

Habits that Heal

*practices for
spiritual formation*



Lenten Devotional

*40 days of honest and authentic accounts
from Thompson Church staff, elders and leaders
on following habits of*

solitude, sabbath, meditation, prayer and fasting

Habits that Heal

Simple practices for a steady, grounded life with God

For centuries, Christians have practiced a handful of habits that create space for God to restore the heart, quiet the mind, and strengthen love for neighbor. These practices offer healing to the pain and brokenness we feel in our lives and see in our communities.

Think of them as rhythms, not rules.

Invitations, not obligations.

Over the course of Lent, we are inviting you to choose at least one practice to engage in. Write down which one you want to pursue and how you plan to pursue it. It is our hope that as you engage in the practice, you will notice a refreshed spirit and interior healing. Below you will find some basic guidelines and ideas to begin. There is no right or wrong way. There is no punishment for not following through. The entire season is about setting your intentions in the direction you want to go and allowing these habits to shape you.

1. Solitude - *making space to be alone with God*

Step away from noise and distraction so you can become present to yourself and to God.

Maybe your life feels too busy or your mind feels chaotic. Try to set aside time where you are not with anyone or responsible for anyone. Turn off the television and put away the phone. To do this with intention, perhaps you set a timer or a notice on your phone for when you would like to begin each day.

Try:

- Sit in silence for 10–15 minutes in the morning before checking your phone
- Take a walk without music or podcasts
- Drink your morning coffee quietly
- Spend time outdoors observing creation
- End the day with a few minutes of stillness

Consider working up to a longer time. Perhaps block out one hour on a Saturday where you can be without distraction or busyness. Learn to get comfortable with yourself and with God.

2. Meditation - *slow reflections on Scripture*

Let God's Word move from your head into your heart by lingering with it. Meditating on scripture can help you to know scripture better, to allow it to be a friend or a comforter or to guide you in your decision making or thoughts. You can choose one scripture verse to guide you the whole season, choose one per day or week. Turn to the meditation section of this booklet to see some ideas of scriptures for meditation.

Try:

- Read one short verse slowly several times
- Carry a line of Scripture with you during the day
- Journal what you notice or wonder
- Practice lectio divina (read, reflect, pray, rest)
- Repeat a sacred word or phrase with your breathing

more on next page



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3. Prayer - *honest conversation with God*

Speak truthfully. Listen quietly. Return often.

Try:

- Set aside five minutes morning or evening
- Keep a simple prayer list
- Take a prayer walk through your neighborhood
- Use gratitude, confession, and hope as a guide
- Pray brief “breath prayers” throughout the day

4. Fasting - *letting go to make room for God*

Step away from something that fills you so you can remember what truly sustains you.

Try:

- Skip one meal and use the time to pray
- Fast from social media or screens for a day
- Avoid unnecessary spending for a week
- Turn off devices after dinner
- Replace the habit with prayer, reading, or service

5. Sabbath - *regular rest and delight*

Stop working. Receive your life as a gift. Trust that God is at work even when you are not.

- Try:
 - Choose one day (or half-day) each week not to work at home or for a career
 - Practice a sundown to sundown sabbath - Friday at 7pm to Saturday at 7pm where there is no work.
 - Consider a shorter sabbath: commit to an hour a day with no work or a Sunday afternoon from 12-3 with no work for the home, church or career.

Small practices, kept faithfully, can heal a weary soul.

And healed people are free to love the world well.



An Invitation to a Holy Lent from the Book of Common Prayer

Dear People of God:

The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution outlined in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. And, to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel before the Lord, our maker and redeemer.



a submission from Brad Michael, head of Property Committee

Snow day, perfect for an hour in solitude.

For those that don't know me well, I am an introvert. I love some "me time". So taking time in solitude should be an easy task for me. But in reality it was much harder than I had anticipated.

No, I haven't changed and I am still an introvert. But something I sometimes forget about myself is that I hate to "not be doing something". So at first an hour of solitude seemed like a no brainer. But it is way harder than I anticipated.

10 minutes. Easy. Maybe even 20. But a whole hour was kind of torture to be silent and not doing something.

No matter how much I tried to turn off my brain to think about God and how this effort could bring me closer to speaking to God, I found myself going through my to-do lists and work dilemmas left undone, family concerns, or world problems, or some song stuck in my head from breakfast.

You see, I realized that this task taught me that I do thrive in being a busy brained introvert. I am constantly multitasking. Probably not the best, but it is what I do.

While solitude and prayer are different, I realized how often I do think of God in my daily walk. It sort of pulled away the cob webs a bit. I do pray each day when driving for all sorts of important or mundane things that pop in my head. (Multitasking again). I don't mind prayer and it has always been somewhat easy for me to do (thanks for being in a small group that fostered this for almost 20 years). So in the moments of my day when I can briefly shut out the other fleeting demands of life I find my solitude in prayer. This was an interesting discovery for me.

Solitude I learned should probably be easier than it was for me. So in that sense, I want to work on it. But what I brought from this exercise was a reminder that maybe prayers through a day are my solitude.



a submission from Julie Carroll, office admin

I remember once, at a recent staff meeting, we were discussing the topic of solitude. Much of the staff shared a similar sentiment: moments of quiet and aloneness can be hard to come by at home, especially with children or other responsibilities constantly demanding attention. I couldn't have felt more differently.

I love being around people. I am a huge extrovert. Growing up, my family was a "living room" family—we played together, talked together, and laughed together from the moment we got home after school until baths and bedtime. Even now, I love sitting beside my husband and my dog, sharing stories about our day, or calling our nephews on FaceTime, just to say hello.

In general, I do not like being alone.

Because of that, I knew solitude was exactly the practice I needed. I decided to practice solitude for one hour each day intentionally. During that time, I avoided activities that involved human interaction, whether direct or parasocial, like scrolling through social media. Instead, I spent that hour cooking, drawing, or simply sitting in silence, watching the sunlight spill through my living room window.

In those quiet moments, I allowed my mind to wander without distraction. Slowly, I noticed that solitude did not feel as empty or uncomfortable as I had expected. Instead, it became a space where I could draw closer to God: where the noise faded, and God's presence felt clearer, steadier, and more attentive than I had noticed before.

Scripture reminds us that solitude is never the same as abandonment. The psalmist writes, Psalm 139: *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?"* (**Psalm 139:7**). Even in moments of intentional aloneness, God is already there. When we step away from voices, screens, and expectations, we do not step into emptiness: we step into awareness. Solitude becomes not a distance from relationship, but an invitation to remember that we are never truly alone. God meets us in the quiet, waits for us in the stillness, and remains with us always.



from **Clowning in Rome** by Henri Nouwen

I am not saying there is an easy solution to our ambivalent relationship with God. Solitude is not a solution. It is a direction.

The direction is pointed to by the prophet Elijah, who did not find Yahweh in the mighty wind, the earthquake, the fire, but in the still, small voice; this direction, too, is indicated by Jesus, who chose solitude as the place to be with his Father. Every time we enter into solitude we withdraw from our windy, earthshaking, fiery lives and open ourselves to the great encounter. The first thing we often discover in solitude is our own restlessness, our drivenness, and compulsiveness, our urge to act quickly, to make an impact, and to have influence; and often we find it very hard to withstand the temptation to return as quickly as possible to the world of "relevance." But when we persevere with the help of a gentle discipline, we slowly come to hear the still, small voice and to feel the gentle breeze, and so come to know the Lord of our heart, soul, and mind, the Lord who makes us see who we really are.

Reflection Questions

- When I enter silence, what do I notice first — peace, or restlessness?
- What pulls me back toward "relevance," productivity, or noise when I try to be still?
- What might God want to show me about who I truly am beneath the drivenness and urgency?

Lenten Practice: Stay Five Minutes Longer

Set aside a brief, intentional time of solitude this week — even ten minutes. When you begin to feel restless or tempted to end it, stay five minutes longer.

Do not try to achieve anything.

Do not evaluate the experience.

Simply remain. Let perseverance — not productivity — be your offering.



a submission from Zena Tredinnick-Kirby, Director of Children and Youth Ministry

I undertook a practice that initially seemed incompatible with the cadence of my life: dedicating one uninterrupted hour each week to solitary presence with God. As a homeschool parent, Penn State professor, Director of Children and Youth Ministry at Thompson, and emerging entrepreneur, my time is ordinarily governed by responsibility, productivity, and constant engagement. Carving out space for stillness required deliberate boundary setting and a conscious interruption of my habitual pace, an act of self-permission I am still learning to extend.

What became apparent almost immediately was how swiftly my internal tempo slowed once external distractions were removed. Although I do not naturally gravitate toward formal meditation, this experience felt less like employing a technique and more like entering into attentive relational presence. In the absence of devices, tasks, and expectations, I became keenly aware of the density of my inner life. Initial mental restlessness gradually gave way to reflective prayer. I spoke honestly with God about fatigue, responsibility, hope, and my need for discernment. Within that quiet, I encountered a deep sense of peace and a renewed awareness that I am not intended to carry every burden alone.

The most significant challenge of this practice was granting myself permission to disengage from productivity. After attending a recent women's retreat focused on being versus doing, I began to recognize how deeply I equate my worth with accomplishment. Sitting in silence initially felt counterintuitive and even unproductive, requiring a reframing of how I understand time, value, and spiritual presence. I had to relearn that attentive presence with God is, in itself, meaningful work. This practice offered unexpected clarity. Through prayer, I discerned the need for healthier boundaries and developed a clearer understanding of what lies within my control and what must be relinquished. The word release, a recurring theme in my spiritual life this year, took on renewed depth. Stillness illuminated the areas where I had been striving unnecessarily and invited me to entrust more fully to God.

Because this experience proved restorative, I intend to make it a regular practice. I also plan to incorporate gentle movement, such as Pilates, into this hour, allowing my body to be cared for alongside my spiritual attentiveness. This integration underscores the interconnectedness of physical and spiritual well-being. Ultimately, this practice was healing in its simplicity. It reminded me that I am permitted to pause, to be still, and to exist without an agenda. In that hour, I was not defined by my roles or responsibilities, but by my identity as a child of God, quietly present in His company.



a submission from Marci Capel, head of Communications Committee

When Stephanie asked us to engage in spiritual practice before Lent, I decided to try solitude, because I spend much less time in that than in the other modalities, which I practice regularly. With years of practice, I've been able to quiet my mind after 10-15 minutes, but to think of being in solitude for an hour was a little challenging. I was in solitude for about 30 minutes, praying, then I started having trouble keeping my thoughts at bay. I decided to add breath prayer. The rule follower in me felt like it may be cheating, but I recognized that I'm not a Tibetan monk so I should give myself grace! I used breath prayers by Sarah Bessey. Breath prayer involves breathing in while reciting a line and breathing out while reciting a different line. The first prayer was:

Breathe in and recite "*Jesus Christ, son of God*"

Breathe out and recite "*Have mercy on me.*"

I repeated that prayer 10 times, sometimes aloud but mostly silently.

I continued the process by reciting other breath prayers from the list. There were so many prayers, and as I read each one I knew instantly whether it spoke to me. If it did, I repeated it about 10 times. I say about because I was in "the zone" and didn't keep counting. Having a little input, like reading a new prayer at regular intervals, helped focus my mind briefly so that I could reach a deeper level of relaxation.

After I finished the breath prayers, I realized that a little over an hour had gone by. While I was happy that I was able to successfully complete the practice, what was more impactful was that I felt refreshed and "lighter".

This is something I wouldn't have been able to do for much of my life, so I want to share my journey to help others who may struggle with quieting their minds.

Over a period of several years, starting in 2013 with my mom's death, I struggled with various types of losses. My faith wasn't as mature back then, but instead of turning away from it after my mom's death I resolved to strengthen it. In addition to studying scripture and praying, I started practicing yoga to better center myself. I realized that I had made myself incredibly busy trying to distract myself from tremendous grief and stress from other life events. The movement, breathwork, and meditation in yoga helped me be more present and grounded in the moment, but I struggled at the beginning and end of class with the meditation piece. I told my teacher that I couldn't quiet my pinballing thoughts. She suggested that instead of stressing about trying to stop thoughts from coming, I should notice the thought and visualize letting it pass. That helped, and then I decided to try guided meditation to get even better results. I learned how to do diaphragmatic breathing and incorporated that with my meditation and prayer practices.

For years now I have spent the first hour of my day doing spiritual devotion practices in the morning. Spending time in scripture and prayer starts my day off right. It took years for me to be able to achieve this, and some days are easier than others. If you're looking to begin or increase your time in spiritual practices, realize that it doesn't happen overnight and requires intention. Always remember to give yourself grace.



a submission from Rick Schaub, head of Personnel Committee

I spent one hour in solitude and silence. I started the hour reflecting on a prayer entitled “Help Me Listen” from Guerillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle by Ted Loder that Pastor Stephanie shared at our last Session meeting:

*O Holy One,
I hear and say so many words,
Yet yours is the word I need.
Speak now,
and help me listen;
and if what I hear is silence,
let it quiet me,
let it disturb me,
let it touch my need,
let it break my pride,
let it shrink my certainties,
let it enlarge my wonder.*

During the hour, I first thought about how hard it is to be still. Our daily lives are full of constant inputs and activity—text messages, emails, phone calls, meetings, projects, chores, exercise, meals, media... Turning all of these off was really difficult for me. For someone who has been constantly busy his entire life, even in retirement, I thought was that this would be a waste of a good hour that I could use to get a bunch of stuff done.

At first, it did feel like I was wasting the opportunity to be more productive. But after ten minutes or so, a peace settled in and I started to like the quiet. I stared out into our back yard on the winter landscape of snow and ice and watched the birds happy for slightly warmer temperatures and food in the feeder. I thought about the times in the Gospels that reference Jesus retreating to a solitary place to pray. All of these places involved nature—mountains, gardens, the wilderness—where Jesus escaped the crowds to connect with God.

Then it started to feel like, now that I had opened the door, that God was suddenly in my presence and quite pleased. I took the time to thank him for all of my blessings and in particular for this timely visit. I really believe what has been said about God always being nearby and just waiting for us to invite Him in.

Thank you Pastor Stephanie for encouraging us to do this exercise. It was a welcome wake-up call and I look forward to continuing the practice.



Cultivating Inner Freedom by Richard Rohr

The desert fathers and mothers withdrew from cities to the desert to live freely, apart from the economic, cultural, and political structure of the Roman Empire. The abbas and ammas knew, as should we, that the empire would be an unreliable partner. They recognized that they had to find inner freedom from the system before they could return to it with true love, wisdom, and helpfulness. This is the continuing dynamic to this day, otherwise, "Culture eats Christianity for breakfast" to use a modern turn of phrase, and our deep transformative power is largely lost.

How do we find inner freedom? Notice that whenever we suffer pain, the mind is always quick to identify with the negative aspects of things and replay them over and over again, wounding us deeply. Almost all humans have a compulsion to fixate almost entirely on what's wrong, which is why so many people become fearful, hate-filled, and wrapped around their negative commentaries. This pattern must be recognized early and definitively. Peace of mind is an oxymoron. When we're in our mind, we're hardly ever at peace; when we're at peace, we're never only in our mind. The early Christian abbas and ammas knew this and first insisted on finding the inner rest and quiet necessary to tame the obsessive mind.

In a story from Benedicta Ward's *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*: "A brother came to Scetis to visit Abba Moses and asked him for a word. The old man said to him, 'Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.'" [1] But we don't have to have a cell, and we don't have to run away from the responsibilities of an active life, to experience solitude and silence. Amma Syncletica said, "There are many who live in the mountains and behave as if they were in the town, and they are wasting their time. It is possible to be a solitary in one's mind while living in a crowd, and it is possible for one who is a solitary to live in the crowd of [their] own thoughts." [2]

By solitude, the desert mystics didn't mean mere privacy or protected space, although there is a need for that too. The desert mystics saw solitude, in Henri Nouwen's words, as "the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs." [3] Solitude is a courageous encounter with our naked, most raw and real self, in the presence of pure love. Quite often this can happen right in the midst of human relationships and busy lives.

References:

[1] *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, rev. ed. (Cistercian Publications, 1984), 139.

[2] *Sayings*, 234.

[3] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (Seabury Press, 1981), 27.



a submission from Susan Nemzoff, member

The Sabbath was made for man's sake, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)

Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

In returning (to God) and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. (Isaiah 30:15)

I always thought that going to church on Sundays meant that I was keeping the Sabbath. Of course that was not true, because after church I went back to doing things I thought needed to be done, or doing what I wanted, even if I was tired, which blew the whole concept. I confess that only once recently have I kept the Sabbath, not perfectly but the best I could do. The effect on me was profound. I realized that I not only had permission to rest but was commanded by God to rest by the Ten commandments which require observing the Sabbath. And instead of feeling burdened or impatient with that command, I felt liberated from my desire to work or strive and free to rest without guilt. As someone who has been striving all my life for everything I wanted and never really accepted the gift of rest, or allowing myself to rest, I have paid an enormous price with my health. Good health and healing have always been out of reach for me, but I never gave God a chance to heal and restore me because I never stopped to rest. This rest is not procrastination, it is not laziness. This rest is a gift from God meant to renew and restore us, to allow for healing and to draw us closer to God. All throughout the Bible God calls His People to rest, and often chastises us for not resting, sometimes with dire results. Generally, it doesn't end well. There is always a price to pay. He never meant for us to endlessly work – after all, He never did! He created the universe in six days and then He rested on the seventh day. So too, we are designed by Him to rest on the seventh day, and when we do we can experience renewed energy, restoration and renewal and strength for the work we will do in the following week. And when we don't, we can and will eventually wear ourselves out. Sabbath was made for us by our loving Father who cares for us and wants us to grow closer to Him and have the strength to carry out His will.



from *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel

One of the most distinguished words in the Bible is the word qadosh, holy; a word which, more than any other, is representative of the mystery and majesty of the divine. Now, what was the first holy object in the history of the world? Was it a mountain? Was it an altar?

It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word qadosh is used for the first time: in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness.

This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established.

Yet it seems as if, to the Bible, it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.

Reflection Questions

- Do I treat time as something to spend and manage, or as something that can be made holy?
- What would change if I saw one day each week as sacred rather than simply unproductive?
- What competes with my willingness to honor holy time?

Lenten Practice: Mark the Day

Before your Sabbath begins this week, mark it intentionally. Light a candle, pray a brief blessing, or speak aloud:

"God, this time is holy."

At the close of the day, extinguish the candle or offer a short prayer of gratitude.

Let the simple act of marking time remind you that holiness is not only found in places we go, but in hours we receive.



a submission from James Daily, Facilities Manager

An Unexpected Sabbath

The snowstorm forced everything to slow down in a way I didn't see coming. Plans were canceled, the normal rhythm of work stopped, and for once, there was no real choice but to rest. Oddly, it felt like an unexpected Sabbath. Not the kind that comes neatly planned or perfectly peaceful, but one that arrives anyway and asks you to pay attention.

Even though we technically had the day off, it wasn't exactly restful in the traditional sense. The snow was heavy and relentless, and there was a lot of shoveling, more than I expected, honestly. It was tiring, cold, and messy. Still, something was grounding about it. The physical work felt honest, like I was clearing space not just outside but mentally too. It reminded me that rest doesn't always mean stillness. Sometimes it looks like simple, necessary work done without rushing.

What stood out most was how present I felt with Dana and the kids. No distractions were pulling me away and no place I needed to be. Just time. Time to laugh, to sit, and to notice little moments I usually miss when life is moving too fast. Dana's calm and the kids' excitement over the snow all felt like a gift. Being fully there with them felt sacred in its own quiet way, and I'm grateful for that. Those moments were a reminder of what really matters and why slowing down is so important.

This pause also gave me space to reflect on where we are right now. I feel genuinely excited for this new season we're stepping into. The renovation at the church is finally nearing the end, and after all the work, stress, and unknowns, there's a real sense of anticipation and relief. It feels like we're standing at the edge of something new and something good. There's still work to do, but there's also clarity and hope.

The snowstorm disrupted the schedule, but it gave me something better in return. It gave me perspective. It reminded me that Sabbath isn't always about doing nothing.

It's about being present, trusting the pause, and recognizing God's hand in the unexpected. I'm walking into this next season feeling grateful, grounded, and ready.



a submission from Pastor Stephanie Templin Ashford

There is a common phrase known as the Protestant work ethic. It refers to Martin Luther's understanding that all work is from God and all work is for God. This idea was strengthened by the Puritans, who believed that the harder we work, the more glory we bring to God. This ethic is woven deeply into my psyche. The work of the church is never done, and so I have, for most of my career, believed that I should not stop working.

One minister challenged me on this notion and asked if I believed that God was not capable of handling the world if I stopped for a day. It was humbling to hear those words, but they still did not lead me to a Sabbath practice.

It was just this year, while reading a book for a course I am taking, that the author suggested practicing a Jewish Sabbath. In his own life, after failing at Sabbath-keeping and feeling overwhelmed by all he had to do, he began to cease work Friday evening at sundown. He would do only things that brought him joy. This time was not to be spent on housework, church work, or anything that felt like work. The Sabbath was meant for rest and joy. He began to enjoy time with his family, play a game, take a nap, or go for a walk. He could pick up his work again at sundown on Saturday.

I began to try this practice, and it was incredibly hard for me. I am still struggling. What has been growing in me, however, is a sense that I can set boundaries that will help me enjoy the life God has given me. The first week, I nearly died from my impulse and desire to check email and work around the house, but I kept feeling God say, "Not today. Rest. Enjoy." I realized that my overworking was my own doing and that it is okay if some things are left undone for a few hours.

I began to sit longer with my family, to spend time in the yard, and to play games. Not only did I have to give myself permission to do this, but I had to see it as a requirement from God. It is amazing how we treat some of the commandments as essential—do not murder, do not steal, do not lie—but when God says to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy, we are quick to dismiss this command.

I am very much still a resting work in progress. I am probably barely achieving a C-, but I can feel myself longing for this pause more and more, and I am trying to listen.



a submission from Tracey Jefferson, Head of Long Range Planning Committee

Sabbath is one of God's earliest and most tender invitations. It is not the absence of work; it is the presence of peace. Sabbath reorients us to the God who provides, protects, and restores. You are allowed to rest. You were created to rest. And God delights in giving you rest.

The struggle is real:

You're balancing work responsibilities, mental and emotional load, caregiving, cooking, cleaning, appointments, the needs of children, the needs of others, and your own often-forgotten needs. Even "days off" quickly fill with everything that couldn't be done during the week.

In this season, Sabbath may feel like something meant for other people—people with margins you don't currently have. Or it may feel like another spiritual ideal that only leaves you feeling behind. But Scripture never frames Sabbath as a burden. It is an invitation, not a demand, a rhythm of rest that bends and flexes with real life.

And here is the truth:

Sabbath does not look the same in every stage of life. It is not "one size fits all." Being given the opportunity to reflect on Sabbath and how I have made and can make space for it in my life has been meaningful. I've found that Sabbath carries different expressions in different seasons.

In early adulthood, Sabbath meant long stretches of quiet, time away from noise, and the ability to "stop" in a more complete way. In my young-family years, the season was (and still is) chaotic, noisy, and unpredictable. Rest is fragmented. Sabbath had to be reimagined:

- A quiet cup of coffee before the house wakes up
- A family walk with phones left at home
- Leaving dishes in the sink on purpose
- Saying "not today" to something that pressures me
- A worship playlist while folding laundry
- And most importantly, a nap as an act of trust

These are not lesser Sabbaths. They are honest Sabbaths; rest in motion, rest woven into the life I actually live.

I'm learning to give myself permission to stop doing one thing, even when I cannot stop everything. Sometimes choosing a small ritual that signals "rest begins here" is what allows me to embody Sabbath in a season when life feels overwhelmingly full. As my responsibilities shift, Sabbath shifts too, but its meaning remains. Sometimes Sabbath is simply refusing to carry burdens alone and remembering who you are. A breath. A whispered prayer. A moment where I let God hold what I cannot.



He Gives You Permission to Rest, by Steph Salinas

I made my way through the house, sorting and cleaning as I walked from the kitchen to the living room and into the master bedroom. Finally, some peace. I looked over at my prayer corner, where there was an unavoidable mountain of laundry piled onto my prayer chair. Great. Another chore.

I recalled the desire I had that week to spend more time with Jesus in the Word. A desire for order and peace—a break from the chaos and busyness of daily life. If only I had time for that. There's so much to get done and schedule out. Meals won't cook themselves and my work is waiting for me.

The enemy knew the lies to whisper to me that would make me feel alone, unseen, and too busy to achieve what my heart really longed for.

In today's Gospel, the Apostles were ready to give Jesus a report for what they were able to accomplish. He was ready to give them rest (see Mark 6:30-31). They were caught up in the doing and He invited them to simply be. Just as His heart was moved with pity for those following Him and hoping to be satisfied, His heart moves for you, too. He tends to you and simply asks you to "come away [. . .] and rest a while" (Mark 6:31).

Do you also get caught up in doing all the things? Some are tedious and necessary. Other tasks are small victories or blessings from answered prayers. Like the Apostles, we can tell Jesus everything, giving Him a rundown of all we got through and what is left to come. His response—so tender and personal each time—is to come away from all of the doing.

Much like the pile of laundry that disappeared with slow and gentle sorting, Jesus wants to eliminate the burdens of your daily life. Your lists and chores will be there. Jesus will be with you as you get them done. There is no task greater than abiding with Him. Coming to the One Who truly gives us what our hearts desire—His presence, His rest, His peace.



from The Practice of Prayer by Margaret Guenther

Our lives and our children's lives have become tightly scheduled to a degree unthinkable even a generation ago. While there may be occasional situations beyond our control, I suspect that many of us are also guilty of "obligation inflation," making sure that we are never quite done and that there is always one more thing looming just around the corner. God forbid that we should follow his example in creation: behold what we have done, pronounce it at least good enough, and then stop for a day to rest and enjoy it!

A long time ago I taught at a university where most of my students were Jewish. I found myself almost envious when they told me about their sabbath, with good food prepared ahead of time and then a day of deliberate rest. Unlike my childhood memories of starchy Sunday afternoons, of sitting quietly in my scratchy "good" clothes while the grownups talked, the sabbath described by my students sounded like something to look forward to. Time is always a gift, but observance of the sabbath (which can come on any day of the week, an important point to remember for those of us who must work on Sunday) is a powerful reminder that God has given us this gift and expects us to use it, indeed, enjoy it for itself.

If we cannot manage a full twenty-four hours, we can at least cultivate the habit of building little sabbaths into our crowded days. We can teach ourselves the art of prayerfully and re-creatively wasting time. Most of us are already able to waste considerable time joylessly and unintentionally. We leave the television on for another half-hour after our favorite program is over. We procrastinate when faced with boring little tasks. We read more of the newspaper than we need: does it really matter to me what the weather will be like in Berlin today, or what specials are being offered at the grocery store where I never shop? Some of us even dawdle over breakfast as we study the back of the cereal box. On the other hand, the deliberate wasting of time by doing nothing can be an important spiritual discipline, especially if it is done with joy and in the spirit of re-creation. We may feel guilty and definitely out of step since everyone else looks so purposeful and busy. Yet a little holy time-wasting can create a bit of true sabbath--fifteen minutes, an hour, even half a day. We can rejoice in God's gift of time as we slow down to savor it.



Breath Prayers

Inhale: Honouring rest
Exhale: *is a sign of faith.*

Inhale: God who rests,
Exhale: *teach me to rest.*

Inhale: Burn-out is not
Exhale: *confirmation of caring more.*

Inhale: Your peace is a safe place
Exhale: *to surrender my exhaustion.*

Inhale: I release the need
Exhale: *to earn my worth.*

Inhale: Nothing is falling apart
Exhale: *outside Your care.*

Inhale: I am allowed
Exhale: *to be held.*

Inhale: Your yoke is easy
Exhale: *Your burden is light.*

Inhale: I lay down
Exhale: *what was never mine to carry.*

Inhale: In stillness
Exhale: *You restore me.*

Inhale: I am not alone
Exhale: *in this quiet.*

Inhale: Teach my body
Exhale: *the language of rest.*

Inhale: I release striving
Exhale: *I receive grace.*



a submission from Tricia Murphy, Music Director

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1Thessalonians 5:16-18

“O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.” Psalm 5:3

For the Habits that Heal series, I chose to focus on prayer. These two scriptures really stood out to me because they really emphasize the importance of daily prayer, which is something I have not always been diligent about.

1Thessalonians 5:16-18 is the ultimate call to make prayer a constant, daily habit rather than a sporadic activity.

Psalm 5:3 emphasizes the importance of beginning the day with God, establishing a tone of intentionality and setting clear expectations before the day begins.

In the past, I would save my prayer time for when I was in the car. It always seemed like the easy thing to do. I have to be in the car anyway, I might as well pray. Not really thoughtful intentions. This was something that I felt I really wanted to change. For the last two weeks, I challenged myself to start my morning in prayer. At first, it wasn't easy. I typically get up around 5:45, scroll through news articles on my phone for a while, work out, get my sleepy teenage son out of bed, shower, have breakfast, then drive my son to school before I go off to work. This has been my daily routine for years. I knew I was going to have to give something up, and the obvious choice was eliminating my phone time. So, instead of the daily news scrolling, I started my morning in prayer. Sometimes, my prayers only lasted 5-10 minutes; other times, I found myself deep in prayer for 20-30 minutes. I prayed about things I was thankful for. I prayed for my family, focusing on my children and my desire for them to be happy and healthy. I prayed for friends, my students, and coworkers. I prayed for things I was anxious or concerned about. I never realized how easy it would be to have such an open dialogue with God.

Daily prayer offered me profound mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits. I felt stress and anxiety being replaced with a feeling of peace. I have always been someone whose had a hard time quieting my brain, but I'm now finding that prayer has helped calm my mind and clear my thoughts. My daily prayer helped me build a closer, more consistent relationship with God.



a submission from Nancy Campbell, head of Inclusivity Committee

When asked by Stephanie to participate in a practice of faith-building, I chose prayer as my practice. I decided to find a particular scripture verse in the Old Testament that contained an ancient prayer that I could relate to. After some research I found this meaningful prayer written by Asa, King of Judah in 2 Chronicles 14:11. This prayer gives me comfort as I struggle with the power of government, war and injustice. "Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, "LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O LORD, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you."

Context is important, so here's a little background on King Asa. In 2nd Chronicles 14–16, King Asa is the third king of Judah, known for starting his 41-year reign with significant religious reforms. King Asa began by purging Judah of idols, smashing sacred pillars, and removing "high places" (altars to foreign gods). His faithfulness led to a decade of peace.

King Asa was a faithful man, a man who trusted God. Reflecting upon his words daily for several weeks, helped me lean on God and trust that, even in these hard times, He is watching and protecting us as His beloved people. The start to my prayer/meditation of this scripture was a bit bumpy. I found myself forgetting to pause and reflect on this passage daily. After about a week, I was reminded of a little trick to help focus me. I printed the prayer on a piece of paper and taped it to my bathroom mirror. That helped a lot! Soon I was reciting this prayer daily, reflecting on its meaning, and giving thanks for God's never-ending loyalty and love.

Reading verse 14:11 and making it my prayer was healing for me. It helped me trust in God and reminded me that we are all created in His love and glory.



a submission from Tim Sandford, head of Mission Committee

I share my thoughts about daily prayer, which I have enjoyed for about 50 years.

I believe in daily prayer, and I believe God really loves when we talk to him. If I can sit quietly for a moment during my prayer time, God inaudibly speaks back to me. Prayer is a direct and immediate conversation with God who created me and everything else. I hurt for those who do not take advantage of this opportunity to converse with God.

How prayer is physically transmitted, I do not know. But I also don't fully comprehend how radio waves travel or electrons flow in a wire. They just do. God made it that way!

I usually pattern my prayers on the acronym ACTS, meaning adoration, confession, thanks, and supplication (thanks Pastor Stephanie, I was listening that day in Sermon Talks). ACTS works well to prioritize daily speaking with God as he is our Heavenly Father, creator, and sustainer of all. The Bible says the Holy Spirit will guide our prayers even when we do not know how to pray. It seems I pray the same prayer each day; however, God slips a new thought into my mind, showing me a different perspective or further appreciation about what I'm praying about. Prayer in the morning starts my day off right and provides the right perspective, knowing that hopefully I've pleased God by praising Him, confessing my sins, thanking Him, and praying for others.

Over the years, I've learned that God provides answers in 3 ways: yes, no, and wait (because He has something better).

God hears my every prayer. Sometimes moved to tears, sometimes feeling the "peace that surpasses all earthly understanding" (Philippians 4:7). I pray in a quiet place, usually in my favorite prayer chair. Occasionally, I go to my knees if especially desperate or sorrowful and in need of repentance! Not all prayer times go smoothly. Sometimes words and thoughts are organized, sometimes distractions and stress mess things up. I know God knows my intent even if my thoughts are jumbled.

To close my prayer time, I pray the Lord's prayer because Jesus taught us "it is how we ought to pray" (Matthew 6:9). I estimate I have done this about 18,000 times, but I still periodically realize a new understanding of a sentence or phrase.

To close, I offer a little "God Wink". Elders and Staff were asked to write a Lenten Reflection, about 400 words in length. I am not a writer, so this was not an easy task. After procrastinating, writing, and editing, I glanced at the bottom of the screen for the word count. 400 words.... Exactly!



a submission from Jessica Kirker-McGettigan, Head of Christian Education Committee

I've always considered myself bad at prayer. I forget to pray when things are going well, and hence I feel guilty to pray when things get challenging. I feel like I only come to the Lord when I am asking for something. My guilt poisons the prayer with timidness and apologies. The other regular prayer practice is confident and loud: the dinner blessing. The dinner blessing feels good because it's positive, communal, and grounds our family with a moment of reflection and gratitude. However, this prayer comes easy because it's simple, fast, and the answers come easy and joyfully as the opening/closing sentiments are often written for you. Both of these prayer practices feel ritualistic; "here is a list of my blessings," or "here is a list of my needs." For Lent, I'm going to practice praying. I believe that if I make prayer more of a regular routine, I'll be able to speak to God with where I am that day. It is my hope that coming to God in conversation rather than ritual or desperation will make me more comfortable using prayer as a path to a stronger relationship with the Lord.

For someone uncomfortable with prayer, I posit there is a discomfort that comes with settling the mind in a quiet space only reserved for yourself and the Lord. There's always an excuse for something else that needs attention first. "I'll be ready when... it would be a better time if..." The chance to delay is always an excuse to neglect the practice. At the same time, I'm fearful of making it inauthentically ritualistic: "I will pray when my alarm wakes me each day" or "I will pray on my drive home from work." These practices would be wonderful IF I was already a seasoned and confident pray-er, but habits centered on specific events are exactly what I'm trying to avoid for this exercise. Furthermore, if the alarm goes off late or something interrupts my drive, I have a built-in excuse to delay or avoid the practice.

I need to be more aware of myself and situations and look for moments of quietness. When the child is dropped off at practice or the work meeting is over and there's a moment of quiet, I'm going to take a pause instead of thinking about my next task. That's my entry to say "hello" to God. I don't want a template at first, I want to try different ways and see what feels right. Are there patterns in how I pray at different times of the day or in different contexts? What practices feel fulfilling? I'm approaching this Lenten practice with curiosity, patience, and grace for myself. I know there isn't a "right answer" but wherever I end at the end of this season will leave me with a better understanding of my relationship with God so that I can adapt my life and mind to be more like Jesus.



She Said, “How Do You Know When You Are Hearing From God?” by Amena Brown

I didn't know how to explain. It is to explain the butter grit of cornbread to a mouth that just discovered it has a tongue, the sound of jazz to ears that only ever thought they'd be lobes of flesh, the sight of sunsets to blinded eyes that in an instant can see, to fail at the ability to give words to how the scent of baked bread can make the mind recall a memory, every detail of a house, a room, a kitchen, a conversation, like explaining to a newborn baby this is what it feels like to be held. My words never felt so small, so useless, so incapable.

I wanted to say, put your hand in the middle of your chest, feel the rhythm there. I wanted to say you will find the holy text in so many places, on crinkly pages of scripture, in dusty hymnals, in the creases of a grandmother's smile, the way she clasps her hands, the way she prays familiar, with reverence as if to dignitary and friend, the way she sings a simple song from her spirit and porches turn to cathedrals.

I learned from my great-grandmother how to pray, how to talk to God, how to listen, watching her and the other silver-haired church mothers gather in her living room, worn wrinkled hands on top of leather bibles well traveled. They prayed living room prayers because you don't have to be inside the four walls of a church to cry out to the God who made you, because no matter where you sing or scream or whisper, God's ears can hear you.

And despite what the laws say or what our human flaws say, God's ears don't play favorites. God's ears don't assess bank accounts or social status before they attune themselves to the story your tears or your fears are telling. God's ears are here for the babies, for the immigrant, for the refugee, for the depressed, for the lonely, for the dreamers, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed and the helpless, those about to make a mess or caught in the middle of cleaning one up. Dirt don't scare God's ears. God is a gardener. God knows things can't grow without sun, rain, and soil.

I want to tell her to hear God, you have to be willing to experience what's holy in places many people don't deem to be sacred, that sometimes God sits next to you on a barstool, spilling truth to you like too many beers, that God knows very well the dance we'll do when we love ourselves so little that just about anyone will do, that God cares about the moments we find ourselves on the edge of a cliff, on the edge of sanity, on the edge of society, even when we have less than an inch left of the thread that's been holding us together.

I want to tell her God is always waiting, lingering after the doors close and the phone doesn't ring and we are finally alone. God is always saying, I love you, I am here, don't go, stay, please. I try to explain how God is pleading with us to trust, to love, to listen, that God's voice is melody and bass lines and whisper and thunder and grace. Sometimes when I pray, I think of her, how the voice of God was lingering in her very question.

How so many of us just like her, just like me, just like you, are still searching, still questioning, still doubting. I know I don't have all the answers. I know I never will, that sometimes the best thing we can do is put our hands in the middle of our chest, feel the rhythm there, turn down the noise in our minds, in our lives, and whisper, God, whatever you want to say, I'm here, I'm listening.



a submission from Pastor Bailey Heckman

It should surprise no one that I have a favorite brand and style of planner: the Moleskine Weekly Planner XL. I love it so much that it has become a recurring Christmas gift, ensuring I can begin each new year with a fresh, clean planner. When the planner is open, the left-hand page lists the days of the week, neatly divided for meetings and appointments. The right-hand page is a blank, lined space where I jot down to-do lists, miscellaneous notes, and ideas.

In September of 2025, I began adding something new to that right-hand page. Beneath my to-do list, I wrote a single word: Prayers.

Throughout the week, people share prayer requests with me. This happens in staff meetings, Bible studies, after worship, and casual conversations in the office. For the past five months, my practice has been to write those names down in my planner. Each new week brings a new list—grief, diagnoses, strained relationships, job uncertainty, gratitude, hope.

As Lent approaches, I find myself wanting to do more than just write these prayers down. It becomes far too easy to list names and then move on to the next thing. Too often, the list sat quietly beneath my to-do items, overshadowed by deadlines and emails. Lent invites us to slow down and pay attention. So my intention for this season is simple and specific: to return to these names each day, even briefly; to pause before moving on. I want to let prayer interrupt my productivity. Instead of prayers living quietly at the bottom of my planner page, I want them to shape how I begin and end my day, trusting that even a few intentional moments of prayer matter.

I started this intentional practice last week, and what I noticed almost immediately was how easy it was to write the word Prayers and how much harder it was to actually slow down and pray. What opened up for me, though, was an awareness of how prayer resists efficiency. Prayer is not something you can rush.

During Lent, this practice feels especially fitting. Lent invites us to slow down and to tell the truth about our lives. These prayer requests stood in stark contrast to my to-do list. These prayers were not for me to answer, to fix, to resolve. I had to learn to be present in them and ultimately, hand them over to God's faithful care.

Jesus himself often withdrew to pray, not to escape the world's needs, but to remain rooted in God while engaging them. This practice of written prayer has become healing, not because it changes circumstances, but because it changes me. It reminds me that I am not alone, that God is already present in every name on that list. It reminds me that faithfulness in prayer often looks small and quiet, like returning, again and again, to the names entrusted to me. And it reminds me that prayer is not about fixing what is broken, but about trusting that God meets us in the midst of it.



a submission from Pastor Stephanie Templin Ashford

The Gulf War broke out in August of 1990. I can remember sitting at the dining room table with my family. The news was on the television, and when the war was announced, my mother, who had lost many friends during Vietnam, stormed away from the table in tears. She had a teenage son, and she immediately feared that he would be drafted.

When things are out of our control, it often feels as though there is nothing we can do. Certainly, I, as a teenage girl, did not understand the enormity of war or how it could potentially impact my family. I did not have a personal memory of war, and we were not a military-focused family.

It wasn't long after the announcement that our national church issued a call to fasting and prayer for the end of the war.

The denomination invited everyone who was inclined to participate to commit to eating only bread and water every Friday until the war ended. It seemed like the least that I could do. It was the first time I had really heard of fasting. I put on my yellow ribbon and began packing my simple meals each Friday.

What followed was fascinating to me. Friday is a common day for lunch dates and a common evening for pizza or parties. I sat faithfully with my baguette and water bottle. People regularly asked what I was doing and why. Fasting gave me an opportunity to speak about what I believed—that God desires that his people learn the ways of war no more and that we find ways to be people of peace.

Every time I wanted to eat decadent restaurant meals or indulge in summer Friday evening ice cream, I refrained. By holding back, I was invited to remember that the world is not as God wants it to be. As the educational pamphlets taught me, my hunger and my noticing were God's way of reminding me to turn to him when life is not as I want it to be. I learned in that long season that when I am hungry, I should turn to God. When I feel like I want or need more than the basics, I should depend on God. And when the world feels out of control, I should remember to trust the One who is always in control.

I can't say I fasted every Friday or remembered every meal, but I remember the fear in my family and in the world. And I remember that my church taught me to turn to God in a new way—one that opened my eyes to simplicity, hunger, and a desire for something more than pizza Fridays.



from 1st Century Christian Monk by John Cassian

Let us not believe that an external fast from visible food alone can possibly be sufficient for perfection of heart and purity of body unless with it there has also been united a fast of the soul. For the soul also has its foods that are harmful. Slander is its food and indeed one that is very dear to it. A burst of anger also supplies it with miserable food for an hour and destroys it as well with its deadly savor. Envy is food of the mind, corrupting it with its poisonous juices and never ceasing to make it wretched and miserable at the prosperity and success of another. Vanity is its food which gratifies the mind with a delicious meal for a time but afterward strips it clear and bare of all virtue. Then vanity dismisses it barren and void of all spiritual fruit. All lust and shift wanderings of heart are a sort of food for the soul, nourishing it on harmful meats but leaving it afterwards without a share of its heavenly bread and really solid food. If then, with all the powers we have, we abstain from these in a most holy fast our observance of the bodily fast will be both useful and profitable.

Reflection Questions

- When I think about fasting, do I primarily focus on food, or do I also consider the condition of my heart?
- What “foods” has my soul been consuming lately — slander, comparison, resentment, self-promotion, distraction?
- Which of these inner habits feels most familiar or most tempting to me right now?

Lenten Practice:

Choose one interior “food” to fast from this week (for example: gossip, complaining, comparison, self-criticism). Each time you feel the urge, pause and pray, “Lord, feed me with what truly satisfies.”



a submission from Pastor Bailey Heckman

One of my most meaningful experiences with fasting was during a 30 Hour Famine. If you've never heard of it before, the 30 Hour Famine was an event church groups would hold, typically with their youth. For 30 hours, the group would fast as a way of stepping, in some small way, into the reality of hunger that millions of people lived with every single day. During the event, you were meant to fast, learn about global hunger, serve in the community, pray, and raise money to help fight food insecurity around the world.

My home church never sponsored a 30 Hour Famine. In fact, I had never even heard of it until I was interning at a church in New Jersey during seminary. I was working with their youth group, and every year they held a 30 Hour Famine.

The idea was simple. Teens would stop eating after lunch on Friday. For the next 30 hours, we would only drink water. They would come to the church that evening, roll out sleeping bags in classrooms, and try (unsuccessfully) to sleep. On Saturday, we would head out for a service project, spend time learning about global hunger, and talk honestly about what it means to live in a world where some people have more than enough and others never do. Then, on Saturday night, we would break the fast together with worship, communion, and finally, joyfully, a delicious dinner together.

For the first several hours, every rumble in my stomach was a meaningful reminder that for many around the world, hunger was not a once-a-year, voluntary spiritual exercise. It was a daily, involuntary reality.

The trouble came the next morning. No coffee. No breakfast. Fifteen tired, hungry teenagers. We finished our service project, but by midday, my head began to throb. I tried to ignore it. I told myself it was part of the experience. But I also knew I was responsible for these students. I needed to be present, patient, and clear-headed. Instead, I was distracted by the pounding in my temples, and all I wanted to do was go home.

So I did what I swore I wouldn't do. I snuck off into a storage closet, ate a granola bar, and took some Advil. I remember feeling terrible, not just physically, but morally. I had "failed." I hadn't made it the full 30 hours. And yet, I walked back out to the group, able to think clearly again and lead the remainder of the retreat.

Looking back now, more than fifteen years later, I still think about that moment, but not nearly as much as I remember what the whole weekend did in me. Even with my moment of weakness, the experience stretched my understanding. It deepened my empathy.

In the end, we still raised funds to help fight hunger. We still taught the teens. We still shared communion and broke bread together. The purpose of the fast was never about proving our endurance. It was about awareness. About solidarity. About allowing discomfort to open our hearts.

I've come to believe that when we choose a fast, whether from food, social media, noise, or something else entirely, the goal isn't perfection. We cannot let our moments of weakness have the final word. The invitation is toward effort, toward intentional sacrifice, toward making space for God to meet us in our discomfort. And sometimes, even a granola bar in a closet can't undo that.



a quote from Catherine Doherty

Lent is a time of going very deeply into ourselves... What is it that stands between us and God? Between us and our brothers and sisters? Between us and life, the life of the Spirit? Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out, without a moment's hesitation.

Reflection Questions

- What currently stands between me and God? Is it distraction, fear, resentment, busyness, pride, or something else?
- What stands between me and the people closest to me?
- Is there a wound I am protecting that is keeping me from deeper love?

Lenten Practice: Remove One Barrier

Choose one small but real obstacle in your spiritual life — perhaps scrolling late at night, chronic lateness to prayer, harsh self-talk, or avoiding worship. For the next seven days, deliberately remove or interrupt that pattern. Replace it with a simple prayer: "Clear the way, Lord."



from **Christianity for Dummies** by **Richard Wagner**

Although modern man thrives on the idea of being independent, beholden to no one, fasting helps you put the facts in the proper perspective. It's easy to believe in your independence with a full stomach, but when you start to feel hunger pains in your belly after missing a meal or two, you awaken to your body's dependency on food to survive. Fasting reveals a physical reliance on food that points to the ultimate dependency — the fact that you're dependent on God for things far more important than food.

Reflection Questions

- In what areas of my life do I most value independence?
- When do I resist relying on others — or on God?
- How does physical hunger change my awareness of my own limits?
- What does fasting reveal about my neediness?

Lenten Practice: The Prayer of Need

Each time you feel physical hunger during a fast, pause and pray:

“Lord, I need You.”

Do not elaborate. Do not perform. Simply acknowledge your dependence. Let hunger become a bell that calls you back to trust. Over time, allow this simple prayer to extend beyond mealtimes — into moments of stress, decision-making, or fatigue.



a submission from Dave Callans, head of Worship & Music Committee

For my spiritual practice I chose fasting, on a day that I would end my fast with celebration with my small group. I was encouraged when Pastor Stephanie pointed out that each time she was hungry when fasting, it provided a prompt to pray. This closeness made me focus on the weakness of my humanity and emphasized my need to rely on God. My other realization was the end of my fast with my friends, with whom I share food and, more importantly, many things.

*O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips.
(Psalm 63:1–5)*



a quote from David Gushee

Fasting is about doing something embodied rather than having a faith that's merely cognitive or spiritual. It's about getting better at keeping promises to God and also to others. It's about submitting to the wisdom and tradition of the Church rather than going it alone. It's about tightening up discipline in one area, which may prove salutary in other areas as well. And in some pitifully small way it's about taking upon oneself, as an expression of gratitude, some very small measure of sacrifice, in response to the total self-sacrifice of Jesus in his life and on the Cross.

Reflection Questions

- Is my faith primarily something I think about, or something I practice with my body and daily habits?
- What promises have I made to God that I struggle to keep?
- How does fasting train me in faithfulness in small things?

Lenten Practice: Keep One Small Promise

Choose one small, specific commitment for the remainder of Lent — something realistic and concrete (for example: abstaining from a certain food on designated days, praying before every meal, refraining from unnecessary purchases, or setting aside a fixed amount for almsgiving).

Keep it faithfully.

Not dramatically.

Not perfectly.

But steadily.

Let the practice train your heart in promise-keeping — not to earn God's love, but to respond to it.



a submission from Ariana DuPont, organist

When I heard the theme Habits That Heal, my first thought was that I probably have too many habits that need healing. So instead of trying to fix them one by one, I chose meditation - hoping it might reset my mind and prepare the ground for whatever healing may come. For one week, I meditated daily, once a day, usually in the evenings. I had no particular ambition, I simply wanted to sit still long enough to sense God's presence - or at least to notice how difficult that can be.

I chose one verse to stay with me: *"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."* (**Exodus 14:14**)

It sounded manageable. It was not.

Impressions From Day One: The Urge to Help God

The first day I discovered how quickly I try to assist the Almighty. I lay down and repeated the line slowly. "The Lord will fight for you." Thoughts immediately started occurring. Solutions to conversations. Revisions of past arguments. Imaginary victories. Apparently, I am quite willing to let God fight, as long as I may supervise. The command to be still revealed how addicted I am to managing outcomes.

I would not call the first three days successful. But I did notice something humbling: most of my inner battles are self-appointed.

Impressions From Day Four: The Body Knows

On the fourth day, neck and shoulder pain entered the conversation. I had no other strategy, so I began with tightening the muscle gently, breathed into it, imagining God's love flushing through it. For a moment, there was no other thoughts to manage - only pain. When the body was busy, the mind softened. I began to notice how often thoughts arrive already carrying tension.

Grace, apparently, can travel through muscle.

Reflection

So, I remain a beginner, awkward and often distracted. But for the moments I lie down, follow the muscle, follow the breath, I am grateful. Grateful for the absurdity, grateful for the tension, grateful for the presence of God, the one that never asks me to be perfect.



passages from *Eat This Book* by Eugene Peterson

The Christian life is not a quiet, orderly progression through a curriculum of spiritual disciplines, but rather a succession of crises that require us to rethink what we are doing, to learn something new about God, and to discover something new about ourselves.

Meditation is not a way of getting rid of our thoughts; it is a way of attending to God through words, letting Scripture shape our imagination so that we live more fully into God's reality than our own.

Reflection Questions:

- Do I tend to approach Scripture as something to understand quickly, or something to dwell with slowly?
- What happens inside me when I resist the urge to rush, skim, or "move on" from a passage of Scripture?
- Where in my life do I feel fragmented or scattered — and how might meditating on God's word help bring coherence?
- What would it mean for Scripture to shape my imagination, not just my opinions or beliefs?

Lenten Practice: Staying with the Word

Choose one short passage of Scripture — a single verse or even a few words — and stay with it for the remainder of Lent.

Each day:

- Read it slowly.
- Read it aloud if you can.
- Allow a moment of silence before and after.

Resist the urge to analyze or explain.

Notice which words linger, comfort, or unsettle you.

When your attention wanders, gently return to the text.

This practice is not about insight or productivity, but presence — trusting that God's word, like water near a tree's roots, does its quiet work over time.



from Christian Meditation by James Finley

You may feel that you have a long way to go before realizing the degree of habitual meditative awareness of oneness with God exemplified by the great mystics. But the intention of your heart that motivates you to read this book bears witness that a transformative journey, not of your own making, is already underway. Imagine that you go to the ocean, take off your shoes and socks, and wade in ankle-deep. It's true that you are in only ankle-deep, but it's also true that you are in the ocean. If you bend down, touch your fingertips to the water, then touch them to your tongue, you taste salt. You feel the wind in your face. You look out at the horizon where the waterline meets the sky. You look down the shoreline. You feel the water about your ankles and, yes, you are in the ocean. In order to get in deeper, you simply need to move forward, and it will get plenty deep soon enough. Awakening the spiritual path is like this. We have but to remain humbly open to the first stirrings of our journey into God, and our journey will, in God's good time, get plenty deep, soon enough.

Actually, it's more mysterious than that. Imagine a man and woman who, even in the beginning of their relationship, loved each other very much. Over the course of many years, their love, in the midst of countless ups and downs, continues to grow even deeper.

And yet it's also true that love itself did not get any deeper for all that. From all eternity, love is abysslike. From the very first moment love stirred within them, they were already in water over their heads. It is not that love got deeper, but rather that their awareness of and response to the abyss-like nature of love grew deeper. This is how it always is with us spiritually. It isn't as if, in journeying forward, we move into a deeper presence of God, for the presence of God is already infinitely deep. Rather, by moving forward, we become ever more deeply aware of the abyss-like presence of God in our lives.

To practice meditation as an act of religious faith is to open ourselves to the endlessly reassuring realization that our very being and the very being of everyone and everything around us is the generosity of God. For God is creating us in the present moment, loving us into being, such that our very presence in the present moment is the manifested presence of God. We meditate that we might awaken to this unitive mystery, not just in meditation, but in every moment of our lives.

This is how Christ lived. Whether he was seeing a child crawling up into his lap or a leper wanting to be healed; whether he was seeing a prostitute or his own mother; whether he was seeing the joy of a wedding feast or the sorrow of loved ones weeping at the burial of a loved one; whether he was seeing his own disciples or his executioners--he saw God. We meditate that we might learn to see through Christ's eyes the divine mystery of all that surrounds us.



a submission from Judy Cronise, Clerk of Session**Meditating on a scripture**

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Peace I leave. (John 14:27)

I get up early. I always have. I like the early morning quiet and solitude. I chose this passage for the phrase "let not your heart be troubled". I am feeling troubled at this season of my life. I sit in my living room, and the moon is full when I start. The house is flooded with light reflected off the snow. I noticed that due to the ice on top of the snow, there are none of the usual animal tracks that would have been in the snow. It is just smooth. I am reminded of a rhyme my mother used to say at the New Year. "The New Year is like a freshly fallen snow, be careful how your footsteps go."

So I read my verse and sit quietly. This is a challenge for me. So many thoughts come rushing into my mind. Peace I give to you. I think this is a time to settle down. Jesus is offering peace to me, not as the world gives, but the inner peace only Jesus can give. I am troubled, but with this peace, I have a gift, a choice to make. How will I respond to my troubled thoughts?

I look out at the smooth snow day after day and re-read my verse and let it become a part of me. It seeps into my soul and fills me with peace, and although I am troubled, I am at peace. I am afraid, but not frantic. The smooth snow offer me time to be still and let Jesus enter and guide me. Jesus will guide my steps and be with me. Peace I leave.



a submission from **Bill Stauffer, Ministry Associate**

*Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.*

Meditation, in general, often carries a bit of a “woo” reputation—amorphous, self-emptying repetition of a nonsense syllable. But the image we get from Psalm 1:1–3 is decidedly different. To avoid the pitfalls of bad behavior and cynicism, it’s not enough simply to approve of the word of God; you must delight in it—and spend a lot of time with it. Why? What does that accomplish? The answer is in the imagery.

You are the tree, and the stream is the word of God, flowing up through your roots—your heart, mind, and soul—to produce a crop that lasts. This tree does not end up like the wicked or the mockers mentioned earlier (keep reading into verse 5 to see where they land). This is a process—a sip-of-water-at-a-time kind of process. Practically speaking, it means spending long stretches of time with short bits of Scripture so that the lasting character you desire can actually take root.

So, meditation requires time—and a willingness to be repetitive. It means reading the same words again and again to uncover meaning upon meaning. For instance:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

“The” signals a unique and specific LORD. “LORD” is in all caps—why is that? “My shepherd”—what are the qualities of a shepherd, and how might that shepherd apply them personally to me?

You see where this is going? By breaking the sentence into its component parts, you expand the meaning of the whole passage. And by setting aside time and attention for the task, you’ve effectively blocked out competing thoughts and influences. Your steady sips from the water of the word of God begin to fill you up. And when you go to live out your faith, you do so nourished by what your meditation has produced.

Meditation is a practice, meaning you will get better at it over time, but only if you take the first step now, and that first step can be a simple prayer: “God, please give me a love for your word, and the patience to spend extra time with it. Help me to drink you in. Amen.”



a submission from Amanda White, Business Admin**Entering Lent: A Practice of Prayerful Allowing**

I had a hard time choosing which Lenten practice to commit to this year. At first, I felt drawn to fasting; it seemed, somehow, like the most noble option. But as I reflected on it more, my heart kept being gently nudged in a different direction: toward meditation, or more precisely, prayerful stillness.

For nearly twenty years, my relationship with meditation has been evolving. In some seasons, I can sit quietly with very little resistance, resting easily in God's presence. In other seasons, my inner world feels loud and relentless, a rushing current of thoughts that makes even getting through the day feel overwhelming. Right now, I am unmistakably in one of those roaring seasons. To-do lists are multiplying, internal pressure is mounting, and self-doubt is no longer subtle. It feels, then, like exactly the right time to return to prayerful meditation; to sit still before God, loosen the grip on some of my worry, and truly tend to what is happening within.

Recently, I've been listening to a theologian who speaks about a faith-based practice of allowing as a posture of trust, offering the opportunity to reframe how we meet our circumstances. They describe this posture like a stream. When the inner landscape is well tended and rooted in faith, the stream flows freely, carrying forward light, possibility, and nourishment both to itself and to everything around it. But when that inner tending is neglected, the stream becomes scarce and narrows to a trickle. Fear replaces trust, and anxiety about doing and being all of the things crowds out the quiet confidence that faith brings.

As we enter the season of Lent, I find myself wondering about the moments of solitude Jesus may have sought before his death and resurrection. I wonder about the weight he carried on his heart, the prayers he whispered, the courage he gathered in those quiet hours alone with God. What sustained him? What strength was restored in stillness?

As I reunite with my meditation practice this Lent, I will hold Jesus at the very center of it, anchoring myself in the steady, never-ending stream of God's love and protection. A stream that does not dry up when the waters rise, but carries us through. As Isaiah reminds us:

*"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."* (Isaiah 43:2)

May this season be one of returning to stillness, to trust, and to the God who meets us there.



a submission from Pastor Stephanie Templin Ashford

When I started my position here at TMPC, I was overwhelmed by the confluence of the pandemic, meeting a congregation remotely, understanding the tasks of my new position and organizing all of the things I wanted to accomplish. It felt as though no matter how hard I worked, I could not keep up. In a leadership podcast, the presenter suggested working during the earliest hours of the morning. He offered that it was quiet, there were no distractions and your mind could be clear. I began rising early and beginning work at 5:00 AM. I kept this practice for several months while I found my way. Eventually I didn't need to put in those hours so early, but I felt God nudging me not to give up the quiet hour and so I began to use that time to meditate and pray.

Most mornings, I sit in the quiet and I meditate on an image given to me by a spiritual director. The image is that there are many boats by the water. Your mind hops from boat to boat. Each boat represents a task that you have to accomplish. There is no end to the boats. The invitation is to stand on the edge of one of the boats and dive off into the deep water. To spend some time in the deep, knowing there are many boats waiting for you, but trusting that God is taking care of them while you search for something deeper.

This introductory meditation gave way to many other forms of focusing my thoughts, trusting that God is in control and learning to rest in his goodness and his Word.

That meditation time is sacred to me now. I was never an early riser before, but now, sometimes I repeat a scripture over and over. Sometimes I work through some old prayer patterns, and sometimes I spend an hour in praise of all that God has done for me. But, without the anchor of prayer, meditation and quiet, my whole day is unsettled and lacks peace.

What I am trying to say is this: whether you tend to overwork, struggle to quiet your mind, feel unsure how to begin, or believe you simply do not have time to be with God, the gift of carving out even a short, sustained space to attend solely to God far outweighs the sacrifice it requires.



Reflecting on 1 Kings 19:3–13 & Luke 5:15–16

Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you." He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds were gathering to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. Meanwhile, he would slip away to deserted places and pray.



Reflecting on Exodus 16:22–30 & Mark 2:23–28

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.'" So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none."

On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. The Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? See! The Lord has given you the sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day." So the people rested on the seventh day.

One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."



Reflecting on Exodus 34:27-35 & Matthew 4:1-11

The Lord said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face, but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off until he came out, and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining, and Moses would put the veil on his face again until he went in to speak with him.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'

and 'On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.' "

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.



Matthew 2:1-11

And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth'phage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If any one says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

*"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on an ass,
and on a colt, the foal of an ass."*

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon. Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."

Reflection:

The week begins with a celebration. Cloaks on the road. Branches in the air. "Hosanna!" on every lip. The crowd is electric with hope. At last, a king who will make things right. But even here, the tone is complicated. Jesus does not arrive on a warhorse but on a borrowed donkey. This is not triumph as the world defines it. This is humility. This is peace.

Palm Sunday reminds us how quickly we can misunderstand what kind of Savior we want. We long for victory without surrender, glory without sacrifice, resurrection without a cross. As Holy Week begins, we walk with open eyes. We wave our branches — and we prepare our hearts.

Prayer:

Humble King, you enter our lives gently, not with force but with love.

Save us from expecting you to conquer in the ways we prefer.

Teach us to follow you on the road that leads through surrender to true life.

Hosanna in the highest. Amen.



John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Laz'arus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Laz'arus was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii[a] and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Reflection:

Before the shouting crowds, there was a quiet act of devotion. Mary kneels. She breaks open the costly perfume. She anoints Jesus' feet. The fragrance fills the house. It is extravagant. It is intimate. It is misunderstood.

Holy Week invites us into this kind of love. A love that is not calculating, not cautious, not concerned with appearances. Mary sees what others cannot yet see: that love sometimes looks like pouring everything out.

What would it mean to offer Jesus something costly this week? Time. Attention. Forgiveness. Trust. The fragrance of such love lingers long after the moment passes.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are worthy of our devotion. Where we have been cautious with our love, soften us. Where we have held back, loosen our grip. Receive what we offer you this week; however small, however imperfect. Amen.



Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Reflection:

In the final days before his death, Jesus speaks plainly. “I was hungry, and you gave me food... I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.”

Holy Week is not only about remembering what happened to Jesus. It is about recognizing where he is now. He is present in the vulnerable. In the overlooked. In the inconvenient need that interrupts our day. The road to the cross runs straight through our neighbor. As the shadow of Good Friday grows nearer, Jesus reminds us: Love is never abstract. It has hands and feet.

Prayer:

Compassionate Christ, open our eyes to see you in the faces around us. Interrupt our comfort with holy compassion. Give us the courage to serve you in the least, the lost, and the forgotten. Amen.



Matthew 26:14-16

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Reflection:

It is a short and chilling passage. Judas agrees to betray Jesus. Thirty pieces of silver. A quiet arrangement in the shadows.

Holy Week does not ignore the reality of betrayal. It does not pretend that faithfulness is easy. Even among the twelve, there is a fracture. We may prefer to skip this day, but perhaps we shouldn't.

Where have we compromised what we know is right? Where have we chosen convenience over courage? Where have we turned away when following felt costly? Yet even here, grace is moving. Jesus is not surprised. God's redeeming work is not undone by human failure.

Prayer:

Merciful God, You know our hearts better than we do. Where we have betrayed love in small or quiet ways, forgive us. Draw us back from the shadows into your light. Hold us fast when we are tempted to turn away. Amen.



John 13:1-17

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "You are not all clean."

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant [c] is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Reflection:

On the night before his death, Jesus kneels. He washes the dusty, tired, ordinary feet of his disciples. The Lord becomes a servant. Power takes the shape of humility. "This is my commandment," he says. "Love one another."

Holy Week narrows here. The kingdom of God looks like a towel and a basin. It looks like bread broken and a cup shared. It looks like love that stoops low. Before the cross, there is this: an invitation to embody the same love we have received.

Prayer:

Servant Savior, You kneel before us in love. Teach us to kneel for one another. Make our lives living reminders of your self-giving grace. May we love as you have loved us. Amen.



John 19:16-30

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Gol'gotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfil the scripture,

*"They parted my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."*

So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag'dalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst." A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reflection:

The sky darkens. The crowd watches. The cross stands still. "It is finished."

Good Friday does not rush past suffering. It does not explain it away. It allows us to sit at the foot of the cross and feel the weight of love poured out completely. Here we see both the depth of human cruelty and the deeper reach of divine mercy. We come today not with easy answers but with quiet reverence. Love has gone all the way to the cross.

Prayer:

Crucified Lord, We stand beneath your cross in silence. For the ways we contribute to brokenness, forgive us. For the weight we carry, hold us. For the love you have shown us, we thank you. Amen.



Matthew 27:57-66

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.

Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the sepulchre secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Reflection:

Silence. Jesus is in the tomb. The stone is sealed. The disciples wait in grief and confusion. The guards take their place outside the tomb.

Holy Saturday is the day in between; between promise and fulfillment, between heartbreak and hope. We know this space. The waiting. The unanswered prayer. The ache that lingers. This day reminds us that even when nothing seems to be happening, God is not absent. Even in stillness, redemption is unfolding.

We wait, but we wait not without hope.

Prayer:

God of the in-between, meet us in our waiting. When we feel sealed inside uncertainty, remind us that you are still at work. Give us patient trust in the quiet. Amen.



John 20:1-18

Now on the first day of the week Mary Mag'dalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rab-bo'ni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Mag'dalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Reflection:

At first, Mary thinks he is the gardener. Resurrection is not recognized immediately. It comes through tears and confusion until Jesus speaks her name, "Mary."

And everything changes. Easter is not only a historical event. It is the persistent declaration that death does not win. That love is stronger. That new life is possible, even now. Christ is risen. And he still calls us by name.

Prayer:

Risen Lord, call us again into life. Where we have settled for despair, awaken hope. Where we feel buried, roll away the stone. Help us live as resurrection people, today and always. Amen.



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You're welcome to use it for notes, reflections, prayers, or whatever emerges
along the way.



Habits that Heal

*practices for
spiritual formation*

