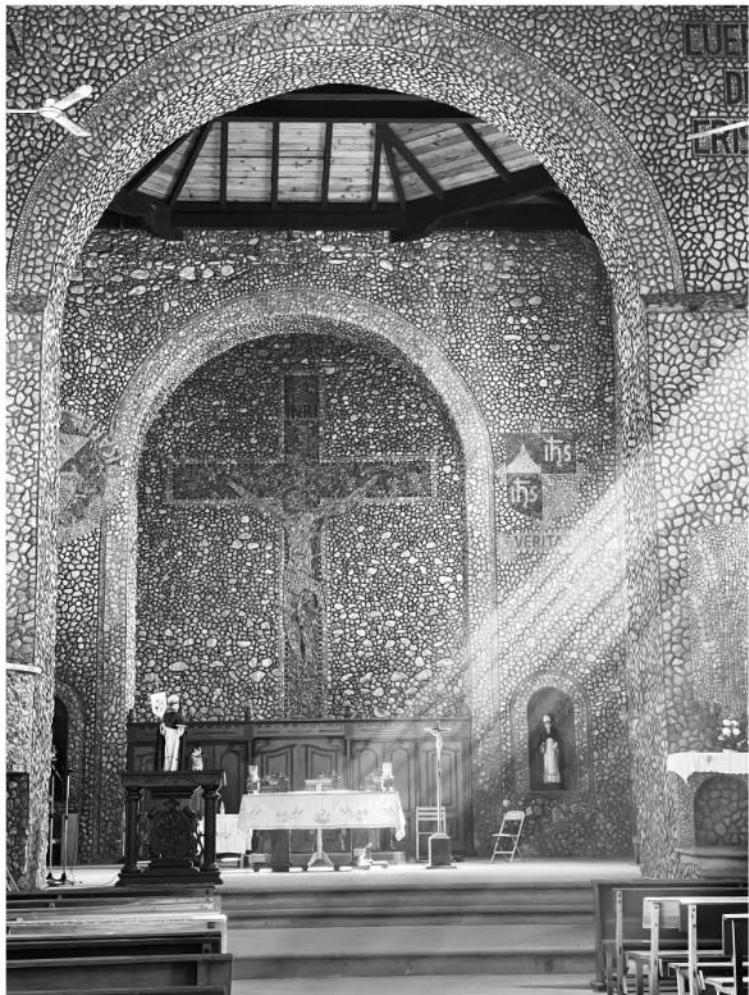
Prayer: Promise-keeping God, I hear Your call today to leave what is safe and follow where You lead. Like Abram, I choose to trust You rather than my own understanding. Give me grace to believe that You give life to dead places in me and call forth what does not yet exist. Draw me closer into the adventure of walking with Jesus. Amen.



Monday in the Second Week of Lent: Thirsty Souls and Living Water

Scripture: Psalm 128; Numbers 21:4–9; Hebrews 3:1–6; Mark 3:7–19a

The people grow impatient on the way, speaking against God and Moses: “There is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” Fiery serpents come, and many die—until Moses raises the bronze serpent, and all who look in faith are healed. Jesus will later point to this moment as a sign of His own lifting up on the cross.



presence before rushing into the day's demands. Apprentices learn that power for ministry flows from time spent with Him.

Prayer: Crucified Lord, I look to You today and live. Forgive my grumbling and impatience. Heal the places bitten by complaint and unbelief. Call me apart to be with You, that I might carry Your healing presence to others. Draw me closer to Your wounded side. Amen.

John Stott wrote that the cross is the blazing center of the glory of God—His love and justice perfectly displayed. The Israelites needed only to look and live; we need only to look to the crucified and risen Jesus and live eternally. The crowds in Mark press around Him for healing, yet He calls the Twelve apart to be with Him first, then to be sent out.

In the dry stretches of your East Valley Monday, when the sun climbs over Superstition Mountains and the air already carries the promise of heat, acknowledge the grumbling that rises when the way feels long. Where have you grown impatient with God's provision? The invitation is not to fix yourself but to look again to the One lifted up for your healing—perhaps while watching herons at the Gilbert Riparian Preserve, reminded that living water sustains life even here.

Today, practice the discipline of gazing. In a quiet moment, picture Jesus on the cross—His love poured out for you. Let gratitude and repentance rise together.

Then, like the disciples, linger in His

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent: The Beauty of New Creation

Scripture: Psalm 128; Isaiah 65:17–25; Romans 4:6–13; Mark 3:19b–35

Isaiah sings of new heavens and a new earth where weeping is no more, where wolf and lamb feed together, where no one shall hurt or destroy on God's holy mountain. This breathtaking vision is the future breaking into the present through Jesus, who redefines family: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Richard Foster reminds us in *Celebration of Discipline* that the discipline of submission frees us to live in harmony with God's new order—laying down our need to control outcomes and trusting His recreating power. The scribes accuse Jesus of evil, unable to see the stronger One binding the strong man and plundering his house.

Amid your East Valley Tuesday, glimpse the new creation already budding: the unexpected green along the Salt River after winter rain, the quiet harmony of desert creatures at the Desert Botanical Garden, signs that God is making all things new. Where do voices—inside or out—accuse the work of God in your life?

Today, practice the discipline of submission. Release one outcome you have been clutching tightly into Jesus' hands. Then do one small act of His will, however ordinary. Apprentices discover that the new creation is not only future hope but present reality for those who align with Him.

Prayer: Creator of new heavens and earth, I release my grip on what I cannot control. Forgive my resistance to Your recreating work. Make me part of Your family by joyful obedience. Let Your peace that ends weeping begin in me today. Draw me closer into Your beautiful future. Amen.



Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent: The Hidden Years and Faithful Waiting

Scripture: Psalm 128; Ezekiel 36:22–32; John 7:53–8:11; Mark 4:1–20

God promises through Ezekiel a new heart and a new spirit, removing the heart of stone and giving a heart of flesh. In the Gospel, Jesus refuses to condemn the woman caught in adultery: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” Grace and truth meet perfectly.

Henri Nouwen often reflected on how God’s love meets us in our most vulnerable places, not with condemnation but with the invitation to new life. The parable of the sower reminds us that fruitfulness depends less on our effort and more on receiving the word with an honest and good heart, persevering through trial.



In the warmth of your East Valley Wednesday, as you perhaps drive past the blooming ocotillo along South Mountain’s silhouette, consider the stony places in your own heart. Where have shame or fear hardened you? Jesus writes in the dust and offers mercy first, transformation second—like spring wildflowers pushing through desert soil.

Today, practice the discipline of honest receiving. Bring one hidden fault or failure to Jesus in prayer, hearing His words of non-condemnation. Then ask for the new heart He promises. Apprentices grow not by frantic striving but by patient openness to His inner work.

Prayer: Merciful Jesus, I come to You with my shame and hardness today. Write Your grace over my story. Remove my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh. Help me receive Your word deeply and bear fruit in due season. Draw me closer into Your transforming love. Amen.

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent: The Lamp and the Light

Scripture: Psalm 95; Exodus 16:1–8; Colossians 1:15–23; Mark 4:21–34

Jesus speaks of a lamp not hidden but placed on a stand, and of the kingdom growing secretly like seed scattered on the ground—sleeping and rising night and day, the earth producing of itself. The smallest seed becomes the greatest shrub, sheltering the birds.

Dallas Willard taught that the kingdom of God is the range of God's effective will, where what He wants done is done. These parables invite us to trust that His rule advances quietly, often invisibly, through ordinary faithfulness rather than spectacular effort.

In your East Valley Thursday, notice the small seeds you scatter: a kind word, a faithful task, a moment of prayer. They are not wasted—like the tiny wildflower seeds carpeting the trails at Boyce Thompson Arboretum after rain, bursting into color when the time is right. The light you carry is meant to shine, not to be hidden in fear or false humility.

Today, practice the discipline of quiet trust. Do one ordinary act of obedience without needing to see immediate results. Then place your “lamp”—your life, gifts, witness—on the stand for others to see Jesus in you. Apprentices learn to rest while the kingdom grows.

Prayer: Hidden Grower of the kingdom, I trust Your quiet work in and through me today. Forgive my demand for visible results. Use the small seeds I scatter. Let my life be a lamp that shines Your light clearly. Draw me closer into partnership with Your unseen advance. Amen.



Friday in the Second Week of Lent: Calming the Storm Within

Scripture: Psalm 95; Exodus 16:9–21; Ephesians 2:11–22; Mark 4:35–41

Jesus sleeps in the stern while the storm rages. The disciples wake Him in terror: “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He rises, rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then to them: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

John Stott observed that the miracles of Jesus are acted parables—signs pointing to who He is and what His kingdom brings. This stilling of the storm reveals His authority over chaos and His desire to bring peace to frightened hearts.

In the winds of your East Valley Friday—whether literal dust swirling across open lots or inner turmoil amid busy schedules—hear Jesus asking the same gentle question: “Why are you afraid?” He is in the boat with you, not distant, as present as the quiet after a monsoon along the Salt River.

Today, practice the discipline of waking Him. In a moment of anxiety, speak honestly: “Lord, I feel like I’m perishing.” Then listen for His “Peace! Be still!” spoken over your soul. Apprentices learn to rest in His presence amid the storm.

Prayer: Lord of wind and wave, I wake You in my storm today. Forgive my fear and little faith. Speak Your peace over the chaos within and around me. Help me trust that You are in the boat, caring deeply. Draw me closer into the calm of Your authority. Amen.



Saturday in the Second Week of Lent: Touching the Gerasene Heart

Scripture: Psalm 95; Exodus 16:27–35; John 4:1–6; Mark 5:1–20

Jesus crosses to the Gentile side and meets a man possessed, living among tombs, unbreakable by chains. The demons recognize Him: “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” At His word, the legion departs into the swine, and the man is found clothed and in his right mind, begging to follow Jesus.

Henri Nouwen wrote movingly of the wounded healer—Jesus enters our tombs of isolation and despair, not repulsed but compassionate, setting us free to tell others what He has done.

In your East Valley Saturday, consider the “tombs” where shame or pain have isolated you or others—the quiet corners even in beautiful places like the Desert Botanical Garden, where one can feel alone amid the crowds. Jesus still crosses boundaries to bring deliverance and restore dignity.

Today, practice the discipline of testimony. Recall one way Jesus has brought you to your right mind. Share it quietly with someone, or write it as a reminder while sitting beside a pond at the Riparian Preserve. Then pray for those still chained, that they might encounter the stronger One.

Prayer: Deliverer from tombs, I thank You for crossing into my chaos and setting me free. Clothe me anew in Your righteousness today. Use my story to point others to You. Send me as You sent the Gerasene, to declare Your mercy. Draw me closer into the wholeness You give. Amen.



Third Sunday in Lent: Living Water for Thirsty Hearts

Scripture: Exodus 17:1–7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1–11; John 4:5–42

On this Third Sunday in Lent, the people quarrel with Moses in the wilderness: “Give us water to drink... Is the Lord among us or not?” God instructs Moses to strike the rock, and water flows abundantly. Centuries later, Jesus sits weary by Jacob’s well and offers a Samaritan woman living water that becomes “a spring...gushing up to eternal life.”

N.T. Wright often describes the gospel as the story of God’s new creation breaking into the old—here, in an unexpected encounter across every barrier, Jesus reveals Himself as the gift of God, satisfying the deepest thirst of the human soul. The woman leaves her jar, runs to the village, and many believe because of her testimony: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done.”

Dear friend, as you worship this morning in the East Valley and perhaps later gaze across the shimmering waters of Saguaro Lake, let the sight of that life-giving reservoir in the desert remind you of the deeper thirst only Jesus quenches. Where do you quarrel inwardly, questioning “Is the Lord among us or not?” He meets you at the well of your ordinary day, offering water that truly satisfies.

Today, practice the discipline of honest encounter. In prayer, name your thirst—approval, security, relief—and bring it to Jesus. Then, like the woman, leave your “jar” (one lesser source of satisfaction) behind for an hour. Tell someone simply what He has done for you. Apprentices learn that living water flows through us to others.

Prayer: Living Lord, I come thirsty to You today. Meet me in my weariness and quarreling. Satisfy my deepest longings with Your spring of eternal life. Use my testimony, imperfect as it is, to draw others to You. Draw me closer into the flow of Your new creation. Amen.



Monday in the Third Week of Lent: Treasures of Mercy

Scripture: Psalm 81; Genesis 24:1–27; 2 John 1–13; Mark 5:21–43

Two desperate people reach out to Jesus: Jairus for his dying daughter, and a woman who has suffered twelve years with hemorrhages. Both receive far more than healing—restoration to community, dignity, life. Jesus calls the woman “Daughter” and the girl “Little one, arise.”

John Stott emphasized that Jesus’ miracles are signs of the kingdom’s in-breaking compassion—God’s mercy made touchable. The woman’s faith risked everything to touch even the fringe of His cloak; Jairus’ faith humbled a synagogue leader to fall at Jesus’ feet.



As your East Valley Monday unfolds beneath the watchful presence of Usery Mountain, let the rugged beauty of that pass remind you that mercy often meets us on difficult paths. Where do you need to reach through the crowd to touch Jesus today?

Today, practice the discipline of bold faith. Name one area of long suffering or fear of death—yours or another’s—and reach out in prayer as if touching His cloak. Then offer a small act of mercy to someone bleeding life away in isolation. Apprentices learn that the kingdom’s treasures are released through faith and compassion.

Prayer: Compassionate Healer, I reach through the crowd to touch You today. Heal my long-hidden wounds and the fears that grip my heart. Make me bold in faith and tender in mercy. Draw me closer into the circle of Your restoring love. Amen.

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent: The Homecoming of Faith

Scripture: Psalm 81; Genesis 29:1–14; 1 Corinthians 10:1–4; Mark 6:1–13

Jesus returns to Nazareth, teaches in the synagogue, and the people are astonished yet offended: “Is not this the carpenter?” He marvels at their unbelief and can do no deed of power there, except heal a few. Then He sends the Twelve out two by two, giving them authority and simple instructions for the road.

N.T. Wright notes that Jesus’ rejection in His hometown reveals the cost of the kingdom: familiarity can blind us to God’s presence among us in ordinary ways. Yet even there, grace touches a few, and the mission continues outward.



In your East Valley Tuesday, as the red rocks of Papago Park glow in the morning light, consider how easy it is to take for granted the familiar presence of Jesus—in Scripture, in worship, in the people closest to us. Where has unbelief limited His power in your “hometown” heart?

Today, practice the discipline of fresh wonder. Read a familiar passage as if for the first time. Then go out “two by

two” in spirit—send an encouraging message or make a short visit—carrying only the authority He gives. Apprentices learn to receive and extend grace even where it is least expected.

Prayer: Familiar yet astonishing Lord, I open my eyes anew to Your presence today. Forgive my unbelief that limits Your power in ordinary places. Send me with simple trust to carry Your authority and peace. Draw me closer into the wonder of Your nearness. Amen.

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent: The True Fountain

Scripture: Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4–13; John 7:14–31, 37–39; Mark 6:13–29

Jeremiah confronts Israel: “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” On the great day of the feast, Jesus cries out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink... Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”

Dallas Willard taught that the primary barrier to life in the kingdom is reliance on our own broken cisterns—strategies for happiness that inevitably leak. Jesus offers Himself as the inexhaustible source.

As your East Valley Wednesday rises with the sun climbing Camelback Mountain’s distinctive silhouette, let that steady ascent remind you of the One who is always available, always sufficient. Which cracked cisterns—achievement, comfort, control—have you been trusting lately?

Today, practice the discipline of abandonment. Name one broken cistern and consciously turn from it. Then drink deeply: spend ten quiet minutes simply receiving from Jesus, letting His Spirit well up within. Apprentices discover that rivers flow only from hearts filled at the true fountain.

Prayer: Fountain of living water, I forsake my cracked cisterns today. Forgive my digging in dry ground. Fill me afresh with Your Spirit until rivers of life flow through me to others. Draw me closer to drink deeply from You alone. Amen.



Thursday in the Third Week of Lent: Feasting in the Wilderness

Scripture: Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:10–21; Ephesians 4:25–32; Mark 6:30–46

The apostles return excited from mission, and Jesus invites them, “Come away to a deserted place and rest.” Yet crowds follow, and Jesus has compassion: He teaches, then multiplies five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand, with twelve baskets left over.

Richard Foster writes in *Celebration of Discipline* that solitude and rest are essential for sustaining ministry, yet Jesus models that true rest is found in communion with the Father, even amid demands. The wilderness becomes a place of abundance when He is host.

In the busyness of your East Valley Thursday, hear Jesus’ invitation to come away—perhaps to the quiet shores of Canyon Lake where water and rock create space for stillness. Where do you need His multiplying touch on meager resources of time, energy, or love?

Today, practice the discipline of compassionate interruption. When demands crowd in, pause to receive His compassion first. Then offer whatever “loaves and fish” you have, trusting Him to multiply. Apprentices learn abundance in the wilderness of service.

Prayer: Shepherd who makes me lie down in green pastures, I come away with You today. Have compassion on my hurried heart. Multiply my small offerings for others’ need. Feed me at Your table in the wilderness. Draw me closer into Your providing presence. Amen.



Friday in the Third Week of Lent: Walking on Water

Scripture: Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:22–31; Ephesians 5:1–9; Mark 6:47–56

Evening comes,
the boat is battered
by waves, and
Jesus comes
walking on the sea.
The disciples cry
out in terror, but
He says, “Take
heart, it is I; do not
be afraid.” Peter
steps out, walks
briefly, then sinks
—yet Jesus
immediately
reaches and
catches him.

N.T. Wright
reflects that this
sign reveals Jesus
as the One through
whom God’s new creation is breaking in, exercising the authority that belongs to God alone over
chaotic waters. Faith is not never sinking, but crying out to the One who saves.



As twilight settles over your East Valley Friday, perhaps visible from a vantage near Papago Rocks, remember that Jesus still walks toward you across whatever storm-tossed waters threaten to overwhelm. Where are you tempted to cry “Ghost!” instead of “Lord!”?

Today, practice the discipline of risky faith. Step out in one area where fear bids you stay in the boat—perhaps a conversation, a generosity, a trust. When you begin to sink, cry out immediately. Apprentices learn that His hand is always nearer than the waves.

Prayer: Lord who walks on water, I see You coming toward me today across my storm. Calm my terror and strengthen my faltering faith. Catch me when I sink, and bring me safely into the boat of Your peace. Draw me closer to walk with You upon the waves. Amen.

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent: The Defiled Heart

Scripture: Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:32–34; John 1:1–9; Mark 7:1–23

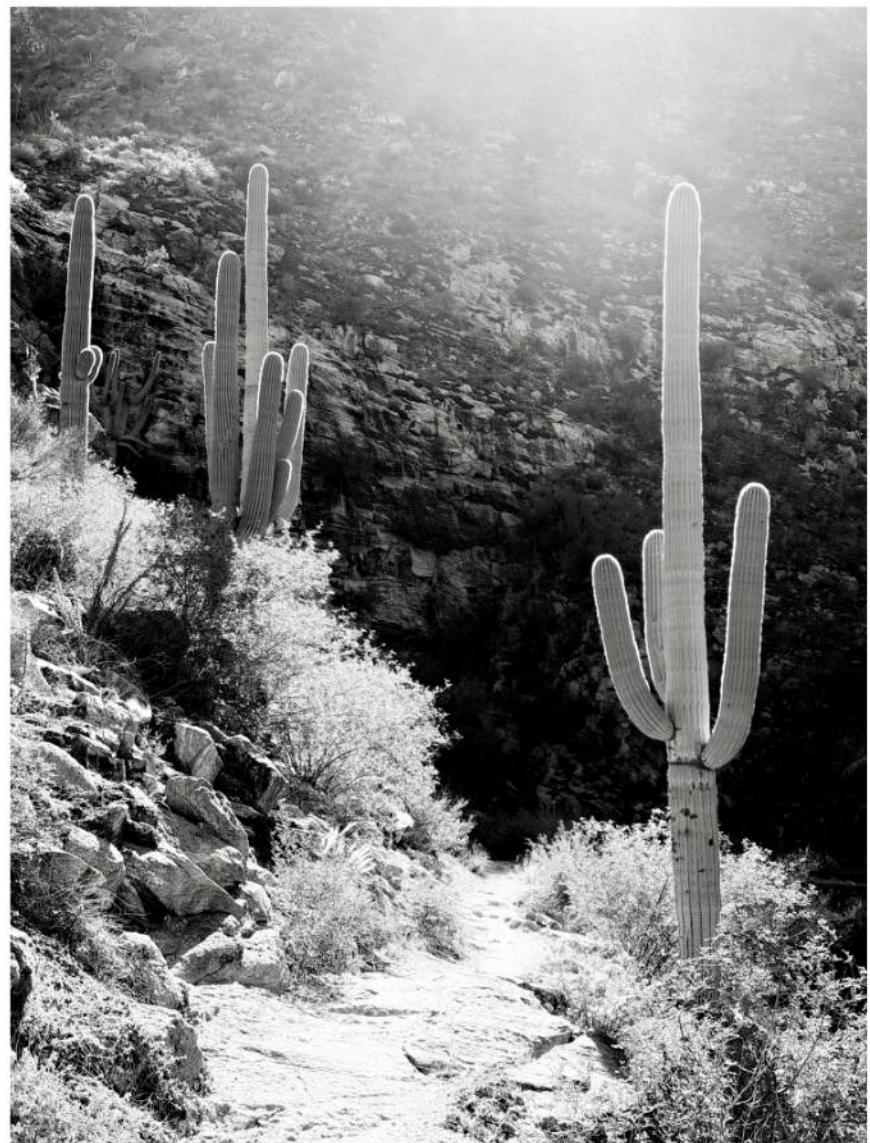
The Pharisees criticize handwashing traditions, and Jesus responds, “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles, but what comes out of the heart.” He lists evils that originate within: greed, deceit, pride, folly.

Henri Nouwen often wrote that the heart is the place where we meet God and others most truly—what flows out reveals who we have allowed to dwell within. Jesus exposes not to shame, but to heal and cleanse.

In the quiet of your East Valley Saturday, perhaps walking the shaded paths near Camelback Mountain as the day cools, let the stillness invite honest examination. What has been coming out of your heart lately—words, attitudes, actions—that defiles?

Today, practice the discipline of inner cleansing. Confess one heart-issue plainly to Jesus. Receive His forgiveness and ask for His light to expose and heal. Then speak one life-giving word to someone. Apprentices grow by inviting the Word to dwell richly within.

Prayer: Searcher of hearts, I open the hidden places to Your light today. Cleanse what defiles within me. Forgive my pride and folly. Fill me with Your pure love until only goodness flows out. Draw me closer into the purity of Your heart. Amen.



Fourth Sunday in Lent: Light in the Darkness

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1–13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8–14; John 9:1–41

On this Fourth Sunday in Lent, Samuel anoints young David, the least likely among Jesse's sons, because “the Lord looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus spreads mud on a blind man’s eyes and sends him to wash in Siloam; sight returns, and a furious controversy erupts. The man who once sat in darkness now boldly confesses, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

N.T. Wright often reminds us that Jesus’ signs are previews of God’s new creation: darkness giving way to light, exclusion giving way to belonging. The Pharisees, certain they see clearly, prove themselves blind; the beggar, once dismissed, becomes a courageous witness.

Dear friend, as you worship this morning in the East Valley and perhaps later stroll a quiet canal path where water reflects the bright Arizona sun, let that interplay of light and water speak of the One who opens blind eyes. Where have you been quick to judge by appearances—your own heart or another’s? Where do you still sit in unseen darkness, waiting for His touch?

Today, practice the discipline of awakened sight. Ask Jesus to spread His “mud” on one area of spiritual blindness. Then look afresh at someone you have dismissed or misjudged, seeing them as God sees—the heart, not the surface. Apprentices learn to walk as children of light, exposing darkness with gentle truth.

Prayer: Lord who anoints the unlikely, I open my blind places to Your light today. Wash the mud from my eyes that I may see clearly. Help me look on hearts as You do. Make me bold to confess Your work in my life. Draw me closer into the radiance of Your new creation. Amen.





Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent: Resurrection Hope

Scripture: Psalm 146; Isaiah 59:9–19; Acts 9:1–20; Mark 7:24–37

Saul, breathing threats, journeys toward Damascus when sudden light blinds him and the risen Jesus speaks his name. Ananias, terrified, is sent to lay hands on his former enemy that scales may fall and sight return. In Mark, Jesus opens deaf ears and looses a bound tongue: “Ephphatha —be opened!”

Amy Carmichael, the Irish missionary who spent her life

rescuing children in India, wrote often of the cost and beauty of obedience when God calls us to unlikely people. Ananias’ trembling “Here I am, Lord” becomes the instrument of transformation for the church’s greatest persecutor.

Along your East Valley Monday, perhaps spotting the wild horses grazing freely along the lower Salt River, remember that the risen Lord still breaks in with blinding light and gentle healing. Who is the “Saul” in your life—an opponent, an irritant, someone you fear? Who needs your hands laid in prayer?

Today, practice the discipline of courageous obedience. Pray for one difficult person by name, asking Jesus to open ears and eyes—hearts and yours. Then take one small step toward them in kindness. Apprentices discover that resurrection hope flows through yielded lives.

Prayer: Risen Lord, I hear You speak my name today. Blind me to my prejudices and open my ears to Your call. Give me Ananias’ courage to go to unlikely people. Use my hands for Your healing. Draw me closer into Your resurrecting power. Amen.

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent: The Hidden Banquet

Scripture: Psalm 146; Isaiah 42:14–21; Colossians 1:9–14; Mark 8:1–10

Again in a deserted place, Jesus has compassion on the hungry crowd. Seven loaves and a few fish become abundance; seven baskets remain after four thousand eat. The disciples, who witnessed the earlier feeding, still wonder, “How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?”

Richard Foster teaches that the discipline of simplicity strips away our anxious grasping so we can receive the provision already present. Jesus gives thanks, breaks, and gives—ordinary actions that release extraordinary abundance when offered to the Father.

As your East Valley Tuesday carries the warmth of spring, perhaps noticing rescued animals finding new life at Carl’s Damaged Pet Warehouse, consider how God delights to feed and restore the broken. Where do you doubt His provision in your own “deserted place”?

Today, practice the discipline of thankful breaking. Take whatever “seven loaves” you have—time, resources, energy—give thanks, break them in service, and give them away. Trust the multiplication to Him. Apprentices learn to live from overflowing baskets.



Prayer: Providing Lord, I bring my small loaves to You today. Forgive my anxious doubt. Teach me simplicity that trusts Your abundance. Multiply what I offer for others’ hunger. Draw me closer into the banquet of Your compassion. Amen.

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent: Seeing Truly

Scripture: Psalm 146; Isaiah 60:17–22; Matthew 9:27–34; Mark 8:11–26

The Pharisees demand a sign from heaven; Jesus sighs deeply and refuses. Then He takes a blind man by the hand, leads him outside the village, and heals in stages: first trees walking, then clear sight. “Do not even enter the village,” He warns.

Dallas Willard observed that many want spectacular proof yet miss the quiet presence of the kingdom in ordinary mercy. Jesus heals gradually, personally, away from the crowd—inviting deeper trust rather than instant spectacle.



In the gentle light of your East Valley Wednesday, perhaps walking a canal path lined with blooming oleanders, let the gradual opening of desert spring speak of how Jesus often restores sight in stages. Where is your vision still partial—half-healed, seeing people as trees walking?

Today, practice the discipline of patient trust. Ask Jesus to touch your eyes again where clarity is lacking. Then refrain from rushing back to old patterns or crowds; linger with Him outside the village. Apprentices grow through stages into clear sight.

Prayer: Gentle Healer, I take Your hand today and let You lead me outside the village. Touch my partial sight again. Forgive my demand for instant signs. Open my eyes fully to see as You see. Draw me closer into the clarity of Your kingdom. Amen.

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent: The Cup of Revelation

Scripture: Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1–3; 2:8–3:3; Revelation 10:1–11; Mark 8:27–9:1

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks, “Who do people say that I am?” Then, more sharply, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Messiah.” Immediately Jesus speaks of suffering, death, and resurrection—truth Peter cannot yet bear.

Ruth Haley Barton, in her writings on spiritual formation, emphasizes the necessity of sacred rhythms that create space to receive hard but life-giving words from God. Ezekiel eats the scroll, sweet as honey yet turning the stomach—God’s word is both delight and demand.

As your East Valley Thursday unfolds beneath vast skies, perhaps near the wild horses moving gracefully along the Verde River, hear Jesus’ piercing question echoing in your own heart. Who do you say that He is—not in theory, but in daily allegiance?

Today, practice the discipline of honest confession. Sit quietly and answer Jesus’ question aloud or in writing. Then receive whatever hard truth about following Him He wants to speak. Apprentices learn to take up the cross after tasting the sweetness of His presence.

Prayer: Messiah who suffers, I confess today that You are the Christ, my Lord. Give me grace to eat Your word fully—sweet and bitter. Help me deny myself and follow where You lead. Draw me closer into the cost and glory of Your way. Amen.



Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent: Transfigured Glory

Scripture: Psalm 130; Ezekiel 33:10–16; Revelation 11:15–19; Mark 9:2–13

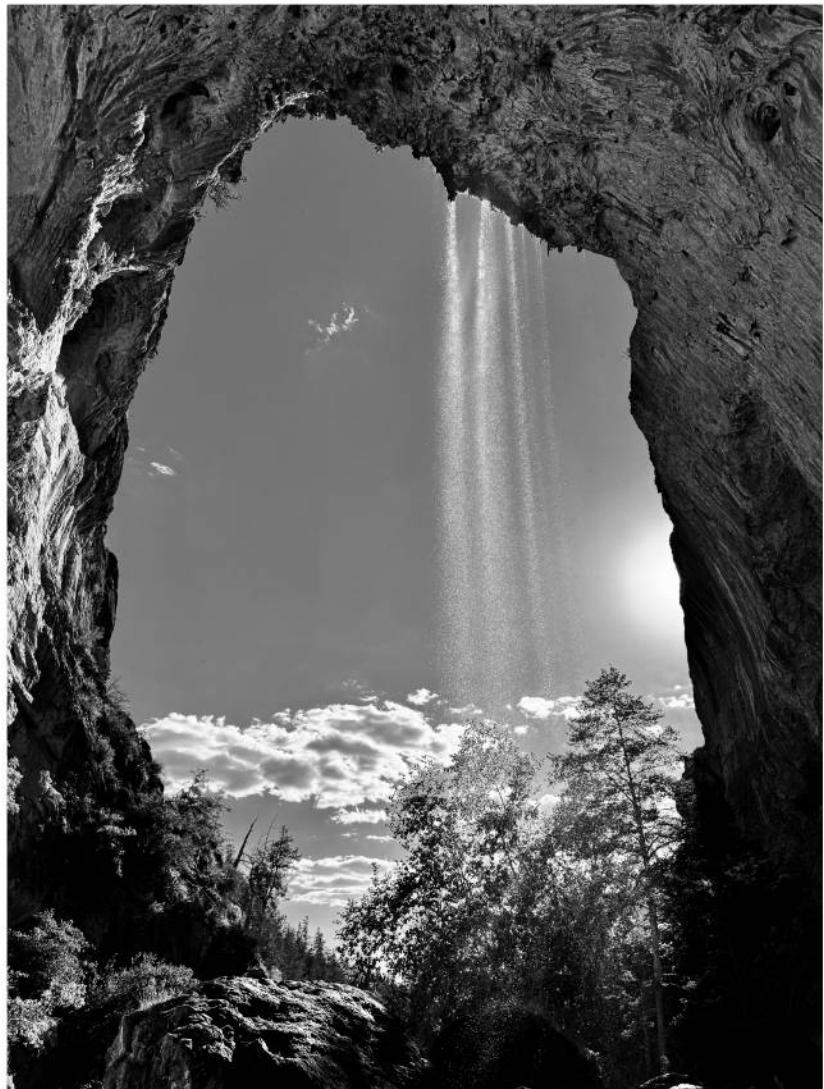
Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. There He is transfigured—clothes dazzling white, face shining—flanked by Moses and Elijah. A cloud overshadows; the Father's voice declares, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him."

Henri Nouwen wrote beautifully of the belovedness that grounds all ministry: only when we know deeply that we are God's beloved can we descend the mountain to serve in the valley. The disciples are terrified, yet Jesus touches them: "Get up and do not be afraid."

On your East Valley Friday, as the sun gilds the rugged peaks visible from many places here, let the light remind you of that momentary unveiling of glory. Where do you need to hear again, "You are my beloved"?

Today, practice the discipline of listening on the mountain. Spend ten minutes in silence, simply receiving the Father's love for you in Christ. Then descend to whatever valley awaits, carrying that touch: "Get up and do not be afraid." Apprentices are formed in glory before they serve in shadow.

Prayer: Beloved Son, I climb the mountain with You today to behold Your glory. Let the Father's voice echo in my heart: I am beloved. Touch my fear and send me down unafraid to serve. Draw me closer into the radiance of Your love. Amen.



Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent: Faith That Moves Mountains

Scripture: Psalm 130; Ezekiel 36:8–15; Luke 24:44–53; Mark 9:14–29

A father brings his tormented son to the disciples, who cannot heal. Jesus arrives, exasperated yet compassionate: “All things can be done for the one who believes.” The father cries, “I believe; help my unbelief!” Jesus delivers the boy, then tells the disciples privately, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

Madeleine L’Engle, poet and believer, often explored the honest interplay of faith and doubt—how raw confession invites God’s power where polished certainty cannot. The father’s cry is one of the most human prayers in Scripture.

In the quiet of your East Valley Saturday, perhaps watching rescued creatures thrive at Carl’s Damaged Pet Warehouse, bring your own mixture of belief and unbelief to Jesus. What “spirit” torments you or someone you love that seems immovable?

Today, practice the discipline of desperate honesty. Pray the father’s exact words over one impossible situation. Then rest in quiet prayer, trusting that Jesus still drives out what we cannot. Apprentices grow strongest in the prayer that admits weakness.

Prayer: Lord who casts out torment, I believe—help my unbelief today. Hear my honest cry over what seems impossible. Drive out every spirit that does not bow to You. Strengthen my faltering faith through prayer. Draw me closer into Your delivering power. Amen.



Fifth Sunday in Lent: Raised to New Life

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1–14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6–11; John 11:1–45

On this Fifth Sunday in Lent, Ezekiel stands amid a valley of dry bones and hears the Lord's question: "Can these bones live?" At God's command, breath enters, sinews and flesh form, and a vast army stands alive. In Bethany, Jesus weeps, then cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man emerges, bound hand and foot, and Jesus says, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Dallas Willard taught that the kingdom of God is the realm where God's will is done effortlessly because life flows from the Spirit within. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now dwells in us, giving life to mortal bodies and dry places.

Dear friend, as you gather for worship in the East Valley this morning, and perhaps later watch the wild horses gallop freely along the lower Salt River—vivid emblems of untamed, resurrected life—hear the Lord asking you, "Can these bones live?" What valley of dryness, grief, or hopelessness lies within or around you, perhaps echoing the stark beauty of South Mountain's rugged trails?

Today, practice the discipline of prophetic hope. Speak God's word over one dead situation: "I prophesy breath—come alive in Jesus' name." Then take one small step to unbind someone else—offer listening, encouragement, practical help. Apprentices learn that resurrection life is released through Spirit-empowered obedience.

Prayer: Life-giving Spirit, I stand in my valley of dry bones today. Breathe Your breath into dead places. Raise what seems hopelessly lost. Unbind me and send me to unbind others. Draw me closer into the power of Christ's resurrection. Amen.



Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent: The Joy of Resurrection

Scripture: Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17–24; Acts 20:7–12; Mark 9:30–41

A widow's son lies dead; Elijah stretches himself upon the boy three times and cries to the Lord, and the child's life returns. In Troas, young Eutychus falls from a third-story window during Paul's long sermon and is taken up dead—yet Paul embraces him and declares, "His life is in him."

Madeleine L'Engle wrote of the "glorious impossible"—how God's power interrupts the expected order with unexpected life. Both stories show resurrection not as distant doctrine but as present compassion breaking into ordinary gatherings.



As your East Valley Monday begins with the sun rising over the Superstition Mountains, perhaps spotting rescued animals finding second chances at Carl's Damaged Pet Warehouse, remember that the God of resurrection still interrupts death with life. Where has exhaustion or despair made you feel "taken up dead," much like a quiet moment beside the ponds at Gilbert Riparian Preserve?

Today, practice the discipline of embracing

hope. Lay your weary places before the Lord like Elijah stretched over the child. Then embrace someone else who has fallen—offer a word of life, a touch of encouragement. Apprentices carry resurrection joy into weary rooms.

Prayer: God of the glorious impossible, I stretch myself before You today over what feels dead in me. Return life to my weary soul. Use me to embrace others with Your resurrection hope. Draw me closer into the joy of Your life-giving power. Amen.

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent: Freed from Condemnation

Scripture: Psalm 143; 2 Kings 4:18–37; Ephesians 2:1–10; Mark 9:42–50

Elisha prays over a dead child, lies upon him, and life returns. Paul reminds the Ephesians they were once dead in trespasses but have been made alive together with Christ—by grace, through faith, not works.

Ruth Haley Barton writes that true spiritual formation begins with grace: we cannot climb out of our graves by effort; we can only receive the hand that lifts us. The “deadness” of sin is met by the gift of new life in Christ.

Along the shaded walking paths of East Valley canals, where steady water nourishes unexpected greenery amid the desert, let the flow remind you of grace that reaches the dead. Where do shame or old patterns still bind you like grave clothes, even as spring blooms burst forth at the Desert Botanical Garden?

Today, practice the discipline of receiving grace. Sit quietly and hear Paul’s words as personal: “You have been made alive... by grace you have been saved.” Then extend that same grace to someone who has stumbled. Apprentices live from the gift, not the grind.

Prayer: Gracious God, I receive Your gift of life today where I was dead in sin. Thank You for raising me by grace alone. Free me from every binding shame. Help me offer Your grace freely to others. Draw me closer into the freedom of Your love. Amen.



Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent: The Cost of Discipleship

Scripture: Psalm 143; Jeremiah 32:1–9, 36–41; Matthew 22:23–33; Mark 10:1–16

Jeremiah buys a field in besieged land—an acted parable of hope in coming restoration. Jesus welcomes little children, saying, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

Henri Nouwen often reflected that childlike receptivity—openness, dependence, wonder—is the doorway to the kingdom. The disciples’ rebuking of children reveals adult hardness; Jesus’ indignation reveals divine welcome.

In the warmth of your East Valley Wednesday, perhaps gazing at the distinctive hump of Camelback Mountain against the sky, consider what “field” God asks you to invest in when circumstances look hopeless. Where have you grown too “adult” to receive the kingdom simply, forgetting the playful freedom of wild horses along the Verde River?



Today, practice the discipline of childlike trust. Approach Jesus with empty hands, asking to be blessed as He blessed the children. Then invest hope in one seemingly hopeless situation—prayer, kindness, generosity. Apprentices enter the kingdom as children and live as stewards of future grace.

Prayer: Welcoming Lord, I come to You today as a little child. Bless me with Your kingdom. Soften my adult hardness and fill me with wonder. Help me buy the field of hope You show me. Draw me closer into Your childlike kingdom. Amen.

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent: The Servant's Heart

Scripture: Psalm 31:9–16; 1 Samuel 16:11–13; Philippians 1:1–11; Mark 10:17–31

A rich young man asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, looking at him with love, says, “Sell what you own, give to the poor... then come, follow me.” The man goes away grieving. Jesus teaches the impossibility of entering the kingdom by human effort—yet “for God all things are possible.”

John Stott wrote that the call to discipleship is a call to radical generosity rooted in love for Christ above all possessions. The young man’s sorrow reveals where his heart truly rested.

As your East Valley Thursday carries the golden light of late winter, perhaps hiking the trails of Usery Mountain Pass where saguaros stand sentinel, hear Jesus’ loving gaze upon you. What possession—money, reputation, comfort—do you clutch that keeps you from following fully, unlike the unburdened grace of creatures at Boyce Thompson Arboretum?



Today, practice the discipline of loving release. Name one thing you grip tightly and offer it to Jesus in prayer. Then take one concrete step of generosity. Apprentices discover that losing life for His sake is the way to find it.

Prayer: Loving Lord who looks upon me with love, I release my clenched hands today. Show me what keeps me from following fully. Give me grace to sell and give and come. Make possible in me what is impossible alone. Draw me closer into Your servant heart. Amen.

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent: The Mind of Christ

Scripture: Psalm 31:9–16; Job 13:13–19; Philippians 1:21–30; Mark 10:32–45

Jesus again predicts His suffering and death. James and John seek places of honor; Jesus teaches, “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant... For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Dallas Willard emphasized that true greatness in the kingdom is measured by Christlike servanthood—living “with” and “for” others as Jesus did. The disciples’ ambition reveals how slowly the cross reshapes our minds.

In the lengthening shadows of your East Valley Friday, perhaps viewing the dramatic red rocks of Papago Park at sunset, let the quiet beauty speak of the One who emptied Himself. Where do you seek greatness on the world’s terms, forgetting the humble strength seen in rescued lives thriving anew?

Today, practice the discipline of servant-mindedness. Choose one lowly task of service without recognition. Do it as unto Jesus. Apprentices are formed when ambition dies and Christ’s mind lives in us.

Prayer: Suffering Servant, I surrender my ambition today. Shape in me Your mind of humility and service. Teach me greatness through giving my life away. Draw me closer into the beauty of Your self-emptying love. Amen.



Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent: The Healing Touch

Scripture: Psalm 31:9–16; Lamentations 3:55–66; Mark 10:32–34; Mark 10:46–52

Blind Bartimaeus cries out from the roadside, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Despite rebukes, he cries louder. Jesus stops, calls him, and asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus replies, “Let me see again.” Jesus says, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he sees and follows on the way.

Amy Carmichael knew deep identification with the marginalized; she often wrote of Jesus hearing the persistent cry of the desperate. Bartimaeus’ bold faith meets the Savior who always stops for the marginalized.

In the gentle close of your East Valley Saturday, perhaps reflecting beside the shimmering waters of Saguaro Lake or Canyon Lake, hear Jesus passing by and asking you the same question. What persistent cry rises from your heart, amid the vast desert beauty that surrounds us?

Today, practice the discipline of bold asking. Cry out to Jesus with Bartimaeus’ words for one area of blindness—spiritual, relational, circumstantial. Then follow Him on the way, whatever He says. Apprentices see clearly when they follow closely.

Prayer: Son of David, I cry out to You today: have mercy on me. Let me see again where blindness lingers. Thank You for stopping and calling me. Give me faith to follow You on the way. Draw me closer into the light of Your presence. Amen.



Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday): The King Enters in Humility

Scripture: Zechariah 9:9–12; Psalm 31:9–16; Philippians 2:5–11; Matthew 26:14–27:66 or Matthew 27:11–54

On this Palm Sunday, the crowds wave branches and shout “Hosanna!” as Jesus rides a donkey into Jerusalem—fulfilling Zechariah’s prophecy of a humble king bringing peace. Yet within days, the cries turn to “Crucify!” Paul urges us to have the mind of Christ, who emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, obedient even to death on a cross.

N.T. Wright teaches that the cross is the climax of the kingdom’s strange victory: not through military might but through self-giving love that disarms evil and reconciles the world. The long Passion reading invites us to walk the way of sorrow with Jesus, seeing every step as deliberate love.



Dear friend, as you worship in the East Valley this morning, perhaps later noticing fresh green fronds of desert palms swaying along canal paths or at the Desert Botanical Garden, let the contrast speak: triumphant entry giving way to suffering road. Where do your own “Hosannas” turn to silence or betrayal when following grows costly?

Today, practice the discipline of humble procession. Carry an invisible palm branch in your heart—offer one genuine act of praise amid difficulty. Then enter imaginatively into the Passion: read slowly, letting sorrow and gratitude mingle. Apprentices learn the paradox: the lowest place becomes the highest throne.

Prayer:

O humble King, riding on a donkey through waving palms,

I spread my cloak before You today—my pride, my plans, my fears.
Teach me the mind that empties itself,
the obedience that descends to the dust of death.
When the crowd’s cry turns cruel, hold me steady in love.
Let every step toward the cross reshape my heart,
until I too bow before the name above every name,
Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Monday of Holy Week: The Anointed One

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1–9; Psalm 36:5–11; Hebrews 9:11–15; John 12:1–11

Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet with costly perfume, filling the house with fragrance. Judas objects, but Jesus defends her: "She has anointed me for my burial." Isaiah's Servant brings justice gently, a light to the nations; the new covenant is sealed in better blood.

Henri Nouwen wrote that true ministry flows from being the beloved—Mary's extravagant act arises from deep listening at Jesus' feet. She alone understands the hour; her love prepares Him for what lies ahead.

In the quiet light of your East Valley Monday, perhaps catching the scent of spring creosote after rare rain along South Mountain trails, let Mary's lavish love challenge your calculations. What costly offering—time, reputation, resources—does Jesus invite from you as Holy Week deepens?

Today, practice the discipline of extravagant devotion. Offer one thing precious to you—unhurried prayer, a generous gift, vulnerable honesty—as perfume poured out.

Apprentices learn that what seems waste to the world is worship to the King.

Prayer: Loving Lord, I pour out my costly perfume at Your feet today. Forgive my Judas-hearted calculations. Teach me Mary's listening love that sees the hour clearly. Let the fragrance of my surrendered life fill the house where You dwell. Draw me closer into the beauty of Your anointed way. Amen.



Tuesday of Holy Week: The Betrayer's Kiss

Scripture: Isaiah 49:1–7; Psalm 71:1–14; 1 Corinthians 1:18–31; John 12:20–36

Greeks seek Jesus; He responds, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified... Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain.” Betrayal looms; the cross casts its shadow.

John Stott described the cross as the wisdom and power of God hidden in apparent foolishness and weakness. Jesus troubles His own soul yet chooses the Father’s will: “Father, glorify your name.”

As your East Valley Tuesday unfolds beneath vast skies stretching over Saguaro Lake, let the solitary saguaros—dying to bear fruit—echo the grain of wheat. Where do fear or self-preservation keep you from falling into the ground?

Today, practice the discipline of dying trust. Name one area you cling to for security; release it consciously to death in prayer. Then serve someone unnoticed. Apprentices bear much fruit only through dying.

Prayer: Glorified Lord, I hear Your troubled soul today and feel my own. Forgive my clinging to single-grain life. Let me fall willingly into the earth of Your will. Glorify Your name through my small dying. Draw me closer into the fruitfulness of Your cross. Amen.



Wednesday of Holy Week: The Listening Ear

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4–9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1–3; John 13:21–32

The Servant declares, “Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen.” Jesus, deeply troubled, announces betrayal; Judas leaves into the night. Glory and darkness intertwine.

Dallas Willard taught that sustained listening to God reshapes the soul for endurance. The Servant’s open ear sustains Him through suffering; Jesus’ obedience sustains Him through the night ahead.

In the hush of your East Valley Wednesday, perhaps walking quiet paths at Gilbert Riparian Preserve as birds awaken the dawn, ask for the wakened ear. What word does Jesus speak to you this morning that requires costly obedience?

Today, practice the discipline of morning listening. Rise fifteen minutes earlier; sit in silence, asking only, “Lord, waken my ear.” Then obey whatever small word comes. Apprentices endure by daily listening.

Prayer: Awakener of ears, I come weary and distracted today. Morning by morning, teach me to listen as one taught. Sustain me through betrayal’s night and suffering’s dawn. Let Your word be my strength. Draw me closer into the obedience of Your open heart. Amen.



Maundy Thursday: The Night of Love's Commandment

Scripture: Exodus 12:1–4 [5–10] 11–14; Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; John 13:1–17, 31b–35

Jesus, knowing His hour has come, rises from table, ties a towel, and washes the disciples' feet—including Judas'. Then: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you." In the upper room, bread broken, cup shared: "Do this in remembrance of me."

Richard Foster writes that service is the outward expression of inward solitude with God; Jesus' footwashing flows from perfect love that "having loved his own... loved them to the end." The mandate—commandment—is love made visible in humble service.

Dear friend, as twilight falls over the East Valley this Maundy Thursday, perhaps gathering with your church family around candlelit tables, let the basin and towel speak. Whose feet—dusty, calloused, betraying—does Jesus invite you to wash?

Today, practice the discipline of humble service. Perform one menial act of love for another, especially someone difficult, without explanation. Then receive Communion remembering: His body broken, His blood poured out—for you.

Prayer:

O Lover to the end, who knelt with basin and towel,
I stand barefoot before You tonight, ashamed of my dust.
Wash me clean—every proud place, every betraying thought.
Then teach my trembling hands to serve as You served, to love as You loved, to the uttermost.
Let the fragrance of broken bread and poured wine fill my life until others taste Your love in me.
Keep me close in this holy night of remembrance. Amen.



Good Friday: The Hour of Darkness

Scripture: Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16–25 or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9; John 18:1–19:42

The Suffering Servant is marred beyond recognition, despised, stricken—yet He bears our griefs, carries our sorrows. On Golgotha, Jesus is lifted high: mocked, forsaken, pierced. “It is finished.” The curtain tears; the earth quakes; a centurion confesses.

Henri Nouwen saw the cross as the ultimate revelation of God’s solidarity with human suffering: Jesus enters our deepest abandonment so no darkness is beyond redemption. The silent hours invite us to stand at the foot of the cross, beholding love crucified.

Dear friend, in the solemn hush of Good Friday in the East Valley, perhaps walking slowly beneath the stark arms of saguaros at Papago Park or keeping vigil in church shadows, let the cross loom large. What forsakeness in you meets His cry, “My God, my God, why?”

Today, practice the discipline of beholding. Spend time simply gazing—upon a crucifix, Scripture’s account, or in silent imagination—at Jesus crucified. Let tears come; let silence speak. Apprentices are formed most deeply at the cross.

Prayer:

Behold the Lamb, silent before shearers,
marred, despised, acquainted with deepest grief.
I stand beneath Your cross in the noonday dark,
hearing hammer blows echo in my own broken heart.
You who knew no sin became sin—
for me, for us, for all the world’s forsaken ones.
In Your thirst I find living
water;
in Your wounds, my healing;
in Your forsaken cry, my
Father’s embrace.
Hold me here until love
crucifies every lesser love,
until I breathe with Your last
breath:
“It is finished.”
Draw me closer, even here,
into the heart of redeeming
love. Amen.



Holy Saturday: The Silent Tomb

Scripture: Job 14:1–14 or Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24; Psalm 31:1–4, 15–16; 1 Peter 4:1–8; Matthew 27:57–66 or John 19:38–42

Joseph and Nicodemus gently take Jesus' body, wrap it in spices and linen, lay it in a new tomb. A stone is rolled; guards posted. Creation holds its breath in Sabbath stillness.

Ruth Haley Barton describes Holy Saturday as sacred waiting—the in-between where grief lingers and hope seems buried. Yet beneath the silence, the greatest work unfolds unseen.



In the quiet of your East Valley Holy Saturday, perhaps resting beside still waters at Canyon Lake or walking slowly at Boyce Thompson Arboretum among sleeping seeds, enter the tomb's hush. What feels sealed in stone awaits resurrection?

Today, practice the discipline of holy waiting. Refrain from distraction; embrace silence and sorrow. Trust the hidden work. Apprentices learn patience in the dark.

Prayer: Lord of the sealed tomb, I wait with You in silence

today. Hold my grief gently as spices and linen held You. Let stillness teach me trust. Work unseen in my buried places. Draw me closer into the mystery of Your holy resting. Amen.