



2024 Lenten Season

CORPORATE FAST

(February 14, 2024 – March 31, 2024)

Mt. Pleasant recognize Sunday as a day of Celebration

Adopted from Alfred Street Baptist Church “How Great Thou Art” 2024 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 *Psalm 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

Fasting: 12 Hour Span; corporately (12 midnight- 12 noon). There is no eating during this time. When you are able to eat within the allotted time frames, stick to the instructions below

February 14, 2024 – February 28, 2024 (13 days)

SCRIPTURE/PRAYER FOCUS: See Devotional Scriptures AND 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

February 29 2024 – March 15, 2024 (14 days)

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 16, 2024 –March 30, 2024 (13 days)

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: See Devotional Scriptures AND also pray for increased faith, revival in the church and land; missions and evangelism. Pray unsaved loved ones (opportunity to accept Christ) People will sincerely desire to commit their lives wholly 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.**

- 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 40 days from February 14, 2024 to March 31, 2024 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, 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. In addition, 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, cannelloni 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. Soymilk, almond milk.

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WHAT IS THE SEASON OF LENT?

Lent was first celebrated during the 4th century and began with only a few days before Easter. The early church would baptize converts to Christianity — all those who believed on the name of the Lord — on Easter Sunday only. With time, Lent was extended to several weeks. The forty days were symbolic of Jesus's 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 forty-day period before Easter and begins on Ash Wednesday. Sundays are not counted in the forty 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 forty 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.

JOY

Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2024

FIXATING ON JOY

READ: Hebrews 12:1–3

KEY VERSE: ... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

Honestly, I am not a fan of exercise. Feeling my heart pound through my chest, focusing on my breathing to keep from fainting, sitting on a hard bicycle seat, and sore muscles after a good workout are uncomfortable. Nevertheless, I subject myself to such physical exertion because I enjoy the long-term rewards that follow. Peaceful sleep, mental clarity, and a favorable doctor's report are all worth the short-term distress. These thoughts are what got me through my first bike marathon last year. Pedaling past monuments in D.C. and Virginia, I focused on the joy I would feel when the event was over — not the short-term burning sensations in my legs and chest.

In Hebrews 12:2, while nailed to the cross, our Savior pushed past His labored breathing, the pain in His hands and feet, and the shame of a public execution. Keeping His thoughts fixed on the joy set before Him, He thought of our salvation and the everlasting joy we can experience during this marathon of life and beyond.

– Bri Douglas

LOOKING WITHIN

On what am I fixating my thoughts?
Short-term or long-term outcomes?

PRAYER

*Lord, help me to stay focused on You,
so that I may have long-term joy that
only comes from You.*





FAITH

Thursday, February 15, 2024

THE ULTIMATE PROTECTION

READ: Ephesians 6:11–17

KEY VERSE: . . .above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. – Ephesians 6:16 (NKJV)

We can all agree that we are living in uncertain and unusual times. Therefore, we must fight against the enemy.

In order to receive the ultimate protection of God, we must wear the armor He has provided. Faith is a piece of that armor. Satan is against Jesus, and he will come against us. Jesus showed us how to defeat him; we must use the Word of God. Ephesians 6:16 says faith will enable you to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”

In our current condition, we are dealing with the fiery darts of addiction, grief, illness, and social unrest, to name a few. Faith extinguishes fire. The darts will fly, but their power will not destroy you! Faith is a war-winning strategy. What do you do when you do not know what to do? Use the strategy! When the enemy comes to you with lies, activate the Word of God by reciting the truth.

– Minister Selwyn B. Cox

LOOKING WITHIN

What new ways can I use my weapon of faith so that I can live a joyous and victorious life?

PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, help me to remember that my faith is a powerful weapon against the enemy. Help me to use it properly each day. Amen!

PRAISE

Friday, February 16, 2024

CLEARING THE WAY

READ: Psalm 100

KEY VERSE: Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise:
Be thankful unto him, and bless his name. – Psalm 100:4 (KJV)

Daily we are confronted with one thing after the other: bad news reports, government ineptitude, family challenges, work overload. Too frequently we allow these things to block our passageway to the God who is waiting to provide us with the love, joy, and peace we so desperately need. He stands with His arms wide open, inviting us to receive everlasting mercy, enduring truth, and unspeakable joy.

So how do we break through these “things”? Praise God! Not the cliché of saying “Praise God” but the action. Today’s Scripture spells out how to create an unhindered passageway to the burden-lifting presence of God: “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.”

So, whether we’re feeling stressed or on top of the world, by lifting heartfelt, unabashed joyful noise to the Lord, we can remove things off the passageway by just praising God!

– Deacon Mark Prioleau

LOOKING WITHIN

What things hinder me from praising God during private or public times? How can I praise God in gratitude for His blessings?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, my spirit joins the spirit of others to say thank You and praise You for Your many blessings. Please accept my praise so that I may be unencumbered by the cares of this world. Hallelujah, Lord! Praise the Lord! Amen.





WORSHIP

Saturday, February 17, 2024

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

READ: John 4:19–24

KEY VERSE: God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.
– John 4:24 (NIV)

We were created to worship God in spirit and in truth. As Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria at Jacob’s well, He talked about the traditional understanding of worship. He said it will not be where we worship the Lord but how we worship Him.

Worship is our time to commune with God and give Him all the praise that is due Him. It’s not the time to ask for anything. We can worship the Lord at any time and in any place in spirit and in truth according to His teachings. It’s a matter of the heart, not location.

Have you ever simply thought about the many blessings God has given you? Before you knew it, you were in your place of worship. At that moment, your heart, mind, soul, and spirit were focused on praising Him. As we continue to strive for a closer relationship with God, we must always praise Him — in spirit and in truth.

– Carla A. McAlpine

LOOKING WITHIN

What expression of praise have I given to God today?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to always worship You in spirit and in truth. Help me to praise You any time and any place with my whole mind, body, soul, and spirit. Amen.

HUMILITY

Monday, February 19, 2024

REDEFINING GREATNESS

READ: Matthew 23:1–12

KEY VERSE: *The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

– Matthew 23:11–12 (NLT)

Societal standards of “greatness” often revolve around power, achievements, wealth, and recognition. The pursuit of “greatness” becomes exhausting, especially when comparing ourselves to the highlight reel of others’ lives on social media. This constant comparison can impact our mental well-being and relationships.

But here’s the twist: In Matthew 23:11–12, Jesus challenges us to reshape our view of greatness, urging humility as the path to true greatness. It’s a paradigm shift, redirecting us to find strength in serving others, discovering that genuine greatness is rooted in humble acts of love and compassion. This shift isn’t just a lofty idea; it can be a game-changer in our everyday lives, helping us navigate challenges with a newfound perspective. Let’s strive for humble greatness, not as a title but as a way of being. In embracing humility, we find ourselves lifted to unexpected heights, experiencing a transformative power aligning us with God’s heart.

– Risa Kornegay

LOOKING WITHIN

Where can I infuse humility into my daily life, transforming routine into purpose?

PRAYER

Lord, empower me to embrace the humility Jesus showed. Inspire my service with love and compassion. Allow my life to reflect the beauty of humility, revealing true greatness in selfless living. Amen.





HOPE

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

PUT YOUR HOPE IN GOD

READ: Psalm 42:5–7

KEY VERSE: *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. – Psalm 42:5 (NIV)*

It's natural to feel disappointed when we put our faith in God and things don't turn out the way we hoped. I can relate to this feeling myself. In those moments, it's important to take a step back and reflect on why things turned out the way they did.

I once got a bad grade on a project that I worked hard on. I felt like God had let me down when it didn't turn out as I had hoped. I talked to my parents about it and then understood that God had a plan for me, and it is always going to work out in the end.

Sometimes there is a lesson to be learned or a different path that needs to be taken. Ultimately, we can find comfort in knowing that God has a plan for our lives, even if we can't always see it in the moment. Putting our hope in the Lord and trusting His plan can bring peace and a sense of purpose to our lives.

– Dani Hebron

LOOKING WITHIN

What seemingly hopeless situation do I need to turn over to the Lord?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please open my eyes to Your perfect plan for my life. When things don't go my way, never let me lose hope in You. Amen.

SANCTIFICATION

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

SHOW THEM WHO YOU ARE

READ: John 17:16–19

KEY VERSE: *For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*
– John 17:19 (NIV)

As a little girl whenever I left my house my mother would always share what she considered a reminder, but felt much more like a warning to me: “Remember who you are and whose you are.” That was her way of letting me know that when I left our home, I represented her. No matter what my friends did, I was to remember who I was!

Isn't that much like the God we serve? We are in this world, but not of it. We were bought with a price, sanctified through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Daily we will be faced with situations that seek to pull us out of relationship with God and into the embrace of a sinful world. Our responsibility is to stay grounded in the Word of God, always being mindful that we represent Christ in all that we say and do. We won't be recognized with a tattoo on our forehead or a cross on our back, but rather the spirit we carry and exude... our witness.

As we walk through this world let us honor the One who loves us both as a mother and father. We've been set apart!

– Rev. Kimberly Norrington

LOOKING WITHIN

How can I exemplify
Christ with my life?

PRAYER

*Sanctify me Lord, that the world
would see You through me. Amen.*





PEACE

Thursday, February 22, 2024

GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU

READ: 1 Peter 5:7; John 14:1–4; 25–27

KEY VERSE: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. – 1 Peter 5:7 (KJV)

Throughout her life, my mother prayed diligently and spent time reading the Bible. I fondly recall her humming various songs that seemed to relieve the daily challenges and stressors. One of her favorites was “God Will Take Care of You.” The lyrics were reassuring, anchored her, and made each daily challenge easier to bear.

As an adult, I find the words of that great hymn reassuring and confirmation of God’s promises to all of us in times of need: “All you may need He will provide, God will take care of you. Nothing you ask will be denied.” Certainly, God has left His permanent promises to strengthen us when facing trials and challenges. He does more with our lives than we can ask, hope, or imagine. For me, it is virtually impossible to doubt His presence and not feel at peace. God is our refuge as He was in the beginning, as He is now, and as He always will be in our lives.

– Deacon Juanita J. Davis

LOOKING WITHIN

What joy and peace do I have in knowing God will take care of me?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your grace, mercy, and unconditional love. Help me to rest in the knowledge that You take care of us better than we take care of ourselves. Amen.

WISDOM

Friday, February 23, 2024

THE WAY OF WISDOM

READ: Colossians 2:6; 4:5

KEY VERSE: *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.*
– Colossians 4:5 (KJV)

In the classrooms that I grew up in, I learned that good knowledge came through a lot of study and good teachers. I learned to listen carefully! If I focused on the subject long enough, I knew enough to explain it to others who didn't understand.

We learn from our daily experiences that as we study events, family, communities, services, and other things closely, we come to understand them well and make life decisions more clearly. Our life's walk in the Lord works similarly.

Wisdom is a gift that allows us to understand things from God's point of view. Paul's letter to the Colossians reminds them, and us, that as we "walk" in the way of Jesus Christ, grounded in our faith, we will "walk in wisdom toward them that are without" (outside the faith). In the study of the Lord's teachings, we will walk in His wisdom and redeem the time (optimize every opportunity to share the gospel) to God's glory!

– Rev. Samuel Nixon Jr.

LOOKING WITHIN

How may I walk in the way of wisdom of the Lord, in my daily Bible study and prayerful meditation in His Word, led by the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER

Lord, may I grow more in You every day, so that I may walk in the wisdom of Your way. Amen.





GLORY

Saturday, February 24, 2024

GLORY TO THE VINE

READ: John 15: 1–17

KEY VERSE: This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. – John 15:8 (NIV)

When I was a young girl, my grandmother Hazel led a prayer circle called the Sunday Morning Prayer Band. Six to eight women gathered in our home to pray, sing, and testify to the glory of God. At the time, I was mystified as to why these women were so committed to this pre-dawn ritual. I wondered why it was necessary to attend home church BEFORE actual church. It's clear to me now that these women understood that fellowship is essential to the faith journey. It allows our faith to grow, mature, and bear fruit to the glory of God.

In John 15, Jesus teaches us that He is the vine, we are the branches and that God — as the gardener — cuts away branches that bear no fruit and prunes others so that they bear even more fruit. As branches of the Eternal Grapevine, we need to stay close to Jesus to love Him and each other as He loves us. I'm encouraged by this lesson, but also challenged by the mandate to build my Christian character, to practice moral discipline, and to persevere when the storm clouds of life form. Thank you, God, for my grandmother and her example.

— Shrona Sheppard

LOOKING WITHIN

How do my actions glorify God?

PRAYER

*Dear Lord, keep me close to You.
Cover me in the warmth of Your
love, nourish my soul. Help me to
model Your love to others for Your
glory, honor and praise. Amen.*

PATIENCE

Monday, February 26, 2024

WHILE YOU WAIT

READ: Galatians 6:7–10

KEY VERSE: Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. – Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

As early as I can remember, I have always wanted to serve others. I was raised to believe that we should love one another as God loves us, but I did not know how difficult that could be when going through my own personal storm.

After college, I planned to go into a doctorate program. I graduated with a 3.6 GPA and thought I was well on my way, but God had a different plan. I graduated with no Ph.D. program acceptance, no job, plenty of bills and no way to pay them. I remained faithful but still nothing. I felt God had abandoned me.

I remember attending church one day and there was a special offering for a family who had lost everything. I wept because I only had \$5 and my heart wanted to give it to the family. I did give it, and the Lord reminded me to keep pushing on. Even in my darkest hour, I believed that if I remained faithful, kept doing good, and helped someone with their harvest, mine was not far away.

Two weeks later, I received a job offer with a full compensation and relocation package. My harvest had come. Waiting on the Lord paid off.

— Deacon Bryan Nails

LOOKING WITHIN

What am I doing for others while waiting on the Lord?

PRAYER

Lord, whatever my lot, please help me to bless others and remain faithful during my waiting periods. Amen.





FELLOWSHIP

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

TOGETHER IN HARMONY

READ: Hebrews 10:24–25

KEY VERSE: Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer. – Hebrews 10:25 (GNT)

An energy infuses and unites a body of believers known as the Voices of Triumph choir or VOT. It's anchored by the choir director's priority of music preparation, prayer, love, and worship as the group's foundation. Beyond the joyful and spirited worship experience, VOT, lovingly referred to as a "sanctified gang," is a picture of fellowship.

Fellowship is evident in the camaraderie of Monday evening rehearsals, an evening together at Wolf Trap, the weekly Bible studies during the pandemic, during a sweltering day in the sun to complete a video recording, and in a fun-filled afternoon of karaoke. The conversations, laughter, and building of bonds both within and beyond the church's walls reflect the growth in friendships. There's a mutual accountability towards one another that is gratifying. It's caring, genuine love, and where fellowship among brothers and sisters of the family of faith is made easy! Beyond fellowship, VOT is proof that a choir that prays together, stays together.

– Anita Banks

LOOKING WITHIN

How am I building a bond with fellow church members and other believers?

PRAYER

Father God, I pray my fellowship with others edifies and strengthens with the outcome of love and togetherness to Your delight. Amen.

DISCIPLESHIP

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

DRAWING CLOSER TO GOD

READ: Matthew 28:16–20

KEY VERSE: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... - Matthew 28:19 (NIV)*

Jesus instructed His disciples to go make disciples. For me, that means living a life that models Christ, which ultimately brings me closer to Him. I try to fulfill Jesus' command by loving God's people, which is what our Savior did while on earth. Praising His name through worship with fellow believers also keeps me connected as the Holy Spirit bonds us as one. I can feel the spirit when I'm in the house of the Lord and surrender to it.

Praising Jesus' name in community carries more weight than it does as an individual. I thank God for my community of believers, worshipping and serving as one body in Christ. We are disciples together, striving to grow closer to the Lord while making other disciples, just as Jesus commanded.

— Deacon Charles D. May

LOOKING WITHIN

What am I doing to draw closer to God? How am I showing others the way to Him?

PRAYER

Lord of all creation, I thank You and praise Your name for guiding me on this life journey. I truly desire to become a disciple worthy of serving Your kingdom. Help me to see the love in others as we all draw nearer to You through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.





GRACE

Thursday, February 29, 2024

GRACE BY ASSOCIATION

READ: Romans 3:19–24; 27

KEY VERSE: . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
– Romans 3:23–24 (NIV)

I had the opportunity to serve as a Department of Defense civilian in Germany. When we moved, we had no car and were living in temporary quarters. What amazed me about that experience was how people came to our aid during that transition. Strangers volunteered their time and resources: Some brought us groceries, some took us to run errands, others welcomed us by inviting us to social events and showing us around the area. They did not know us, yet they welcomed us into their tight-knit community. There was nothing they wanted from us, and there was nothing we did to earn their kindness.

Similarly, God gives us His grace not because we've earned it, but because we believe. We've all heard the phrase, "Guilty by association." In Christ we receive grace by association because it is our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior that connects us to Him. We receive God's grace freely and solely through that connection. As we walk in that grace, we must remember to extend it freely and lovingly to others.

– Jacqueline Verrine

LOOKING WITHIN

How can I extend grace to others?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for extending grace that requires only my faith. Please show me how I can extend grace to others. Amen.

COMPASSION

Friday, March 1, 2024

TRY A LITTLE KINDNESS

READ: Galatians 5:13–26

KEY VERSE: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
– Galatians 5:22–23 (NIV)

Kindness is defined as selfless, compassionate, friendly, generous, considerate acts toward others. Kindness' greatest power is displayed when we extend it to our enemies and the least of those among us. However, we don't see much kindness or compassion in today's world. But we can do something to correct that.

Isaiah 54:10 tells us that although the mountains shall depart and the hills will be removed, God is forever compassionate toward us. He also tells us to cloth ourselves in kindness. It is His desire for us to be compassionate to one another. We have been chosen to do good works to our sisters and brothers. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be the sons and the daughters of the highest" (Luke 6:35). Let us always remember that what we do to the least of us we do to the Father.

– Deacon Charles Hawkins

LOOKING WITHIN

When was the last time I showed compassion to someone? What random act of kindness can I do today?

PRAYER

Father God, help me to have compassion in my heart today, and guide me to find ways to extend Your kindness to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.





MERCY

Saturday, March 2, 2024

PAY IT FORWARD

READ: Matthew 9:10–13

KEY VERSE: But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. – Matthew 9:13 (NKJV)

I saw a post by someone I follow on Facebook who told a story by how he had gone to church for the first time in a long time with his mother. They had been estranged due to differences in opinions on his life choices and lifestyle. That day the sermon was full of judgement and abomination, which delivered a huge setback in the progress he and his mother had made toward mending their relationship. I commented under his post to try Alfred Street Baptist Church either online or in person if he was in the area. I confidently made the suggestion because I have witnessed how our church wins souls through acceptance and the outward expression of God’s grace and mercy.

This passage in Matthew reveals that Jesus wants us to focus on compassion rather than judgement; forgiveness rather than unbending religious precepts; love rather than “performing” acts of worship; and mercy rather than rebuffing. Showing mercy to others is an act of gratitude for the endless mercy God shows us every day. As the song says, “For His goodness and His mercy toward us... we offer praise.”

— Stephanie Garcia

LOOKING WITHIN

Am I showing mercy to others
regardless of who they are?

PRAYER

*Lord, thank You for Your unwavering
love, grace, and mercy. Please help
me to show the same to others so
that Your name may be glorified.
Amen.*

ETERNITY

Monday, March 4, 2024

HERE AND NOW

READ: Mark 10:17–31

KEY VERSE: Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
– Mark 10:17b (NRSVUE)

It can be hard to see how “eternity” relates to the Lenten season. This difficulty is produced by my narrow vision for eternity’s vast capacity. Like many, my definition of words is greatly impacted by culture and tradition. And so, like in this Mark text, I associated the word eternity with afterlife. However, that restricts its use. This revelation came to me as I considered the words of an iconic poem by Dr. Benjamin R. Mays to which I was introduced as a student at Morehouse College.

“I have only just a minute, only sixty seconds in it. Forces upon me, can’t refuse it, didn’t seek it, didn’t choose it, but it’s up to me to use it. I must suffer if I lose it, give account if I abuse it, just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it.”

What if our promised inheritance of perpetual time is not limited to heaven? How would we handle our moments differently if we imagined them as containers of eternity? As we journey through Lent, let us consider ways in which we may experience heaven on earth amidst hellacious, challenging, and oppressive realities. Let us envision the future joy and peace of eternity in our now and every minute that God blesses us.

– Minister Otis Byrd Jr.

LOOKING WITHIN

What have I forfeited to a future eternity that I can experience in the moments and minutes of life?

PRAYER

God of time and eternity, reveal to me the eternal capacity in each life moment. Amen.





PRAISE

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

A HEART TO PRAISE

READ: Psalm 28:6–7

KEY VERSE: *The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.*

– Psalm 28:7 (NIV)

After graduating from Virginia State University in the late 1990s, I moved to the D.C. area. As a native New Yorker, I was excited to be in the nation's capital, living on my own, and starting a career. However, I never thought that I would have unfortunate experiences with employment.

I was laid off in 2001, 2002, and 2017. Each layoff left me unemployed for several years at a time, which caused financial strain. Amid these layoffs, I held lower-paid jobs where I reported to difficult managers, felt devalued, and underappreciated. For years I questioned my self-worth and developed low self-esteem, which led to bouts of depression.

It's hard to give praise when you're down, but I had to shift my focus. I couldn't deny God's greatness because by His grace, bills were paid and the dollar menu saved me from many hungry nights. He's kept me through it all and it's one of the many reasons why I praise the Lord through singing, dancing, acting, and serving. God positions and repositions us for His purpose and with every move, there's a blessing.

–Virginia J. Raye

LOOKING WITHIN

How do I trust and praise God during difficult moments in my life?

PRAYER

Father, I lift my hands and praise You for what You have done, and for what You will do. Thank You for Your wisdom, grace, and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

HOPE

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

THE MEMORY OF HOPE

READ: Lamentations 3:19–23

KEY VERSE: But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness! – Lamentations 3:21–23 (RSV)

Many scholars refer to the prophet Jeremiah as “the weeping prophet.” Reading the book of Lamentations, it’s easy to understand how he earned the name. For the two chapters preceding today’s key verses, Jeremiah pours out his despair over the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and exile of Israel. It can be a difficult passage to read, for some of the references seem to parallel today’s news headlines.

The turning point and beauty in this narrative is found in Lamentations 3:21, the moment when Jeremiah’s memories overshadow his sorrow and sadness, and he surrenders to hope. Have you ever felt so overwhelmed by your troubles that you couldn’t find a glimmer of hope in your life? I certainly have. But if you take a moment to remember God’s love, mercy, and faithfulness toward you, you can watch your hope soar. I thank the Lord that He has given us access to that same hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

— Cheryl A. Wilcox Tatum

LOOKING WITHIN

How can remembering God’s faithfulness give me hope?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may the memories of Your everlasting love rekindle my hope that I may be encouraged to share Your mercy and grace with the world. Amen.





PATIENCE

Thursday, March 7, 2024

WAITING ON THE LORD

READ: Isaiah 40:28–31

KEY VERSE: ...but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. – Isaiah 40:31 (NRSVUE)

What does it mean to “wait on the Lord?” To some, that means spending time in prayer, seeking God. To others, it means standing firm on what God has already spoken to you. To wait on God’s answer, voice, or promise in prayer is an essential part of our walk with God.

In 2022, I had to wait eight months for something that would change my life dramatically; 252 days is a long time when you have no control over the situation. I’d be lying if I said I never asked God some questions. I knew He could and wondered why He didn’t. Was He waiting on me to do something?

Knowing that patience is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), I remembered reading that “patience is the product of God’s grace, not a talent we are born with.” So, I changed my prayer to ask God to grant me the grace to endure the wait. I focused on the blessings I already had and trusted God’s perfect timing and provision, all the while giving Him all the honor and praise!

– Deacon M. Tia Johnson

LOOKING WITHIN

Do I show patience to “wait on the Lord” and trust that He’s in control?
Or do I just whine and complain?

PRAYER

Lord, give me strength to endure the wait and to trust in Your perfect timing. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

JOY

Friday, March 8, 2024

A GIFT FROM GOD

READ: Romans 15:8–13

KEY VERSE: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
– Romans 15:13 (NIV)

Joy reminds me of a song from my childhood: *I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart...* Once that song gets into your heart you will be singing it all day! I once thought that joy and happiness were synonymous, but I came to know that true joy — that overwhelming sense of comfort and contentment that floods one's soul — comes only when we are focused on walking with the Lord and valuing others.

Our relationship with Jesus is our greatest joy. He gives us complete joy, which we simply cannot find apart from Him. His joy is a gift that we can choose to accept and pursue no matter where we are in life and no matter what situation we're in.

– Nancy Massey

LOOKING WITHIN

How do I show that I am willing to let God lead and find joy in my circumstances? How do I exhibit my willingness to be obedient to what God is calling me to do (or not do)?

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, I thank You not only for calling me to rejoice in the Lord always, but also for producing that joy in my life through Your presence, in Jesus' name! Amen.





WORSHIP

Saturday, March 9, 2024

RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT, GO

READ: John 4:23–24

KEY VERSE: Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration. – John 4:24 (MSG)

As a young child I was taught that worshiping God is honoring Him for who He is and thanking Him for what He is about to do. This has always stuck with me. When you know that God has done some heavy lifting on your behalf, your worship and witness should reflect that. God illuminates with joy when we honor Him with our heartfelt worship.

I recall a moment while sitting at a red light listening to one of my favorite songs. As tears fell and my hands lifted in tandem, I heard a horn blow. I thought it was my cue that the light had changed, but in fact it was someone signaling me with a profound nod in agreement of my worship.

God is forever working on our behalf, and He deserves our worship. God is not ashamed of us, so we cannot be ashamed of Him. We must be billboards for God's goodness.

– Michell M. McBee

LOOKING WITHIN

How might I take advantage of more moments to come to a complete stop and give God my worship?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I ask that You never let me miss an opportunity to give You my sincere worship. Allow me to give You honor for who You are wherever I am. Amen.

HUMILITY

Monday, March 11, 2024

BOOSTING HUMILITY

READ: James 4:5–7, 10

KEY VERSE: But He gives more grace. Therefore, He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” – James 4:6 (NKJV)

Humility is defined as the disregard of all concern for achievements and privilege and to live one’s life to bring glory and honor to God. We see that humility and humbling oneself is becoming out of fashion in today’s world and appears unappealing to some. Many people feel a need to be the center of attention. Others are quick to share with you their accomplishments and the influential people they know. But God expects us to turn our backs on status, security, and success, and seek opportunities to humbly serve others.

James writes that Christianity is characterized by virtuous deeds and faith, and that God exalts those who humble themselves before Him. The best example of humility is when Jesus assumed a servant role and washed the feet of His disciples with no loss of dignity. We should adopt a modest opinion of ourselves to better understand the world within which we live and, most importantly, to best serve the Lord.

– Deacon Byron S. Bagby

LOOKING WITHIN

How can I use the resources and titles God has so richly bestowed upon me in a way that brings Him glory and His approval?

PRAYER

Gracious Father, grant me the confidence and courage to always be humble and to resist all temptation to boast. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.





FAITH

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

HELP ALONG THE WAY

READ: Psalm 23

KEY VERSE: Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I shall not fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. – Psalm 23:4 (NKJV)

About five years ago, I was traveling home from North Carolina with predictions for a bad snowstorm. I checked the weather and left early in the morning, thinking I was ahead of the storm.

Unbeknownst to me, I was not in front of the storm, I was actually in the midst of it. The snow started with the beginning of my drive and steadily increased. At one point, I called out to God and said, “Lord, I am in the eye of the storm.” As I often do when I am fearful, I began to recite Psalm 23, pray, and ask God to be with me.

The windshield wipers iced over, and the defroster was not effective. The lanes were only visible through tracks in the snow. The shoulder was not visible. I was concerned about stopping to clean the wipers. Again, I asked God, “What do I do?” Within seconds, the driver in front of me maneuvered to the shoulder to stop for the same thing. I immediately followed and cleaned the wipers and windshield. In every instance, God was with me. Every time I call on God and have faith in Him, the Lord provides sight and direction. *Hallelujah!*

– Deacon Tanya Walker

LOOKING WITHIN

When my faith is shaken,
who do I call on?

PRAYER

Precious Lord, thank You for always walking with me. Please continue to strengthen my faith and help me know You are always there and interceding on my behalf. Amen.

FORGIVENESS

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

READ: Ephesians 4:32–34

KEY VERSE: Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. – Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

Forgiveness is a powerful tool that can bring peace and healing to our lives. It is important to understand that we all make mistakes, and it's natural to hurt others unintentionally. However, it is equally important to recognize the hurt we have caused and take responsibility for our actions.

Sibling relationships can be complex, and it's common to have disagreements. It can be especially challenging to forgive siblings whom we've had issues with. However, we must never forget to work on our relationships with them.

My sister, Jailani, and I have had disagreements and fights. Sometimes it's difficult for me to forgive her, but I understand that holding on to grudges will only damage our relationship more. Instead, I attempt to remember that we all sin and make mistakes, but God forgives us unconditionally. That helps me understand that I should extend the same forgiveness to others, especially my sister. Also, I remind myself that holding on to grudges is not healthy for me or my relationship with Jailani. I want to love her, even when it's hard.

Forgiveness can help us build stronger relationships. It's not always easy, but it's definitely worth the effort.

– Johnell Welch

LOOKING WITHIN

Who do I need to forgive? How can I show love to them today?

PRAYER

Dear God, I need Your help to forgive, find peace, and to please you. Thank You for empowering me to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving. Amen.





GRACE

Thursday, March 14, 2024

GRATEFUL FOR GRACE

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)

In our spiritual journey, grace is a guiding light, a divine gift that defies our understanding with its depth and unconditional nature. This grace is the foundation of our salvation. It's not something we earn or deserve; God freely gives it. In His eyes, our value isn't based on our deeds but on our identity as His beloved children.

Imagine a life without grace. Each error, each flaw would be a perpetual burden, leading us down a path of despair. But, in His boundless love, God removes this weight, offering us renewal and a fresh start, free from the chains of our past mistakes.

Grace isn't merely a theological concept; it's a way of life. It urges us to extend forgiveness and love, mirroring God's compassion in a world that thirsts for such kindness. Embracing grace means accepting our own imperfections while recognizing the profound love God has for us. Our true worth lies not in our accomplishments but in our inherent dignity as creations of God.

Living in grace is living in constant gratitude and awareness of God's encompassing mercy. It's understanding that despite our flaws, we are endlessly cherished and supported by our heavenly Father.

– Minister Rasheem Rooke

LOOKING WITHIN

What does God's grace look like in my life?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I am eternally grateful for the gift of Your grace. Help me to embrace it in my heart fully and to extend Your grace to those around me. Amen.

LOVE

Friday, March 15, 2024

GET READY WITH GOD

READ: Colossians 3:12–14

KEY VERSE: *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. – Colossians 3:14 (NIV)*

Millennial content creators inspire my year-round wardrobe ideas. I like the featured staple pieces as modeled on social media. The “Get Ready With Me” trend is a favorite for practical fashion sense. My creative side appreciates a timeless pair of blue jeans or a sleeveless white top to bring together spring and autumn looks.

In similar style, God’s Word defines our staple piece for Christian living: love. When we interact with one another, we must always do it in love. We can get ready with God each morning and let the Holy Spirit fashion our hearts to imitate Christ, in person and online. God sets us apart for this calling that unifies when we mirror the gentleness and compassion that Jesus modeled during His ministry on the earth.

The timeless love God pours into us renews our hearts daily. As a result, our must-have virtue shines anytime we choose to disagree lovingly, speak encouraging words, forgive offenses, and greet differences with respect. The world recognizes the Savior whom we follow by how we show up. We’re ready to pursue harmony and peace across multiple generations within our diverse communities.

– Cherie Trahan

LOOKING WITHIN

What earthly habits should I put off today? How can I put on love instead?

PRAYER

Lord, please fix anything within me that doesn’t fit the occasion of always pouring out love. Amen.





THANKSGIVING

Saturday, March 16, 2024

THE PERFECT ANTIDOTE

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 request to God. – Philippians 4:6 (NIV)*

Notably, the YouVersion Bible app revealed that the most shared, highlighted, and bookmarked verse of 2019 was Philippians 4:6. In the first half of the verse, Paul reminds us not to worry and in the second half he gives us the antidote to worrying — prayer and thanksgiving. From the pulpit to the pew, worry does not discriminate; we can fight back with prayer and by giving thanks. We can thank God for employment when we are passed over for promotion or when working conditions are less than favorable.

A heart of gratitude has a way of changing our perspective on the challenges we are facing. Scripture is replete with giving God thanks for His many benefits. The psalmist beseeches us to thank Him. Psalm 100 reminds us to “Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting.” Psalm 107 tells us to “Thank Him for His unfailing love and wonderful deeds.”

Difficulties notwithstanding, we can find reasons to give thanks. We give thanks trusting that God is working all things together for our good. By giving thanks, we gain a peace that vastly exceeds our finite understanding.

– Deacon Johnny President

LOOKING WITHIN

How can I say thanks for all the Lord has done for me?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, when I am tempted to worry, remind me to always pray and give thanks. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOPE

Monday, March 18, 2024

HOPE FOR A FUTURE

READ: Jeremiah 29:1–23

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)

As a zealous fan of a perennial losing sports franchise, there is no better time of year than the beginning of the season. Every team’s record is zero wins and zero losses with everyone tied for first place. Although we know our team isn’t likely to win many games, we have hope. Because the games have not been played and the losses are yet to mount, it’s easy to be hopeful. But what do you do when the reality of the season starts to play out? When the team’s performance begins to meet your low expectations? When your hope to finally have a winning season is withering away?

This hopeless place is where the children of Israel found themselves when Jeremiah pens his prophecy to them in Jeremiah 29. He reminds us that despite the present circumstance and situation, we have a God who has plans for our future. And knowing that we have a God looking out for us should give us hope.

— Deacon Warren Sutton

LOOKING WITHIN

When the deck is stacked against me, do I place my hope in the Lord?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, when my back is against the wall remind me that You have a plan for my life. Amen.





OBEDIENCE

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

STAYING WITH GOD

READ: 1 John 2:3–6

KEY VERSE: But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them... – 1 John 2:5 (NIV)

Some of us say that we know God. Yet the same people aren't really prepared to obey what He says. For example, Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding." However, sometimes when things don't go our way, we can doubt God.

This has happened to me. I can pray, believe, and obey at one moment, but when something bad happens, I can lose my trust in God. For example, when my mom's car broke down while driving to Cleveland for my first family Thanksgiving in four years, I asked God, "Why?" I was disappointed because it looked like we were going to miss Thanksgiving. I was very excited to see my cousins, who I hadn't seen in years. However, I knew God was with me and His Word is true when my grandparents and aunt, who were only 10 minutes behind us when we broke down, came and offered to take us to the nearest dealership.

Even in our unluckiest moments, God still manages to work things out for us. Trusting Him goes hand in hand with obedience. I know that I will try to be obedient and not lose trust in God because He has my back.

– Xavier Paultre

LOOKING WITHIN

How can I try to be more obedient to God's Word?

PRAYER

Dear God, please give me what I need so I can follow You. Amen.

FREEDOM

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

BREAK THE SHACKLES

READ: Isaiah 61:1–4

KEY VERSE: . . .he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. . .

– Isaiah 61:1b (NRSV)

As Christians, we believe Jesus went to Calvary to free us from the bondage of sin. Indeed, the Savior’s initial proclamation includes His mission to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prisons to those who are bound. Yet, sin and, maybe more importantly, shame, continue to shackle us. Shame, the belief that we are unworthy and “not enough,” can produce a sense of being unloveable and irredeemable — the opposite of how God sees us.

Even as we repent, shame about our sin can operate like invisible chains that restrict our liberty to dream, explore, create, and relate. Shame can fracture our relationships and separate us from community. When we feel shame, we are likely to disconnect from God and isolate from others, which is never God’s will for us.

But thanks be to God, we can be free from shame. Despite any fear we may have, we can take our shame to Him. So, the next time you have a shame experience, take it to God. Resist the urge to run away. Stay there until you see the face of a loving parent who tells you that you are loveable, redeemable, deserving, and worthy. Take it in. And listen for the sound of shackles falling to the ground.

– Carlton Green

LOOKING WITHIN

What shame do I need
to release to God?

PRAYER

*God, thank You for forgiving my sin.
Free me from my shame. Amen.*





TRUST

Thursday, March 21, 2024

DON'T YOU WORRY 'BOUT A THING

READ: Matthew 6:25–34

KEY VERSE: Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?
– Matthew 6:27 (NIV)

In today's uber-busy, highly overscheduled lifestyles, we find ourselves frequently worried about this or concerned about that. It seems we are constantly chasing something — wealth, promotions, health, relationships, and more — in an attempt to be extraordinary.

I ran that race so intensely that I suffered a heart attack. I scurried from meeting to meeting and from event to event. I did that until God told me to pause. After my heart attack, I began to look at the activities in which I engaged and evaluated their value to me and my family. I was able to eliminate most of them with no major impact to the organizations and used my new free time to meditate and relax.

When I stopped worrying, my quality of life improved. Now, I'm in good health, my stress levels are down, and my family is more engaged with each other. Constantly worrying and scurrying around did not bring me the inner peace and satisfaction that I thought it would. I've learned that asking God to show me the way and trusting Him is the only way to go.

– Deacon Carroll Hebron

LOOKING WITHIN

What am I chasing and worrying about? How can I trust God more and worry less?

PRAYER

Father God, please help me to trust You with my cares and concerns so that I can live a more peaceful and abundant life. Amen.

PEACE

Friday, March 22, 2024

GODLY PEACE

READ: John 14:25–27

KEY VERSE: *I'm leaving you well and whole. That's my parting gift to you. Peace. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left — feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught. — John 14:27 (MSG)*

What does it mean to be at peace? Is peace the absence of strife, conflict, or anxiety? Or is peace the ability to live with strife and anxiety and yet somehow remain unaffected?

Jesus' life was the antithesis of freedom from conflict and strife but for many He is the exemplar of peace. How did Jesus achieve godly peace? Through His daily practices of prayer, appropriate application of Scripture, and being sure of His mission and purpose. These gave Jesus the assurance to move forward, very often despite the circumstances.

In simple terms, godly peace is the ability to hang in there, to face life's difficulties with an internal stillness and reassurance. We are not promised a life free from worries and hardships, but we have been given the tools to sustain. As Jesus promised, "Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."

— Rev. Rosalind Brooks

LOOKING WITHIN

How am I using the tools of prayer and God's Word to sustain peace within me?

PRAYER

Dear Abba, I praise You and thank You that I am Yours. Therefore, I possess the keys to life and how to live. Amen.





PRAYER

Saturday, March 23, 2024

DON'T STOP

READ: Philippians 4:4–7

KEY VERSE: Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. – Philippians 4:6 (NLT)

Last year my college gospel choir had planned a big reunion that included a concert performance at our alma mater in Ohio. At each rehearsal we prayed that all would go smoothly for our long-awaited gathering and that God would be glorified.

But despite the prayers, things didn't exactly go as planned. I got COVID a week before the reunion and could barely sing a note. Then my roommate for the weekend pulled a muscle the day before she was to leave Texas and couldn't attend. On concert day, one of our soloists, who was also our mistress of ceremony, got laryngitis. But the last straw came when the power suddenly went out at the concert site a half hour before we were to go on stage. I mean, really Lord?

Despite the setbacks and disappointments, we kept praying and trusting God. The enemy was just trying to derail us from our mission. In the end, I was well enough to travel, my classmates and I made it safely to Ohio, our MC's voice returned, the power finally came back on, and we praised the Lord. Once again, I had living proof that praying without ceasing really works.

– Deacon Barbranda Walls

LOOKING WITHIN

How do I react when it appears God is not answering my prayers?

PRAYER

Father God, please help me to remember that You answer prayers in Your own time and way. Let me not worry or be discouraged but trust in You. Amen.

SACRIFICE

Monday, March 25, 2024

THE COST TO SERVE

READ: Romans 3:21–26

KEY VERSE: God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.
– Romans 3:25 (NIV)

About 15 years ago, my mother and I began annual mother-daughter trips. This year, it was our desire to return to Arizona to visit family and see the Antelope Canyons. However, my HVAC decided to burn out the motor and carburetor, so I had to re-allocate my vacation funds for air conditioner repairs.

Yes, I had an emergency fund, and the AC unit was one of many surprise expenses in a short amount of time. I had to prioritize needs versus desires. As much as I wanted to take a vacation, I knew the cost to repair the AC outweighed the desire to travel.

Jesus paid the ultimate cost to repair our separation from God. Our sins were “re-allocated” on the cross of Calvary as Jesus died so we could live. Hallelujah to our Savior who prioritized our need of salvation over our desire to remain in our sinful nature.

– Deacon Shalonda Scott

LOOKING WITHIN

What will it cost me to serve God
and others?

PRAYER

Father God, thank You for Your Son, who set the standard for sacrifice and service. May I look within to search where I too can re-allocate or lay aside my wants to serve others in their need. Amen.





RIGHTEOUSNESS

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

MAINTAINING RIGHTEOUS INTEGRITY

READ: Job 1:1–2:10

KEY VERSE: His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity?” – Job 2:9a (NIV)

Comedian D.L. Hughley asked, “What can stop a man from cheating?” Among the more than 2,000 online responses received to his probing question were: hot grits, only himself, a good woman, impotence, isolation, nothing, death, and God. Probing questions are designed to deepen the understanding of the person asking and answering the question. Though infidelity was the hook, D.L. was really asking what motivates a person to remain righteous — that is, live consistent with God’s will.

Though hot grits can be a motivator to live righteously, God has given us much more to help maintain our righteous integrity. King David declares that God’s word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). The Apostle Paul highlights examples from the great cloud of witnesses who were not perfect but were considered righteous (Hebrews 11). The Holy Spirit produces in us love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). And by faith in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven of our sins and therefore are justified and made righteous (Romans 5:1). Righteousness is not attaining perfection but maintaining righteous integrity through the pursuit of the heart of God.

– Deacon Ken Williams

LOOKING WITHIN

Am I consistently pursuing God’s heart?

PRAYER

Father, I acknowledge that in my flesh dwells no good thing, but I also joyfully accept that I am made right because of the blood shed by Your son, Jesus. Help me to live worthy of His sacrifice. Amen.

REDEMPTION

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

SAY SO

READ: Psalm 107:1–8

KEY VERSE: *Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble.*
– Psalm 107:2 (NRSV)

One of the traditions I cherish from holidays during my childhood is gathering with my cousins to play the Nintendo game Mario Kart. Various pieces of Mario Kart have evolved through time, such as the graphics, powers, and settings, but one distinct concept remains integral to the game. When your character voluntarily derails too far or is thrust off the race because of the powers of your racing competitors, a cloud figure emerges that picks you up and restores you to where you're supposed to be.

Although you aren't go-karting with Mario, life can often feel like a race with competitors, obstacles, and circumstances intended to keep you from winning. Yet, when you've been steered off your course, a supportive presence whose love redeems you from where you fell is ready to restore you. This is the presence referenced in Psalm 102:7, which was written about a people who like us were redeemed from what often seemed irredeemable. Thus, to "say so" does more than refer to what God can do. To say so encourages self — and those who have been derailed — from the belief that doom will have the final say. Live so. Say so.

— Rev. Denzel Goodlin

LOOKING WITHIN

What have I been redeemed from
and redeemed for?

PRAYER

*Dear Lord, I open myself to receive
Your redemption, that I may return
to finish what I have begun. Amen.*





SALVATION

Maundy Thursday, March 28, 2024

THE SALVATION FACTOR

READ: John 3:1–16

KEY VERSE: 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 (NIV)

On Thursday evenings in my grandmother’s home, we would gather around the floor model TV in her living room to watch Billy Graham after dinner. As a child, I loved listening to his sermons and spending time with my grandmother. His offering “salvation” to the thousands of people in the arena piqued my interest. That curiosity caused me to ask, “What is salvation?”

Salvation is simply preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss. John 3:16 highlights eternal salvation, which, as a Christian and disciple of Christ, is a benefit. After all, our first sin should have eliminated us from the possibility of salvation. But because of our humanity, God knew we could not save ourselves. So, He sent His son Jesus to do it for us. We should thank God for Jesus, who is our salvation.

During this Lenten season, I pray that we remember who saves, why we are saved, and be thankful for salvation.

– Rev. Paul H. Hypolite Jr.

LOOKING WITHIN

What does salvation and “being saved” mean to me?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me draw closer to You and Your Word. I thank You for being saved and pray for salvation for those who have not accepted You as their Savior. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

HOLINESS

Good Friday, March 29, 2024

THE SUPREME EXAMPLE

READ: 1 Peter 1:13–16

KEY VERSE: But now you must be holy in everything you do,
just as God who chose you is holy. – 1 Peter 1:15 (NLT)

Some time ago, I was convicted of not living for God as I should. I prayed to God to help me to love Him and live for Him more each day.

Last year, I found myself literally in Isaiah 53, watching Jesus as He was oppressed and tormented, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and still He did not even open His mouth. Tears flooded my eyes and the reality of what Jesus did for me was so real. I stood watching as He took on my punishment and did not say a word. He did it all for me.

If Jesus can do this for me, I asked myself what can I do for Him in return. This verse has opened the eyes of my heart of how I should live and love — to be holy as He is holy. I do not want to be conformed to the things of this world but to be set apart. To love as Jesus loves and not as the world loves. For me to do this, to be holy, I need the Holy Spirit's guidance.

— Jean Walters

LOOKING WITHIN

When people see me,
who or what do they see?

PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, please help me to live as
Jesus did, to love as He loves because
I cannot do it without You. Amen.*





ATONEMENT

Saturday, March 30, 2024

A IS FOR ATONEMENT

READ: 1 John 4:16–17

KEY VERSE: God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. – 1 John 4:16b-17 (NRSV)

The theological concept of atonement is complicated. Many of us were raised to believe that God needed compensation for humanity's sins and that Jesus was God's payment plan. However, a God who demands a blood sacrifice to love that which love created does not strike me as a God who is love. There must be another way to comprehend atonement.

Perhaps atonement can be understood like this:

- Humanity is prone to sin (Romans 3:23).
- When we sin, we separate ourselves from God and no longer share in the fullness of God's love.
- By our power, humans cannot bridge the eternal gulf sin creates.
- Jesus' choice to take on the cross of Calvary bridges that gulf and creates a clear and perfect path back to the heart of God.
- This creates an at-one-ment (atonement) with our God.

1 John 4:17 says, "Love has been perfected among us." Jesus' act was a perfect act of love; because of it, we are redeemed and saved.

– Rev. Dr. Zina Jacque

LOOKING WITHIN

Do I believe that no sin can create a gulf too vast for Christ's love to bridge?

PRAYER

God, who is love, remind me that You loved us first, and no matter what, Your love is sufficient for redemption and salvation. 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 forty days in Lent. The six Sundays in this period are not counted because each one represents a “mini-Easter,” a celebration of Jesus’s 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.