



LENT *GUIDE*

2023

INTRODUCTION

MAKING THE MOST OF *LENT*

Because of our society's historical overlap between religion and culture, there is a fairly common, though fadingly so, understanding of sacred Christian holidays. For instance, Christmas and Easter are very common culturally observed holidays that are explicitly Christian. And for the historic Christian calendar, Christmas and Easter (the seasons of Advent and Lent) are the primary anchors of time around which the entire calendar revolves.

So what if there was a way to leverage these culturally relevant holidays in such a way that:

- 1. Enabled us to be formed by Jesus Christ on a deeper level, and*
- 2. Empowered followers of Jesus to communicate the message of Jesus to those who don't follow Him?*

We have an opportunity for personal transformation and communion with Christ, and we have opportunities to engage on mission with our neighbors through these common holidays.

WHAT IS *LENT*?

The first day of Lent is known as Ash Wednesday. It marks the first of 46 days leading up to Easter in which followers of Jesus intentionally walk into a wilderness of sort in order to fast from the things of this world that vie for our attention and affection. Lent is a season of fasting from lesser things that we tend to love in our lives, in order to feast on Christ, whose love is better than life (Psalm 63:3).

This season of fasting is for the purpose of preparing our hearts for Resurrection Sunday (Easter), which is set apart to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, on which the entire message of the gospel hinges. We fast, in part, to mirror Jesus' season of fasting in the wilderness after he was baptized by John the Baptizer and before he began his public ministry (Matthew 4:1-17, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13). In this way, the Lenten season can be incredibly formational for followers of Jesus as we set ourselves apart to feast on Christ supremely and in an extraordinary fashion.

LIVING EXPRESSIONS

This season of Lent also positions us to be a living, breathing, talking expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who need it. Because fasting from the common things we usually participate in is so unusual, the way we relate to those around us will be unusual as well. If we're fasting from TV and social media, we won't be able to join in on the conversations at work about the latest episode or meme. That will give us an opportunity to explain why and, ultimately, point to Jesus.

Observing Lent can be both personally and missionally transformative.

This season, we will consider fasting from lesser loves in order to seek and rest in Christ's love more fully. We will leverage this opportunity to invite people who don't know Jesus into conversations about our decisions to observe Lent, follow Christ, and how we are being transformed by Him.

HOW TO USE *THIS GUIDE*

Starting with Ash Wednesday, this guide will take us day by day through the season of Lent until Resurrection Sunday. Each day has a morning and evening reflection, with the mornings being more robust and the evenings consisting of a simple Scripture and a short prayer.

SUNDAYS: PRACTICING CONFESSION *TOGETHER*

This guide is designed to be your companion as we gather together for Worship on Sundays as well. Each week starts on Sunday, and we will be invited to practice both corporate and personal confession and to receive forgiveness during the worship gathering. Bring your guide with you week-by-week as we participate in the season of Lent together as one family in Christ.

MORNING AND *EVENING PORTIONS*

Each portion begins with two minutes of silence and stillness before God. Each morning portion ends with two additional minutes of silence and stillness as well. There is tremendous value in slowing down and being silent and still before God. Prayer in the language of the Bible is mostly listening, with some talking. This daily time of silence is aimed at helping us discern the voice of God as we steep in the Scriptures and listen for his voice.

This takes a lot of practice, so give yourself plenty of grace if you are not accustomed to this ancient spiritual practice. There's nothing inherently holy about silence. It is the God we encounter in that silence that makes all the difference. In Scripture, the Lord has invited us to be still and to know that he is God. Let us respond to that invitation with all the faith we can muster. He will meet us there.

BEING EMOTIONALLY *PRESENT*

At the beginning of each morning portion, you'll notice the question, "Describe how are you feeling today (feel free to reference the Feelings Chart in Appendix ?)". During this season of Lent, if you choose to embark on a fast of some sort and invest in the daily portions of Scripture and prayer, you will likely experience unique discomforts and emotions. We are more than brains with bodies. We are human beings made of heart, soul, mind, and body. This guide is designed to engage us at every level of the human experience. Taking time to write out however we are feeling is a part of learning to love God with all our heart.

FASTING

Each week, there will be a new suggested fast. You are invited to do one of three things with this suggestion:

1. Fast from only that thing for the week and switch to another one the next week.
2. Add each week's fast to the last one thereby ending Lent fasting from multiple things at once.
3. Modify the fasts to fit your own desires and convictions.

Things to keep in mind while you fast: Be prepared to feel a little restless, irritable, and sometimes outright miserable. When we choose to go without things we are used to, our whole selves will tend to revolt as we experience a form of detox. In this way, we identify with the Lord Jesus as he fasted for 40 days in the wilderness. And in this discipline of fasting, we are invited not only to give something up but to replace the time and energy typically spent on those things with time in God's presence praying and meditating on Scripture.

WEEKLY SUGGESTED FASTS

1 Social Media and the Internet (for entertainment)

2 Television & Movies

3 Sleep (*i.e. an hour less in the evening or in the morning*)

4 Caffeine and sweets

5 Shopping for non-essential items

6 Food (*choose a kind of food from which to abstain, if this is a healthy and wise option*)

PRELUDE

ASH WEDNESDAY

CONFESSION

REFLECTION

DAY 1: DUST TO DUST

THURSDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“You return man to dust and say, ‘Return, O children of man!’ For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.”
Psalm 90:3-6

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

THE SEASON of Lent is a confrontation with our own mortality. In Genesis 3:19, God tells Adam that he is made from dust and to dust he shall return. This is true of our first parents, and it is true of us. Thousands of years later, Moses is standing before the people of God and inviting them to sing this same reminder to one another and to God, who returns man to dust.

How could this be a good thing to remember? Why would it be holy to confront our own mortality? Moses helps us see that it is only in confronting our own limits that we can truly see God for who he is—limitless—and experience true flourishing. From the beginning, God made us with gracious limits. But our tendency has always been to try and go beyond them. We work too much (or too little), eat too much (or too little), we overindulge in sex or substance, we act as if we can play God in our lives all the time.

We need Lent. We need to be reminded that we are not God. But God himself is in his Holy Temple, and he alone is worthy to occupy that place. Not only is he alone worthy, but he himself came to live among us, and to embrace our human limits and even submitted to crucifixion—all for our sake. Not only is no one like God, he loves us more than we could ever dream.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What is it like for me to consider my own mortality?

In what ways do I tend to ignore my limits?

PRAYER:

Our Father in Heaven, may your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? If then you're not able to do even a little thing, why worry about the rest? Luke 12:25-26

PRAYER:

Lord God, I am only human. Help me to come to grips with my humanity and revel in my own limits. I cannot be everywhere, do everything, and fix everything. Only you can do that. Help me to rest easy, knowing that you provide what we need, when we need it. Carry me through the night by your grace and wake me refreshed by your love. Amen.

DAY 2: TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

FRIDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” *Psalm 90:12*

“For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.” *Psalm 90:9-10*

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

All throughout the Psalms and Proverbs, we are taught that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Surely, we are meant to hear that as an invitation to see God for who he truly is—God Almighty, outside of time and space. He dwells in all eternity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has made all things, and all things find their purpose in him.

There is a tremendously wide expanse between the nature of the Creator and the nature of the Created. However, somehow, Eve and Adam listened to the Deceiver in the Garden when he told them they could be like God, knowing good and evil. Somehow, he convinced these first humans that God limited them because he despised them. They believed God was keeping things from them. And this same suspicion of God haunts our very own hearts today.

There isn't a person alive who is born believing God has their best interest in mind. We believe all sorts of things are possible when we're young and innocent. But we treat our parents and caregivers as hostiles when they forbid us to run with sharp objects or place our hand in the fire. We want what we want, and easily believe that no one who loves us could keep us from having that which we love.

But when we see that our days are numbered—at most 80 years the Psalmist says—we come to grips with our inability to really know what is best for our own selves. Only God truly has that divine wisdom. Oh, if only our first parents could have seen this. If only we could by faith receive it—God really does have our best interest in mind. And ignoring him really does steal from us and others.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Think about your lifespan. If you live to be 100 years old, how many years would you have left?

Now, work backward from there. How might you live differently, knowing that you will one day breathe your last breath and that only God knows your last day? He will also surely outlive it.

PRAYER:

Our Father in Heaven, may your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

[Jesus] is before all things, and by him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. Colossians 1:19-20

PRAYER:

The end of this day has come. Carry me now into the kind of blissful rest that would come if I could see you holding the world in place by the word of your power. Strengthen me, and my brothers and sisters around the world, as we sleep this day. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

DAY 3: SATISFY US WITH YOUR LOVE

SATURDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!”

Psalms 90:14-17

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

The season of Lent is designed to expose us to the depths of our own sin and desires for lesser loves than God. It is an invitation to empty ourselves of simple pleasures in order to be filled with the satisfying love of God. There is only so much space in our hearts. If too many unworthy loves fill up our attention, then the only way toward freedom is to be emptied. That’s painful. It’s costly. It means losing things we might have thought we needed. But all for the greater gain of knowing the boundless, limitless love of God in Christ Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Is there anything we are clinging to tighter than Christ?

Take a moment to open your hands and out loud, surrender your greatest wants, desires, and loves to the Lord. Give them to him. Ask to be emptied and filled again.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

1 *Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

2 *He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him.*

3 *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him.*

4 *Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.*

5 *But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds.*

6 *We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all.*

7 *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent*

before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.

8 *He was taken away because of oppression and judgment and who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the land of the living; he was struck because of my people's rebellion.*

9 *He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully.*

10 *Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him severely. When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and by his hand, the Lord's pleasure will be accomplished.*

11 *After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities.*

12 *Therefore I will give him the many as a portion, and he will receive the mighty as spoil, because he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.*

Isaiah 53

PRAYER:

Lord, lead me to fast, pray, confess, give, and listen to you this Lenten season. Fill these practices with your Spirit, so that they might work in me a love for you and a freedom from sin that I've never known before. Turn my heart away from religious performance or the rituals of external worship and instead to a radical love for God and my neighbors. This is the fast you would choose. Help me to choose it, too. Amen.

WEEK ONE

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

CONFESSION

REFLECTION

DAY 1: THE GOOD LIFE

MONDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“There was a man in the land of Uz whose name Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil...this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.”
Job 1:1,3

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”
1 John 2:15-17

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

We tend to do what we want to do. Philosophers call this gravitational pull on our desires a telos. A telos is a sort of ultimate dream. Our culture prizes an idealized version of this telos, and we know it as the “American Dream”—our culture’s vision of the “Good Life.” More and better marks the ethos of American life. If one has enough, there’s still more to be desired. If the life one has is good, there is still a better one to be had.

The Governor of Virginia in 1774 noticed the relentless appetite of Americans early on when he said that they “forever imagine the Lands further off are still better than those upon which they are already settled...if they attained Paradise, they would move on if they heard of a better place farther west.” Lands further off are still better. This fundamental belief that there is more and better somewhere else gives way to a pace of life in which one is constantly trying to do better and try harder to attain that Dream.

In the Bible, there was a man named Job who had achieved the kind of life that lives only in most of our imaginations. He had a family he loved, a rich religious life, and wealth beyond compare. He had achieved the Good Life. But in the first words of his story, we see that any version of the Good Life we may hold can vanish in a moment. Job’s dreams died, literally. The same can be true of our versions of the Good Life. What will be left if we never achieve but always strive for our dreams? What would become of us if we did achieve but then lose our dreams of the Good Life, just as Job did? Will our joy in Christ be sturdy enough to withstand such a death?

Today, let us consider our versions of the Good Life—the dream of our preferred futures that drives our thoughts, actions, and emotions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What is my version of the Good Life? What are my dreams for my family, career, health, and wealth?

Dreaming is not a bad thing. It's good to dream. The question we are getting at is "Do I believe God can be trusted with my dreams?"

PRAYER:

Our Father in Heaven, may your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

"Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. Completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge."
Psalm 51:1-4

PRAYER:

Lord God, thank you for all your hand has given me, the good and the difficult things. Nothing has come my way by accident. Help me to see the ways in which I cling too closely to the good things you give and too easily turn against you when they are withheld. As I go without certain things during my fast this week, remind me that you are the one thing without a shelf-life that I can hold to and never be in want. You are the Good Shepherd, and though I may have many other wants, if I have you, I know I have it all. Give me the faith to believe that you are enough. Amen.

DAY 2: WHEN THE EARTH GIVES WAY

TUESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

Psalms 46:1-3

“Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him, a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and turns away from evil. Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing?”

Job 1:8-9

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

When God draws Satan’s attention to the integrity of Job, Satan responds with a fair assumption (Job 1:8-9). Satan accuses Job of only loving God and doing what’s right by his neighbors because of how privileged of a life he leads. Satan suggests that should God remove those good things from his life, Job will curse God to his face. God removes everything holding Job’s very good life together until the man is left with only a few (semi) close friends and his own grief and anguish.

In this place of deep sorrow and loss, Job utters perhaps some of the most well know words in all of the Scriptures: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,” Job 1:21. What we do, say, feel, and think when the bottom falls out of our lives reveals what we truly love, worship, and hope in the most. It is only human to grieve the loss of beloved people and things, but there is a grief that exposes our gods, and there is a grief that blesses God even in suffering.

Lent is a season in which followers of Jesus intentionally go without beloved, and even necessary things, for a brief time in order to train our hearts to say, when things are good and when things are severely difficult, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Now is the time to train our hearts to love the Lord, in the good and in the bad days. Because he is our true refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What might those beloved things in my life be, which, if lost, might feel as if I've lost more than I can stand? What might that say about their place in my life versus God's place in my life?

Can God be trusted with those people and things that I love the most?

PRAYER:

Please, Lord God, be my strength. I am so very prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. I'm prone to leave the God I love. Remind me today, Lord, of your steadfast love which is better than life itself. Teach my heart to love you more than anything else. Should I be in peril or in great comfort, I want to say with Job, "Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

"Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me. Surely you desire integrity in the inner self, and you teach me wisdom deep within." Psalm 51:5-6

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, remind me of my never-ending need of your grace moment-by-moment. Let me not be quick to be self-reliant. What is more, remind me of your love, which is never-ending. Let me be all the more quick to remember the gospel, that Jesus Christ is sufficient for what is deficient in me. Amen.

DAY 3: BETTER THAN LIFE

WEDNESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“O God, you are my God; earnestly 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; in your name I will lift up my hands.”

Psalm 63:1-4

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

King David’s son, Absalom, had just led a coup against him and tried to take his father’s throne. David and his warriors went to battle against Absalom and, in the squeamish, Absalom was violently killed. When King David, who had commanded his soldiers to deal gently with his son, heard of Absalom’s death, he was crushed. That day, the bottom fell out of David’s life, and he wept bitterly.

It is in this moment, in this place of mourning and deep sorrow, that David writes Psalm 63. Picture him, alone, weak, broken-hearted, and in the wilderness. He’s physically thirsty and weary, and he sees his physical condition as a clear picture of his spiritual condition: thirsty, hungry, and exhausted.

Though the story of our lives may look very different than King David’s, we have some things in common. Namely, none of us is guaranteed safe and easy passage through life. In reality, we are all one phone call away from some bad news that could forever change our lives. Jesus said to us, “In this life, you will have trouble.” That’s a promise. So, if our hope is in a comfortable, easy, and happy life, we will be marked by disappointment and a shallow love for God when hard times come. Likewise, our joy will be stifled when we experience good days if we feel entitled to them.

When King David says to God, “Your steadfast love is better than life,” he says it through tears and in deep anguish. His dried, cracked lips opened to praise God from a broken heart. This reaction can only come from a life that dwells deeply in God. No shallow religion with only happy days can utter such rich praise from the bottom of the human soul. Lent is about identifying with those like Job, King David, and King Jesus as they suffered in the wilderness and yet found God there, holding tightly to them. Only in the wilderness of suffering can we truly see that the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life itself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What hard times have come recently or are currently in your life? What has been your response to God in those times?

How might the Lord be showing you his steadfast love even now? Consider how you might open yourself up to the Lord, even now, to reveal his love to you afresh and anew.

PRAYER:

O, Lord, teach me how to take both the good days and the bad and still hold fast to you. Teach me the riches of the good news of the gospel, that even when my love grows cold and my heart grows weary, you will hold me fast. Today, show me new depths of your steadfast love, even in my weakness and frailty. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

"Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Turn your face away from my sins and blot out all my guilt." Psalm 51:7-9

PRAYER:

Holy Spirit, search me and know me. Know my every anxious thought, and reveal to me any broken way in me. Expose me to the depths of my sin and to my deep need for you. Then, after these broken bones begin to heal, let me hear again the sound of joy and gladness as I walk in new life. Let me know from experience that your steadfast love is better than life. Amen.

DAY 4: THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF *DEATH* THURSDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”

Psalm 23

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

The season of Lent is an invitation to a deeper confrontation with personal, corporate, and cosmic sin. Among the key practices of this season are confession and silence in prayer, as we ask the Lord to expose the lurking desires and thoughts which would steal our love for God and for our neighbors. This is an invitation to walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Death, after all, is the inevitable consequence of sin. Quite literally, the death of the Son of God is brought about by all of the sin in the world. Sin ruins everything. Trying as hard as we may, no person can ever rescue themselves from their own sin. St. Paul warns us of any attempts to be our own rescue when he says that we are all dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). We need someone alive in their own sinlessness to revive our cold souls. Indeed, Jesus Christ is that savior.

But the great preacher Gardner Taylor warns us of his approach in saving us: “God does not save us by flattering us. He saves us by opposing us.” If we wish to be led from the Valley of the Shadow of Sin and Death, we must come to grips with our native sin which causes all the death in our lives. We must be confronted with our own wickedness, our insufficiency, and our spiritual blindness. In other words, we must see that we are not God. This realization is painful. But it's essential to our own salvation and freedom.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Take a moment to reflect on the areas of your life which are marked by some sort of death, in a figurative sense. Where are there places of lack in your life, places where God says there ought to be life? How has sin, both your own and the sins of others, stolen the fruit of the Spirit from your life (see Galatians 5:22)?

PRAYER:

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who for our sake bore our sin and guilt. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-25

PRAYER:

O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live: Watch over those, both night and day, who work while others sleep, and grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAY 5: THE PATH TO *LIFE*

FRIDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

1 John 1:8-10

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING *TODAY*:

Mature Christians are good at confession and repentance. Consider the author of our Scripture reflection for today. John the Apostle, who walked with Jesus and likely wrote this letter to Christians well into the latter years of his life, uses the first person plural when talking about the present reality of sin in our lives. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves...”

The ongoing ethic of the Christian life is confession, repentance, and restoration. This path leads to life and requires regular confrontations with our own shortcomings. We cannot be like those who cannot stand to deal with their own weaknesses. There is no salvation or freedom there. There is only freedom when God opposes us in our sin and rescues us from it.

We must grow to be good at confession and repentance. For it is there that we will also receive no shortage of grace and mercy to help us in our time of need. Christ’s love for us compelled him to suffer and die for us. Surely, he will not abandon us when we come to him for mercy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Are there any barriers to confession between you and God? Are you generally quick or slow to come to him with your sin?

What does repentance look like in your life? When you confess sin, or the Lord brings conviction, is your response one of guilt and shame, or a godly grief that leads to repentance (turning the other way)?

PRAYER:

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*God, create a clean heart for me
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not banish me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore the joy of your salvation to me,
and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit.
Psalm 51:10-12*

PRAYER:

O Lord, Maker of Heaven and Earth, make us to lie down tonight in rest. The day has come and gone and much has been said and done. We cannot change or erase any second of it. And from the beginning of time, you saw this day; its triumphs and travails. All around the world, the happenings of humanity have gone in a billion directions, and we have been sovereign over absolutely none of it. What has come, is now gone. Bring about the kind of rest which comes from knowing you saw all of it, and yet considered us flimsy people worth bleeding and dying for. Hold us now in the depths of your mercy and love. We surrender to your good care this night as we rest. Amen.

DAY 6: A GOOD DAY

SATURDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

Psalm 130

*Out of the depths I call to you, Lord!
Lord, listen to my voice;*

*let your ears be attentive
to my cry for help.*

*Lord, if you kept an account of iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?*

*But with you there is forgiveness,
so that you may be revered.*

*I wait for the Lord; I wait
and put my hope in his word.*

*I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning—
more than watchmen for the morning.*

*Israel, put your hope in the Lord.
For there is faithful love with the Lord,
and with him is redemption in abundance.*

*And he will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.*

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How has the Lord revealed your need of him this week? Are there any sins to which He has drawn your attention and conviction? How has that made you feel?

What have you discovered about confession and repentance that you had not known or experienced this week?

What dreams or visions of the Good Life has the Lord revealed to you and invited you to surrender to him? Do you sense you are more or less able to trust Him with your dreams?

PRAYER:

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*Then I will teach the rebellious your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Save me from the guilt of bloodshed, God—
God of my salvation—
Psalm 51:13-15*

PRAYER:

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever, and ever. Amen.

WEEK TWO
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

CONFESSION _____

REFLECTION _____

DAY 1: THOSE WHO SUFFER TOGETHER

MONDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.
1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

“Good!” said the foot, when it learned that the hand had recently been broken. “He had it coming. He was full of himself, anyway. We might even be better off without him. Hopefully he’ll learn his lesson. It’s not all about him!”

The thought that one part of our physical body would rejoice at the injury of another part of the body is absurd, indeed. In fact, anyone who has experienced an illness or injury knows quite well that a problem in one part of the body often reverberates throughout the entire body, impacting function across the board. How many of us, though, have secretly rejoiced (maybe even with a Chicago-style “He had it coming!”) or at least found a small sense of satisfaction when we learned about the difficulties of a fellow Christian with whom we disagree or find it hard to get along with?

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul calls Christians “the body” of Christ collectively, with different members serving different purposes, but all united in one interdependent organism. Just like a physical body, then, a problem in one part actually means a problem for the whole; or, in Paul’s words, “If one member suffers, all suffer together...” (1 Cor. 12:26). In a different place, Paul phrases this sentiment more actively: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).

May our hearts experience the love of Jesus today so that we can joyfully and sacrificially embody this command.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In what way(s) might the Lord be calling me to repent of the ways I've responded to the suffering of my brothers and sisters?

With whom might the Lord be calling me to rejoice or weep?

PRAYER:

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace to take to heart the grave dangers we are in through our many divisions. Deliver your Church from all enmity and prejudice, and everything that hinders us from godly union. As there is one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so make us all to be of one heart and of one mind, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and love, that with one voice we may give you praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in everlasting glory. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*Who perceives his unintentional sins?
Cleanse me from my hidden faults.
Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins;
do not let them rule me.
Then I will be blameless
and cleansed from blatant rebellion.
May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.
Psalm 19:12-14*

PRAYER:

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father:
We have sinned against you, through our own fault, in thought, and word, and deed, and in what we have left undone. For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us all our offenses; and grant that we may serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

DAY 2: COMFORTED TO COMFORT

TUESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

Some years ago, highly energized by their recent marriage, a young woman and her husband were excited to start their new family. Month by month, however, the disappointment started to build. Soon, the frustrating months rolled into agonizing years, with no pregnancy to speak of. It wasn't long before the smoldering coals of resentment would impact almost every area of life: relationships, work, identity, and even faith.

Feeling alone and angry, the woman eventually reached out to a couple of friends who were also walking through infertility. They talked about how difficult this journey was. They cried together. They prayed together. They experienced healing together.

Discouraged by the lack of resources for couples working through infertility, and grateful for the healing that she had experienced in community, this woman set out on a mission: to create a space where women could come, share their grief with one another, and experience hope and healing. She was comforted by God, through the Body of Christ (see Monday), and shared that comfort with others. This is what Paul was talking about in today's reading.

In this world, we suffer in many ways. The Good News is that God comes to us in Jesus, who is both the Suffering Servant and Victorious King, to take our suffering and bring it into the life of God. In short, God comforts us in all our affliction. But there's also a purpose to this comfort: that we might offer it to others who are suffering as well.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In what ways am I currently suffering and in need of comfort? To whom is God asking me to reach out, so that I can experience comfort? In what ways has God comforted me?

Who has God brought into my life who needs to experience the comfort that He has given me?

PRAYER:

God of all comfort, we commend to your fatherly goodness all those who are in any ways afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; that it may please you to comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

PRAYER:

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

DAY 3: DISCIPLINE OF *BELONGING*

WEDNESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
Hebrews 10:24-25

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

In the age of technology and consumerism, it's easy to view the Church as a dispenser of religious goods and services. We, the consumer, attend the church that has the music we enjoy and feeds us with the best teaching. We “shop” for the one we like the most. If it stops meeting our needs, we “upgrade” to a new one. Actually, with podcasts and Spotify, we don't even need to go to church anymore; we can have our own personal “church” whenever it's convenient. But what if there's more to church than having my spiritual needs met?

Some early Christians endured great persecution; sometimes so much that people turned away from the faith. That's the context of today's reading, when the writer of Hebrews implored listeners to meet together. Yes, faith is personal...but it's never private. The “we believe” of the Creed is stronger than the “I” of personal faith, especially on the hard days. Bonhoeffer said it this way: “The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure.” We need to gather with each other. Some days, I need the strength of your faith; other days, you need mine.

But the pull of our culture is toward the individual. Thus, many of us have to fight for community. For us, belonging is another “discipline:” a choice to nurture relationships with brothers and sisters that glorify God and build each other up.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What are my attitudes toward gathering in community? Am I tempted to dismiss it as unnecessary? Am I tempted to make an idol of it and neglect the importance of solitude?

What does it look like for me to stir up others to love and good works, meet together, and encourage others? What is the Lord calling me to do in this area?

PRAYER:

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things in heaven and on earth: Mercifully listen to our prayers, and grant that in our local church the pure Word of God may be preached. Strengthen and confirm the faithful; protect and guide the children; visit and relieve the sick; turn and soften the wicked; arouse the careless; recover the fallen; restore the penitent; remove all hindrances to the advancement of your truth; and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church, to the honor and glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*Why are you like a helpless man, like a warrior unable to save?
Yet you are among us, Lord, and we bear your name. Don't leave us!*

*Can any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain?
Or can the skies alone give showers? Are you not the Lord our God?
We therefore put our hope in you, for you have done all these things.
Jeremiah 14:9,22*

PRAYER:

O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live: Watch over those, both night and day, who work while others sleep, and grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAY 4: CULTIVATING SPIRITUAL FAMILY

THURSDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

Colossians 3:12-15

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

The other day, I watched intently as two children (around ages 5 and 8) encountered conflict around a stolen toy. Would it hit the fan? What I heard surprised me. “I’m sorry I took the car,” said the older one. “I accept your apology,” replied the younger, “I forgive you.” As a parent myself, I can declare with confidence that this exchange resulted from years of cultivation. Healthy family dynamics don’t just happen; rather, they are the product of forethought, intentional decisions, and persistence over time.

The New Testament is full of language that describes Christians in family terms. From numerous references to “brothers and sisters” (Gal. 1:2; Col. 1:1-2; James 1:2, etc.), to Paul being a “father in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 4:14) to Jesus’ words: “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:49-50), we see that we now live in a new family, brought into existence through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus...we’re adopted into the family of God!

Pete Scazzero once said, “Jesus may be in your heart, but Grandpa is still in your bones.” He’s saying that entering God’s family doesn’t automatically transform unhealthy patterns that we learned in our earthly families. Instead, he says that most of us need the help of our new family of faith to learn healthier ways of living in this new Kingdom family. May our passage today provide a good starting point.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In what ways (positively and negatively) has my family influenced how I see and relate to others?

Reflecting on the passage, is there a particular word or phrase that the Holy Spirit is calling you to take action on? What is the action, and in what relationship?

PRAYER:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who adopted us into a new family: We commend to your continual care the relationships we now enjoy. Put far from them every root of bitterness, the desire of vainglory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, and godliness. Knit their hearts together in constant affection, and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we may evermore be kindly affectioned one to another; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

“Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. John 8:12

PRAYER:

O God and Father of all, whom the whole heavens adore: let the whole earth also worship you, all nations obey you, all tongues confess and bless you, and men and women everywhere love you and serve you in peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAY 5: ENDURING AFFLICTION TOGETHER: CONFESSION AND PRAYER

FRIDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” James 5:13-16

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

A few years ago, the basketball world was abuzz over a 13-game winning streak by the Portland Trailblazers catalyzed by one player’s confession. Moe Harkless, pouting about his recent demotion from the starting lineup, interrupted practice one day to confess his poor attitude and apologize to his teammates for his sulking behavior. That vulnerable action resulted in forgiveness by his teammates and enhanced team chemistry moving forward.

When we live in community, we will undoubtedly encounter adversity together. One person’s attitudes, actions, and even life difficulties (e.g., illnesses) impact the rest of the group. How we go about dealing with individual and group hardships will influence the health of the community as a whole. Our passage today provides some helpful guidance in establishing a healing community with two key practices: confession and prayer.

In community, people must feel safe enough to confess how they have sinned in thought, word, and deed. When the vulnerability of confession meets the grace-filled, cross-shaped assurance of God’s forgiveness embodied by the community, the result is healing, trust, and an atmosphere of authenticity, where others feel the freedom to drop their pretenses and come to the Lord as they are.

In God’s sovereign wisdom, He has chosen to be present to his people through prayer. Whatever the affliction—physical, emotional, relational, spiritual—we are instructed to bring it to God in prayer, where the Holy Spirit pours the healing love of the Father, through the finished work of Christ, directly into human need.

May we confess and pray!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What are my attitudes about confession? Do I think it's important? Do I practice it?

If not, what fears or doubts are holding me back? Are there any places in my life where I might experience healing through confession?

What is the Lord saying to me about prayer? Are there doubts that I need to acknowledge? Have past experiences with prayer made me hesitant or eager to pray?

What practical steps might I take to live a confessional and prayerful life?

PRAYER:

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

PRAYER:

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

Amen.

DAY 6: BEARING EACH OTHER'S BURDENS

SATURDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:1-2

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

"In the world, you will have trouble," Jesus once said (John 16:33). Unfortunately, most of us have borne the full weight of that trouble. From sickness to anxiety and depression, from intense grief to shame, guilt, and self-doubt, from divorce and breakups to addictions and poverty, we know what a burden feels like. And if the burden itself weren't enough, we often add the crippling effect of isolation: the loneliness of bearing the burden on our own.

This is precisely where true Christian community is so crucial. In Gal. 5:14, Paul writes that "the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" In our passage today, we see what this love looks like: bearing each other's burdens. When our brothers and sisters are straining under their heavy load, we come alongside to share the burden with them.

I am continually amazed by the ways that I see followers of Christ bearing each other's burdens, even at great sacrifice to themselves. I've watched as physicians have given free medical care to those who are sick and can't afford care. I've seen tired parents watch another couple's kids so that they can go to marriage counseling. I've marveled at those who have taken all of their vacation time from work to serve in under resourced areas. May our community be marked by this kind of self-giving love, both in care for our brothers and sisters and as a witness to a watching world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What burdens have I been trying to shoulder on my own that I need to invite others to share?

Which brothers or sisters have burdens that the Lord is calling me to help bear?

PRAYER:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

“May the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight; through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.”

Hebrews 13:20-21

PRAYER:

We give you thanks, O God, for revealing your Son Jesus Christ to us by the light of his resurrection: Grant that as we sing your glory at the close of this day, our joy may abound in the morning as we celebrate your resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WEEK THREE

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

CONFESSION _____

REFLECTION _____

DAY 1: SHADOW VS. SUBSTANCE

MONDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” James 1:17

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

So many times when we think of shadows, we think of darkness and evil. In order to truly appreciate the concept of shadow versus substance, we need to separate the words “shadow” and “darkness” for a moment. In this conversation, “shadow” refers to good gifts in our life which are evidence of Christ’s presence. Anytime you see a shadow, it is evidence that something is present. The shadow of a tree is evidence that there is a tree nearby. In the same way, there are so many good gifts on this earth that reflect Christ’s presence and nature in our life. We are meant to enjoy these good gifts, but we must remember that they are meant to point us to Christ, the true substance.

When we hunger, we have food, yet Christ calls Himself the Bread of Life. When we thirst, we have water, and Christ is the Living Water. It is not good for man to be alone, and marriage is symbolic of Christ’s relationship with the church. A career gives us purpose, yet Christ calls us to His good purpose. There are so many good gifts on this earth, yet every single one of them simply whets the appetite that is meant to be fulfilled in Christ.

Let’s not become so fixated on the shadows that we miss the beauty of Christ. He is the substance that all of these point to. He is what we need. He is what we desire.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What are some shadows (good gifts) in your life for which you can thank God?

Are you allowing yourself to enjoy a shadow more than you enjoy Christ?

PRAYER:

Lord, I praise you for you are the One whom my soul truly hungers after. You designed my heart to long after you. After you, O Lord, do I seek! Lord, thank you for all of the blessings you have brought into my life which are reminders and evidence of your presence and love. Thank you for your grace and mercy. Thank you for your provision. In this season of fasting, prayer, and confession, keep my heart and mind from chasing after these things more than I chase after you.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

This week, we are going to meditate on the same Scripture each evening.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
Colossians 1:15-20

PRAYER:

Jesus, tonight I am focusing on the truth that you are the image of the invisible God. You are the exact representation of Yahweh. To know You is to know God. Grow my understanding of the magnificence of this truth. It is amazing that although You are God, You humbled Yourself to the point of being a servant and going to the cross. My heart exalts Your name, King Jesus.

DAY 2: WHEN A SHADOW IS MISSING

TUESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”

2 Timothy 2:11-13

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

If we have placed our faith in Christ, then His Spirit is within us, and He is at work within our life. At times, however, we are blind to how he is working. Let’s ask God to open our eyes to his fingerprints all around us. For me, one of the things that can cause blindness is tunnel vision on one particular thing I want to see Him do.

Yesterday we talked about how shadows (good gifts) are evidence of Christ, yet these should never take the place of Christ. Today I want to warn us that sometimes the absence of one particular shadow may tempt us to question whether Christ is present or whether He cares.

Perhaps you believe Christ will prove Himself once he provides _____. The truth is, whether or not he provides this particular gift, He is still here. Also, if we could peel our eyes away from this empty void we would see so many other shadows He is lavishing on us, the most important being peace with God.

Please do not allow one missing shadow to cast doubt on Christ’s sufficiency in your life. He loves you, and He cares. He longs for us to love Him more than the gifts He brings. And when we do, we find satisfaction in Him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Do you have tunnel vision on anything that is keeping you from seeing Jesus?

What are five things you can be thankful for today?

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for loving me and coming alongside me every single day. Jesus, thank you, that through you, I have peace with God. Forgive me for the times I fix my eyes on something on this earth rather than fix my eyes on you. Jesus, help me fix my eyes on you! Thank you for remaining faithful to me even when I am not faithful. I love you Lord Jesus. Help me to love you even more!

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

This week, we are going to meditate on the same Scripture each evening.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
Colossians 1:15-20

PRAYER:

Jesus, tonight I am focusing on You as Creator of all things, visible and invisible which means in our earthly realm as well as in the spiritual realm. You created all things for You. Jesus, I pray that You expand my trust in You as the Creator. You understand how all things fit and work together. You are the best designer, author, planner, and everything else that takes creativity. I choose to trust in You!

DAY 3: OUR DAILY BREAD

WEDNESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

"This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Psalm 118:24

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

In John 6, Jesus calls himself the Bread of Life. During His time, bread was a staple food known to nourish and sustain them. In the same way that physical bread nourishes the body, Christ is meant to nourish our spirit. This reminds me of the Israelites in Exodus. God gave them manna every morning, creating a daily dependency on Him. Each morning, they would go out and gather just as much as they needed for the day. Then, they would go out again the next morning, needing that nourishment once again.

As I meditated on this, God made something so clear to me: I often go to God's Word looking for answers for my circumstances, not looking for nourishment for my spirit. How many times are my prayers trying to get Him to show me something about my future rather than sitting in His presence for today? As we meet with Christ, He is ready to give us everything we need for today—His grace, peace, comfort, love, wisdom, etc. He will give us what we need for tomorrow as well, but that will come tomorrow as we meet with Him again. The verses below reveal how much God desires us to walk one day at a time with Him.

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Matthew 6:34

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Psalm 118:24

"Give us this day our daily bread."

Matthew 6:11

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'" James 4:13-15

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Do you recognize your daily need for Jesus like you recognize your daily need for food?

When spending time with Jesus, do you desire to encounter Him or to gain His answers about the things He is doing in your life?

PRAYER:

Lord, forgive me for the times that I have come before you simply to ask you how you are working in my life and not to see your face. Today I choose to come and simply sit before you. Let me take time to reflect on your nature and your love.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim. In the light of His glorious grace."

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

This week, we are going to meditate on the same Scripture each evening.

*"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."
Colossians 1:15-20*

PRAYER:

Jesus, tonight I am focusing on the truth that You are before all things and preeminent in everything. Not only do You deserve to be above all things, You are above all things. Jesus, help me align with this truth, elevating You to the proper place within my heart. Forgive me for the times I allow other things to come before You in my heart. Search my heart for anything that I value above You. Take first seat in my heart, King Jesus.

DAY 4: DAILY TREASURE HUNT

THURSDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

Blessed is the one who endures trials because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. No one undergoing a trial should say, "I am being tempted by God," since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. By his own choice, he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."
James 1:12-18

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

What would it look like if we were so confident about Christ's presence in our life that every day became an amazing treasure hunt, looking for His shadows throughout our day? Yesterday, we talked about going to Christ for daily nourishment. Rather than coming to Him for answers about the day, we come to feast on Him. We worship Him, read His Word to be reminded of who He is, and pray to show Him we trust Him and expect Him to be present in our day. Then we move forward into the day, expectantly looking for all of the evidence that points to Him.

Ask God to open your eyes to every single one of His shadows within your life. If you have been experiencing tunnel vision on one particular shadow, ask God to broaden your scope. If you are discouraged because there have been more trials than blessings, remember that God calls you to consider it joy when you go through trials. These trials allow you to rely on His presence and cultivate your character. Standing steadfast in the midst of a trial is definitely evidence of Christ at work in your life. Look at how He is cultivating His fruit of the Spirit within you. If you have put your faith in Jesus, I guarantee you that He is present and at work in your life every single day. You simply need to be watching.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Do I truly believe that Christ will present throughout my day today?

How can a trial be an opportunity for Christ to be present in our life?

Are the trials in your life making you question God or cling to God?

PRAYER:

Lord, I want to be so fully aware of your presence that I see your fingerprints on everything. I pray that I not only see you in the good gifts but also realize that trials are an opportunity to rely on You. Let my eyes turn to you often throughout the day. Please reveal to me my blind spots, Lord Jesus. I do not want to miss one shadow which you have for me today. Lord, thank you for your love and your presence in my life! I love you, Lord Jesus!

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

This week, we are going to meditate on the same Scripture each evening.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
Colossians 1:15-20

PRAYER:

Jesus, tonight I am focusing on the truth that you are the head of the church. Thank You for our church, Gospel Community. We pray that we all will choose to seek You and follow You. Thank You for the plans that You have for our church. Protect us from anything that may distract us from allowing you to be our Head, King Jesus. May You always be the center of everything we do.

DAY 5: CHRIST THE *MEDIATOR*

FRIDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“He is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together, someone to remove God’s rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.”
Job 9:32-35

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

It is hard to imagine all of the heartbreak that Job went through. In one day, he lost his children, his flocks, and his servants. Basically, he lost his livelihood along with some of the most precious people in His life. Most of Job features conversations between him and some of his friends speculating on why all of this happened in Job’s life. We soon see that Job despairs of life itself, desiring for God to crush Him.

Even in the midst of this desperation, Job’s cry was to be able to speak to God face-to-face. He knew he could not be declared innocent in the sight of God, yet he longed to speak to Him like a man. Job cries out, “If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together, someone to remove God’s rod from me.”

Jesus is the mediator that we all long for. No matter how righteous or unrighteous we are, on our own we are unworthy to come before God. Yet God loves us too much to keep us at a distance. Jesus bridges the gap for us. Through Christ, we have the freedom to come to God with our heartaches and our dreams. Because of Christ, we can confess our sins to God in order to be cleansed and freed from them. We can come to Him for comfort and peace. Do we realize that our deepest desire is peace with God? Through Christ, this deepest desire is granted to the fullest.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Do you recognize that all of our longings stem from a longing to be at peace with God? Have you accepted that God has given you His peace through Christ?

Is there anything that you are striving to do in your own strength to receive this peace?

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you that through Christ I have peace with you. At times I forget this and worry and stress about whether I am enough. Thank you that no matter the condition of my heart, Christ grants me access to you. If I come with heartache, you will give me comfort. If I come in repentance of sin, you give mercy and grace. If I come in turmoil, you give peace. Lord Jesus, thank you for being all that I need. Thank you for giving completely of yourself in order to pave the way for me to come to our Father.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

This week, we are going to meditate on the same Scripture each evening.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
Colossians 1:15-20

PRAYER:

Jesus, tonight I am focusing on the truth that all of the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in You. And because Your Spirit lives within me, all of the fullness of God is within me. Jesus, show me how this truth should impact my life. You modeled such humility alongside such confidence in doing Your Father’s will. Jesus, help me to walk in Your steps, trusting in the fullness of God and surrendering to His will.

DAY 6: TO CHRIST BE THE GLORY

SATURDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

*"As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one.
There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God."
Romans 3:10-11*

*"All of us have become like something unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment;
all of us wither like a leaf,
and our iniquities carry us away like the wind."
Isaiah 64:6*

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

We have spent a lot of time this week talking about looking for shadows of Christ within our life. For the most part, we have talked about external shadows that point us to Christ. What are the gifts and the ways that God is at work around us? Today I want us to look internally. Yesterday we talked about how Job wanted to be able to have a mediator between himself and God so that he could talk to God face-to-face. Jesus is that mediator.

As we read more of the dialogue, however, it is evident that Job had a desire for personal righteousness. He wanted to stand righteous before God. You may look into your own life and see some good things. Perhaps you truly have a love for God and a love for the lost. Your heart breaks for the homeless and for the hungry. You feel a righteous anger for injustice all around you. I praise God that we are His image bearers. Even among those who are not believers, we see reflections of God's image within them. Let us be very aware that there is no righteousness except Christ. For those of us who have put our faith in Christ, any good that we see within ourselves is evidence of Christ at work, not a righteousness of our own. Our good deeds are merely a shadow of the substance of Christ within us. Let's be sure that He receives all of the glory for the work which He has begun in us, being confident that He who begins a good work will bring it to completion.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Do you allow God to receive all of the glory for the righteous deeds that you do?

Is there any part of you that wants to earn God's favor without relying on Christ?

PRAYER:

Lord, I thank you for not only working around me but for working within me. I praise you for loving me so much that you desire to see me transformed more and more into your image. I pray that every day I reflect you more and more as Christ does His work in my life. Forgive me for the times that I want the credit and the glory. To Christ be all of the glory!

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

This week, we are going to meditate on the same Scripture each evening.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

Colossians 1:15-20

PRAYER:

Jesus, tonight I am focusing on the truth that You reconciled all things to Yourself through Your blood. Jesus thank You!! Thank You for making peace by Your blood. Help me walk in this reconciliation with both You and my brothers and sisters in Christ. Do not let me allow any division or separation to remain but to walk in this beautiful truth. Bind the enemy who always wants to bring division in the very relationships which You have reconciled.

WEEK FOUR

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

CONFESSION _____

REFLECTION _____

DAY 1: HEALING OR HURTFUL WORDS

MONDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

*“Then Job answered and said: ‘How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me? And even if it be true that I have erred, my error remains with myself. If indeed you magnify yourselves against me and make my disgrace an argument against me.’”
Job 19:1-5*

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

Have you ever been in a place where you felt like no one was for you? Have you ever felt like no one believed you or truly understood what you were feeling and experiencing? Enter Job. There is no one who understands suffering, loneliness, and anguish better than Job. Gardner Taylor notes that Job is an accurate transcript of all of human life.

In the majority of the first half of this book, Job’s friends have worn him down. For fifteen chapters he has endured their harsh rebukes and confrontations. In chapter 19 he can take it no longer. He cries out to his friends: “How long are you going to keep tormenting me and breaking me to pieces with your words?” Job acknowledges to his friends that even if he has sinned, it is between he and God alone.

Our words hold significant weight in the lives of those around us. Our words have the power to hurt or heal; they can add to a burden or offer support to bear it. Job’s friends burdened him with their words. Their comments did not offer support in the face of all he was going through. It is wise to be sensitive to what others are experiencing and thoughtfully speak in relation to their current situation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How are you currently interacting with those around you who are suffering or experiencing loss? Have you encouraged those around you who are suffering or going through loss, or have you attempted to diagnose their situation?

How can this season of Lent reshape and redeem your desires to help heal others with your words?

PRAYER:

Jesus, I need your divine power to guide my words. I understand and know that my words carry more weight than I often consider. I want to uplift others instead of tear them down. I understand that others have invited me into their lives and trust me to strengthen them with my words. Let me speak what you would have me say.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits for the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Ephesians 4:29

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank you for reminding me of the power of the words that come from our mouth. Help me to be sensitive to Your Spirit as I speak and interact with others. I want to be Your mouthpiece.

DAY 2: EMPTIED TO BE FILLED

TUESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“Know then that God has put me in the wrong and closed his net about me. Behold, I cry out, ‘Violence!’ but I am not answered; I call for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths. He has stripped from me my glory and taken the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, and my hope has he pulled up like a tree. He has kindled his wrath against me and counts me as his adversary. His troops come on together; they have cast up their siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent.”

Job 19:6-12

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

Job’s faith is tremendous. It leaves the believer speechless as to how he continued to maintain a reverence for God despite the extreme heartache and pain he went through. In verse six, Job acknowledges that it is God who has allowed all of this to happen to him; yet he does not appear to doubt that God is just. He continues in verse eight to explain that it is God Himself who has allowed his suffering to occur. It is interesting to note the language in verse 8: “He has walled up my way...” In Job 1:10, Satan describes to God that His “hedge” (wall) has protected Job thus far and that this is the only reason for Job’s piety. Then in Job 3:23, Job describes his suffering as being “hedged in” (walled up) and that there is no way for him to escape his suffering and pain. Again, in Job 19:8, Job declares that it is God who has blocked his path.

At times it can feel like God is the enemy. When you are walking through a season of suffering, pain, or loss, it is difficult to reconcile how a loving God would allow such darkness to come upon you. Job walked through this complexity just as we do today. What Job could not see, and what we do not often see in our suffering, is that God can only fill the places that have first been emptied. In fact, sometimes the greatest power is received from the spaces of darkness and emptiness.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What are places in my life that I have experienced God empty me to then fill me with more of Him?

What are places in my life that have yet to be emptied but that God is wanting to fill?

PRAYER:

"Oh, the unspeakable benediction of the 'treasures of darkness'! It is not the days of sunshine and splendor and liberty and light that leave their lasting and indelible effect upon the soul, but those nights of the Spirit in which, shadowed by God's hand, hidden in the dark cleft of some rock in a weary land, He lets the splendors of the outskirts of Himself pass before our gaze." (Oswald Chambers)

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*"Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of His servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God."
Isaiah 50:10*

PRAYER:

Jesus, even in the darkest seasons, help me trust You. Help me look to you for help in navigating the way. Help my desires be reordered by what you teach me in the darker seasons.

DAY 3: BE PRESENT

WEDNESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“He has put my brothers far from me, and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me. My relatives have failed me, my close friends have forgotten me. The guests in my house and my maidservants count me as a stranger; I have become a foreigner in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives no answer; I must plead with him with my mouth for mercy. My breath is strange to my wife, and I am a stench to the children of my own mother. Even young children despise me; when I rise they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?”

Job 19:13-22

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

We do not often desire to sit with others through their time of suffering and pain. It is uncomfortable and hard. Sometimes it can be messy and affect our lives in ways we were not wanting or expecting. We often overlook the poor, helpless, and sick because of this.

Consider Job. He was bankrupt and sick. No one wanted to be associated with him. His appearance scared others away. His wife did not even come near him. Job felt like even those whom he had loved and taken care of had now turned their backs on him in his time of extreme difficulty. Job was lonely and isolated because of his suffering.

Jesus' actions completely opposed the actions of Job's family and friends. Jesus identified with the outcast and least of these. He publicly dined with sinners (Matt. 9:9-13). He brushed shoulders with lepers (Matthew 8:1-4). He hung on a cross and died between two criminals (Luke 23:32-33). Jesus knew what it was like to be a man of sorrows and grief (Isaiah 53:3). It is wise to have the same compassion that Jesus possessed for those who are suffering and in seasons of pain and loss.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Have I ever avoided a person in their season of suffering?

How can this season of Lent help reshape my desires to be present with those who are hurting and broken?

PRAYER:

Jesus, help me lay aside my selfish desires. Open my eyes to those who are hurting around me that I can minister to and care for. I am sorry for times that I have avoided others in their times of suffering. Help this season of Lent chisel away my selfishness. Let me be present with others and be Your hands and feet to those who are suffering.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."
Philippians 2:4*

*"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth."
1 John 3:17-18*

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank you for reminding me that I am called to care and think beyond myself. Help me in the days ahead to be sensitive to Your Spirit. I am confident and know that you will guide my steps to minister to those who are hurting and suffering. I trust You.

DAY 4: FAITH OVER CLARITY

THURSDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!”

Job 19:23-24

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

Job longed and ached for his story to be recorded. Job wanted others to know his story long after his death. Job’s story shows believers that in losing everything, one’s wants and desires are fully exposed.

The interesting thing about Job is that one could argue that his desires were holy before he lost everything. In reading the first chapter of Job, you can see that Job had a God-loving, worshipful heart. His hope was in the Lord before his loss (Job 1:4-5, 8). He loved and desired God because he knew his success and wealth were from God. He loved and desired God even after his loss because he knew God was sovereign. Satan, however, thought that Job would curse God and change direction if he lost everything (Job 1:11; 2:5). Little did Satan know that losing things, or going without, can actually produce a more grateful and hungry heart for God.

It is never recorded in Job whether he discovered his reasoning for suffering. This is often the case. Reasons for human suffering are often kept secret from human beings. While God is deeply concerned with his created beings, he does not always answer their questions. We often ask God for clarity when He instead wants to increase our faith.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How in this season of Lent and “going without” are you growing in gratitude and hunger for God?

Are you asking God for clarity when instead He wants to give you faith?

PRAYER:

Jesus, I know that suffering will come in this life. Hardship and trial are inevitable. The answers to the questions of suffering may never come. May I be even more sure of Your goodness in this place. I trust You. I know that You are for me and not against me.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

REFLECT AND PRAY THROUGH THIS PASSAGE THIS EVENING. KNOW
AND TRUST THAT GOD’S WAYS ARE ALWAYS GOOD.

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:26-28

PRAYER:

Spirit of God, help me to come to you, still and slow and in faith. It’s incredible to know that you are praying for me, even now, when I don’t have the words I need. Remind me of your love by the presence of your Spirit now, and as I turn to sleep. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.

DAY 5: MY REDEEMER LIVES

FRIDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints with me!” Job 19:25-27

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

Almost everyone chooses to avoid suffering. Most people believe that suffering should be avoided at all costs. Furthermore, if one must face it, he or she must learn to cope in the face of suffering.

In Lent, however, we stand in opposition to what most believe. In Lent, we choose to lose or go without. We willingly choose to suffer, asking that our desires be made more for Him and like Him. When what distracts us is taken away, we discover all we need and want: Jesus, our Redeemer.

It is imperative to remember how little of a situation we actually see. Job teaches us that we can trust in our God, who sees us in our deepest anguish and pain, and know that He is faithful to redeem all things. Christian tradition recognizes that self-denial leads to further sanctification. And Lent leads to contentment in God's design and plan for us even if suffering occurs.

Job shows us that in losing everything, his greatest hope still rested with His Creator. Job believed that the Lord would redeem his suffering. Undoubtedly, we are not going through the same degree of suffering as Job in Lent. However, in our "loss," we can see that God is our greatest hope. Lent teaches us that our Redeemer lives.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How is it, that in our greatest and deepest losses, we often find our greatest confidence in our Redeemer?

In this season of Lent, where are you finding that your hope often lies?

PRAYER:

Jesus, just like Job, let my faith appear at its highest even in moments of greatest despair. I know and am confident that You are alive and that You have not forgotten me. I believe that I will see you one day. I know my hope and longing for heaven pushes me to be holy and humble on this side of eternity. You are good. Thank you for loving me and providing for me.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

“Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, ‘I shall never be moved,’ By your favor, O LORD, you made my mountain stand strong; you hid your face; I was dismayed. To you, O LORD, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy: ‘What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me! O LORD, be my helper!’ You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!”
Psalm 30:4-12

PRAYER:

Oh God, I praise You for my Redeemer lives! No matter what I face each day, I can stand strong on the fact that Jesus is alive. Forgive me for the times that I doubt Your power and Your love in my life. Jesus, I want to sing of Your greatness from the mountain tops, but may I also sing Your praises to those around me who may not know You as their Redeemer. Jesus, this evening I praise You!

DAY 6: BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN SIN

SATURDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

"If you say, 'How we will pursue him!' and, 'The root of the matter is found in him,' be afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishment of the sword, that you may know there is a judgment."

Job 19:28-29

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

At this point, Job is feeling personally attacked by his closest friends and family. He feels as though those who have come to comfort him have instead attempted to incite God's wrath on him. Job cries out and urges his friends to wake up before they incur God's judgment in their own lives, too. Job is reminding his friends that he cannot be the only one who is considered a sinner.

It is not man's job to pronounce judgment on another. The only One who is able and responsible for carrying the sword of judgment is God alone. Each person will stand accountable before God on their own one day. Job tells his friends to end their worrying about his sin and begin to consider their own.

It is often too easy to look at sin in other's lives before we notice our own. It always feels easier to identify something wrong with your spouse, children, best friend, or family member over your own indiscretions. Worry and concern for a friend or family member can often start from an intentional and pure place, but prescribing what is wrong with an individual is ultimately not man's responsibility. If you jump ahead to the New Testament, Jesus will echo Job's remarks to his friends in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:1-5). In addition, Paul will also give a warning of how all will give an account to God (Romans 14:10-13). It is wise to remember that our sinful actions are just as frequent as the ones we notice in those around us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How have you attempted to be “the Judge” in someone else’s life? Have you focused more on others’ sins than your own?

How can your choice to “go without” in Lent lead you to a holier outlook on your own, and others’, sin?

PRAYER:

Jesus, I confess that I have often assumed the role of “Judge” in other’s lives. I understand and know that this is not the responsibility that you have placed on me. You instead have called me to be gracious, loving, and forgiving. You have called me to speak truth, but not in condemnation over your children. Today I submit my thoughts and words to you. Help me think and speak words of life and truth to others.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you seek the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

Matthew 7:1-5

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank you for reminding me that I must look at the log in my own eye before I look to others’. I need to remember to evaluate my own sin before looking at someone else’s. Help me remember this in the days ahead. Help me entrust others in your hands. Let this season of Lent be one where I grow healthier in my relationship with You and others, too.

WEEK FIVE

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

CONFESSION _____

REFLECTION _____

DAY 1: ISRAEL WALKS INTO THE WILDERNESS

MONDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“So he saved them from the hand of the foe and redeemed them from the power of the enemy. And the waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left. Then they believed his words; they sang his praise. But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel. But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert.”
Psalm 106:10-14

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY: _____

The book of Exodus starts with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Egypt. Under the bitter slavery and hard labor of their Egyptian taskmasters, the newly forming nation of Israel cries out to God. They cry out for deliverance. Deliverance from the bricks and the clay and the tar. Deliverance from the oppressive, backbreaking conditions.

GOD HEARS HIS PEOPLE. Creator God stretches out His hand to send Moses, the Deliverer. Awe-inspiring signs spread through the land and terrifying wonders light the sky. Under the fearful weight of God’s power on display, the king of Egypt stretches out his hand in submission to the King of the universe... and lets God’s people go.

As Israel journeys into the desert, God pushes back the water from their path. Women, men, and children cross on dry land. But the king of Egypt gets this thought in his head: “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”(Ex.14:5b) He sets out with chariots and war horses to end this desert march toward freedom.

Creator God again stretches out his hand against the king of Egypt and crushes the armies under the weight of the water. Israel is delivered, and they journey toward the land God promised them. Moses delivers the commandments and the law to the newly delivered nation. Israel is being led through the desert wilderness by God’s miracles and signs.

What response do the people have?

Try reading this whole section of Psalm 106 again.

See the response to the deliverance? *“They sang His praise.”* But moments later, Israel allows its heart to be dried up in the desert: *“They quickly forgot His works.”*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

While the deliverance from Egypt was still fresh in their heads, the heart of Israel turned away. The desert wilderness gripped them and Israel did not hold to the commands they were given. This week, during the Lenten season, we have the chance to reflect on the suffering and the trials of the wilderness. Think back on the times where God showed Himself as a Deliverer.

What response did you express to God? To the people around you?

Think back on the times where you felt that you were in the desert. What response did you express toward God? To the people around you? Are you in a wilderness moment now?

PRAYER:

Creator God, thank you for being our deliverer. Thank you for hearing us and leading us. We confess that our memories are sometimes short and that our hearts are sometimes weak. As we walk through desert times, replenish us and help our hearts to be obedient. Give us the wisdom to remember your works and to wait for your counsel. Replace our desires and cravings for things of this world and allow us to follow Your leading.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

"Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes and were brought low through their iniquity. Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry. For their sake he remembered his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love. He caused them to be pitied by all those who held them captive. Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, 'Amen!' Praise the Lord!" Psalm 106:43-48

PRAYER:

God Almighty, bring to mind all of the ways you have provided for me. Bring to mind, even today, the large and small graces that I experienced. Help me to see the ways in which I take your presence and mercy in my life for granted, and create in me a renewed sense of gratitude. Teach my heart your Word, even now as I sleep. Amen.

DAY 2: GOING INTO THE *WILDERNESS*

TUESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

READ. Take a few moments today to read the following passages 3 or 4 times. Give yourself space to read slowly. Feel free to read slowly and quietly by yourself or create space to read aloud with others.

THINK. God is not the Bible but chooses to reveal aspects of Himself in these accounts. What truth is God revealing about Himself to you right now?

PRAY. By reading and reflection, we allow God's story to enter into our lives. By praying, we agree to submit ourselves to entering God's story.

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

REFLECTION *QUESTIONS:*

LIVE. In what practical ways can you live the truth of this reading today? This week? This month? This year?

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

READ. Take a few moments today to read the following passages 3 or 4 times. Give yourself space to read slowly. Feel free to read slowly and quietly by yourself or create space to read aloud with others.

THINK. God is not the Bible but chooses to reveal aspects of Himself in these accounts. What truth is God revealing about Himself to you right now?

PRAY. By reading and reflection, we allow God's story to enter into our lives. By praying, we agree to submit ourselves to entering God's story.

LIVE. In what practical ways can you live the truth of this reading today? This week? This month? This year?

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."
Colossians 3:1-17

DAY 3: JOB WALKS INTO THE WILDERNESS

WEDNESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?” Job 28:12

“With God are wisdom and might; He has counsel and understanding.” Job 12:13

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

Job’s journey into the wilderness began differently than Israel’s. His desert wilderness was also a different kind of desert. Israel’s journey started with their deliverance from slavery. Job’s started with wealth, family, and the joy of health. Israel was lead by signs and wonders toward a new promised land. Job was lead down a wilderness of loss as possessions, family, and health were stripped away. Israel literally walked into the desert. Job’s figurative desert of loss was brought upon him.

In the desert, Israel sinned. They quickly became disobedient and gave into dark cravings. They worshipped golden idols and spat out at God. Job, despite what his friends guessed, was not led into suffering because of his sin.

But they both had a lesson to learn about a wisdom and obedience that can only be found in the desert. So they were brought into and kept in the desert for a time. Early into his suffering, Job cries out and questions God. He wants to understand how God’s justice can work in the desert that his life has become. “And where is the place of understanding?” But answers to Job’s questions about his suffering were revealed in the desert of loss and suffering. Rather than melting down gold and worshipping idols like Israel, Job’s suffering lead to a renewed submission to God’s wisdom. Unlike Israel, Job listened to God and obediently worked through his pain and desires. Unlike his friends, Job eventually stopped indulging in the prideful explanations of life. He faltered and was tempted, but was eventually restored in wealth, family, health, and understanding. In his suffering, he listened for the Creator’s wisdom. The wisdom of the desert what not wasted on Job.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

During Lent, we get the opportunity to remember the desert moments of life. Fasting from certain food or abstaining from certain habits allows us to prayerfully enter into a time where we can be reminded to obediently seek the wisdom of God. We do not set out to suffer with the same depth as Job, but we take the time to intentionally remind ourselves to crave God and His wisdom rather than to indulge ourselves.

Take a few moments to write down ways that you can intentionally remind yourself to daily seek God's wisdom. Are there any habits in your life that need to be removed in order for you to more fully seek the Creator's wisdom?

PRAYER:

Write down a short prayer that you can revisit several times today. Reflect on obediently submitting to the wisdom of God rather than self-indulgent explanations or cravings.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*"God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.
For he looks to the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.
When he gave to the wind its weight
and apportioned the waters by measure,
when he made a decree for the rain
and a way for the lightning of the thunder,
then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.
And he said to man,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding."
Job 28:23-28*

PRAYER:

Revisit your prayer from this morning. Commit to the Lord once again that His wisdom is greatest.

DAY 4: GOING INTO THE *WILDERNESS*

THURSDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

READ. Take a few moments this morning to read the following passages 3 or 4 times. Give yourself space to read slowly. Feel free to read slowly and quietly by yourself or create space to read aloud with others.

THINK. God is not the Bible but chooses to reveal aspects of Himself in these accounts. What truth is God revealing about Himself to you right now?

PRAY. By reading and reflection, we allow God's story to enter into our lives. By praying, we agree to submit ourselves to entering God's story.

"The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

To know wisdom and instruction,

to understand words of insight,

to receive instruction in wise dealing,

in righteousness, justice, and equity;

to give prudence to the simple,

knowledge and discretion to the youth—

Let the wise hear and increase in learning,

and the one who understands obtain guidance,

to understand a proverb and a saying,

the words of the wise and their riddles.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;

fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Proverbs 1:1-7

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In what practical ways can you live the truth of this reading today? This week? This month? This year?

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

READ. Take a few moments this evening to read the following passages 3 or 4 times. Give yourself space to read slowly. Feel free to read slowly and quietly by yourself or create space to read aloud with others.

THINK. God is not the Bible but chooses to reveal aspects of Himself in these accounts. What truth is God revealing about Himself to you right now?

PRAY. By reading and reflection, we allow God's story to enter into our lives. By praying, we agree to submit ourselves to entering God's story.

LIVE. In what practical ways can you live the truth of this reading today? This week? This month? This year?

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures."

James 1:1-18

DAY 5: JESUS WALKS INTO THE *WILDERNESS*

FRIDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone.’ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’” And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,’ for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.”

Luke 4:1-15

— DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY: —

Job is taken into the wilderness of loss to renew his submission to God’s wisdom.

Israel walked into the wilderness as part of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Jesus walks into the wilderness in order to show that he is the Deliverer. He is obedient, and He proves that the wisdom of God is stronger than hunger and self-indulgent cravings. The wisdom found in God’s word is on his lips rather than grumbling or cheap cliché. Jesus walks into the desert, faces temptations, and does not falter. The wisdom of God flows through him even when his stomach is empty.

His 40 days in the wilderness is our model for our 40-day Lenten season. In His willing suffering, He reminds us that obedience to God and wisdom from God are sufficient to overcome trials when we walk with God’s spirit. In allowing His hunger, He claims the truth of God’s sufficiency to provide life-giving sustenance.

Israel was tempted and sinned by giving into their own cravings. Job was tempted and faltered while leaning on his own understanding. Jesus was tempted and remained sinless because He is the embodiment of wisdom.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What recent temptations have you faced? Did you give into those moments?

How can you better equip yourself to follow the example of Jesus?

PRAYER:

“Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”
Psalm 19:12-14

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.”* Psalm 19:7-11

PRAYER:

O Holy Father, I pray that I hold Your word in such reverence as this passage gives it. Thank you for how perfect, wise, true, pure and enduring is Your word. I do pray that I will desire more than anything else in this world. That I will take its warning to heart and walk in your way and in your mercy. May I hide Your word in my heart that I may not sin against You.

DAY 6: FOLLOWING JESUS INTO THE WILDERNESS

SATURDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

READ. Take a few moments this morning to read the following passages 3 or 4 times. Give yourself space to read slowly. Feel free to read slowly and quietly by yourself or create space to read aloud with others.

THINK. God is not the Bible but chooses to reveal aspects of Himself in these accounts. What truth is God revealing about Himself to you right now?

PRAY. By reading and reflection, we allow God's story to enter into our lives. By praying, we agree to submit ourselves to entering God's story.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers." Deuteronomy 6:4-18

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In what practical ways can you live the truth of this reading today? This week? This month? This year?

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

READ. Take a few moments this evening to read the following passages 3 or 4 times. Give yourself space to read slowly. Feel free to read slowly and quietly by yourself or create space to read aloud with others.

THINK. God is not the Bible but chooses to reveal aspects of Himself in these accounts. What truth is God revealing about Himself to you right now?

PRAY. By reading and reflection, we allow God's story to enter into our lives. By praying, we agree to submit ourselves to entering God's story.
Live. In what practical ways can you live the truth of this reading today? This week? This month? This year?

"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'" Matthew 22:34-40

WEEK SIX

SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT

CONFESSION _____

REFLECTION _____

DAY 1: THE WEEK JESUS *DIED*

MONDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

As he was going along, they were spreading their clothes on the road. Now he came near the path down the Mount of Olives, and the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen: Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven! Some of the Pharisees from the crowd told him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out." As he approached and saw the city, he wept for it, saying, "If you knew this day what would bring peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. For the days will come on you when your enemies will build a barricade around you, surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you and your children among you to the ground, and they will not leave one stone on another in your midst, because you did not recognize the time when God visited you."

Luke 19:36-44

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

As we enter into this last week of Lent, we are going to journey with the disciples and Jesus through Holy Week. Let's use the Gospels as well as our imagination to understand what they may have experienced this week. The disciples have no idea what they are walking into, yet Jesus is very aware.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rides through town with palm branches being laid before Him and voices crying out praises, declaring Him the King coming in the name of the Lord. Jesus knew that these same faces and voices would be singing a very different tune in just a few days time.

Later, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. I wonder if the disciples were confused. The praises of Palm Sunday would be something to revel in, yet they see their King weeping. Jesus was able to see through the crowd. They praised Him for the miracles and for what they thought would be deliverance from Rome. By the end of the week, there would be such contagious hatred against Him that the mobs would be joining together to condemn Him to death on the cross.

Jesus' weeping must have expressed both grief and frustration. There was such compassion for them, yet also frustration and anger that things were not the way they were supposed to be. His lament is an expression of love for these people that comes from the depth of his soul.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How often are we like the people in the crowd? Does our allegiance to Jesus ebb and flow either with our circumstances or the passions (both for and against) of those around us?

Can you relate to Jesus as He weeps over things that simply are not as they should be? Does your lament stem from a love for God and others?

If not, take the time to confess this to Jesus. He responds with compassion, grace, and mercy.

PRAYER:

Jesus, I confess that so often I am like these crowds. Within the same week I can praise Your name and shake my fist at You for not always doing the things that I desire or expect. I pray that You continue to refine my heart and my desires. Thank You for always responding to my repentance with grace, mercy, and love. Jesus, guard my heart from straying from You. Thank You for always being steadfast in Your loving kindness.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people were looking for a way to kill him, but they could not find a way to do it, because all the people were captivated by what they heard. Luke 19:47-48

PRAYER:

Jesus, during your last week You spent so much time in the temple and the people were captivated by You. Jesus, You are captivating-Your love, Your words, Your kindness. I pray that I am more and more captivated by You. Also, help me to be such a reflection of You that others are in awe of You when they encounter me.

DAY 2: PREPARING TO *DIE*

TUESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

While Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman approached him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. She poured it on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw it, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This might have been sold for a great deal and given to the poor."

Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a noble thing for me. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. By pouring this perfume on my body, she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

Matthew 26:6-13

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

A woman approached Jesus with an alabaster jar. In the book of John, we learn that this is Mary, Lazarus and Martha's sister. She seems to be the only one who is even somewhat aware of what is coming. While the others become indignant arguing over waste, Jesus once again affirms her. Jesus defended her once before while she sat at His feet during His teachings. Now He is affirming this extravagant gift which was preparing Jesus for his burial.

Somehow, Mary connected with Jesus beyond the hectic pace of ministry and future plans. Could it be that her tendency toward sitting and abiding with Jesus allowed her to be more in tune with all that her Jesus was walking through? It would have taken such bravery to walk into a room filled with many other men and to anoint Jesus. Her alabaster jar was filled with expensive, aromatic oil that would have brought much attention to herself.

Yet, she seems oblivious to the attention, her eyes fixed on Jesus, the one she wanted to honor. Whether or not she was aware that He would soon be needing preparation for burial, Jesus knew and recognized the beauty of her act of worship. And just as Jesus said, centuries later, we are still telling her story and exploring the significance of this moment.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

As you think about this encounter, what stands out to you?

Imagine yourself as one of the people in the room, only that you were also fully aware that this would have been a ritual for burial preparation. Why do you think this story is so deeply significant that it is connected with the telling of the gospel even now?

PRAYER:

Jesus, our beautiful Savior. We bow our hearts in honor of You. We align our heart with Mary as she pours our a sacrificial gift to show her love and devotion to You. Forgive us for the times that we become judgmental toward others. Or the times that we are stingy and not willing to give our best to You. Thank You for always loving us. Jesus, You deserve our best!

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have what I need.
He lets me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside quiet waters.
He renews my life; he leads me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even when I go through the darkest valley,
I fear no danger, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me
all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
as long as I live.
Psalm 23*

PRAYER:

Jesus, I acknowledge that You are the Great Shepherd. I pray that I will trust in You for all that I need. I relinquish control to You and rest in Your anointing. Thank You that as I walk with You, my cup overflows. I agree with David who longs to dwell with you, in your goodness and mercy, for as long as I live.

DAY 3: THE BETRAYAL

WEDNESDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

"The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put him to death because they were afraid of the people.

Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, who was numbered among the Twelve. He went away and discussed with the chief priests and temple police how he could hand him over to them. They were glad and agreed to give him silver. So he accepted the offer and started looking for a good opportunity to betray him to them when the crowd was not present."
Luke 22:1-6

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

It is so easy to judge Judas, but the truth is, we do not know the motives or the thought process that led him to betray Jesus. We do know that he was one of the twelve who spent day and night journeying with Jesus and the other disciples. We know that his greed got the best of him at times. We know that Satan had influence over him and when all was said and done, he experienced such shame to the point of taking his life. Judas took his life before he had the chance to hear about the resurrection. What would have happened if Judas had interacted with the risen Jesus? We will never know.

On the other hand, Jesus must have experienced such sorrow in being betrayed by one He had chosen to follow Him. Jesus would be able to echo David's expression of grief in the Psalms.

*"Now it is not an enemy who insults me—otherwise I could bear it; it is not a foe who rises up against me—otherwise I could hide from him.
But it is you, a man who is my peer, my companion and good friend! We used to have close fellowship; we walked with the crowd into the house of God."*
Psalm 55:12-14

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Is there something of Judas that we can see in ourselves? Has there been a time when greed, selfishness, or pride has made me betray Jesus?

What is the difference? How does the resurrection of Jesus bring hope in the midst of my sin?

PRAYER:

Jesus, when I think about how you must have grieved over the betrayal of Judas, I need to also realize that I am not so innocent. My sin is just as great, yet I think You that I know of the hope of Your resurrection. But, as I sit in this Lenten week, let me grieve and cry out what would have been my life if my sin was never pardoned by Your work on the cross. May this heaviness forever remind me of the weightlessness of being yoked with you. Thank You for carrying my burden for me.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

*Cast your burden on the Lord,
and he will sustain you; he will never allow the righteous to be shaken.*

Psalms 55:22

PRAYER:

Jesus, I choose to cast all of my burdens onto You. Thank You for being greater than all of my sin. I confess to you that there are so many times I do the things that I should not and there are even more times when I neglect to do the things You have called me to do. Jesus, You are the true righteous one and I can only be named among the righteous because of faith in You. Continue to prune and refine me so that I can look more and more like You.

DAY 4: *MAUNDY THURSDAY*

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

"When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothing, he reclined again and said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am. So if I, 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 just as I have done for you."

John 13:12-15

"Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Luke 22:31-32

For further reading, read John 13.

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

The day of Passover must have been such an emotional roller coaster for the disciples who were walking closely with Jesus. They were only a couple weeks removed from seeing Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. More and more political unrest took place, but they had such high hopes that they were following the Messiah whom they thought would overcome the unrest. Now they had the opportunity to take the Passover with their beloved Teacher. In a moment of jaw-dropping humility, Jesus tied a towel around his waist, knelt to remove their sandals, and washed each of their feet. He looked them in the eyes with love, kindness, and expectation. "As I am doing for you, do for one another."

Jesus poured the wine and broke the bread, telling them to always remember Him whenever they did this in the future. What a beautiful, intimate moment. Yet a heaviness settled in the room. Jesus spoke of betrayal and death ushering in sorrow and confusion. Who would betray Jesus? Each asked, "Is it I?"

Today, let's try to imagine ourselves in the experience of the disciples. At this point, they did not know how this story would go. They are simply walking with Jesus and trying to make sense of it all. But what had started out as a wonderful day turned into utter chaos. They experienced Jesus' love and humility right before seeing their beloved leader arrested and taken away.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Take a moment to reflect on Jesus's act of washing His disciples' feet as an act of humility and example. How does his actions impact you, knowing He would do the same for you if He were physically present with you?

The night did not end as they had anticipated. How do you respond when things go much differently than you expect? Are you still able to trust that God is at work for your good and His glory?

PRAYER:

Jesus, I cannot imagine the journey you went through on this Thursday, knowing all that would take place and knowing that your friends and followers were so confused. Jesus, it makes me wonder how you are interceding for me today, having perfect understanding of all that is happening in my life and how I will respond. Jesus, I am asking for you to intercede for me like you did for Simon Peter. May I be found faithful, come what may.

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

"After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." Mark 14:26

"Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he told his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. He said to them, "I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake." He went a little farther, fell to the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, 'Abba, Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will.'"

Mark 14:26, 32-36

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank You for giving us such a raw, authentic example of what it looks like to pour our heart out to the Father. And thank You for choosing to obey the Father and go to the cross. Jesus, help me trust the Father as much as You do. Because of Your obedience, You empower my ability to choose obedience. Holy Spirit, help me to pour out my heart to Abba Father like Jesus and to wrestle toward declaring not my will, but Your will be done in my life.

DAY 5: GOOD FRIDAY

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

Jesus spoke these things, looked up to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to everyone you have given him. This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent —Jesus Christ." John 17:1-3

"It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three, because the sun's light failed. The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle. And Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." Saying this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, "This man really was righteous!" All the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, went home, striking their chests. But all who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things." Luke 23:44-49

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

The night before heading to the cross, Jesus asked the Father to glorify Him so that people would know God and have eternal life. This is a prayer The Father was happy to answer. A crowd of spectators formed during the crucifixion. Some people gathered simply out of curiosity. Others rallied, truly believing that this was a day of needed justice, crucifying the one they believed to be a blasphemer and rebel. Little did they know that this would be the day of cosmic justice. All sin and its effects—past, present, and future—would be overcome in full on the cross. And according to Jesus's request, the Father glorified the Son during His death.

The Sun disappeared causing darkness to cover the earth for three hours. Thunder erupted and the temple veil was torn in two. The Bible says that when the Centurion experienced all of these things, his heart was in awe when he realized that Jesus was who He said He was. Many spectators left that day beating their chests, aware of how wrong they had been to be jeering at Jesus and celebrating his demise. But there were others who just stood back and watched. They watched because they had already known. This was their beloved Teacher, friend, son, brother, Messiah... their beloved Jesus.

Our beloved Jesus... *"who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that (we) may not grow weary or fainthearted."* Hebrews 12:2b-3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What does Jesus' prayer to His Father reveal about His heart toward us?

Are there any areas in your life where you are weary and fainthearted?

How does Hebrews 12:2-3 encourage you?

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank You for willingly going to the cross so that I may have strength in time of weakness. Father, thank You for glorifying Jesus in such a way that many believed. I confess, there are many times in my life that I need to see Your glory on display as a reminder of Your love and Your power. However, if ever I begin to question Your love for me, please always bring my mind back to the cross, which is the display of your love poured out for me. Jesus, I could never thank you enough for what you endured and accomplished on that day. THANK YOU!

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

*Why are you so far from my deliverance
and from my words of groaning?*

*My God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
by night, yet I have no rest.*

Psalm 22:1-2

PRAYER:

Jesus, it is humbling and comforting to know that no matter what pain I may experience on this earth, You understand. You were rejected, despised, betrayed. You understand physical pain as well as emotional. You also took on the wrath of God on my behalf so that I will never have to. Jesus, thank you for enduring the cross. Remind me often that I can come to you with the depths of my soul knowing you will have compassion. You also are the hope to healing and restoration. I am asking You to help me cry out as authentically and expectantly as you did. Thank you for being such a loving example as well as our savior.

DAY 6: *SILENT SATURDAY*

BEGIN WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

"Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." Luke 23:50-56

DESCRIBE HOW YOU ARE FEELING TODAY:

Have you ever reflected on how devastating the crucifixion was for Jesus's followers? For many of us, it may be hard to picture the death of Jesus without also picturing the resurrection because we learned about both at the same time. Was there ever a time that you knew about the cross that you did not also know about the resurrection?

According to Luke 24, we know the disciples did not yet understand because Luke says the disciples thought the women were sharing idle tales when they announced the empty tomb. So, if they did not expect the resurrection, then this was much bigger than a beloved friend or Teacher being killed. This wasn't simply martyrdom, this was the death of everything they thought to be true. Their entire world was flipped upside-down without any hope of it being right-side-up again. They were in need of a miracle and their miracle worker was dead. I can't even begin to imagine the heavy mood that must have clouded over Jesus's followers the day following His death. How they most likely attempted to console one another while also regrouping and considering where they had gone wrong. What now?

While they were grieving, another was celebrating. "Oh death, where is your sting?" Well, at this point, Death's sting was unbearable. But this is not how the story would end.

So where did the disciples miss the story? They were following the right Messiah, but their expectations of how the story would play out were different from that of Jesus. They experienced painful bewilderment as they buried their Teacher, the one in whom they had placed all their hope. Little did they know that in one day's time, their hope would be restored.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What does Jesus' prayer to His Father reveal about His heart toward us? Are there any areas in your life where you are weary and fainthearted? How does Hebrews 12:2-3 encourage you?

PRAYER:

Jesus, we confess that it is so easy to lose faith when things do not go as expected. And we must admit, there are many, many times when your thoughts are not our thoughts and your ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55). Help us keep our eyes fixed on You and not our expected outcomes. Abba Father, help us to always trust that no matter what, You are at work. You will never abandon us. We praise You that You always see the big picture and know how you will work all things for our good and Your glory. And, thank you for Your grace, mercy, and compassion when we are disillusioned or disenchanted by our limited view of how You are working. Jesus, thank you again for enduring the cross. You were abandoned by our Father for a short time so that we will never have to experience separation from You. Jesus, we love you!

END WITH TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE WITH GOD.

EVENING REFLECTION

What are the three biggest takeaways for you from this entire study? Take the time to think on this, and write out your answers. Hold on to this booklet until the next Lent season, then look back at your notes and what you wrote here. How did it end up playing out over the year? Does God marvel at your faith and faithfulness?

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank You so much for walking through this Lent season with me. Thank You for the journey this has been and the way You have worked in my heart. I pray that I will never take for granted the excruciating sacrifice You willingly went through in order to give me invitation into Your family. Thank You that I am able to be part of this global family of brothers and sisters who are one in You. Jesus, I echo Your prayer from the garden. May we all be One as You and the Father are one.
Amen

HAVING SAID THIS, SHE TURNED AROUND AND SAW
JESUS STANDING THERE, BUT SHE DID NOT KNOW
IT WAS *JESUS*. "WOMAN," JESUS SAID TO HER, "*WHY*
ARE YOU CRYING? WHO IS IT THAT YOU'RE SEEKING?"

SUPPOSING HE WAS THE GARDENER, SHE REPLIED,
“SIR, IF YOU’VE CARRIED HIM AWAY, TELL ME
WHERE YOU’VE PUT HIM, AND I WILL TAKE HIM
AWAY.” *JESUS SAID TO HER, “MARY.”*

JOHN 20:14-16A

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