



# *2021 Lenten Season*

## *CORPORATE FAST*

**(February 17 – April 4, 2021)**

*Mt. Pleasant recognize Sundays as a day of Celebration*

*Adapted from Alfred Street Baptist Church "At the Cross" 2021 Lent Meditations*

***Disclaimer:*** Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church strongly encourages individuals with health concerns to consult their physician prior to beginning a fast. This is especially important if you take prescription medications or have a chronic condition. Some people should never fast without professional supervision.

## BEFORE THE FAST (BODY & SPIRIT)

**Physical & Basic Preparation:** (Consult your physician. Use wisdom)

- Begin to reduce your food portions prior to the fast.
- Flush the body by drinking plenty of water.
- Begin to eliminate caffeinated and sweet beverages.
- **Be strategic. Plan your meal ahead of time. Preparation is Key.**
- Before the fast, remove temptations (snacks, candy, sodas, etc.) that will distract you during the fast. Begin limiting fast foods.

**Spiritual Preparation:**

- Read and meditate on *Psalms 51* daily.
- Reduce distractions and designate your quiet time and place to be with the Lord.
- Schedule time for reading the word each day.

## SUGGESTIONS DURING THE FAST

- **Get A Journal of Renewed Strength:** Get a journal/notebook. Write down what your prayer requests and answers. Journal what the Lord says to you. (Psalm 77:11-12, Deu. 17:18, Deu. 6:4-7, 2 Timothy 1:5). **HONOR THE LORD AND HIS PURPOSE FOR YOU!**
- **Be Accountable:** Pair with a person or persons. Pray, share, and commit to the Fast with each other. (Matthew 18:20, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, Psalm 133:1-3)
- **Pray in Silence & Solitude** Spend some time in silence and solitude (noise-free) to allow God to speak to you. It is important to **limit** social networking, texting, tweeting, and unnecessary cell phone use. Also **limit** secular television/radio. (Matthew 4:1, Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42, Psalm 46:10)

## SUGGESTIONS AFTER THE FAST

- Gradually return to implementing meats into your diet. Be careful. Continue to drink plenty of water. Begin with eating soups. Continue to eat healthy

## SCRIPTURES

- 1 Peter 4:7-10
- Acts 4:32-33
- Joel 2:15-17
- Psalm 51 (Psalm of Repentance)
- Psalm 27:14
- Philippians 4:13
- Daniel 10:2, 3

### February 17 – March 6, 2021

SCRIPTURE/PRAYER FOCUS: See Devotional Scriptures AND also pray for spiritual, emotional and physical healing; breaking of strongholds, bad habits and deliverance from evil.

- Eliminate sugar, sweets, caffeine, and snack foods (candy, cake, chips, coffee, soda, etc.)
- Eat fruit and vegetables during the Fast.
- Drink plenty of water and 100% juice

### March 7 – March 27, 2021

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: See Devotional Scriptures AND also pray for provision, protection, direction and unity; God's will and plan for Mt. Pleasant and for our individual lives; obedience and wisdom for the journey; our nation, leaders (spiritual and world), and finances; that the great grace of God will be upon us all.

- Eliminate sugar, sweets, caffeine, and snack foods (candy, cake, chips, coffee, soda, etc.)
- Eliminate bread, pasta and rice.
- Limit meat intake to 1 serving of chicken, turkey or fish per day
- Eat fruit and vegetables during the Fast.
- Drink plenty of water and 100% juice

### March 28-April 4, 2021

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: See Devotional Scriptures AND pray for increased faith, revival in the church and land; missions and evangelism. Pray for unsaved loved ones (opportunity to accept Christ) People will sincerely desire to commit their lives to Christ. Hunger and thirst for holiness. Identification with the Sacrifice, Suffering, and Resurrection of Christ. Pray for a desire for the word of God and the demonstration of miracles, signs and the wonders of God! Declare God's greatness

in the entire earth/

**\*\*\*THE REMAINING OF THE FAST WILL CONSIST OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES ONLY.**

**(Please see in the suggested list of vegetables and fruits)**

- Eliminate sugar, sweets, caffeine, and snack foods (candy, cake, chips, coffee, soda, etc.)
- Eliminate bread, pasta and rice.
- Eliminate All Meats
- Eat fruit and vegetables during the Fast.
- Drink plenty of water and 100% juice
- Pray for Great Power!!!

**There are 47 days from February 17<sup>th</sup> to April 4<sup>th</sup> Easter Sunday. Mt. Pleasant does not fast on Sundays.**

## HERE IS A LIST OF FOOD ITEMS THAT CAN BE INCLUDED IN THIS FAST.

- **All fruits.** These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Fruits include but are not limited to apples, apricots, bananas, blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cantaloupe, cherries, cranberries, figs, grapefruit, grapes, guava, honeydew melon, kiwi, lemons, limes, mangoes, nectarines, oranges, papayas, peaches, pears, pineapples, plums, prunes, raisins, raspberries, strawberries, tangelos, tangerines, watermelon
- **All vegetables.** These can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or canned. Vegetables include but are not limited to artichokes, asparagus, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chili peppers, collard greens, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, ginger root, kale, leeks, lettuce, mushrooms, mustard greens, okra, onions, parsley, potatoes, radishes, rutabagas, scallions, spinach, sprouts, squashes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, turnips, watercress, yams, zucchini, veggie burgers are an option if you are not allergic to soy.
- **All whole grains,** including but not limited to whole wheat, brown rice, millet, quinoa, oats, barley, grits, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat tortillas, rice cakes and popcorn.
- **All nuts and seeds,** including but not limited to sunflower seeds, cashews, peanuts, sesame. Also nut butters including peanut butter.
- **All legumes.** These can be canned or dried. Legumes include but are not limited to dried beans, pinto beans, split peas, lentils, black eyed peas, kidney beans, black beans, cannellini beans, white beans.
- **All quality oils** including but not limited to olive, canola, grape seed, peanut, and sesame.
- **Beverages:** spring water, distilled water or other pure waters. Soy milk, almond milk, unsweetened tea, black coffee

# What is the Season of Lent?

Lent was first celebrated during the fourth century and began with only a few days before Easter. The early church would baptize converts to Christianity—all those who believed in the name of the Lord—on Easter Sunday only. With time, Lent was extended to several weeks. The 40 days were symbolic of Jesus' preparation and temptation by Satan in the wilderness after His baptism and before the beginning of His ministry. It was a time of purification and separation.

Lent became known as the 40-day period before Easter and begins on Ash Wednesday. Sundays are not counted in the 40 days because the day commemorates the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Since early biblical times, ashes have been symbolic of repentance (turning away from sin and turning to God) or of grief in mourning. The ashes were used to make a sign of the cross on the forehead of believers from the charred remains of the palm branches used on Palm Sunday the year before. This extended period of 40 days became a time of prayer and fasting as well as a time of self-examination and inner reflection for the purpose of repentance.

As we celebrate Lent, we should remember that what we give up for a short period of time cannot prepare us for how God expects us to live our lives daily in relationship with Him. Perhaps that is why after the Reformation, the discipline of fasting became unpopular. Yet, there were those church fathers and leaders who still wanted to preserve Lent as a time of self-sacrifice; thus, people were encouraged to give up something they enjoyed during Lent.

We suggest during this season of Lent to forget about giving up trivial things. Instead, take on a newfound attitude to live in accordance with God's Word. No amount of fasting, abstaining from physical pleasures or any other form of self-denial can purify us. Our cleansing can only come from the atoning blood of Jesus who sacrificed His life for our many sins.

Get to know Jesus intimately for yourself during this sacred time. Use these meditations—written by the board members of the Christian Life Institute and ministers and members of Alfred Street Baptist Church—to help guide you as you reflect on Christ's great sacrifice and how it impacts your life today. Let the Holy Spirit convert your mind daily and lead you to do and think the things that are pleasing in His sight. Pray, repent and let God work in you and to do His good pleasure.

# GLORY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2021

## Transformed

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 3:12–18

**KEY VERSE:** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. – 2 Corinthians 3:18b (NKJV)

After daily looking into the bathroom mirror for over five decades, I have seen myself change from one level of maturity to another. Similarly, the person of Jesus is a mirror in which the Lord's glory is brilliantly mirrored, and it is into this the new life bestowed in Him that those who see with eyes of faith "are transformed."

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul depicts the life of faith as being changed into the image of Christ and as moving from one degree of glory to another. He characterizes the Christian life as one of growth and improvement.

We are all works in progress. Through the intimacy of our relationship with Christ, we are daily transformed from the inside out. The season of Lent is a great time for self-examination and self-correction of our faith walk. Keep your eyes focused on the Lord and observe how amazingly He blesses you!

— Rev. Dr. Sylvia Dayton-Jones

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How do I see my faith growing and improving?

*Lord God, help me to daily grow in my relationship with you and be transformed into your likeness with ever increasing glory. Amen.*



# LOVE

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2021

## What is Love?

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 13:4–8

**KEY VERSE:** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.  
– 1 Corinthians 13:4 (NIV)

My favorite verses in the Bible about love are found in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. It tells us what love is, not what it should be. Love is patient, not “love should be patient.” The Bible is telling us that love isn’t just something applied to a romantic relationship but to interactions with our parents, friends, and even people we hardly know. Love isn’t just saying you love someone—it’s displayed in everyday actions we take for granted.

These verses tell us how God loves and how we are to love like Him. As Christians (and just decent people), we should “love one another, for love is of God” (1 John 4:7). We may not be able to do something as sacrificial as God giving us His only son. But we can always be patient, kind, helpful, considerate, and generous. During difficult times we all need a little more love.

— Charis Tillman

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I show love to someone today?

Heavenly Father, thank you for your love. Your love is always patient and kind, it never fails. As I go about my day, I pray you show me how to not only love those I know, but also those I don’t know. In Jesus’ holy name I pray, Amen.



# JOY

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2021

## Inexpressible Joy

**READ:** 1 Peter 1:3–9

**KEY VERSE:** You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.  
– 1 Peter 1:8 (NLT)

Have you ever watched a three-year-old kid spot a puddle of muddy rainwater, jump in, and splash it everywhere? The smile that breaks across the child's face is an expression of beautiful, inexpressible joy. Somewhere along the road to adulthood we lose the ability to live in the moment and enjoy the blessings of a perfect sunrise or the taste of the garden's first tomatoes. These events should remind us that faith in our Father's grace, though we cannot see Him, is enough to give us glorious joy.

Our anxiety about the trials of everyday life often cause us to overlook the many occurrences that demonstrate God's love for us. I have always found the fellowship expressed when we sing "There's a sweet, sweet spirit in this place," as we greet each other during worship services, to be one of the joys of belonging to a loving congregation. God brings us together to be each other's shoulder when we need to lean, a helping hand when misfortune strikes, a cheerleader to help someone achieve a goal. That knowledge should sustain us and give us joy even when we cannot see Him.

— Doris Hutchinson Collins

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I see the good things that occur daily and keep my mind on God-given joy?

*Heavenly Father, thank you for grace and the fellowship of true believers who bring joy into my life. Amen.*

# THANKSGIVING

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2021

## Oh, Give Thanks

**READ:** 1 Chronicles 16:29–34

**KEY VERSE:** Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.  
– 1 Chronicles 16:34 (NKJV)

As I've seasoned to the very young age of seventy, Thanksgiving has taken on a whole new meaning. It is more than a holiday in November. For me, it's waking up each day that God gives me in my right mind and being blessed with food, clothing, shelter, family, friends, and the list goes on and on. Simply put, it's a "thank you God" day.

We are currently in an era of social, economic, and political dismay. The inability to visit family and friends, dine out, go to the movies, and especially fellowship with others at church undoubtedly causes a great deal of stress and anxiety.

The blessing we oftentimes forget is that God is in control of all of our circumstances. So, be thankful and give thanks that He has the final say in these turbulent times. When all else fails and you are dismayed, pray without ceasing—because trouble don't last always.

— Emma Varner

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What blessings will I thank God for today?

*Father God, please continue to define my daily life with purpose and meaning so that I may always be a blessing to someone else. Hide me behind the cross—for I am a sinner. I thank you for allowing your son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for my sins. Amen.*

# FELLOWSHIP

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2021

## Like the Redwood Trees

**READ:** 1 John 1

**KEY VERSE:** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. – 1 John 1:7 (NIV)

On a trip to California, I had the opportunity to walk in the Redwood National Park. The redwood tree, known to thrive in thick groves and to be the largest and tallest tree in the world, has a remarkable root system. Although they are very shallow, the roots can intertwine, which gives the trees great strength against wind, rain and other forces of nature.

As Christians, God wants us to be in fellowship with Him and one another to create this same support network. Individually, we are shallow and cannot withstand that which comes to destroy us; but together we are strong. As the hymn “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms” says, “What a fellowship, what a joy divine.” When we depend on God and one another as Christians, we can be safe and secure from all fears and harm.

— Deacon Winston Gaskin

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What does fellowship look like in your families, communities, and church?

*Lord, as believers in Christ, teach us to support one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

# FAITH

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2021

## Keep It Movin'

**READ:** Deuteronomy 31:1–6

**KEY VERSE:** Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. —  
*Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)*

I'm pretty sure all of us are aware that 2020 was difficult. Some may have even lost sight of their faith. I had a tough year, too. I had to complete my senior year of high school online and missed having a formal graduation and the usual senior year social opportunities. I had to start my freshman year of college mostly taking the majority of my classes on Zoom. I know I'm not the only one who thinks that these situations have made us very lonely. It's times like these when I like to find verses to help me have an extra connection to the Lord. Today's verse, Deuteronomy 31:6, is one of those.

In tough situations I've learned that I still must keep the faith no matter what. Having faith in God and trusting His will gave me the confidence to push through. God was there for me in moments where I didn't think I needed Him. I was able to keep up my studies and finish my first semester with a high GPA and a positive well-being. Whenever I need to realign my faith, I will meditate and reflect on what the Lord has done for me. By keeping your faith, you will always and forever trust God's will.

— Jonathan Randle

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What do I need to do to ramp up my faith in God?

*Dear Lord, please give me the strength to follow your will and to never lose faith even in the toughest times.*

*Amen.*

# WORSHIP

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2021

## Get Yo Life!

**READ:** Romans 12:1–2

**KEY VERSE:** Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. – *Romans 12:1 (NASB)*

Have you ever heard the phrase “get yo life”? It is an expression made popular by Tamar Braxton in her reality TV shows and used to explain an unawareness that a person has expressed.

Many people may be unaware that worship means more than just a single act of singing or praise on Sunday morning. The way to offer God authentic worship is to live a life every day that is *holy*, meaning “set apart” or “different” from the secular world.

When we become followers of Jesus, we soon learn that no part of us exists outside of our walk with Christ. We also realize that a life that is pleasing and acceptable to Him is something that we must continuously strive for every day. It will not come easy, but the reward in heaven is so much greater than anything we will face on earth. So, when we think again about what worship means, I want you, in your Tamar voice, to “get yo life” and commit to the lifelong pursuit of holiness that is your acceptable act of worship to God.

— Eboni Jones

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How am I committed to living a life of holiness to worship God?

*Lord, please turn the desires of my heart away from the world and seek only to do your will in effort to cultivate a life of worship to you. Amen.*

# HOLINESS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2021

## Heart Matters

**READ:** Psalm 51:1–12

**KEY VERSE:** Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
– Psalm 51:10 (NIV)

When we think about the heart, we must consider how awesome it is! This dynamic muscle not only pumps blood throughout our entire body, it also guides us to seek wholeheartedly after the things we are passionate about.

Have you ever heard or spoken the phrase, “My heart wasn’t in it”? I’m sure we can agree that this statement suggests that we’re more likely to give our all to the things we’re genuinely passionate about. The love story of how our heavenly Father sent His only son to die for our sins is a powerful example of the length that love will extend when the heart is aligned.

As children of God, the way we show our love and reverence for Him is through offering Him our whole hearts and living a holy life. The more we spend intentional moments in His Word, the more we learn about Him (John 17:17). The more we know about Him, the more we will become passionate about obeying His Word and living a life that pleases Him. We cannot do this in our own strength but only through His grace and power (1 John 4:4).

— Hope Kent

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What heart lessons do I need to learn?

*Father, thank you for being so concerned with my heart. Help me seek after you each day and exhibit actions that honor you. Help me to desire a heart that is holy. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*



# HUMILITY

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2021

## A Top Model

**READ:** Philippians 2:3–11

**KEY VERSE:** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. - *Philippians 2:3 (NIV)*

Like millions of others, I was shocked last summer to hear the news of the death of actor Chadwick Boseman, star of “Black Panther” and other acclaimed movies. He was just 43. After his passing, I learned that Boseman had waged a private battle against colon cancer for four years. But he went about life as usual and gave of himself—visiting sick children in the hospital, helping a friend raise money for African American communities hit hardest by COVID-19, and sending instructions and money to family to help them prepare for the pandemic. He used his fame to direct attention to people he thought needed it more than him. “He was always humble,” his brother said in an interview. And those close to him say he continued to praise God throughout his illness.

Boseman’s life epitomized what Paul encouraged the Philippians to do: to be selfless and to value others above yourselves. Jesus was the ultimate example of humility, an obedient servant of God whose mission was to help others and save us from our sins. While none of us can be as perfect as Christ, we can strive to follow His model.

— Deacon Barbranda Walls

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How am I modeling the humility of Jesus in my life?

*Dear Lord, help me to be a humble servant who points others to you. Amen.*



# REDEMPTION

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2021

## No Expiration

**READ:** Hebrews 9:11–15

**KEY VERSE:** He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. - [Hebrews 9:12 \(NIV\)](#)

My mother was the high priestess of coupon-clipping. Every Sunday after church, she would clip dozens of coupons out of the oversized Sunday newspaper and then wait until Wednesday to redeem them at the A&P supermarket because that was the day you could get double the value of the coupon. Occasionally, however, the cashier would have to discard some that were too tattered or smeared to read. Others were torn in the wrong spot. And worse, a few could not be redeemed because they had expired.

When I think about my own fallen nature and sinfulness, I am mindful that I am just an old tattered and torn coupon that could not be redeemed, had it not been for the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. No matter how sinful I have been, no matter how far down into the gutter I may have fallen, I thank God that I have been saved by the grace of the Father, redeemed by the love of Jesus, and sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the best thing about it is that my redemption never expires!

— Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What are some ways I can demonstrate my gratitude for my salvation and redemption?

*God, help me to be more mindful of your sacrifice and more thankful for my redemption. Amen.*

# FAITH

MONDAY, MARCH 1, 2021

## Follow the Shepherd

**READ:** Psalm 23:1–6

**KEY VERSE:** But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name. - *John 1:12 (KJV)*

On April 14, 1945, when I was almost thirteen years old, I was seated among a large crowd of teenagers at a Youth Rally in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. “Where He Leads Me, I Will Follow” was the hymn of invitation. That is when I made the choice to receive Jesus Christ as my Savior. I had faith that He would guide me through life and when it is over, I “will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6).

Seventy-six years later, I know that I’ve come this far by that faith. When plans did not go as I had hoped, God led me to unimagined possibilities. As the Andraé Crouch song says, “Through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus.” I have faith that “He walks with me, talks with me and tells me I am His own,” as the hymn “In the Garden” reminds me.

I believe the many “But, for God” incidents I’ve experienced during my lifetime cannot be explained in any other way. Faith negates worry. I have learned that what I imagine may happen, most likely will never come to pass. So, I pray for God’s new mercies instead.

— Juanita Patience Moss

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How must I conduct myself so others will know the source of my faith?

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to teach me how to pray and trust in you. Amen.*

# PEACE

TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2021

## Change in Focus

**READ:** Philippians 4:4–7

**KEY VERSE:** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. - *Philippians 4:6 (NIV)*

There is no shortage of Scriptures to draw encouragement and inspiration from within our Bible. Some are more applicable at certain times throughout our lives than others. Every year of our lives presents its own challenges, tests of faith and struggles. Part of our innate human characteristics is to try to control situations. We become afraid and nervous of unknown consequences and outcomes, which we ultimately cannot control. What we can do is recondition our reactions.

To fully trust God and truly cast our burdens on Him frees us from fighting battles that we are not humanly capable of fighting. When a situation—good or bad—presents itself and we choose to release feelings of nervousness and panic and focus on calm, trust and peace, we are where God needs and wants us to be.

— Gerald Smith

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What can I do to refocus my thoughts so that I can worry less, trust more, and be at peace?

Most High God, remind me in my heart and spirit that you see all my struggles and challenges. Lord, please give me peace that surpasses all understanding. Block the “what ifs” and doubts from invading my peace. Amen.

# GRACE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2021

## Grace, It is Amazing

**READ:** Ephesians 2:8–10

**KEY VERSE:** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. - Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

Several years ago, a colleague stopped in my office to share with me that he admired my wall décor and found it encouraging. This wall décor spelled out one simple word, “Grace.” My colleague told me what he believed grace meant and that he was thankful for God’s grace. He wanted me to know that we had to earn grace, and that God would reward us because “we work” hard to earn His grace.

But I knew that the Bible does not support what he believed. I was happy to share what grace really means! I am so glad that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Grace is a small word with a profound meaning. It is central to our faith. As today’s key verse reminds us, we do not need to work for or earn it. Grace is a gift that God has freely given us. Indeed, it is amazing.

— Demetrice A. Crumley

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What does it mean to me that I have been saved by grace?

*God, thank you because you have freely given me the gift of grace. Help me to receive this amazing gift with gladness. Equip me to go out and share your love with others. I ask these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.*

# PRAYER

THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2021

## The Ultimate Conversation

**READ:** Luke 22:39–46

**KEY VERSE:** Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. – Luke 22:46 (NIV)

Life happens! The trials of life can at times compel us to travel to an inward journey of tiredness, depression, oppression, doubt, and confusion. In these moments, our seasons of unrest, discomfort, and grief can catapult us either into a deep longing for something better or an unshakeable agitation. Both can lead us to temptation—temptation to worry, to fear, to become anxious, or to commit some unconscionable act.

No matter the crisis, Jesus gives us a direct command to “get up and pray”! This is the opportunity to have the ultimate conversation with Him. When there is no one to talk to in the midnight hour, He is there. When we think that no one will understand our situation, He will make a way. When we feel too embarrassed to even discuss the situation, He will wait for our invitation to include Him in the matter. In faith, the same thing will happen to you that happened to Jesus in this passage of Scripture—an angel will show up to strengthen you!

—Valerie Miller

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How much time do I spend talking to the One who is the life giver?

*Dear Lord, help me to understand that an effective prayer is not contingent on my ability to properly articulate. Rather, prayer is an honest conversation — the ultimate conversation with the One who said, “I have come so that you may have life and have it more abundantly.” Amen.*

# WISDOM

FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2021

## Wisdom From Above

**READ:** James 3:13–17

**KEY VERSE:** But the wisdom that is from above is pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. – James 3:17 (KJV)

I remember Rev. Bynum from years ago. Most Sundays, he was at the Pleasant Green Missionary Baptist Church in St. Louis when the Nixon family entered on the way to Sunday School. Sitting near the door, this old man would gently smile and greet us with a quiet, reflective word of wisdom to help start our day. It was never a long conversation. Just a pleasant, brief word of wisdom from the Lord served to us, imploding with love from above.

James reminds us of this wisdom from above, while describing the distinguishing characteristics from earthly wisdom. He raises the question, “Who is a wise man... with knowledge ...?” then declares that person will show it with good, meek conversation! Unlike the bitter envying and strife of earthly wisdom, heavenly wisdom is pure (holy), peaceful, gentle, submissive, merciful, fruitful, and without hypocrisy—just like the old man by the church door who greeted us every Sunday.

— Rev. Samuel Nixon Jr.

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I show wisdom in the holy, peaceful, gentle, merciful, fruitful way of the Lord?

*Lord, let me prayerfully show and demonstrate your wisdom in my daily conversation, in the pure, peaceful, gentle, meek, and merciful way that you did during your walk here on earth — even at the cross. Amen.*



# PRAISE

SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2021

## Free in the Spirit

**READ:** Psalm 150

**KEY VERSE:** Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.  
- Psalm 150:6 (KJV)

When I was a child, I thought the Baptist church was too noisy and didn't like it. I went to church with my grandmother because her church was quiet and quick. As I matured, praise became my greatest weapon against spiritual warfare. Often, I had restrained the spirit inside because I got tired of the "it don't take all that" look in church. At one church, I got the usual "I can't see!" look. I responded with, "If I don't ask you to stand up, don't tell me to sit down!"

Since then, I've never allowed the spirit to be stifled again. Sometimes my praise is quiet and reserved, but most of the time it is not. If I am not ashamed to scream at a football game or concert, I am not ashamed to do so in the house of God. I love the freedom that affords me.

Be your authentic self in praise. Get your praise on in whatever way you feel led.

— Deacon Alma Haygood

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How do I allow the Holy Spirit to guide my praise?

*Lord, give me the courage to praise your holy name at all times. Let me care more about pleasing you than I care about what others may think. Grant me spiritual boldness. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.*



# SACRIFICE

MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2021

## Let It Go!

**READ:** Jeremiah 29:11–13

**KEY VERSE:** “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” – *Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

I’m a great list maker and planner. I use index cards, Post-it notes, little scraps of paper, almost anything that I can write on to list all the things that I want to accomplish. Sometimes there are so many little lists that I don’t know where to start and easily lose sight of what the goal was supposed to be. I ask myself, “What is it that I truly need to accomplish?” Ultimately, some project or activity has to be sacrificed.

It’s the same way with my walk with God. I cannot do everything on my lists and expect to have time to focus on Him and His plan for my life. A sacrifice must be made so that I have time to concentrate on and understand what He wants me to do.

— Lynda Poole Prioleau

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What do I need to sacrifice in order to keep my focus on God?

*Father, help me to make you a priority in my life and not let my plans stand in the way of my relationship with you. Amen.*

# OBEDIENCE

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

## Living Out Our Faith

**READ:** James 2:14–18

**KEY VERSE:** What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? - James 2:14 (NKJV)

From a young age, my mother always emphasized the virtue of empathy. Whether we were volunteering at a soup kitchen, writing thank you letters, or cleaning up a local park, I quickly learned that the best way to show my sincerity was not through my words, but through my actions.

Similarly, being obedient to God extends beyond just calling ourselves Christians. It is when our faith is exemplified through our actions. By applying God's Word to our lives, we are actively living out our faith.

During this Lenten season, may we challenge ourselves to live in such a way that when people look at us, they are reminded of the goodness of God.

— Olivia Purefoy

### LOOKING WITHIN:

In what areas of my life can I actively display my faith through obedience?

Heavenly Father, I am grateful for your unchanging hand and steadfast mercy and grace. Please help me to show my appreciation for you in my everyday actions that embody obedience. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# ETERNITY

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021

## Future Deposit

**READ:** Isaiah 57:14–21

**KEY VERSE:** For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. – *Isaiah 57:15 (NIV)*

One of the funny things about time is that we experience it differently. Time “flies” when we are having fun, and drags on when we are not. When we are young, it moves so slowly—and as we age, it moves faster and faster. Imagine how the Israelites in exile felt. They had suffered greatly for so long that they began to wonder if they had been utterly forsaken. When the long-awaited word of comfort comes, it includes a reminder that God’s promises come from a place of eternity, where there is no beginning or end.

We can trust God’s work because it is eternal, and because God’s work is eternal, it is never just about our circumstances. Whatever God does in and for us is a part of a long-term plan. We are God’s investment for future generations.

— Rev. Dr. Judy Fentress-Williams

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How is the eternal God investing in me for the future?

*Lord, help me to remember that your work in me is a part of your investment plan for the future. Thank you for including me in your design. Amen.*

# FREEDOM

THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021

## No More Bondage

**READ:** Galatians 5:1–12

**KEY VERSE:** Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. – *Galatians 5:1 (KJV)*

The year 2020 was indeed one of unrest, physically and mentally, but the most predominant theme I have heard expressed throughout society is about freedom. This word invokes civic rights and liberation from servitude. It implies that the bondage that choked our spirits has been broken and we now have the right to self-govern and choose our own destiny. But I wonder how authoritatively we vocalize freedom when the addictions and/or unhealthy biases that God has delivered us from whisper in our ears.

Quite honestly, I sometimes forget my voice and my power when it relates to my spiritual life. The Scripture states that God has liberated us, and we have to do our part not to backslide. My part is speaking freedom into my darkness and believing that no matter what I see or hear, what God has set free is free indeed! I not only have the power to fight for my civil rights, I also have been empowered from above to fight for my spiritual birthright.

— Emily Lette-Jackson

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What words can I speak over my challenges to remind me that I am free in the Lord?

*Dear heavenly Father, thank you for your Word that guides me and reminds me of the promises you made to those who love you. May I constantly speak freedom through my challenges and believe I am delivered in Jesus' name. Amen.*

# DISCIPLESHIP

FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021

## Never-ending Journey

**READ:** John 12:23–26

**KEY VERSE:** If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. – John 12:26 (NKJV)

In life our goals, objectives, hopes, and desires generally have an end state in mind. However, being a disciple of Christ does not adhere to the same rationale. Discipleship is an unpredictable journey often full of ever-changing conditions and challenges. A prevalent misconception is that the longer someone is a Christian, the more experienced their discipleship. Actually, it is the heart that guides our ability and desire to be obedient. The more contrite the heart, the more one will repent from wrongdoing, which equates to a more seasoned follower of Jesus.

God doesn't care how many Scriptures you know, but He does care about how you live. He doesn't care how many acts of kindness you perform, but how much love is in your heart. To be a true disciple you must love God, your neighbor, and your enemy. Take everything to the throne of grace and trust in Him, and only then are you progressing on the road called discipleship! The beauty of the journey is that Christ is with you every step of the way, and the Holy Spirit is your compass.

— Deacon Earl Stafford Jr.

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What changes do I need to make to be a better disciple?

*Dear God, please remove the distraction of my own understanding and fill me with your wisdom and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

# RESTORATION

SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 2021

## The Pendulum

**READ:** 1 Peter 5:8–10

**KEY VERSE:** And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. - 1 Peter 5:10 (NRSV)

I bought a T-shirt at the 1992 Family Day Festival in Mt. Vernon, New York—and I still wear it. The shirt is more than twenty-five years old. Please don't judge me. I kept the shirt for two reasons. The minor reason: It still fits. The major reason: The message. The front of the shirt bears the words, "Trust God." The back of it, "Why Worry?"

As a nineteen-year-old, the message resonated with me because of obstacles I overcame to have a hint of success—disability, homelessness, abandonment, and being economically disadvantaged. The shirt pushed me to release the anxiety that grew out of my circumstance. It pushed me to acknowledge that everything was in God's hands. And it pushed me to rejoice in the truth that dark times don't last forever.

This old shirt quickly taught me my most valuable life lessons. It taught me that life is like a pendulum. When it swings toward stress, anxiety, sickness, emptiness, and despair, be encouraged that it will inevitably swing back in favor of the opposite, and you will be restored.

— Minister Rasheem Rooke

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can my prayer life anchor my trust in God's ability to restore me?

*Lord, relieve the anxiety that separates me from you and your promise. Amen.*



# MERCY

MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021

## My Bodyguards

**READ:** Psalm 23:1–6

**KEY VERSE:** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. – Psalm 23:6 (NKJV)

Mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone by a person who has the power to punish or harm the individual. We have received great mercy from our loving Savior, Jesus Christ. What we have freely received, we ought to freely give.

The late Dr. John O. Peterson, former pastor of Alfred Street Baptist Church, would frequently use the word mercy. Hearing him say it so often, the word resonated in my spirit. Initially, I began saying it as more of a cliché, using it casually without any real cause. However, the real cause arose when I had an experience that prompted me to call on God for mercy. My beloved 100-year-old aunt passed away and things changed drastically. She had been with me all my life and her absence devastated me. I felt God's great mercy.

You may have experienced a moment when you needed to cry out for mercy. I want to encourage you to take goodness and mercy as your bodyguards. God's mercy is bigger than any person, pandemic, president, police brutality, or problem we can encounter. During times of uncertainty, we must continue to ask God for His mercy.

— Selwyn B. Cox

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How has God's mercy helped me overcome major obstacles in my life?

*Dear Lord Jesus, I am grateful that your goodness and mercy follow me and remain with me forever. Amen.*



# LOVE

TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021

## A Faithful Covenant

**READ:** Psalm 89:1–2, 33–34

**KEY VERSES:** But I will not remove my loyal love from him, nor be unfaithful to my promise.  
I will not break my covenant or go back on what I promised.  
– Psalm 89:33–34 (NET)

It was a late-night text. No name, but I knew immediately who the text was from: our prodigal child.

“Hey, Momma. Please call me. I need you to reassure me that you still love me even if I have messed my life up. I need to know I am worth loving.”

Heartbroken, I wondered: Did she need to ask? Was it not obvious?

But, really, I completely understood. I do the same with God. “Are you still there?” “I messed up again. Can you still love me?”

Ethan the Ezrachite wrote in Psalm 89:2, “I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.” Why do I compare my failings with the Almighty’s faithfulness? He declared nothing can separate me from His love (Romans 8:38–39). I will choose to believe.

— Sherry Wasserstein

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What areas of my life make it difficult to believe God still loves me? What has He done in my past to remind me He has not forsaken His love for me?

*Lord, I want to believe what you said: Nothing can separate me from your love. Your death was proof! Help me walk and live knowing this. Amen.*

# OBEDIENCE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2021

## Under God's Authority

**READ:** Luke 7:1–10

**KEY VERSES:** “For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him (the centurion), and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, “I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick. - [Luke 7:8–10 \(NKJV\)](#)

We are familiar with the centurion whose faith in Jesus led to the healing of his servant. But the centurion speaks also on authority and the authority of Jesus. What we find is a formula for obedience that is part belief (existence), part recognition of authority, and covered by faith (action).

The reason we obey the Word of God lies in these three elements interacting with one another. When one or more is absent—having a lack of belief, deciding to disregard heavenly authority, and/or loss of faith—we become disobedient. This has been witnessed numerous times in the Bible from Adam and Eve, to Lot's wife, to Saul's fall, and so forth. Remember, we are all God's children placed under the Father's loving authority.

— Rev. Keith Perkins

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What causes me to disobey God's authority over my life?

*Heavenly Father, please let me always believe, recognize your authority, and never lose faith so I may always obey you. Amen.*

# THANKSGIVING

THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021

## A Commitment to Gratitude

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

**KEY VERSE:** Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.  
– 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

For many people Thanksgiving is the day to gather with family and friends, give thanks, watch lots of football on television, feast on sumptuous food, and overdose on sweets. But is that all there is? No! Because we are God's children, thanksgiving should be a way of life. It is an attitude of gratitude.

We should continually be thankful for all our blessings, great and small, seen and unseen, the ones we understand, and even the ones we do not. Giving thanks is a spiritual practice.

We are living in chaotic times. But I am proclaiming from experience that in times of stressful circumstances and trials, a heart of gratitude means more than just saying "thank you." It means believing that God is good, He is love, He never changes, and He never fails. When we pray and give thanks to God, even when it is hard to do so, we are promised grace and faith.

— Louise L. Nickens

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How do I show gratitude in my daily living?

Dear Lord, thank you for your goodness and for your blessings. I am so grateful to you for your amazing love and care and for your grace and mercy through good and not so good circumstances. Fill me with your peace and joy. Amen.

# HOPE

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021

## Standing on the Promises

**READ:** Hebrews 10:19–23

**KEY VERSE:** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. – *Hebrews 10:23 (NIV)*

Lately, circumstances and current events have left even strong believers “shook.” We have faced historic wildfires, flooding, a growing opioid epidemic, widespread protests against racism and police misconduct, a broken justice system, and a global pandemic. In his book “Unshakable Hope,” Christian author Max Lucado says people are dying for lack of hope. And he points to a powerful antidote for the depression, anxiety, and hopelessness that can creep up on believers traveling through this fallen world: We can build our lives on the promises of God.

There is hope in knowing and claiming the promises of God. When I am troubled, I tune out fear and anxiety by tuning into the strength and comfort of God’s Word. God promises to give rest to the weary and heavy laden (Matthew 11:28). He said He has plans to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). We can let these promises soak into our spirits and erode negative thoughts. Then the living water of His Holy Word can fill us with thanks and praise as we recall how God continuously blesses us.

— Pat S. Jones

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What promises of God give me hope for the future?

*Dear Lord, I pray that the God of hope fills me with all joy and peace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

# PRAISE

SATURDAY, MARCH 20, 2021

## Authentic Praise

**READ:** Psalm 150

**KEY VERSE:** Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.  
— Psalm 150:6 (NKJV)

For those of us who have spent any time in church, Psalm 150 is a familiar passage. When I was younger and heard it as a call to worship, it felt like a cue to act in a way that was uniform with the rest of the congregation. “Praise,” as I understood it, looked and sounded a certain way.

When I became older, I understood that the commands were the opposite of my interpretation. To praise God in the sanctuary and in His mighty firmament is to praise God everywhere. To praise God for His mighty acts and His excellent greatness is to be in a continuous state of praise. There is no set time and place to give God praise because God is always deserving of our praise.

Psalm 150 also gives us permission to praise in authenticity. Praising God with the “loud cymbals” may not fit my personality or talent, but I can praise with the strings. When my authentic “string” praise combines with another’s authentic praise on the “loud cymbals,” it becomes part of a symphony that is pleasing to God.

— Aaron Watson

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How am I using my gifts and personality to give God an authentic praise?

Lord, thank you for another day and another opportunity to give you praise. I acknowledge your greatness and I commit to using my gifts for your glory. Amen.

# HOLINESS

MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021

## Preparing My Sanctuary

**READ:** Romans 12:1–2; 1 Peter 1:13–25

**KEY VERSE:** Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. - *Romans 12:1 (NIV)*

I must admit that at times I feel emotionally drained. With the daily pressures of dealing with numerous tasks, not enough money to meet expenses, and health uncertainties, it is no wonder that I may lay awake at night in tears asking God, "Why?" One day when I'd reached a breaking point, I decided to take a long walk and listen to some music on my headphones. I stumbled across a station playing an acapella melody that gave me unexplainable peace. I meditated on the words: "Lord prepare me, to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. And with thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you."

God showed me I needed to refresh my soul. I realized that I am a reflection of God's sanctuary and that my body is His temple, so I must cleanse my soul daily of worry, stress, and character flaws. My trials are tests to sanctify me for His holiness. I must regularly feed my spirit through prayer and meditation on God's Word to restore my soul. With a grateful heart, I cheerfully give Him all my praise.

— Alexina Hairston

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I regularly invite God into my personal sanctuary in order to keep it holy?

*Lord, impart within me a yearning desire to thirst for more of you to help prepare a sanctuary that is pleasing in your sight. Amen.*



# DISCIPLESHIP

TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021

## Race to Win Hearts

**READ:** Isaiah 40:28–3; Philippians 4:13

**KEY VERSE:** But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. - *Isaiah 40:31 (KJV)*

October 28, 2007, I ran my first marathon. At mile 17, I was sick of running! Fortunately, my running buddy spotted another runner's T-shirt that said "I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Strengthens Me." I finished the race because God was with me, Philippians 4:13 was in front of me, and I had a supportive running partner.

In some ways, discipleship is like training for the lifelong race to win hearts for the kingdom of God. First, you'll need to step out of your comfort zone. Yield to the Lord's leading. Let your light so shine that others may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). Someone may need your words of encouragement, a simple smile, a listening ear, and even sometimes your resources.

Also, stretch yourself and bless others. Yes, even those who mistreat and hurt you. As disciples we should live a Christian life that others recognize and respect. We are not running for a medal; we're aiming for the ultimate prize of winning hearts for God's glory.

— Sylvia Thomas

### LOOKING WITHIN:

Am I living my life in accordance with God's will?

*Father, I'm a work in progress. Please continue to guide and strengthen me as I run this race as your disciple to bring you glory and honor. Amen.*



# RIGHTEOUSNESS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2021

## I Can't Breathe

**READ:** Amos 5:11–15a, 24

**KEY VERSES:** Hate evil, love good; ... let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! – *Amos 5:15a, 24 (NIV)*

“I can’t breathe!” Those three words spoken by the late George Floyd triggered massive protests across the country. Viewing the video, I was as shocked and outraged as everyone else. I thought about the Minor Prophets. Their overarching message was that justice and righteousness are linked for God. Righteousness isn’t just about personal piety. Instead, it matters to God how we treat people. The test of justice for a nation is how the weakest are treated. All our “religiosity” is meaningless to God if we stand mute in the face of injustice.

With all that’s going on, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed and think there’s nothing we can do. But the prophet Amos warns us against being silent when we see injustice abounding. Figure out what you can do. As the late Rep. John Lewis said, “Find a way to get into trouble. Good trouble, necessary trouble.” It’s only in acting against injustice that we can bring an end to it. That’s righteousness in God’s eyes.

— Deacon M. Tia Johnson

### LOOKING WITHIN:

What injustice have I seen and said or done nothing about? What can I do to help bring about change?

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

# MERCY

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2021

## Loving Mercy

**READ:** Luke 6:27–36

**KEY VERSE:** Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. – Luke 6:36 (NKJV)

In today's passage, Jesus raises a high standard for us and connects mercy to loving enemies and offering goodwill without expecting anything in return.

As I consider what it means to be merciful as God is to us, I'm reminded of the passage in Micah that says God requires us to "love mercy." Since we're expected to be merciful like God, we can infer that He must love mercy.

God demonstrated His love by giving His only begotten son to live among a wayward humankind and to die as a sacrifice for our sins. While living among humans, Jesus taught that we must forgive others to receive God's forgiveness (Matthew 6:14–15).

If we are honest, God gives us daily opportunities to extend mercy to others. Every time we show kindness and give our undivided attention to someone who we know doesn't care for us, we're loving mercy. Each time we consider our own shortcomings and look beyond the shortcomings of others to share blessings with them, we're loving mercy. And every time we forgive those who have wronged us, we're loving mercy. It's as simple as that.

— Deacon Russell Easter

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I be more merciful to others?

*God, help me to love mercy and not to just consume it for myself. Help me to love mercy like you, so that I will be compelled to give it away. Amen.*

# JOY

FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2021

## New Mercies, New Joy

**READ:** Psalm 30:1–5

**KEY VERSES:** Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. - Psalm 30:4-5 (ESV)

We live in a world with unprecedented events and during unprecedented times. One of the biggest challenges facing us is COVID-19. But God is powerful and can bring us out of the pandemic. There are many other challenges that we are grappling with—joblessness, social injustice, and divided political views—but through it all, God will guide us. If we keep our faith, God's joy will outshine it all. Time and time again, God has held us, and He will bring us a huge burst of joy at the end of the pandemic. We must praise Him for the joy and mercies we experience, no matter how big or small.

It was Maya Angelou who said, "We need joy as we need air. We need love as we need water. We need each other as the earth we share."

— Zachary J. Gunn

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I trust God to bring me joy in troubled times?

*Dear Lord, thank you for all you have done and continue to do for me. I know that you are the way, the light and my salvation, and therefore you will spread your joy over us. Please help me to be joyful during trying times. I ask this in your mighty name, Amen.*

# PRAYER

SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2021

## The Power of Prayer

**READ:** Philippians 4:4–7

**KEY VERSE:** Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. – *Philippians 4:6 (KJV)*

Are you in a totally helpless situation? All options exhausted? Strength gone? Well, no one is helpless whose faith is in God. Turn your fears over to Him and pray. God moves through our prayers to accomplish great good in the lives of His people.

Asking for God's guidance in any situation—big or small—is not only an act of faith on our part, but is the sure way of making the right decision every time. By relying on God and His wisdom, we are receiving the best possible support ever. Jesus said, "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will" (Mark 11:24). We can ask and receive answers only if our requests are directed to God in faith and according to His will (1 John 5:14–15). Faith will keep you going when troubles plague your soul.

Today, I encourage you to take courage in knowing that God will see you through whatever challenge you face. Faith in Him is simultaneously an exercise of our will and the impartation of divine strength. By having faith, we acknowledge Christ as our captain, Savior, leader and Lord. As you trust Him, He'll give you not only joy and peace, but also hope.

— Deacon Juanita J. Davis

### LOOKING WITHIN:

In what ways can I encourage those who feel hopeless to pray?

*Loving and Almighty God, thank you for the amazing gift of prayer and the many ways you move through it to comfort us and answer our needs. Amen.*

# SANCTIFICATION

MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2021

## Math Problems

**READ:** Galatians 5:22–25

**KEY VERSE:** If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. - *Galatians 5:25 (NRSV)*

“What is God’s will for my life?” I get that question a lot. I find it interesting because the assumption is that I fully understand God’s will for my own life (depends on the day). And then I came across a definition of sanctification that offered a possible answer to this question: *Sanctification – The process whereby a believer is brought closer to the will of God.*

We often equate the sanctification process with a math problem; subtract road rage, add patience. But it is more than addition and subtraction; sanctification is the equation that solves the “God’s will” problem. The addition is found in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

As Easter approaches, take time to reflect on the meaning of Christ’s life and how it affects our lives. We think God’s will for us means a radical change to our everyday lives. In fact, God’s sanctifying will for believers is the measured, everyday addition of God’s characteristics.

— Rev. Rosalind Brooks

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I let God do the math and in the “process” find out His will for my life?

*Heavenly God, may your transformative power work in my life so that I come closer each day to your will for me and to be closer to you. Amen.*

# GRACE

TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2021

## Jesus, God's Grace for Us

**READ:** John 1:14–16

**KEY VERSE:** From his fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. – John 1:16 (NRSV)

Jesus is the graciousness of God revealed in Scripture. This happened when the Word became flesh and Christ fulfilled the law by giving grace to everyone. Grace is one of the gifts from God that just keeps on giving. Words like everlasting, unending, astonishing, unmerited, and undeserved should come to mind when we think about this amazing gift. Jesus is God's grace for us.

The mere fact that we cannot earn or buy grace puts all of humanity in a class together where we see God and experience His love toward us through the demonstration of grace. It really is quite simple: Receive grace, apply grace, repeat. Grace is the help and strength we need when we are helpless and weakened on this journey. It empowers us to continue, even though we do not deserve to do so. Yet, we advance despite deserving something completely different. This is grace!

So, let us strive to live fully in the presence of God by embracing the divine gift of grace that was not just given but came through Jesus Christ.

— Rev. LaTasha Morgan

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How would grace improve a difficult area in my life?

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of grace. It is the gift I never knew I needed but now know I cannot live without it! Amen.



# FORGIVENESS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2021

## Beyond Forgiveness

**READ:** Luke 15:11–31

**KEY VERSE:** 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. – *Luke 15:20b (NIV)*

I long for the days of unencumbered flight as flying provides me a sacred moment of peace to read, reflect, and rest. Inevitably, there is one person that disrupts my plan. For example, I recall a flight with an ambitious passenger who reassigned herself to an unoccupied row, delaying the flight by 20 minutes in order to reconfigure the weight distribution on the plane. Admittedly, I was perturbed by this infringement on my peaceful moment and time.

Identifying with the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son is not difficult in moments like these. While the elder brother articulated anger towards his father's response, I ponder whether his anger was, in whole or part, stemming from feelings such as abandonment by his brother or heartache from watching his father grieve his lost son. Like the elder brother, we can find ourselves impacted by the offense of another through direct action, public policy, or systemically. Yet, we have a model from the father—our Father—that directs not only forgiveness, but compassion.

— Deacon Stephanie Cunningham

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How can I move beyond forgiveness and be more compassionate?

*Lord God, offense is inevitable. Open my heart to be not only forgiving, but compassionate like you. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

# HOPE

THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2021

## An Anchor in the Storms of Life

**READ:** Hebrews 6:16–20

**KEY VERSES:** God cannot tell lies! And so his promises and vows are two things that can never be changed. We have run to God for safety. Now his promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us. This hope is like a firm and steady anchor for our souls. - *Hebrews 6:18–19 (CEV)*

How many times have you hoped that a job would come through, or that a relationship would work out, or that a lottery ticket would be a winner? Hoping for good outcomes when we desperately want something to succeed is almost second nature. Yet, there are times when despite our high hopes and even our best efforts, we end up disappointed.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to place our hope in God—not in things, people, or chance. Whatever God has promised, we can count on. His Word is sure. The Bible is filled with more than 160 promises. God has promised never to leave us, to be our comforter, and to give us joy and peace. He has promised us eternal life and a home in heaven.

The Scripture says hope reaches behind the curtain into the most holy place, where Jesus, our high priest, advocates for us. That's why those who hold fast to that hope can say with confidence: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

— Deacon Geri Tucker

### LOOKING WITHIN:

In whom or in what have I placed my hope today?

*Dear God, thank you for your unfailing love and for hope. Amen.*

# SALVATION

FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2021

## Salvation Protects Us

**READ:** Psalm 27:1–2

**KEY VERSE:** The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? - *Psalm 27:1 (NKJV)*

One of my favorite things to do at night is sit on my deck and watch the stars. While stargazing I imagine what it must be like to live in a world beyond this earth. But I also know that around the earth we have an atmosphere that protects us from dangers that could destroy us.

In this Scripture, David sings a song of joy about God's salvation; and because of God's protection David exclaims and asks the question, "Whom shall I fear?"

First, we have the God-given salvation that protects us from the penalty of our sins through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Secondly, we have the protection of God's grace and mercy that the Bible says is given freely to us each day.

Just as we have an atmosphere that protects us, God provides us with salvation that shelters and protects us from dangers seen and unseen. Therefore, we can live a life of continued joy and praise.

— Rev. Dr. Sedric Roberts

### LOOKING WITHIN:

How have I seen God's protection in my life?

*Dear God, teach me how to have courage and to trust your protection and power in my life daily. Amen.*

# ATONEMENT

SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 2021

## Your Immeasurable Worth

**READ:** 1 John 2:1–6

**KEY VERSES:** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. - 1 John 2:1–2 (NRSV)

It gives the soul great comfort to know that God sees value in us. Many of us have been hurt by individuals who failed to recognize our value. Yet in this season, we rejoice in the fact that God values us and places an immeasurable amount of worth on our lives.

This is what we should consider every time we think about atonement. God paid a price for us. God decided that you were too valuable to perish. More than that, God decided that you and I shouldn't even pay the price for the wrongs we committed. Atonement is the act of correcting the wrongdoing of another. And it's that beautiful act that Jesus did for us on the cross. He corrected all of the wrongs that you and I commit on a daily basis. God looks at all those hideous wrongs and decides that our future still has immeasurable worth. Today may you shine in the light of your great worth, knowing that you are God's priceless child.

— Rev. Elijah McDavid III

*Lord, I thank you for correcting the wrongs in my past, present, and future. May your sacrifice for my wrongs inspire me to do more right. Amen.*

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Lent** is the period of the liturgical year from Ash Wednesday to Easter in the Christian tradition. The traditional purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer—through prayer, repentance, almsgiving and self-denial—for the annual commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus during Holy Week, which recalls the events linked to the Passion of Christ. There are traditionally 40 days in Lent. The six Sundays in this period are not counted because each one represents a “mini-Easter,” a celebration of Jesus’ victory over sin and death.

**Ash Wednesday** is the first day of Lent and occurs 46 days before Easter. Ash Wednesday dates may differ each year because it is dependent on the date of Easter. Ash Wednesday derives its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of adherents as a sign of mourning and repentance to God.

**Palm Sunday** is the Sunday before Easter. It commemorates Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and in many Christian churches Palm Sunday is marked by the distribution of palm leaves.

**Maundy Thursday** is the Thursday before Easter that commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with the apostles. The significance is derived from the Latin mandatum (A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you), the statement Jesus made in John 13:34 by which He explained to the apostles the significance of His action of washing their feet.

**Good Friday** (“good” meaning pious or holy) is the Friday of Holy Week, observed primarily by Christians commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and His death at Calvary.

**Holy Saturday** is the day before Easter and the last day of Holy Week in which Christians prepare for Easter. It commemorates the day that Jesus Christ’s body lay in the tomb.

**Triduum** (TRID-uh-wum) is the period of three days that begins the evening of Maundy Thursday and ends the evening of Easter Sunday. It recalls the passion, burial and resurrection of Jesus.