

# Lions and Camels, and Goats Oh My!

-Lenten Family Devotional on Creation



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## February 23 – Metamorphosis

*“And [Jesus] was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white” Matthew 17:2*

Last year our family got caterpillars to raise. My son had read all about them— the food they eat, the way they got really full and fat, how they build a little house around themselves called a chrysalis, and how they transform into butterflies. This process is called metamorphosis, a change in form. Have you ever read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*? It was just like that! It was so exciting.

Imagine what it was like for the disciples to see Jesus’ form be changed! At first he looked like their normal, human friend and teacher, but suddenly he was shining with the power of God. It must have been awesome, confusing, and a little scary. They knew that Jesus was someone special, and that he would transform their lives, but they had no idea what would happen next.

We know that this transformation was just the beginning of a long road for Jesus. He would later be hurt, killed, and be laid in a tomb. Then, like a butterfly coming out of a chrysalis, or in his case a tomb, Jesus would come back to life! He would rise again, showing us the beauty and strength of God’s love. As you ponder this process, how might you be changed?

Dear God, transform us today with the love that you show us in Jesus. Amen.

## February 24 – Honey Bees

*My child, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.*

*Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, you will find a future, and your hope will not be cut off. Proverbs 24:13-14*

When we drizzle honey onto our favorite things, the transformation from flower nectar to get this sticky sweet goodness is largely an unknown process. A honey bee would have to fly around 90,000 miles -3 times around the globe – to make 1 pound of honey. They visit about 100 flowers each trip to fill their stomachs full of nectar to bring back to the hive. It is then where things get weird. Multiple bees will regurgitate the nectar into each other's mouth-like stomachs to collect enzymes and other things to make honey. It is then deposited into comb and dried using the bee's wings that flap around 11,400 times a minute. They do all of this to make the liquid gold that we know as honey. The proverb says it is worth flying around the world 3 times. Wisdom in knowing that God is love is sweet for our souls. Wisdom that through Christ, we are forgiven. Wisdom that we have hope, love, and grace through Christ is as sweet as honey. How do you like use honey?

God, we know that your love is as sweet as honey. Remind us daily to have wisdom of your love for us. Amen.

## February 25 - Creation

*Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power...has been understood and seen through the things he has made. Romans 1:20*

What is your dream super power? Is it super strength, like Superman? Is it a "spidey sense" like Spiderman? How about Iron Man's super-genius brain? Sometimes kids feel like the grownups have all the power in this world, but that is not true. God, the greatest superhero, made all of creation, but here is the thing: God gives power to us, to take care of creation (including each other). We have power to do GREAT things, whether it's planting a tree, or recycling a bottle to help the planet, or making a sad person smile, or holding a door for someone, to help people. They may not feel like superpowers, but put all together, these things make a super big difference in our world.

Powerful God, thanks for creating the world. Thanks for giving us the power to take care of it. Amen.

## February 26 - Flies

*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*  
Proverbs 4:23

One summer, my kids noticed several small flies flying around the kitchen. I didn't think much about it because we had some bananas on the counter, and the flies could have come from them. I said, "They'll go away if I throw out the bananas!" So out went the rotting bananas! But the next day there were small flies in the kitchen and in the living room. I said, "They'll go away if I wash the banana bowl!" So I washed the bowl! But the next day there were small flies in the kitchen, living room, and bathroom. I said, "They'll go away if I scrub down the kitchen wall where the bananas were." So I scrubbed down the kitchen walls! But the next day there were flies in the kitchen, living room, bathroom, and now in the kid's bedrooms. Finally, I opened the cabinet under the counter where the bananas used to sit and found a bag of rotten potatoes. They were full of baby flies waiting to be born! So I throughout the rotten potatoes and all the baby flies! Within a day, all the flies left the kitchen, living room, bathroom, and bedrooms. As Christians, we are to guard our hearts, so that good things flow from us. But we are not perfect, and sometimes we do rotten things. If that is the case, we need to find what is causing the problem and throw it out! God wants to use our hearts for good. What do you do to guard your heart against what is rotten?

Dear Jesus, create in me a new heart, and do not let rotten things "fly" me in the wrong direction. Amen.

## February 27 - Dirt

*“And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

1 Peter 3:31

When I was a little girl, my grandpa would take me into the woods, turn over a log and teach me about how creation works together. The trees grow. They fall. The damp ground and bugs work together to help the tree decay. The decayed tree breaks down and nourishes the soil – the dirt. To this day I love watching Rolly Pollies do their God given jobs. Dirt is good when it nourishes life.

For us, baptism is that moment when God washes us clean, not from physical dirt, but of our sins. Just as Jesus was transfigured on that mountain side, we are transfigured in our baptism. We are given new life if Christ. There is nothing we can do to earn it, change it, or return it. God's love is a free gift! Just as dirt nourishes plant life, we are nourished as we study God's Word in the Bible, worship together and serve others. So the next time you wash the dirt from your face and remember your baptism! Do you like to play in the dirt?

Dear God, thank you for Rolly Pollies and dirt, water and baptism, and for washing away my sins! Amen.

## February 28 - Wormwood

*"Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."*

Ephesians 4:31-32

Have you ever tasted anything bitter? A coffee bean? Dark chocolate? Try tasting something bitter, and then immediately after tasting something sweet – like a spoonful of honey. Which one is easier to take? Wormwood is a plant with a bitter leaf, and is referenced several places in the Bible when talking about bitterness. Bitterness does not only refer to how something TASTES but also to how we feel. Bitterness can be a feeling, like when you feel really sad or angry about something and you just can't forget about it. The Bible tells us that it is best to let go of that bitterness, not necessarily so we forget what happened, but so we can make room for the sweetness of God's love and forgiveness.

Dear Jesus, help us release anything that is making us sad or angry. Help us let go of those

"wormwood" things to make room for the sweet honey of your love and forgiveness. Amen.

## **February 29 - Green Grass**

*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*

1 Corinthians 13: 7-8a

One of my favorite smells of summer is the scent of healthy, green, grass especially while I am lying on a blanket with my face just inches away. Grass used to be seen as a nemesis of mine while I was growing up – you know what I'm talking about: the infamous green grass stain on your knees! I can easily remember as a kid how afraid I was to get off the bus and walk up to the house on our long driveway. I grew up in Wisconsin and everyone had long driveways which gave you plenty of time to really think about how upset your mom would be after she took one look at your knees! It wasn't until I became a mom myself and was scrubbing the knees of my own daughter's jeans that I realized there was NO WAY to get out the green grass stains. That's when it occurred to me that the grass stains were just like God's love for us: the stain, just like God's love, is going nowhere. God loves us deeply and forever. No. Matter. What. Do you like to play in the green grass or white snow?

Heavenly Creator, Continue to remind us that your love is deep and forever! Amen.



## **March 1 - Camel**

*"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is*

*rich to enter the kingdom of God."* Mark 10:25

Of course, you cannot get a camel to go through the eye of a needle. It's not so much that they are too big; it's that they are mean and grumpy. In fact, if you get one mad they will spit regurgitated food at you! So when Jesus was talking about the camel, he just might have been thinking about how crabby we can be when we have to do something we'd rather not. But no matter what, Jesus still loves us and welcomes us with open arms filled with love and joy. So remember that Jesus is our friend and Savior, even on those days when we feel like grumpy camels!

Thank you, Jesus, for loving us on our grumpiest days and our happiest days too! Amen.

## March 2 - Caterpillar

*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18*

Butterflies are one of the most beautiful of all God's creatures. There are countless varieties with every color under the sun! They flutter and fly so elegantly, landing gently on flower after flower. Can you picture a butterfly in your mind? But wait, butterflies don't start out as butterflies, do they? Of course not! A butterfly starts out as a caterpillar. God creates caterpillars knowing they will transform into butterflies. God creates butterflies knowing they will start out as caterpillars. Is that cool or what? So what does this mean for us as people? Does God create us knowing we will be transformed? Take a look at the Bible verse above for some clues!

Creator God, thank you for being a God of transformation. Make us new and help us to shine with your light and love. Amen.

### **March 3 - Frogs**

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Frogs are amazing creatures. For one thing, they go from being a tadpole that lives completely underwater to becoming a frog that breathes air! Here's an interesting fact about frogs: Did you know that frogs molt? This is the process where they shed their skin. Most frogs molt once a week but some will do it every day. Once the old skin has been pulled off, the frog usually eats it! That's a lot of opportunities for the frog to start over with new skin. Think about it, we get a fresh start every day as well. God has promised us that in Christ we are a new creation. Each day is a chance to start over, living as the amazing person God has created us to be.

God of Fresh Starts, help us to see each day as a new beginning. Amen.

## March 4 - Moth

*“Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”*

Matthew 6:20-21

Ever opened a door on a summer evening and had a moth fly in the house? Or walked by an outside light and seen it surrounded by moths? What is your first inclination? Swat them away, send them back outside, and get rid of them? We have even invented some horrible smelling mothballs to keep them away. It is easy to imagine the religious leaders surrounding Jesus harbored similar feelings about him. Can you picture them watching Jesus approach wishing they had a fly swatter or maybe some mothballs to make him go away? Despite the words in the Gospel, the moth does not destroy and despite the feelings of religious leaders it was not Jesus intention to destroy but rather change their focus and guide hearts towards heaven. The cool thing about moths is they are nocturnal but are always driven towards the light. So if we seek Jesus like the moth seeks the light we can travel through the darkness of Lent towards the light of Easter and Jesus' resurrection.

Dear God, thank you for creating creatures that can set examples for us of following your light through the darkness and your promises of treasures in heaven. Amen.

## March 5 - Lions

*"I command everyone in my kingdom to worship and honor the God of Daniel. He is the living God, the one who lives forever."* Daniel 6:26

I wonder what lions eat for lunch? The Old Testament tells a story of a guy named Daniel who almost became a lion's lunch! Daniel worked for King Darius. He also loved God and prayed to him all the time. Other guys that worked for the king were jealous and wanted to get Daniel in trouble. They talked Darius into making a rule that people could only pray to him. If someone prayed to anyone else, they'd be tossed into the lions' cage! Well, Daniel kept praying to God and was tossed into the cage. This made Darius sad and he hoped Daniel's God would save him. And guess what?! The Bible says, *"God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me!"* Not only did God shut the lions' mouth and save Daniel, but he also changed King Darius' heart! The king said, *"I command everyone in my kingdom to worship and honor the God of Daniel. He is the living God, the one who lives forever."* How cool is that?! God used Daniel to help the king believe in God!

Dear God, help us to follow you in all that we do so others might believe in you. Amen.

## March 6 - Clay

*"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows*

*bountifully will also reap bountifully."* 2 Corinthians 9:6

Last spring, we began working on an addition to our home. The yard was marked with flags and spray paint letting us know where the power lines and sewer lines were buried under the dirt. Preparations and lots of prayer were happening, and then finally the day arrived that the big backhoe pulled into our yard to begin digging. My son was 4 and was very excited!!

He watched as the backhoe operator began to move the top of the ground that had the grass and the brown dirt. Then he went deeper, and my son started to notice that the dirt was changing it was no longer dark brown but instead it was light brown and then, clay. The deeper the operator dug the more rich clay he pulled up. My son got a turn to help the operator dig as well. He was so excited and later we talked about the transformation of our yard, the dirt turned to clay, and now the big hole in our yard. Together let's see how our faith life transforms and we learn and grow deeper in our faith.

Heavenly Father, help us to transform our relationship with you and guide us to cultivate and grow in our faith. Amen.

## March 7 - Bird

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 Corinthians 5:7

In a house near a marshy forest pond, we were surrounded by countless animals and one determined robin with a brilliant orange tummy. She sat in the branches of a tree outside my window and every twenty minutes, she courageously charged it. Pumping her wings *hard* – day after day – she kept flying with faith that one day, the invisible wall wouldn't be there, and she'd get through. To fly by faith, not by sight, means that even when we can't see what is ahead of us, we keep flying forward trusting that whenever we run into impossible situations or invisible walls we can't get around, God meets us in those collisions and offers help. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus didn't want to die but the deadly collision was still coming, and God was present. If *that* collision between life and death couldn't keep God away, then no collisions we experience can keep God away either.

Dear God, help us to fly by faith, not by sight, trusting that when we run into impossible situations or invisible walls, you will meet us in these collisions and offer us help. Amen.

## March 8 - Water

*Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with..." Mark 10:39b*

What kind of bear enjoys hanging out in light rain? (A drizzly bear.)

What did one ocean say to the other ocean? (Nothing, it just waved.)

Why do sharks swim in salt water? (Because pepper makes them sneeze.)

Now, these are water jokes. But really? Water is important. Without it, we cannot live. Water is essential to life. What would you think if someone spit on the ground to make mud and put it on your eyes? Sounds kinda gross! But, that is just what Jesus did to heal blind Bartimaeus, and Jesus gave him new life. Water is used in baptism to give us new life, too. It is as if the old is washed away, and we become new creations in Jesus. Like water, Jesus is essential to life, too. Without him, we cannot live.

Life-Giving God, thank you for refreshing water that gives us life. Amen.



## March 9 - Growth

*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man too and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all the other seeds, but when it is full grown is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. Matthew 13: 31-*

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My grandma is a gardener. She won't be deterred. She will try to grow anything. Once I visited her to see a potted banana tree in her living room, with real baby bananas! I had no idea that plant would grow inside in the middle of the US in the winter. Weird! I continue to be surprised by things that grow. Did you know a carrot can bend (in the right conditions)? You can take a straw and push it right through a potato? Nature is fascinating, and so is the one who made it. A tiny seed, small as the head of a pin, can grow to be a 12 foot mustard tree. Amazing! Things grow all around us all the time, and with God, nothing is impossible!

Creator, give us a green and growing faith, so that we can follow you more closely to do impossible and amazing things. Amen.

## March 10 – Vipers

*“You brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to [the dead]?”* Matthew 23:33

“I remember back in the good ‘ol days,” Grandpa starts. We always know we are in for a treat when we hear those words! Grandpa’s stories are old-fashioned but so cool to hear. His life of farming the plains is so different than our life in the city. He tells us about setting fire to the stubble of a harvested crop in order to help prepare it for the next season. As cool as fire is, what I really love is when he says he would see snakes slithering away from the flames. I think how cool it would be to see SO many snakes all at once! Grandpa once told us about snakes shedding their skins to get rid of worn out, damaged, and sick skins. Now I see a way farmers and snakes are alike!

Dear God, we are so thankful that we can “shed” our wrongs and be set free to live better lives. Amen.

## March 11 - Ants

*"You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two." Proverbs 6:6*

In the Disney movie "A Bug's Life" a little awkward ant tries desperately to find his place in his colony of ants. He tries to create ways to gather food more efficiently than the way it's always been done but his ways are not well-received. Sometimes we are different and awkward according to other's standards. But know this: You are uniquely and wonderfully made in the image of God. You each have a gift to offer as you do God's work in the world. Be bold in offering your gift(s) to others. Let your light shine in the world glorifying your Father in heaven!

Gracious God, you created the world and called it good. Send your Spirit stirring your people to share their gifts with their neighbors. Amen.

## March 12 – Spiders

*"O God, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." Psalm 104:24-26*

Arachnophobia! Big, hairy spiders and fast, little ones with spindly legs that skitter across the floor, up and down the walls, and into places we cannot reach. They creep at night, spin sticky, frightening webs, and cause fear. But fear of what? Unless it is a rare black widow or brown recluse, the 3,000 other species of spider in North America are harmless.

But, fear? How do we die to fear so we can live in the freedom of un-fear? By appreciating spiders. Spiders are valuable insect-controllers in ecosystems. They also are food for lots of animals. They have their niche. At least they are not mosquitoes, right?! Information is empowerment, they've always said. Our "Spidey-sense" (mixing a metaphor here!), appreciates the intricacy and forethought of God's creation. Then, our fear metamorphoses into gratitude and even into a certain oneness with creatures as we sense all the niches that exist in God's incredible, complex, beautiful creation.

This Lent, Lord Jesus, help me confront my fears, learn more about what is behind them, and begin to trust you, my Savior, helping me overcome them. Amen.

### **March 13 - Grasshopper**

*But among the winged insects that walk on all fours you may eat those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to leap on the ground. Leviticus 11:21*

In Leviticus, it names the locusts and grasshoppers as insects that the Israelites were allowed to eat. John the Baptizer ate locusts and wild honey. Today, in many parts of the world, people do eat bugs, including grasshoppers. Locusts and grasshoppers reproduce quickly and are a good source of protein. In parts of Mexico, Asia, and Africa, grasshoppers, and other bugs, are commonly eaten. Grasshoppers don't have a lot of flavor, but they say grasshopper in tacos or stir fry tastes good. Maybe they would be good covered in chocolate too, or in wild honey the way John the Baptizer ate them. The foods we eat are as varied as the people around the world. Frog legs, pig feet, beef tongue, sea urchins are other unusual foods that are not common here. What food would you like to try? Have you ever changed your mind about liking a certain food?

Generous God, thank you for the many foods you provide for us and for the courage to try new foods and find new favorites. Amen.

### **March 14 – Chameleon**

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10*

Have you ever known anyone who was very different in different situations? We might not trust someone who isn't the same all the time, but just like the chameleon, who changes color in order to blend in, so that no one will EAT him or her, maybe your friend or classmate does this as a matter of survival, in order to be safe. Maybe they're big and tough when the older kids are around, but gentle and loving with a baby sibling or a grandparent, with whom they always feel safe.

God, watch over us. Keep us safe and help us to be true to you. Amen.

## March 15 – Grapes

*“A man planted a vineyard.” Mark 12:1b*

We are always changing. Babies start out needing to be carried, then they crawl, then walk, and then run. We all change over time! Caterpillars become butterflies. Seeds become flowers! We are always changing. Even Jesus changed over time! Just a few weeks ago we thought of him as a baby! Life was different when Jesus lived. In the Bible, we often hear stories about wine (it is mentioned over 160 times)! Before it was wine it was just “a bunch of grapes” waiting to be crushed! Grapes would be put in a big basin and stomped on by men holding hold onto ropes and stamping their feet. The skins would pop open and the juice would run into containers. Imagine that sound! Grapes into wine! Death into Life! That’s what we get from Jesus. Do you like red or green grapes?

Jesus, you went from a baby, to a boy, then one who taught, preached, healed and prayed. After your death, the world changed for the good. Amen.

## **March 16 - Lady Bug**

*"Give thanks to the God of heaven, for God's steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 136:26*

I remember getting excited about ladybug sightings; seeing a bright red one wasn't an overly common occurrence. If you were lucky enough to have fly away from your fingertip, you could make a wish! The excitement I has been replaced with disdain for common spotting of an Asian beetle. The faded versions of the same beautiful beetles I made wishes on as a child, more orange than red. They bite, stink if they get squished, and cover the south side of homes on sunny days. My impression about beetles has changed, much the metamorphosis of a beetle itself. Everything changes over time, except God's love for us. No matter if you have hope-filled and beautiful attitude or a stinky one, you are always God's beloved child!

No matter how I change, thank you God for always loving me!



## March 17 - Scorpion

*"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set  
before you life and*

*death, the blessing and the curse."* Deuteronomy 30:19

The Deathstalker Scorpion is one the most dangerous critters on the planet. This creepy, fast bug grows to only a little over 2 inches, but its sting can lead to vomiting, incredible pain, difficulty breathing, heart problems, and even death. A scorpion's sting can make a person sick for days, weeks, or even months. Now that's a lot of power in a little creature! Too bad the power is so hurtful and damaging. The scorpion venom is definitely a curse – but it is also a blessing. Scientists are discovering ways to use scorpion venom to treat brain tumors and other types of cancers. To turn that damaging power into something good. That poison becomes medicine. That death becomes life. That curse becomes a blessing.

God, please help me see the blessings you give to me even in the moments that look very dark. Amen.

## March 18 - Mountain

*And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have*

*faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."*

I grew up near the beach and had never seen a mountain. I always wanted to go, especially in the Fall to see the leaves display their brilliant red and gold colors. I was 25 years old when I saw my first mountain. Its splendor was better than I could have ever imagined, the colors were spectacular and the mountain itself was ginormous...or so I thought. Ten years after my first mountain experience, our family moved to Whidbey Island, Washington. What I thought was a huge mountain turned out to be a great big hill. The mountains in Washington were twice the size of the mountains in Virginia. I think that maybe our problems are that way, too. What we think to be a big deal may not be; we make mountains out of mole hills. We need to remind ourselves that no matter what we are going through, no matter how big our problems seem to be, God is always with us. God is bigger than any fear or situation that we will ever face and with God, there is nothing that we cannot do.

Loving God, you walk with us every day of our life. Help us to remember that you are always

with us and with you, nothing is too big for us to conquer. Amen.

## March 19 - Volcano

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."*

Jeremiah 31:3b

Have you heard about these volcanic eruptions that have made the News:

On January 12, 2020, Taal, a volcano in the Philippines erupted, sending a large plume of ash 9 miles (14 kilometers) into the air.

On December 9, 2019 on White Island off the coast of New Zealand, an eruption killed 18 people.

Beginning in May of 2018, Kilauea in Hawaii erupted and continued to belch out so much ash and flowing lava that over 500 homes were destroyed and thousands of people were permanently displaced.

Look up some videos of volcanic eruptions, they can be amazing. Most of us don't think about the rocks under our feet becoming so hot that they turn into liquid or shooting ash and stream into the air and blocking out the sun. What are things in life that you count on? Just like a volcano erupting and changing the landscape and life of those that live near it, there are lots of things in that can change the things that we count on. There is one thing we can always count on: God's love for us. In this verse, the prophet Jeremiah is speaking to the Israelites coming back from Exile. They had been without a home for 70 years! Do you think this promise is still true for you?

Unchanging God, keep reminding us of your love, and that even in the scariest times, you are there and that you never change. Amen.

## **March 20 - Mud**

*He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." John 9:11*

When I was a camp counselor at a Bible camp, many afternoons with my group of middle school girls was spent in our mud pit. Laughter would ensue as they covered each other in the mud. Before I knew it, the girls would be caked from their head to their toes. After a while, they would run into the lake to wash off. This process would continue over and over. The water and mud remind me of this story in the book of John. Jesus used mud to heal this man. In our baptism, we are washed clean and claimed as God's beloved.

Dear God, no matter how covered in mud we are, you wash us clean. Help us to never forget our own baptismal promises. Amen!

## **March 21 – Human Body**

*“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”* Genesis 1:27

Isn't it weird how our bodies do everything they are supposed to do? The way everything has a purpose, even down to the yucky parts, to keep us moving and active and healthy and able to do what we should do. It is really cool, and if you think about it, the human body is complicated. Doctors go through advanced schooling and training for years just to understand how our bodies work, and how to keep them healthy. The human body is one of those things that gives me a reason to believe in a creator God, who created us in God's own image. Our bodies work the way they do because we are the ones God chose to be designed like God!

God, thank you for our bodies, created in your image, and help us to keep them healthy and strong. Amen.

## March 22 - Heart

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Mark 12:29*

“Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes! Eyes, and ears, and mouth, and nose! Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes!” My youngest son as a preschooler would sing this song over and over again. He would sing it as a whisper, and he would sing it at the top of his lungs. While he sang, he would get faster and faster, and his actions would get bigger and bigger. Finally, he would fall on the floor, exhausted. It is amazing what our bodies can do – they can sing, move, jump, and bend. God made us to be on the move, and when we are on the move, we can share God’s love in everything we do! That’s the point, right? That we as God’s people, over anything else, are to love.

Dear God, help us to love you and others with our hearts, with our minds, and with all our strength. Amen.

## March 23 - Plants

*God said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food." Genesis 1:29*

My father was a botanist – a scientist who specialized in plants. He spent decades teaching biology in colleges. After he retired, he worked as a consultant who specialized in creating wetlands to replace ones that had been destroyed by development. He spent a lifetime reminding everyone of the importance of the plants all around us – how they cleaned our water, held down our topsoil, and created the oxygen we needed for survival. He also had a daughter who cannot manage to grow anything. Every plant I have ever tried to grow has died. While he never could teach me to grow a plant, he did teach me to appreciate them. The beauty they bring to our world is unmatched. The importance of them is unmatched. We need them to breathe, to eat, and to survive. God gave us the world, it is up to us to protect it and honor one of God's greatest gifts.

Dear God, help me to honor and appreciate the beauty of all the plants that surround me. Help me protect them so our world may continue as you intended it to be. Amen.

## March 24 - Lamb

*"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* John  
1:29

I am a "FOODIE". In our house we enjoy FOOD. We love to learn about FOOD. Our heroes are people like Bobby Flay, Giada De Laurentiis, and Antonio Lafaso. If these names are new to you check out the Food Network, but be careful, it might mean you too become a FOODIE! I am fascinated by how much there is to know about food. There are tips and tricks that enable even one such as me to prepare delicious meals. In our home, while we do have favorites, we rarely eat the same meal for long stretches. To say the least our menu offers variety and adventure as we experiment with new and different ways to prepare a meal. Now, for my confession: In my appreciation for and pursuit of excellence in the food we prepare; I fail to care much for LAMB. Something about the taste just does not work for me and believe me, I will eat just about anything (except oysters of course, which no one would eat). So, as I read that Jesus is the "Lamb of God," I admit to needing a bit of study to find the relevance and meaning; and yet, in the Old Testament the LAMB holds a place of reverence as the chosen sacrifice of God's people. The LAMB represents purity, peace and forgiveness, certainly qualities much needed in our lives and thus why Jesus would be called the Lamb of God sense in the sacrifice of Jesus our sins are forgiven once and for all; the perfect sacrifice for our imperfection.

I pray that we all be challenged to learn more about the meaning of Jesus being the LAMB of God. Amen!



## March 25 – Landscape

*“For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” Psalm 95:3-5*

Recently while traveling in South Africa, I had the joy of visiting Cape Town. In this coastal city, there is a famous mountain called “Table Mountain.” It looks like a mountain that had its peak sawed off and the top is now a “table.” From all parts of Cape Town, Table Mountain can be seen on a clear day. I could not wait to see Table Mountain, but unfortunately for the days I was there the weather had other plans. The locals told us the clouds were creating what is known as “the table cloth.” Beautiful clouds made a blanket on the top of the mountain, and I could not see the top. But what was really interesting is that even though I could not see it I knew the top of the mountain was there. We are reminded by our scripture that even that mountain covered in clouds belongs to God, even the ocean at the base of Table Mountain belongs to God, and even the penguins that call that mountain home belong to God. Even when we cannot see we know everything belongs to God – not just creation but EVERYTHING.

Gracious God, help us to see you are in, around, and through all things even when we cannot see you. Give us the assurance you are with us when life seems cloudy, rocky, and windy. Amen.

## March 26 – Cocoon

*"For if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" 2 Corinthians 5:17*

A cocoon is a special encasement or tight little shelter that a caterpillar spins when it is ready for the next step in its life transformation. Basically, that means that when a caterpillar is ready to turn into a butterfly, it spins a cocoon all around itself, and then it's caterpillar body dies, to recreate a new body; the body of a butterfly. It's a pretty big miracle if you think about it! Something has to die, for the beautiful new life to begin! This is JUST like what happened to Jesus at Easter if you think about it; and why the butterfly is often a symbol you see in church at Easter time! For Jesus to rise and go to heaven to save us all from our sin, Jesus had to die. The tomb was kind of like a cocoon! This miracle transformation, or change, happened, and Jesus, who died on Friday, rose back to life again on Sunday! The same thing happens for us in our baptism too! When we are baptized, we use water as a sign of dying or drowning to our old sinful self, and when the Holy Spirit comes in baptism, we are raised again as a new creation in Christ! Our sinful, dead self becomes like a beautiful butterfly ready to spread its wings and share God's love with all the world. Next time you see a cocoon, remember that death for the caterpillar, and death for Jesus also means a new beautiful life, for the butterfly AND for us!

God of all miracles, help us to remember that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we too rise again, changed, like a butterfly, to live a new life sharing your love with others. Amen.

## **March 27 - Beetles**

*"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5*

Beetles are hardy little creatures than can withstand some pretty severe conditions, including extremely low temperatures. They do this by going into a state of diapause. They can even make their own sort of antifreeze! In our lives, we will also face all sorts of seasons, and some are downright cold and dark. But there is good news! Throughout lent, we remember that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Soon, we will remember on Good Friday how some tried to extinguish the light. On Easter morning, we celebrate that not even death can put our Christ's light! So when things seem dark, listen to words of THE Beatles, "Little darling, it has been a long cold lonely winter. Little darling, it feels like years since it's been here. Here comes the sun (doo doo doo) Here comes the sun, and I say, It's all right." Keep on shining!

Gracious God, thank you for your light and for your love! No matter how dark things seem to be, help me look for your light in and around me. Amen.

## **March 28 - Earthquake**

*“Suddenly a strong earthquake shook the jail to its foundations. The doors opened, and the chains fell from all the prisoners.” Acts 16:26*

Imagine being trapped in a room. Suddenly the building shakes, windows rattle, the doors fly open, and the path to outside is clear! You are free—not trapped, able to go and do as you like! Jesus’ disciple was in prison, believing God did, does, and would protect him and his friends. As they were their singing psalms and praying, sharing the story of Jesus and his miracles, an earthquake shook the whole building. Doors fly open and chains fall off...they are free! Paul was trapped in a place that could not hold his spirit, his love of Jesus, and his hope for a better tomorrow. God heard him and opened to him a way to be free physically as he was always free in his spirit!

Trusting God, we pray, sing, and tell God’s story. God will always find a way to help you be free, even if it takes an earthquake! Amen.

## **March 29 - Stones**

*As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him,  
“Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”*

Mark 13:1

Sometimes stones are sharp and hard to walk on. Sometimes they are smooth and feel good to hold in your hand. Stones can be fun to play with. When did you last hold or play with a stone?

A stone thrown into the water sinks to the bottom very quickly. Have you ever skimmed a nice smooth stone across water and counted its magical skips along the surface as it defied gravity? Something that normally behaves a certain way can for a time behave differently, but it eventually succumbs to what its own nature is.

In this part of the scriptures, Jesus warns that many people will appear to be someone or something that they are not. This may fool people for a time but ultimately they will fall down, just like the stones of the temple or rocks skimmed across water.

Thank you, Lord, that when you were torn down like the temple, you were able to defy death and come through to a new way of living. Help us to not be afraid of what we hear from others but to trust in you and to build our lives on Jesus the rock. Amen.

## March 30 - Fleas

*[David said to Saul], "So who is Israel's king coming after? Who are you chasing? A dead dog? A single flea?"* 1 Samuel 24: 14

Sometimes people like to re-tell a Bible story from a different angle or from the viewpoint of a different character in the tale. This is the story of Saul and David told by Felix the flea:

Felix was scared. He could hear the tramping of soldiers' feet. It shook the ground so hard he fell right off the dog's shaggy tail. Felix only felt safe when he was tucked safely deep inside the matted fluff. But now, he was out there, all alone, on the sandy ground. Toes, lots and lots of human toes, all bare and boney, scuffed the sand. He was terrified of being stomped!

And then, could it possibly be any worse? David's voice, high and sad and angry all at once, saying to the man with the shiny crown on his head,

"Who are you chasing? A single flea?"

"Me?" squeaked Felix? (But being a flea, no-one heard him).

"What did I do? What am I going to do?! Oh no!! I'm being hunted!!" said Felix.

Just then, David chuckled, and ruffled the dog's head, who wagged his tail (Felix's favorite tail), as it flopped down in the sand, next to David and right on top of Felix, who couldn't be happier.

He did what all fleas do when presented with a dog's furry behind, he leapt on, and burrowed comfortably back into the warmth and the safety.

That was close! Felix was once again, the happiest a flea could possibly be!

Holy God, you made every single one of us, from Kings to tiny fleas. You have given us a place to be safe, and a place to be brave as we be the best "me" we can be. THANK YOU! Amen.

## March 31 – Rain

*“God turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.” Psalm 107:35*

Rain turns cracked dirt  
into mud waiting to be squelched  
under rubber boots  
or even  
between bare toes.  
I turn my face upward.  
This way  
no one knows  
if the drops come from  
the sky or  
my eyes.  
They fall off my cheek  
onto the dirt,  
running along the cracks,  
softening.  
Afterwards, new growth.

God, you make rain to fall on the righteous and the wicked, on those springing into joy or falling into pain. However I feel, you are with me, transforming me as water wears down rock: gently, slowly, certainly. Thank you for bringing me into new life through Jesus. Amen.

## **April 1 – Gnats**

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.'" Exodus 8:16*

To persuade Pharaoh to let the people go, God sent gnats to help the cause along. Maybe God even created them for exactly that purpose - to be annoying! If you've experienced a cloud of gnats flying around your head on a summer evening, you can easily imagine being cursed with gnats. Maybe you've experienced the gnat-like annoyance of a sibling. One who swarms your space, won't leave, gets in your face, and makes you want to go somewhere else. Your sibling may be your personal gnat: a small annoyance that God can use for very big tasks. And you may be their personal gnat. Pay attention! God may be sending messages through gnats!

Creator God, may we see the potential in all that is annoying. Amen.



## **April 2 - Wolf**

*"The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Isaiah 11:6*

So often this verse brings to mind all the wonderful changes that God will bring about in the wolf. The wolf will no longer hunt or terrify the lamb. It will cease to be cunning. Its motivations will change. But that isn't the only thing God is doing. God also transforms the lamb. The lamb is able to trust that God will care for it. The lamb is able to know that in spite of the obvious danger, God is present. The lamb needs to know that it is loved and valued in God's kingdom. Only then will it not run at the sight of the wolf. God's transforming power touches all of us. In God's kingdom all are changed, everyone is valued and invited to use our gifts to be faithful disciples.

Dear God, transform me so that I can trust and love you. Amen.

### **April 3 - Fire**

*"Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*

Jeremiah 23:19

Have you ever built a campfire? It can be fun to roast marshmallows, sing songs, tell stories, or sit by the fire to keep warm. Fire can be useful, but it is also very powerful, which is why we need to treat fire with respect. Sometimes fires start for other reasons, like human carelessness or when lightning strikes a tree. When we see forest fires or house fires on the news, we might feel sad or even afraid – but did you know that some pine trees have cones that need the heat of a fire to sprout? Fires are one way that nature makes space for new plants to grow. The ashes left behind after a fire can also act as fertilizer for the soil. Isn't it cool that God works for good, even through something like a forest fire, helping new life to spring up in the future?

Jesus, thank you for turning even scary things, like the cross, into new life for everyone! Amen.

## April 4 – Gazelle

*"They were... as agile as gazelles racing across the hills."* 1 Chronicles  
12:8

Gazelle is a fun word to say, yet one not frequently found in the Bible or used in daily conversation. Gazelles resemble small deer with horns and live in Africa and Asia.

They are known for their high speeds and gracefulness. They can reach 60 miles an hour and sustain 40-50 mph for long distances. The word "gazelle" describes the first wave of world-class athletes who dash by my house as part of the annual Rock N' Roll Marathon. They run with grace and speed and complete 26.2 miles in record-breaking time. I join my neighbors in enthusiastically cheering the thousands that follow. I'm in awe of the committed and determined individuals who have prepared for months to run, walk, or compete in wheel chairs to reach the finish line. Regardless of the final recorded time, all are transformed— individuals challenged and changed, cheered-on to run the race.

Dear God, I may be fast or slow, the very best or ordinary... I am here. I am ready—use me, transform me! Amen.

## April 5 - Colt

*“Shout aloud, your king comes to you; humble and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot and the war-horse and shall command peace to the nations.”*

Zechariah 9:9-10

There's an old Sufi tale about a man who showed up at the border with a donkey carrying a bundle of straw on its back. The border agent was sure the man was trying to smuggle something across the border so he searched the bundle, causing all the straw to fall in a heap on the ground. Finding nothing, he grumbled and waived the man through. The next day, the man appeared again with a donkey carrying a bundle of straw on its back. Once again, the agent suspected the man of smuggling something across the border so he searched the bundle of straw and found nothing. The pattern continued day after day for ten years. When the border agent retired, he ran into the man in the market and asked, "What was it you were smuggling over the border all those years? I know it was something!" With a wry smile, the man replied, "Donkeys." (ba-dum-bum!) Jesus was far less subtle when he rode into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He was making it clear that he was a king, but not the kind they expected. The people wanted a mighty king who would quash their enemies, but instead Jesus came to interrupt their pattern of violence and revenge.

Dear God, keep working on our hearts. Help us to seek peace when we would rather seek revenge. Amen.

## April 6 - Sky

*“God made this space to separate the waters of the Earth from the waters of the heavens. God called this space SKY” Genesis 1:7-8*

“Look! Up in the SKY! Is it a bird? Is it a plane? It’s Superman!”

So went the famous tag line for the most popular super-hero show of my childhood. There was something special about the stories of a hero who flew around in the SKY solving crime and catching bad people. Throughout time people often look up to the SKY when they think about God. The SKY holds many mysteries: Some want to become pilots or astronauts; others study the universe as astronomers; yet others are interested in meteorology, the study of weather patterns. In the Bible since God named the SKY in Genesis 1:8 there is a recurring fascination with the SKY. In the book of Acts, we read that Jesus was taken up into the clouds. In Matthew 24, Jesus will return in the clouds. Truly the SKY is of interest to many. What is your interest in the SKY? Think about it and share your response with others.

Lord of the heavens, open our eyes and hearts to the wonders and the joys of the SKY as we look beyond our selves to embrace the majesty of your creation. Amen.

## April 7 - Goat

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* Matthew 18:1

Let's play a little word association, ok? What do you think of when I say goat? Do you think of a hairy four-legged animal with horns and a silly beard? Maybe. Or maybe you think your favorite athlete - the "Greatest Of All Time!" That is GOAT as well. Did you know that Jesus in his word talks about BOTH? Yep! Isn't that awesome? When Jesus' disciples were arguing and wanting to know which one of them was the greatest, which one was the "GOAT?" He answered them, by SHOW-ING them! That's right! He called a kid over to them (and isn't it funny that a baby goat is called a kid!) and said, *"Unless you become like this child, you'll never enter the kingdom, whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom!"* Wow!

I bet the disciples weren't expecting an answer like that, and maybe you weren't either!

But Jesus taught the disciples, and teaches us, something very important in his answer - to be humble is to be GREAT!

Lord, help me to be humble as I live and grow in you, for this is the REAL definition of great! Amen.

## April 8 - Chicken

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."* Ephesians 2:8, 10

"Guess what? Chicken butt! Guess who? Chicken poo!" Have you ever thought about chicken poop? Did you know that chickens poop A LOT?! They poop about 1/3 of a pound each day. That's like how much 3 kitchen spoons in your silverware drawer weigh...which is a lot for a little chicken!!! But, did you also know that chicken poop is one of the best fertilizers for plants there is? It's chock-full of nitrous oxide which is a big chemistry word for GREAT plant food! Plants need nitrogen to grow well. So while chicken poop might be plentiful and very stinky, it helps grow the best plants. It's amazing how God can turn stinky smelly things into something so great and so helpful. God does the same thing with us. We make mistakes. Sometimes there are things about ourselves that we think are yucky or not so good, or just downright smelly. But the good news is...even when we are stinky to the max, God uses us to help others grow and to spread God's love all over the world. Just like fertilizer! So the next time you start to worry about what you don't like about yourself, remember that it is a part of you that makes you who you are...and God uses all the parts of us (even the stinky messes we make) to grow ourselves help others grow too!

Dear God,

Help us to remember that you created us good, and that even our mistakes and the stinky parts we don't always like are parts of us too. Give us the courage to use our mistakes and smells for your purpose and to help grow your love in the world. Amen.

## Maundy Thursday, April 9 – Rooster

*“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice<sup>[a]</sup> you yourself will disown me three times.”* Mark 14:30

Roosters are known to be mean. I remember as a young child venturing out to the hen house alone one day at my grandparents farm. I had done this before, so this seemed pretty simple. This time, as I walked across the fenced-in yard to the hen house, I was surprised when a rooster came flying at me, flapping wings and squawking at the top of his lungs. He just would not stop. I was backed up against the adjacent barn wall and scared to death how I would ever get myself out of there. I tried sliding along the barn wall, but the rooster just kept flying at me and squawking. I was helpless. Soon my mother came to rescue me. What a relief! God rescues us from danger in the same way. When we feel helpless, we can call on him.

Dear God, we are glad we can call on you when we are in danger and you will deliver us. Amen.



## **Good Friday April 10 - Tree**

**“And there they crucified him.” Mark 15:24a**

Trees give us so much. Clean air, shade, sometimes food. They give us piles of leaves to jump in and homes for insects, birds, and squirrels. I do not like chopping trees down, but if we have to, there is lumber for buildings and furniture, paper and cardboard boxes. In the story of Jesus's death, trees provide a lot. There is the cross of course, but also the crown of thorns is a kind of wood, the reed the soldiers use to strike him, and the stick with which someone tries to give him a drink. Living trees are wonderful. But even if we cut a tree down, it can live on. It can be a tool, a home, a beautiful carving. Death can be a beginning, like how a seed dies to become another tree.

Creator God, thank you for trees—and all the ways they make the world more beautiful. Amen.

## **April 11 – Sun**

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Psalm 100:1-3*

The sun is up.

I uncover my head.

I stretch out some

Then tumble out of bed.

With my fingers toward the ceiling

And my feet on the floor,

I say Thank you God for what's in store.

I spin around.

I dance and sing.

Thank you Jesus

For the blessings that you bring.

Aaaamennn!

## **Easter Sunday, April 12 - Butterfly**

*"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!" Mark 16:6*

Lily stared at the little green chrysalis hanging off the branch in her room. She had watched as the caterpillar had wiggled and jiggled its way forming the green slimy shell that had eventually hardened around it. She could see no movement, just stillness. The life that had once moved around eating green leaves and enjoying the day appeared gone. Day after day, Lily waited and watched, and nothing changed. But one day she saw something new; the outer shell of the chrysalis changed from lime green to clear and the colors of brown and orange appeared. Something was happening inside even though Lily couldn't see it nor could she understand. A day later there was yet another change- movement. Here it was at last this! She wasn't sure what to expect, the change happened right before her eyes. There was the butterfly bold and beautiful holding onto the leaf. Her friend was back with new style and color. The butterfly's life would never be the same, it wouldn't take long before she would fly away and leave Lily behind, but she knew that the life ahead of her friend would be filled with flowers, sunshine and wondrous flights in the breeze.

Dear God, thank you for your love that has the power to change us. Thank you for your promise that assures us that out of death there is new life. Thank you for Jesus who helped us to understand that your love is with us in death and in life and that one day we will all fly away like the butterfly and live with you in heaven. Amen.

## **Easter Monday, April 13 – Fly**

*And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest..." Psalm 55:6*

When I was a child, I spent many hours on my backyard swing set. Swinging as high as I could muster, I imagined I was flying and free from all the sadness and hurts inside me. Swinging made me feel free. In the resurrection of Jesus, I am gifted with wholeness and freedom from the sin that holds me down. That doesn't mean I am free to run away and hide from my problems; but it does give me hope and comfort knowing that I am fully loved and fully forgiven through Christ. This is good news worth sharing. When I allow others the dignity of being seen, heard and accepted for who they are, I share the peace and freedom of Christ. Acceptance allows them to stop hiding and running away from life. Then my good news in Christ can also be their good news.

Redeeming Lord, thank you for the freedom and wholeness you give me through your resurrection. Grant me the grace to see and hear and accept others so they too can feel your peace and newness of life. Amen.

Thank you to many hearts and hands that contributed to this Lenten Family Devotion.

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