

INTO THE WILDERNESS

Devotions for Lent

by

Dr. Steven Wood

I want to invite you INTO THE WILDERNESS for this season of Lent. It's ok. Jesus has already been there. The word, *wilderness* evokes feelings of fear for some of us, an air of risk for others, and even a sense of foreboding. Certainly, *wilderness* can be all those things and more. It is unknown, dangerous, harsh, and very, very risky, but I want to invite you INTO THE WILDERNESS anyway. It's ok. Jesus has already been there.

¹*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

³*The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*

⁴*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

⁵*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.*

⁶*"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"*

⁷*Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

⁸*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

¹⁰*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*

¹¹*Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*

Matthew 4:1–11 (New International Version)

Not only has Jesus already been to the *wilderness*, but he was, "*led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*" (Matthew 4:1). Of course, the devil waited until Jesus, "*had fasted forty days and forty nights*" (Matthew 4:2) before showing up to question his deity – "*if you are the son of God*" (Matthew 4:3, 5) and tempt him. Notice how Jesus dealt with the devil. Three times the devil tempted him, and three times Jesus answered with Scripture. That is how it's done! Even in his weakened condition – remember, he "*fasted forty days and forty nights*" (Matthew 4:2) – Jesus used the power of God's Word and "*the devil left him*" (Matthew 4:11).

This showdown in the *wilderness* between Jesus and the devil is the biblical event on which we base our modern season of Lent. Jesus, "*fasted forty days*" (Matthew 4:2), so Lenten tradition says we fast forty days – ok, its 47 days between Ash Wednesday (March 2, 2022) and Easter Sunday (April 17, 2022), but Sunday is the Lord's Day, a day of Worship, so we leave the Sundays out and it comes out to 40 days.

This time of prayer and fasting has been part of Christian tradition since apostolic times and was formalized during the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. For centuries Lent was intended for baptism candidates who wore sackcloth and ashes while following strict dietary rules and performing acts of service in the weeks leading up to Easter, the only day of the year they could be baptized and accepted into the church. Over time church members began fasting and performing acts of service alongside baptismal candidates and eventually the practice of "giving up something for Lent," became part of the tradition. Sackcloth and ashes were replaced with the imposing ashes on the foreheads of believers and by the ninth century Ash Wednesday was widely accepted as the first day of Lent. The practice of observing Lent varies within the Body of Christ and not all local churches acknowledge it. Many Christians choose to give up specific things like sweets, alcohol, social media, or caffeinated drinks during Lent as a way focus more on their relationship with Jesus and to foster simplicity and self-control. If you choose to give up something for Lent that is a matter between you and God – we encourage you in that practice, but it is not a requirement for the Lenten season.

That said, I would like to give each of us a gentle pastoral challenge for Lent this year. I would like each of us to prayerfully consider going a little deeper in our Lenten observance. I would like to invite you INTO THE WILDERNESS where we will go a little farther in our relationship with Jesus, a little closer to Father God, and a little more in touch with the Holy Spirit. This *wilderness* will be challenging for some of us, and it will be scary for others, but it is ok. Jesus has already been there.

This is a book of daily devotions, each designed to stand alone. There is not a scope or sequence. While the Bible readings are in chronological order, the thoughts, meditations, and fasts do not necessarily go with the readings. These devotions may even seem unrelated and disjointed – that is by design because that is the nature of the *wilderness* – we do not know what is coming next.

Since March 2020 I, like many of you, have experienced a *wilderness* of sorts. We all got much more acquainted with COVID-19 than we ever wanted to, and words like, “*quarantine*,” “*droplet*,” “*sanitizer*,” and, “*social distance*,” became part of our vocabulary. Out of concern for our families, members, and friends we closed our building and learned how to worship via livestream. We survived the Great Toilet Paper Shortage of 2020, improved our Zoom skills, acquired a vast collection of facemasks, waited in the parking lot for our groceries, and rejoiced when vaccines became available. Along the way we lost a great deal, struggled with change, and entered the *wilderness* whether we wanted to or not. Now we find ourselves dealing with depression and anxiety in unprecedented numbers, school children who are at least one year if not two years behind their grade level, racial tension that rivals that of the 1960’s, political division and dishonesty that has created a rift so deep only God will be able to heal it, an American church that seems to have completely lost its function and focus, and so much death we have relegated it to a statistic because we can’t handle it any other way.

This is the *wilderness* my friends, but it’s OK. Jesus has already been here.

I believe with all my heart that this is an unprecedented time in Christian history. The effects of the pandemic, racial tension, political upheaval, economic struggles, national unrest, and spiritual confusion will reverberate for decades. Times are going to be very hard. People – your families, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and classmates – will desperately need the love of Christ. Many do not know it yet, but when the time comes, and the Holy Spirit moves the followers of Jesus will be the only ones empowered to spread his love through the Gospel. This will not happen by growing bigger churches, developing slicker programs, or producing better media. It will happen through people like you who have been to the *wilderness* and are ready to work. When I invite you to the *wilderness*, I am inviting you to get ready by going deeper in your relationship with Jesus – maybe deeper than you’ve ever been before.

So, here are the specific steps to consider this Lenten season:

1. Get up a little earlier every morning during Lent. Use that time to pray and read that day’s entry in this book. Do it every day.
2. Pay particular attention to the meditate and fast steps included at the end of each day’s entry. Do the ones you feel God leading you to do.
3. Write down the things God tells you regardless of whether they relate to the Bible reading, meditation, focus, or anything at all.
4. While there are daily fasts included in each entry, carefully consider what you choose to give up for the Season of Lent. Make it something significant, something between you and God, maybe even something you need to give up for good.
5. Be in worship with FCC all seven Sundays from Ash Wednesday to Easter – no excuses, no exceptions – be in worship. We’re calling this The Seven Sunday Lenten Challenge (and there will be prizes).
6. While you’re at it, bring your Bible with you to worship. That’s right, carry your Bible to church with you every Sunday.
7. One more thing – invite the other people in your house (you know, your family!) to worship, too – invite them every Sunday, ask them to come with you and then ask them again.

This year I would like to challenge you to something different, something more, a deeper walk with Jesus, and more love for those around you. I hope this Lenten season will be one of growth for you. I hope you will join us in the *wilderness*. Don’t be afraid. It’s ok. Jesus has already been there.

God bless all of you!

Dr. Steven Wood, Pastor

Day 1
WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday
March 2, 2022

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ² *He was with God in the beginning.* ³ *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* ⁴ *In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity.* ⁵ *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

⁹ *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.* ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.* ¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* ¹² *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God —* ¹³ *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.* ¹⁴ *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:1-5, 9-14

At its origin Lent represented Jesus' forty days in the wilderness when he fasted and prayed before being tempted by the devil. Jesus responded to the taunting of the enemy by using the truth of God's Word and gave us an example of what to do in the face of temptation.

Today we contemplate the narrative of Jesus' life. He left his throne in heaven and became an infant in the care of a teenage girl and a young man who chose to trust God despite the difficult circumstances. Even though Jesus was, *"in very nature God, [he] did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness"* (Philippians 2:6-7). He fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17). He, *"demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). He, *"died for our sins according to the Scriptures... was buried... was raised on the third day... appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born"* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

As you consider Jesus' life, remember, *"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"* (Revelation 5:12). Ash Wednesday reminds us, *"for dust you are and to dust you will return"* (Genesis 3:18), but because of Christ, we are *"beauty instead of ashes"* (Isaiah 61:3).

Meditate: HE IS WORTHY.

Fast: LENT AS PROJECT. Rather than looking at Lent as a project, look at it as an opportunity to grow closer to Jesus.

Day 2

THURSDAY

March 3, 2022

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Mark 2:13-17

On this, the second day of Lent, focus on how God carries you. He carries you despite your weakness, sin, grief, brokenness, need, and everything else. He carries your whole heart. Consider Psalm 121,

I lift up my eyes to the mountains — where does my help come from?

My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber;

indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD watches over you — the LORD is your shade at your right hand;

the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life;

the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

(Psalm 121:1-8)

When we find ourselves in a wilderness of emotion – pain, grief, betrayal, anxiety, depression, just to name a few – it is easy to feel isolated. Remember, you are never alone! Rehearse the truth that God is always with you today and every day.

Meditate: HE IS MY HELP.

Fast: ISOLATION. Do not allow the devil to give you the lie that you are alone. God is with you.

Day 3

FRIDAY

March 4, 2022

⁴³ *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."*

⁴⁴ *Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

⁴⁶ *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.*

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷ *When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."*

⁴⁸ *"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.*

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ *Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."*

⁵⁰ *Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."*

⁵¹ *He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."*

John 1:43–51

It is the third day of Lent and today we focus on Jesus' completed work on the cross. Consider this, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6). In other words, the payment for all sin was completely and totally made. As Peter wrote, *"He bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed"* (1 Peter 2:24). In Christ, your sin is obliterated. Finished. Done for. Eradicated. Kaput. Nada. Gone. You are clean before God.

In the wilderness, the devil will try to remind you of your sin and question whether you are truly forgiven. After all, you might still be dealing with the consequences of sin in this life, so are you sure you are forgiven? Consequences in this life are not the same as the spiritual death because of sin in the next life. Sometimes consequence in this life can be beneficial as they teach us to avoid sinful or destructive behavior. If you did not have the consequence of pain from putting your hand on a hot stove, you might keep your hand on the burner until it was permanently injured or even destroyed. The fact that we deal with consequences in this life has no bearing on God's grace and forgiveness. If you know Christ as Savior, you are forgiven even as you go through the wilderness. You are clean.

Meditate: JESUS MADE ME CLEAN.

Fast: FALSE GUILT. Lay aside the guilt you might still feel for confessed sin, as well as those things that are not yours to deal with.

Day 4

SATURDAY

March 5, 2022

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

¹⁵He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

²⁰Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹He began by saying to them, *“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Luke 4:14–21

Focus today on God’s presence in your heart. What an amazing thought! However, it is a truth that must be taken on faith because you and I cannot see God or that which we often refer to as our heart (no, not the blood pumping muscle in your chest!). God of heaven and earth, the Maker of the universe, chooses to live within us! In fact, Jesus taught, *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you”* (John 15:4). Rather than being an observer of our lives *from a distance* (that is why I *really* dislike that song), God is our partner, our friend. He seeks to shelter us in His arms and uphold us by His hand. *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1). He guards us, goes before us, stands behind us, walks beside us, covers over us, and surrounds us. In short, you are created to be with God, and he is always with you, especially in the wilderness.

Meditate: GOD LIVES IN ME.

Fast: ARTIFICIAL LIGHT. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, there is a moving moment on Forgiveness Sunday – also known as Cheesefare Sunday, the Sunday before Easter Orthodox Lent begins, and the last day dairy products and meat may be consumed before Easter. At the prescribed moment in the liturgy all lights in the church are turned off and the community begins to figuratively wander in the darkness through the wilderness of the Lenten Season. Unplug from electric and battery powered lights for an hour or perhaps the whole day.

SUNDAY**March 6, 2022**

As was explained at the beginning of this book, we do not count Sundays in our 40-day observance of Lent. This is the Lord's Day, a day of Worship. If you choose to do so, you may take a break from your Lenten fast today.

Sunday Worship begins at 10:00am. Come join us!

Day 5**MONDAY****March 7, 2022**

¹One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ²He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

⁶When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him.

Luke 5:1-11

On this fifth day of Lent, focus on the voice of Jesus. Like most (if not all) of you, I have never heard Jesus' voice with my physical ears. However, I have heard his voice in my spirit and through his Word enabled by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus speaks, he speaks the truth. He said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me*" (John 14:6).

We can, in fact, listen for the voice of Jesus because we are his followers. He said, "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me*" (John 10:27). Listen for his voice today. Of course, we should always listen for his voice, but be especially aware of it today. He speaks primarily through the Bible, and he will never tell you anything that contradicts his Word, but he also speaks through your times of prayer, other people (preachers, teachers, etc.), and sometimes through circumstances. It is especially important to listen for the voice of Jesus in the wilderness because it sometimes seems like he is no longer speaking. Just keep listening.

Meditate: JESUS SPEAKS THE TRUTH.

Fast: TIDY FAITH. Faith is messy. That which is known is knowledge. That which is defined is fact. Faith, on the other hand is trusting in what is not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Tidy faith is an oxymoron. Let your faith be messy today.

Day 6**TUESDAY****March 8, 2022**

²⁷After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, ²⁸and Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

²⁹Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. ³⁰But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

³¹Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³²I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Luke 5:27–32

Focus today on God's mighty power. That is a big task when you consider God is *omnipotent* (all-powerful) – he is not just most powerful, he is all-powerful. On the other hand, you and I are dust. It's ok. "*As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust*" (Psalm 103:13-14). Part of the meaning of Lent is that we are nothing but dust... except for the mighty power of Jesus. The same power that resurrected Jesus resurrects us (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Because of His mighty power, we will live on, not just in the memories of others, not because of something we have accomplished, but in eternal reality.

Not only that, but Jesus has given us access to His mighty power in this life – the power to resist sin, the power to overcome the lies of the devil, the power to live as children of God, and the power to show His love to others. Paul put it this way,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

(Ephesians 1:18-23)

Meditate: HE IS MIGHTY.**Fast:** BLOWING PAST SORROW. Honor the losses in your life today. Slow down and be present to your emotions with Jesus. Sit with your sorrow and let loss do its eternal work in your soul.

Day 7

WEDNESDAY

March 9, 2022

Join us for Wednesday Nite LIVE(stream) at 7:00pm!

¹Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

⁴"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely, they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

John 3:1–21

Let living in the safety and peace of God's arms be your focus today. It is the seventh day of Lent, and it might be a day of worry and stress that try to overwhelm you while making you busy with the things of this life, some of which might be good things. But when you willfully rest in God's presence you force those other things into the background. "*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'*" (Psalm 91:1-2).

The devil will fight you on this. He wants to turn your eyes away from the truth to his lies. Even in the wilderness we are safe in Christ and his peace cannot be taken from us. Rest in him.

Meditate: I CHOOSE PEACE.

Fast: PANIC. No matter what comes today embrace the peace of Christ and push panic away in faith.

Day 8

THURSDAY

March 10, 2022

¹ Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John — ² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you — I am he."

John 4:1–26

Focus today on the joy of the Lord. Nehemiah said, "...the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). So, if it feels like you are living your life in a weak, dismal survival mode, with your head down, it might be you lack the joy of the lord (or at least you are not accessing it). This kind of joy does not just happen, it must be chosen. It is not within you; it comes from the Lord.

Where does this joy come from? It does not come from worldly, wealth, accomplishment, status, or substance which is why Jesus warned us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Joy is found in trusting Jesus, especially in the wilderness. Especially when things are going badly.

Joy is found in sharing life with Jesus and his people. It is found in feeling the indescribable love he has for you. It is found in being free to be who he created you to be. It is found in praising and worshipping, allowing your heart to overflow with love for Jesus, because you know Who He is and what He has done for you.

Meditate: THE JOY OF THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH.

Fast: FIXING IT. The fact is you can't fix everything – you can't fix most things. Let the grieving grieve and let the hurting hurt without feeling like you must fix it. Be present, but let God heal.

Day 9

FRIDAY

March 11, 2022

¹ Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ^{4 5} One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

John 5:1–9

Faith. What do you think of when you read that word? Focus on faith today. Consider the example of Peter,

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

(Matthew 14:22-33)

As he stepped onto the water, Peter’s eyes were glued onto Him alone. It wasn’t until Peter started noticing the wind and the waves, and the storm instead of keeping his eyes on Jesus, that he began to sink. Faith isn’t a magical formula or crossing our fingers and hoping fate will smile on us or believing things will turn out like we want them to. “*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*” (Hebrews 11:1). The essence of faith is in where we focus our eyes. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, we will see through His eyes, and understand based on His truth. If we turn our eyes toward ourselves or the world for answers and understanding, we will sink. Trust Jesus today.

Meditate: I WILL KEEP MY EYES ON JESUS.

Fast: RATIONALISM. Rationalism is the belief that human intellect, reason, and logic are paramount to truth. It is the practice of treating reason as the ultimate authority even in religion. Sometimes we must have faith.

Day 10

SATURDAY

March 12, 2022

³⁶ When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸ As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is — that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹ "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

Luke 7:36–47

Focus today on the name of Jesus. Peter said, "... *there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12); the writer of Romans declared, "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Romans 10:13); and Paul wrote, "...*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Philippians 2:10-11).

There is tremendous power in the name of Jesus... especially in the wilderness.

Meditate: THE NAME OF JESUS.

Fast: AVOIDANCE. What avoidance mechanisms surface when you face the unknown, unknowable, uncomfortable, or unavoidable? Do you eat more? Sleep more? Domineer more? Disappear more? Why? Ask God's Holy Spirit to sensitize you today to the existence of avoidance defaults in your life and fast from them.

SUNDAY**March 13, 2022**

Daylight Savings Time begins today.

As was explained at the beginning of this book, we do not count Sundays in our 40-day observance of Lent. This is the Lord's Day, a day of Worship. If you choose to do so, you may take a break from your Lenten fast today.

Sunday Worship begins at 10:00am. Come join us!

Day 11**MONDAY****March 14, 2022**

¹After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³ Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

⁴While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: ⁵ "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. ⁶ Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

¹¹ "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴ The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Luke 8:1-8, 11-15

Focus today on the idea of the water of life. In the physical sense, water *is* life. You cannot survive without it. Your brain and heart are over 70% water, and your lungs are over 80% water. We can survive without food for 40 days or more but without water we will die in as few as 3 days. So, when Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10), she did not fully understand, but said, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (John 4:15). Jesus completed his analogy by saying, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14).

The truth of our need for Christ's gift of "living water" is reflected in our physical bodies and experienced in our spirits. You know what it is to be thirsty. So, when Jesus talked about drinking the living water so that we never thirst spiritually again, you get it. We cannot live without Him. This becomes even more evident in the wilderness. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

Meditation: THE LIVING WATER.

Fast: PROFILING. Do you ever profile people by judging them based on some external thing? Do you ever look down at the elderly? The young? The poor? The wealthy? The disabled? The black? Ask God to shine his light on any form of profiling you might be guilty of and fast from it.

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. ⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house ⁴² because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. ⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

⁴⁹ While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore."

⁵⁰ Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

⁵¹ When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵² Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep."

⁵³ They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!"

⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶ Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Luke 8:40–56

Focus on home today. For some, the thought of home conjures up warm, happy memories, for others, not so much. However, for the twelfth day of Lent consider your alien status in this life and the heavenly home you are moving toward (Ephesians 2:11-22). Your alien status as a follower of Jesus might even be the reason you feel like you are in the wilderness. We must learn to live as foreigners, keeping our own beliefs and convictions while following Jesus in the face of multiple "gods," such as wealth, power, superiority, pride, and possession. While we make our way in this life, our home is with God.

Jesus explained this truth when he said, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:16-20). Of course, we know the Kingdom of God is a present reality because it is within us (Luke 17:21). However, Jesus is preparing a place for us, as he said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1-3).

Meditate: THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME.

Fast: Isolation. Meet a friend for coffee, call a cousin, visit a neighbor, or connect with a colleague. Fast isolation today by not being alone.

Day 13

WEDNESDAY

March 16, 2022

Join us for Wednesday Nite LIVE(stream) at 7:00pm!

³⁵That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Mark 4:35-41

For day thirteen of Lent, focus on *focus*. What has your attention today? What we choose to focus on matters because what we focus on will consume our thoughts, our attention, our emotions, and even our reality to a point. The devil wants to distract you and put your focus on things that don't matter by convincing you they are important, that you are entitled to them, that you need them or want them, and even that you can't be happy without them.

How do we resist the devil's schemes? How do we deal with him when we are in the wilderness? By, "*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith*" (Hebrews 12:2). We must resist him because "*Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue, though he cannot bear to let it go and lets it linger in his mouth, yet his food will turn sour in his stomach; it will become the venom of serpents within him.*" (Job 20:12-14).

Take a page from David's book today, "*...my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge — do not give me over to death. Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers, from the snares they have laid for me*" (Psalm 141:8-9).

Meditation: FOCUS ON JESUS.

Fast: Stinginess. Seek an opportunity today to be lavishly generous toward someone who cannot possibly return the favor.

Day 14

THURSDAY March 17, 2022

St. Patrick's Day

²¹Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. ²²And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

²³Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ²⁵What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Luke 9:21–26

Think about God's grace.

Grace is reflected in the beauty of every sunrise and the glory of every sunset. You can see grace in the magnificence of each mountain peak and ocean wave. Grace carries us during our deepest losses and helps us through our most difficult struggles. Whatever is good and pure in this life comes from God's grace.

The sufficiency of Grace was one of the Apostle Paul's favorite subjects. He stood firm on the doctrine, "...it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). If you are saved, having accepted Jesus as your Savior, it is through Grace. If you walk in righteousness as a follower of Jesus, it is through Grace. If you have the strength to live through today, it is by Grace. If you make it through the wilderness, you may be dealing with, it is by Grace. Anything and everything that is good in this life is by Grace. If you make it into heaven, it is by Grace.

Meditate: AMAZING GRACE.

Fast: Spectatorship. Don't just watch today. Choose to enter into Worship. Engage. Be present.

⁵⁷As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

⁵⁸Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

⁵⁹He said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

⁶⁰Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

⁶¹Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

⁶²Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:57-62

It is the fifteenth day of Lent. Think about the battle. Some will read that and respond, "What battle?" Others are shaking and maybe crying because the battle is on-so-real right now. While I am not all that fond of war analogies, life in 2022 is a battle ...especially in the wilderness. When difficult circumstances find us, the battle gets real really fast. However, the battle is not always limited to hard times. That is why Paul admonished us,

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

(Ephesians 6:10-18)

While the *armor of God* is vital, we need to remember who fights by our side on our behalf, as well. Call on Jesus for truth, for training, for leadership and direction, and for help in the struggle.

Meditation: JESUS HEAR ME.

Fast: Pulling back. Ask the Holy Spirit to alert you when you are pulling back from God and the challenges that come your way.

Day 16

SATURDAY

March 19, 2022

²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:25–37

You are God's child. Think about that. No matter what anyone says about you; no matter what has happened to you; no matter what lies the devil whispers in your ear; no matter the circumstances or mistakes or sins... you are God's child. David wrote,

"You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast...

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, God!

How vast is the sum of them!

Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand —

when I awake, I am still with you.

(Psalm 139:1-18)

As Paul put it, "... the Spirit you received brought about your adoption..." (Romans 8:15).

You are a child of the King.

Meditation: I AM A CHILD OF THE KING

Fast: Halos. Lay aside the false definitions of holy. You are holy because God says you are holy.

SUNDAY**March 20, 2022**

As was explained at the beginning of this book, we do not count Sundays in our 40-day observance of Lent. This is the Lord's Day, a day of Worship. If you choose to do so, you may take a break from your Lenten fast today. *Sunday Worship begins at 10:00am. Come join us!*

Day 17**MONDAY****March 21, 2022**

³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38–42

Focus today on listening to God. He promised the Israelites, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Jesus promised us, "...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26), and "...when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13).

Are there times in your prayers when you do all the talking, but you should be listening to God? We all do that. In the wilderness it can be hard to hear God speak. Elijah was in the wilderness, running from a wicked queen who wanted to kill him.

"The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

(1 Kings 19:11-13)

Once Elijah was quiet enough to hear God whisper, he received encouragement and instruction from the Father Himself (1 Kings 19:14-18). If we open our hearts and take the time in quiet prayer to listen, God will speak even in the wilderness.

Meditation: GOD SPEAKS.**Fast:** Apathy. Caring and connecting are choices, willful decisions. Fast apathy today.

Day 18
TUESDAY

March 22, 2022

¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”*

¹⁴ *Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”* ¹⁵ *Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.”* ¹⁷ *He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’* ¹⁸ *“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.’* ¹⁹ *And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”* ²⁰ *“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’*

²¹ *“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”*

Luke 12:13–21

God loves you. You have heard that again and again and again but stop and focus on it today.

God loves you.

Read it again. God loves you.

Even in the wilderness God loves you.

From the beginning of Genesis through the end of Revelation, God’s story is the story of the loving pursuit of his children. His love for us has withstood our rejection, our denial, our abandonment, our betrayal, and our disdain, and it has never failed. In the face of all we have done, and all we didn’t do, “*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8).

He still left the throne of heaven for our sakes,

Paul wrote, “*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*” (Ephesians 3:16-19). In addition, Paul asked,

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:31-39)

God loves you.

Meditate: GOD LOVES YOU.

Fast: Appearances. The appearance of faith without the fruit of faith is meaningless. Fast from keep up appearances today.

Day 19

WEDNESDAY

March 23, 2022

Join us for Wednesday Nite LIVE(stream) at 7:00pm!

²²Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap; they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

²⁷“Consider how the wildflowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your father knows that you need them. ³¹But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:22–34

Who are you? You might answer that question with your name, what you do for a living, where you live, or where you went to school, but who are you really? Sometimes when we find ourselves in the wilderness it is easy to forget who we are. You were created by God with careful planning and extravagance, as David wrote,

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be”

(Psalm 139:13-16).

In addition, you were created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) and are known and treasured by him (Matthew 10:29-32). You are a friend of God John 15:15-16).

Meditation: GOD KNOWS MY NAME.

Fast: Self-esteem. Focus instead on God-esteem. See yourself as he sees you.

Day 20

THURSDAY

March 24, 2022

²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

John 8:2–11

Today is the twentieth day of Lent, the halfway point. Focus today on redemption. We know God saved us for eternal life with Him, which is amazing and glorious, but not the whole picture of redemption. Redemption is not just a future promise, it is also a present reality. “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified*” (Romans 8:28-30). In other words, the thing that is predestined – that which God works for the good of those who love him – is redemption. So, in good times and in bad, in triumphs and trials, in familiar paths and in the wilderness, redemption is predestined for those who love God, and he is working everything for it.

Redemption is a process that began at the Cross, continued when you accepted Jesus as your Savior, and will be completed when you are fully Christ-like and with him in the place he is preparing for you. So, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going*” (John 14:1-4).

Meditate: JESUS IS MY REDEEMER.

Fast: Leavened bread. Fast leavened breads as a symbol of rejecting hypocrisy.

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹ "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

²⁰ "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

²⁶ Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

²⁷ He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

John 9:13-34

Today we focus on Jesus. He is the hero who came to rescue you. He is the wise father who speaks wisdom and strength to his children. He is the faithful friend who walks with you as you navigate life, even life in the wilderness, and who carries you when you fall. He is the King of kings who established the order of the Kingdom of God and protects his people. He is the warrior who fights against the enemy, the great deceiver, satan. He is God Incarnate who died in your place and rose from the dead in overwhelming victory.

Again and again, Jesus reminded Israel of their story and told stories to illustrate God's love. He instructed His disciples to frame the Passover story with His story, the story of the cross. He reminded them to take the bread and the cup, "in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). People who follow Jesus must tell, and retell, the story in order to remember it and communicate the truth of God's love.

Meditate: JESUS IS MY STORY.

Fast: Resistance. Whatever God is trying to do in your life, whatever he seeks through your story, let him do it.

Day 22

SATURDAY

March 26, 2022

¹“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. ¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the father knows me and I know the father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father.”

John 10:1–18

Focus today on the light. Wilderness is often a place of darkness, but Isaiah wrote, “*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor*” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Wilderness takes many forms. For some it comes with grief and the loss of a loved one. For others it is the shame and brokenness that comes with sin. Still others find the wilderness in conflict, uncertainty, or anxiety and depression. Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life*” (John 8:12). Only Jesus can find us in the wilderness and bless us with his presence.

Meditate: JESUS IS MY LIGHT.

Fast: Sound. Today, attempt to fast sounds for an hour. Turn off your music, TV, and phone. Power down anything that beeps or buzzes or blinks.

SUNDAY**March 27, 2022**

As was explained at the beginning of this book, we do not count Sundays in our 40-day observance of Lent. This is the Lord's Day, a day of Worship. If you choose to do so, you may take a break from your Lenten fast today.

Sunday Worship begins at 10:00am. Come join us!

Day 23**MONDAY****March 28, 2022**

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

As you enter day twenty-three of Lent focus on refuge. When we find ourselves in the wilderness a place of refuge is welcome and refreshing. We long for refuge like David who wrote, "...hide me in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 17:8). David, who knew a thing or two about living in the wilderness, also wrote, "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock" (Psalm 27:5).

When we think of all the ways we seek shelter in the wilderness we have to be careful not to make the mistake Adam and Eve made when they tried to hide from God because of their sin (Genesis 3:1-19). David learned there is no hiding from God, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you" (Psalm 139:7-12). We all know, "God is our refuge" (Psalm 46:1), but we still try to hide from him sometimes.

Media, electronics, alcohol, drugs, and work are just some of the ways we seek refuge when we are in a wilderness season. None of them work. Only God gives actual refuge. "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'" (Psalm 91:1-2).

Seek shelter in Jesus today.

Meditation: JESUS IS MY REFUGE.

Fast: Self-sufficiency. Depend on the Lord, not yourself.

Day 24

TUESDAY

March 29, 2022

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Luke 15:1-7

Focus today on the deep, deep love of Jesus. Paul wrote, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19). In other words, the love of Christ is immeasurable, but the more we grasp and understand how much he loves us the more his love and presence will fill us.

While most people think of his birth, his crucifixion, or his resurrection when considering the love of Christ — and all of those are certainly evidence to the fact — we must also think of his presence. Jesus is with you because he loves you. It is normal to want to spend time with someone you love. Jesus wants to spend time with you. He promised, "...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). He *wants* to be with you.

Meditate: JESUS WANTS TO BE WITH ME.

Fast: Neutrality. Choose Jesus over yourself.

Day 25

WEDNESDAY

March 30, 2022

Join us for Wednesday Nite LIVE(stream) at 7:00pm!

⁸“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Luke 15:8–10

Focus today on abundance but be sure to focus on God’s abundance rather than the counterfeit our culture holds up before us. Focusing on the counterfeit may lead us into the wilderness, or keep us in the wilderness for a longer season. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10), so we know abundance is part of the plan, but does that mean God will make you wealthy or give you cool things? Nope. Remember, Jesus challenged the rich, young ruler to give away his wealth (Mark 10:17-27), and taught, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20). Two things are important here: First, Jesus was not saying you are blessed if you are or *because* you are poor, he was elevating the poor into *the kingdom of God* because *everyone* is valuable to God. Second, if you are expecting God to make you rich, you will probably be disappointed in your relationship with him because abundance in the kingdom of God is all about your relationship with Jesus.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

(Romans 8:5-9)

Walk in abundance today, authentic abundance. Let Jesus surround you in his peace; Let him shield you with his truth; Remember you are not alone – you are never alone. “Love never fails” (I Corinthians 13:8), and Jesus never leaves you (Matthew 28:10).

Meditation: AUTHENTIC ABUNDANCE.

Fast: Denial. Be honest with God. He knows everything anyway.

Day 26

THURSDAY

March 31, 2022

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them.

¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate.

Luke 15:11-24

It is the twenty-sixth day of Lent and today we consider fear. As Christians, we are used to sermons against the sins of lust, envy, pride, gossip, and greed, but we seldom consider fear as sin. When we walk in fear, make choices in fear, or walk in fear, fear becomes sinful because it is greater than our faith. We remain silent when we should share the Gospel; we walk by when we should stop and help; we go along with sinful behavior when we should walk away; or we fail to seek justice for the oppressed or underprivileged. John wrote, "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love*" (1 John 4:18).

There is also the issue of a persistent believe that each of us is worthy of judgment and should be punished. While that is certainly true, "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8), and "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). Do you love yourself the way God loves you? Have you forgiven yourself for your sin the way God has forgiven you? "*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption...*" (Romans 8:14-15).

Here is a crazy idea: In Jesus you are made perfect – perfect in God's eyes and perfect in his love. There is no room for fear there.

Meditation: JESUS CASTS OUT FEAR.

Fast: Comparison. Stop determining your value by the way you think others see you, or the way you see them.

Day 27
FRIDAY

April 1, 2022

April Fool's Day

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 19:1-10

Back on day eighteen we thought about love, God's love to be more specific. Today we consider the importance of love. Why did Jesus talk about so much? Why does it matter? You might remember, Jesus was asked, "*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*" (Mark 12:28). Jesus answered, "*The most important one is this: '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.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these*" (Mark 12:29-31). So, love is really important.

The love of God changes everything. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). God's love changed Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, Nicodemus, Paul, and countless others mentioned in the Bible. God's love changed millions throughout history as the Gospel spread. God's love changed you ...or it will if you have not accepted Jesus yet. As Paul wrote, "*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Meditate: GOD'S LOVE TRANSFORMS ME.

Fast: Discontentment. Every time you are tempted to picture your life with something else or something new or something different, stop and redirect your mental energy to thank God for anything in your current reality for which you can be grateful.

Day 28

SATURDAY

April 2, 2022

¹Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²(This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

⁸"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

¹¹After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

¹²His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

¹⁶Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

²⁸After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³²When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴"Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵Jesus wept.

³⁶Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹"Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

⁴⁰Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

John 11:1-44

Meditation: Jesus wept.

Fast: Limitations. Fast the limitations you place on yourself – restrictions put there by age, disease, dysfunction, requirements, or rules. Prayerfully ask God to show you which ones need to be laid aside.

SUNDAY April 3, 2022

As was explained at the beginning of this book, we do not count Sundays in our 40-day observance of Lent. This is the Lord's Day, a day of Worship. If you choose to do so, you may take a break from your Lenten fast today.

Sunday Worship begins at 10:00am. Come join us!

Day 29

MONDAY

April 4, 2022

¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

⁹ Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

John 12:1-11

Focus today on endurance – standing firm and strong. Your enemy, the devil, is a liar (John 8:44), and will attempt to chip away at the foundation of your faith through wilderness circumstances, the actions of others toward you, and your own sin. Peter wrote, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The lies the devil tells can sound or feel true in the wilderness. He uses your past against you, reminds you of sins God has already forgiven, and whispers you are simply not good enough. This makes the harshness of life even more harsh, amplifies the cruel words spoken by others, and makes you feel isolated and rejected. It is vital to stand firm and strong in the wilderness, but you do not stand in your own strength. You stand in the strength of the Lord Jesus.

Meditation: JESUS IS MY ROCK.

Fast: Intimidation. Fear is intimidation's oxygen. Satan is a skilled intimidator – reject him and his lies.

Day 30
TUESDAY

April 5, 2022

²⁸One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

³²"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

³⁴When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Mark 12:28-34

It is day thirty of Lent and we are counting down to Holy Week and Easter Sunday. Focus on legacy today – your legacy. Legacy is that which is passed from one person to another like an inheritance. You may think your earthly family, how they see you, how they treat you, your family history, and how your family acts is your legacy – and that is true in part. We all deal with issues and blessings from our family tree. However, your family history does not necessarily define you because, "...we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..." (Romans 8:17). In addition, Paul wrote, "So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:7).

So, here is a question: Do you want longevity or legacy? Of course, all of us probably answer, both! However, if you had to choose would you want a long life with no impact like Methuselah (Genesis 5:21-27), or do you want lasting generational influence through your legacy? Moses instructed the Israelites, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). So, even if you received a negative legacy, you can leave a godly one for your children, grandchildren, and future generations. As David wrote, "The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children — with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts" (Psalm 103:15-18).

Meditation: JESUS IS MY LEGACY

Fast: Self-Confidence. God-confidence is our only hope.

Day 31

WEDNESDAY

April 6, 2022

Join us for Wednesday Nite LIVE(stream) at 7:00pm!

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Mark 12:41–44

Focus today on hope – the hope we have in Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us, "...*hope that is seen is no hope at all... But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently*" (Romans 8:24-25); to, "*Be joyful in hope...*" (Romans 12:12); and to let, "*the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace*" (Romans 15:8). The hope that we have in Jesus will sustain us and empower us even in the wilderness. You have probably heard the adage; time heals all wounds. With all due respect to Greek poet, Menander, and Geoffrey Chaucer, both of whom included a version of the phrase in their poetry, I am closer to agreeing with Rose Kennedy, who wrote, "It has been said that time heals all wounds. I don't agree. The wounds remain. Time - the mind, protecting its sanity - covers them with some scar tissue and the pain lessens, but it is never gone."

Time does not, in fact, heal all wounds, but hope can. The hope that is found in Christ can heal the damage done by trauma, the destruction of sin, or the loss of a loved one. This is by no means meant to lessen the impact of the terrible things that come into our lives – memory is indelible, scars remain, and tragedy is awful – however, hope in Christ can heal enough for us to carry on in this life.

Meditation: JESUS IS MY HOPE.

Fast: Hopelessness. No situation this side of heaven is permanent.

Day 32

THURSDAY

April 7, 2022

¹² The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

Mark 11:12–17

Focus on accepting Jesus today. God did not come to you with demands, expectations, and lists of things you must do to gain acceptance from him. That is not the nature of Grace. He is not waiting with folded arms for you to get it right so you can reach him where he is. "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*" (John 1:14). If you have not yet accepted Jesus as your Savior, what are you waiting for? You are never going to get it right because, "*...all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory*" (Romans 3:23). You are never going to have it all figured out because it requires faith which is, "*...confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*" (Hebrews 11:1). In fact, Paul wrote, "*I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Jesus said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:28-30). If you do not know him as your Savior, if you have not yet accepted him, do it now.

Meditation: HAVE I ACCEPTED JESUS?

Fast: Addition. Jesus is enough. He is sufficient for your salvation. Do not add a thing. Try to go all day today without spending money to remind you of what you cannot purchase: Salvation.

Day 33

FRIDAY

April 8, 2022

¹² On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished, and ready. Make preparations for us there."

¹⁶ The disciples left, went into the city, and found things just as Jesus had told them. So, they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me — one who is eating with me."

¹⁹ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"

²⁰ "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Mark 14:12–21

Focus on perseverance today. James wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4); and, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). Paul added, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:1-5).

If you are in the wilderness today, do not give up!

Meditation: JESUS CARRIES ME.

Fast: Willful Sin. This is a sincere challenge for you to start loving Jesus to the degree that it compels you to walk away from sin where you can and get help where you cannot.

Day 34

SATURDAY

April 9, 2022

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ²saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

⁴They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

¹⁰"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Mark 11:1–10

This is day thirty-four of Lent, the last day before Holy Week begins. Focus on the Kingdom of God today. This was such a radical idea when Jesus introduced it that it is still reverberating today.

To gain my life I must lose it?

Blessed are the poor?

Take the least important seat?

Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and the humble exalted?

Blessed are those who are persecuted and insulted?

To be great I must be a servant? Love my enemies?

Forgive seventy times seven?

Blessed are those who mourn?

Reconcile with others before offering a gift to God?

Sell what you have and give to the poor?

The greatest will be the least?

The Kingdom of God as described by Jesus is a series of paradoxes that turn our worldly thinking upside down. It is a present reality, as well as a future hope.

Meditation: JESUS CHANGED (AND CHANGES) EVERYTHING.

Fast: Criticism. Remember Jesus knows everyone by name and treat them as such.

Holy Week

SUNDAY

April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday

As was explained at the beginning of this book, we do not count Sundays in our 40-day observance of Lent. This is the Lord's Day, a day of Worship. If you choose to do so, you may take a break from your Lenten fast today.

Sunday Worship begins at 10:00am. Come join us!

Day 35

MONDAY

April 11, 2022

¹ *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

² *The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.* ³ *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;* ⁴ *so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.* ⁵ *After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

⁶ *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

⁷ *Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."*

⁸ *"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."*

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ *"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"*

¹⁰ *Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."* ¹¹ *For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.*

¹² *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.* ¹³ *"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.* ¹⁴ *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.* ¹⁵ *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.* ¹⁶ *Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.* ¹⁷ *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

John 13:1–17

Meditation: JESUS SERVED.

Fast: That which is mine. Hold your material things loosely today and if God leads, give something away.

Day 36

TUESDAY

April 12, 2022

²² *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."*

²³ *Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.*

²⁴ *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. ²⁵ "Truly I tell you; I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

²⁶ *When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Mark 14:22–26

Focus today on being communion. Be the bread, the Body of Christ, in that you are mindful and purposeful about being part of the Church. Be the cup, the blood of Christ, in that you consciously carry the gospel. Your life has more impact, good or bad, than you realize. Your words and actions influence others and their perception of Jesus and his Church. Follow Jesus' example today. Remember, Jesus taught, "*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house*" (Matthew 5:14-15).

Be the light.

Meditation: I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Fast: Withholding. Ask God to reveal any area in which you are withholding love from Him, others, or yourself.

Day 37

WEDNESDAY

April 13, 2022

Join us for Wednesday Nite LIVE(stream) at 7:00pm!

⁴³ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." ⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁴⁸ "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

⁵⁰ Then everyone deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, ⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

Mark 14:43–52

Focus today on the arrest of Jesus. Put yourself in the garden where the crowd found him. Are you carrying a club? A sword? Are you the young man who ran away naked in a panic? Lent is designed to bring us closer to Jesus by reminding us of the things he did from the temptation in the wilderness all the way to the Cross. Stay in the garden for now. Judas has carried out his scheme. Everyone who followed Jesus has fled and the crowd has taken him. Sit there in the garden alone and think about what just happened.

Meditation: JESUS KNOWS THE WILDERNESS OF BETRAYAL.

Fast: Your own voice. Select a time that is doable — an hour, an afternoon, or even a day — fast your voice (talking, typing, and texting). Honor Jesus with a period of focused quietness.

Day 38

THURSDAY

April 14, 2022

Maundy Thursday

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

⁵⁵ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. ⁵⁶ Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

⁵⁷ Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him. ⁵⁸ "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'" ⁵⁹ Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶¹ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again, the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

⁶² "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶³ The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

Mark 14:53–65

Focus today on Jesus' suffering from his betrayal in the garden at Gethsemane, to the awareness that everyone who said they loved Him abandoned Him, to the mockery of his trial before the Sanhedrin, to being spit on and beaten. He faced it all.

Meditation: JESUS KNOWS HOW I FEEL.

Fast: Escapism. Instead of distracting yourself with activity, cancel appointments to make space to be still. Instead of drowning yourself with pity, address God directly and honestly about your ache. Instead of numbing yourself with entertainment, let the pain be a reminder that you still need time to heal. Let Jesus heal you.

Day 39

FRIDAY

April 15, 2022

Good Friday

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). ²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: **THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁸ ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Mark 15:16–32

Focus today on the Cross. Along with Jesus' physical suffering, he endured the humiliation of carrying your sin and shame as he shouldered the weight of the cross. Do not turn away from his suffering today. Look at it. Jesus took your sin, suffering, and death.

Meditation: JESUS DIED FOR (AND BECAUSE OF) ME.

Fast: Guarding Tombs. Is shame standing watch over any dead things in your life? Jesus died to forgive you — follow His example and forgive yourself.

Day 40

SATURDAY

April 16, 2022

Holy Saturday

³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mark 15:33–46

This is the last day of Lent. Tomorrow is Easter Sunday, but for today be silent. Focus on silence – the silence of death, the silence of the tomb, the silence of sunset on a dark day.

Meditation: SILENCE.

Fast: Media. This is Holy Saturday. As you reflect on Jesus dead in the tomb fast from television, music, and screens that make noise. Fast for an hour, part of a day, or the whole day.