

# make room

LENT 2026



Cuyahoga  
Valley Church

## Wednesday, February 18

### Day 1 – Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24 // *Inviting God to search us* // Dale Piscura

As we begin the season of Lent, our desire as a community of faith is to draw near to God, that we may celebrate with great joy—and with one another—the resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

We begin with the remarkable Psalm 139, written by David. In verses 1-12, we are reminded that God sees all and knows all—our words, thoughts, deeds, and intentions. As David remarks in verses 4 and 6:

“O Lord, you know it all together.”

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.”

We can celebrate the glorious attributes of God, knowing that His perfect knowledge of each of us is joined with His perfect love. Even before I was born, God knew me. Even before my first breath, He began His divine scrutiny of my life. My best moments and my darkest moments have been observed in totality.

Recently, I have been—somewhat reluctantly—under medical and dental care. Science has provided technologies that allow us to see hidden conditions. Professionals pursue realities that lie beyond our senses. They care enough to scan and x-ray, sometimes in uncomfortable ways. They order tests, and I submit, knowing there may be alarming results that lead to corrective procedures.

David pleads with the Lord to search his soul thoroughly (verses 23-24). He also knows that God can lead him to the cure—the purification of his life and deliverance from sin. David desired God’s nearness, the blessedness of His presence. To experience this intimacy, a cleansing of sin is required.

#### **Question to Consider:**

Will you ask for God’s gaze? Will you agree with His search results? Will you dare to invite this divine scan?

#### **Prayer Prompt:**

Let us pray for one another, that we would regularly engage with God in pursuit of spiritual health. Let us pray not only for divine examination, but also for hearts willing to welcome His holy presence.

## Thursday, February 19

### Day 2 – Jeremiah 17:5–10 // *The heart's hidden loyalties* // Raquel Schors

What is in a heart?

Look beyond the physical organ itself, rhythmically pumping lifeblood throughout the body.

Look instead at the *biblical* heart—the inner self. The headquarters of emotion, desire, motive, thought, and will within each person. The heart directs the whole of life.

And the heart we start off with has a fatal flaw.

Jeremiah tells us something revealing about the original condition of every human heart. He writes, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick.” In other words, every person is born with a heart defect of sorts. We are born with hearts that long for things that will ultimately harm us; hearts that justify and minimize sin; hearts determined to go their own way instead of God’s way; hearts that lead us—like the pied piper—to be loyal to all the wrong things. Our hearts are so sick that we are unable to stop them from turning to stone. It’s a terminal diagnosis.

And the root cause of the disease is a lack of trust in the only One worthy of trust. Consider the image the Lord gives Jeremiah in verses 5 and 6. A heart that trusts in anything other than God is in a sorry state indeed. It is like a dry, brittle shrub in the parched desert—barely alive and destined for death. When its roots reach for water, they find only salt. It is alone. It lacks nourishment. It produces no fruit. It is cursed.

But praise be to God, who can heal what we cannot! He offers an antidote to cure the incurable. By His grace, when we transfer our trust from everything else and place it fully on Jesus as the Leader and Forgiver of our lives, God performs surgery on us. He removes the sick, stony heart and replaces it with a healthy heart of flesh—beating and alive. Our new hearts love God and others, and they become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. The image changes from a shriveled shrub to a leafy tree planted near a river, whose roots never lack the life-giving water needed to bear fruit, even when conditions become harsh.

This is good news. Actually, this is *great* news. What a spectacular and loving God we have!

But take note: God works His healing in our hearts across the span of a lifetime. Our new hearts are alive, yes—but there may still be areas in need of further healing. Jesus-followers do not need to fear that their hearts will revert entirely to stone, yet the old self, with its habits and sins, can quietly creep back in and take up residence. It happens easily and often unnoticed. That is why we need regular checkups and routine examinations with the Great Physician. This happens through the work of the Holy Spirit, God’s Word, prayer, reflection, confession, surrender, and accountability within community.

So let us return to our original question: What is in a heart?

What is in *your* heart?

Do you know? Have you stood still long enough to look? A mere glance will not do, because the heart is vast. It is wide, deep, and multi-layered. Things can hide easily within it. To know what is truly there, we must take time to dig. But it is difficult to discern the truth on our own, so do not dig in the dark. Let God—

who sees *all*—shine His light so you can truly see. He is the One who searches the heart and tests the mind. He knows, so ask Him to show you.

Be willing to look where His bright spotlight falls—especially in the places where the weight of your trust rests on fragile things that cannot last and will eventually break under the strain. What are those things in *your* heart? Career? Money? Home? Family? Romance? Health? Appearance? Talent? Hobbies? Good works? Or perhaps something unnamed?

These things are not evil in themselves, but they cannot bear the weight of your trust. They will fail you. Allow Jesus to hold your hand as you shift your trust away from those things and place it securely in Him—the Rock who will not crumble under any weight, even the weight of the world. Stand *there*, and your life will flourish. Your roots will grow deep. You will endure drought and storm. Your branches will remain green and heavy with fruit—because a heart that trusts Jesus alone is truly a blessed heart.

### **Question to Consider**

What things in your life, other than Jesus, do you tend to trust? (It may help to consider what you would struggle most to give up if Jesus asked.) Is the weight of your trust currently leaning on any of those things?

### **Prompt for Prayer**

Quiet yourself before the Lord. Praise Him for His grace, and thank Him for the healing He has begun in your heart. Ask Him to reveal any hidden loyalties that remain. Pray for His help in shifting your trust away from those things and onto Jesus alone.

## **Friday, February 20**

### **Day 3 – Psalm 42 // *Disordered thirst and holy longing* // Joe Valenti**

I was driving down the road today when I noticed a car, covered in snow, sitting at the bottom of a steep driveway that hadn't been plowed. Maybe you've been in a situation like that—where you can't seem to get to where you want to go. It might have been a stuck car, a delayed flight, or the Metro bus that never shows up—leaving you unable to get where you need to go.

That's the situation we're invited into in Psalm 42.

The psalm places us with someone who is unable to visit the temple. Many scholars believe the obstacle may be physical—that the person has some kind of infirmity that prevents them from getting out of bed and traveling. We catch hints of this in the psalmist's longing to appear before God and in the memory of once leading a joyful procession to the house of God. Whatever the cause, the result is clear: a downcast soul, marked by deep sadness and deep longing to once again be near to God.

That longing doesn't remain vague or abstract. The psalmist describes his desire for God as an intense thirst, like that of a deer desperate for water. Around here, deer can usually find water without much trouble, so the image might be lost on us. In the ancient Near East, this picture would have communicated danger and desperation—severe dehydration, even the threat of death. The image is

meant to make us uncomfortable. This longing for God is not merely intellectual; it is visceral. The psalmist is desperately in need of God.

That's important to notice, especially in a season like Lent. We often assume that spiritual maturity looks like composure—that faith is calm, collected, and unshaken. But Psalm 42 gives us freedom to be honest about our neediness. This entire psalm is marked by pain. Here, faith expresses itself not through satisfaction, but through longing.

And the psalmist is not ashamed of that thirst. He doesn't rush to silence it or spiritualize it away. Instead, he names it honestly before God.

*My soul thirsts.*

*My tears have been my food day and night.*

*Why are you cast down, O my soul?*

Notice what he does *not* do. He doesn't scold himself for feeling this way. He doesn't tell himself to "be grateful" or "have more faith." He doesn't pretend that remembering past joy makes present sorrow disappear. In fact, as he remembers the past, the pain seems to intensify. Memories of songs, celebration, and closeness now sit alongside absence.

This is a particular kind of suffering—not the loss of belief, but the loss of access. God still feels real to the psalmist, just not near.

Have you ever felt that way?

I have. It's terrible.

Many of us know this experience well. We aren't rejecting God. We aren't walking away. We're simply unable to get to where we once were—or where we long to be. Prayer feels difficult. Scripture feels quiet. Worship feels distant. The road that once felt open now feels blocked.

Psalm 42 gives us permission to say that out loud. And I love that. The Psalms give us language we might not think we're allowed to use with God. Can we be angry, sad, exhausted—at the end of our rope—before Him? Yes. The Psalms say we can.

But we're not meant to stop with ourselves and our emotions. This psalm shows us that longing itself can be a form of prayer. The psalmist does not resolve his sadness by the end. The refrain repeats. Hope is named, but not yet felt. It still feels somewhere out there in the distance.

Lent is not a season for forcing resolution. It's a season for staying present. For noticing what hunger reveals. For allowing desire to surface rather than numbing it. The psalmist's thirst does not disqualify him from faith—it is evidence of it. His ache points toward relationship, not failure.

Perhaps the most hopeful aspect of Psalm 42 is not the declaration of hope, but the honesty that comes before it. The psalmist refuses distraction. He doesn't replace longing with noise or escape discomfort by pretending everything is fine. He brings his unsettled soul directly into God's presence—even when that presence feels far away.

This is the invitation Psalm 42 offers us during Lent: to stop rushing past our thirst. To notice what we long for and *feel it*, so that we can be honest about those unmet desires and bring them to God.

You may not feel close to God right now. You may feel delayed, stuck, or held back by circumstances you cannot change. Psalm 42 reminds us that longing itself can be a faithful posture. God meets us right in the middle of the thirst.

### **A Question to Consider**

What longing or thirst has been most present in your heart lately, and how have you been responding to it?

### **A Prompt for Prayer**

Bring that longing honestly before God. You don't need to resolve it or explain it. Simply name it. If words are hard to find, that's okay. Romans 8 reminds us that the Holy Spirit prays for us even when we don't know what to pray. You might simply sit quietly and say, "Holy Spirit, I need You to take this one—I don't know what to say." Ask God to meet you not by removing the ache, but by being present with you in it.

## **Saturday, February 21**

### **Day 4 – Luke 10:38–42 // Busyness vs. attentiveness // Kristy Klasa**

I can imagine being in Mary and Martha's living room at that moment. Knowing me, I would probably be thinking something like, "*Martha, read the room—do you see anyone else scurrying around? Maybe it's because Jesus is teaching in your living room, and this would be a great time to listen.*" I wonder how many of us have the same reaction to Martha in this scene—and yet, if I'm honest, I relate to her.

How often have I done the same thing—made myself busy instead of pausing, quieting my heart and mind, and simply spending time with the Lord? When I'm alone, shifting from busyness to attentiveness might be as simple as hitting the "Do Not Disturb" button on my phone. It's a different story when others are around, especially when they're expecting something from me.

I imagine Martha felt the weight of others' expectations. It was her home, after all. If I put myself in her shoes, it would matter to me that people felt comfortable and cared for. There is something good and meaningful about creating a warm, welcoming environment.

Have you ever visited the home of someone who truly displays the gift of hospitality? I have. You can feel the intentionality behind their preparation—cleaning, tidying, cooking, anticipating needs. All of that is good, and I genuinely appreciate it. There is a time and place for that kind of preparation. But what ultimately makes me feel most welcomed in someone's home is not how put-together everything is—it's their presence with me. Undistracted, unhurried time with me. What a gift!

Martha's busyness—while understandable—begins to undermine the very purpose of hospitality. Luke tells us she was "distracted with much serving." She was missing out on a sacred opportunity to not just serve Jesus from a respectable distance, but to be with Him and listen to His teaching. To take the time to know Him and be known by Him.

How kind of Jesus to take a moment to redirect Martha. Despite her obvious distraction and growing frustration, He doesn't shame her or dismiss her efforts. Instead, He graciously invites Martha to refocus her attention and make the very best use of this moment in time. Everything else can wait.

Two thousand years later, I'm grateful for this story. It reminds me that Jesus sees me—not just in moments of quiet devotion, but in the middle of my busyness. He sees me on a crowded Sunday morning at CVC when I can easily be “distracted with much serving.” And even there, He invites me to pause, to listen, and to be with Him.

Because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that same invitation is available to us today. Jesus invites us to be attentive to Him because He knows how easily our hearts become divided. Attentiveness to Jesus is how we remember who we are and Whose we are. It is how we stay grounded in His love. When we choose to sit at His feet and pay attention to Him, we are choosing the one thing that reorders everything else.

And perhaps even more amazing than this invitation to be attentive to Jesus is the truth that Jesus is attentive to us. He sees Martha in her anxiety and speaks her name with tenderness. He notices her inner turmoil, not just her outward busyness. The same Jesus who invites our attention is already paying attention to us—fully present, deeply aware, and never distracted. What a picture of true hospitality.

Let's do that today. Let's set aside our busyness for a while and make room in our hearts to be attentive to Jesus. Start by thanking Him for being attentive to you.

### **Question to Consider**

Where and when is it hardest for you to be attentive to Jesus—and how might remembering His attentiveness to you change the way you approach that space?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Jesus, thank You that You are never distracted from me. Thank You for seeing me in the midst of my busyness and for caring enough about me to not leave me there. Forgive me for allowing busyness to distract me and pull me away from time with You. Help me, Holy Spirit, to turn back to You when I lose sight of the Truth and allow the anxieties of this world to take over my thoughts. Help me to rest in the Truth of Your love. Remind me who I am and Whose I am. Amen.

## **Monday, February 23**

### **Day 5 – Proverbs 4:20–27 // *Guarding the heart* // Dean Siley**

Proverbs 4 reads like a parent leaning in close, speaking with urgency but also with deep care. “My child, pay attention... do not let these truths out of your sight... keep them within your heart.” The tone is not harsh or demanding; it is protective. What follows is one of Scripture’s most familiar invitations: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

We often hear this verse as a warning—something to be vigilant against, something to lock down or defend. But in the context of Proverbs, guarding the heart is less about fear and more about

transformation. The heart, in biblical language, is not merely the seat of emotions; it is the center of desire, will, attention, and trust. And yet it can also be deceitful. To guard the heart is to tend the place from which both our lives and our inclinations—toward good or toward hidden deceit—take shape and grow.

Lent gives us space to notice how easily our hearts become crowded. Not necessarily with bad things, but with loud things—urgent things, familiar distractions, and the ways we soothe ourselves. Without realizing it, we can begin to live from a heart shaped more by hurry, anxiety, comparison, or control than by wisdom and truth. Proverbs does not shame us for this; it simply invites us to notice the direction of our attention.

The passage moves deliberately through the body: eyes, mouth, feet. What we look at. What we speak. Where we walk. These are not random instructions; they reflect a slow awareness that transformation happens through repeated focus. Over time, what we focus on shapes what we love. What we love shapes how we live.

Guarding the heart, then, is not about perfection or constant self-correction. It is about direction. “Let your eyes look straight ahead... give careful thought to the paths for your feet.” Lent is not asking us to fix everything at once. It invites us to pause and ask: What is forming me right now? What has my attention? What am I allowing to shape my heart? What needs transformation?

This kind of guarding requires gentleness. If we approach our hearts with harshness or suspicion, we often miss what God is doing beneath the surface. Proverbs assumes that wisdom is learned over time, through attention and practice. Growth is slow. Transformation is cumulative. And God is patient.

To guard the heart is also to make room. Room to notice what we have been carrying. Room to recognize where we have drifted rather than remained anchored. Room to allow God to renew and restore our hearts. Lent does not demand immediate change; it offers space for awareness. And awareness is often the beginning of healing.

We may discover resistance here. Guarding the heart means acknowledging what we would rather ignore—sin, patterns of thought, subtle resentments, misplaced hopes. But Scripture does not leave us alone with that awareness. The invitation is not to self-manage our hearts, but to keep God’s words “within.” Wisdom is received before it is practiced. We guard our hearts not by tightening control, but by staying close to God through prayer, His Word, and community.

As a church, this season is about tending to our hearts. If lasting fruit is to grow, it must grow from a heart that is being slowly shaped by our surrender to Jesus Christ. Guarding the heart is not about closing ourselves off; it is about opening our hearts to God in all areas—even the hidden areas.

Lent gives us permission to slow down and ask not just, *What am I doing?* but, *Who am I becoming?* And to trust that as we ask for God’s wisdom, He will faithfully shape our hearts to reflect Jesus.

### **Question to Consider**

What has been shaping your heart lately—your thoughts, desires, or what you are consuming—and what might it look like to bring that before God rather than manage it on your own?

## Prompt for Prayer

Take a few moments in quiet. Ask God to help you notice what has your attention and affection right now. You may want to name where your heart feels guarded, weary, or distracted. Offer these honestly to the Lord, and invite Jesus to shape your heart with His wisdom as you learn to walk with Him, one step at a time.

**Tuesday, February 24**

**Day 6 – Psalm 131 // Quieting the soul // Josh Hamm**

Psalm 131

Beautiful pictures of the spiritual life are illustrated all around us. The Bible is replete with images from everyday life that powerfully bridge truth to our souls. And in Psalm 131 David helps us both “hear” and “sense” what the heart is meant to be when it has been with God. I imagine that David, who fathered more than twenty children, would have seen this “visual” truth played out on a daily basis! And what visual is that?

In v2 he says, “But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.”

Every parent (as well as anyone in earshot) knows when a baby is hungry. Infants don’t “hint” to us of their need. They simply cry out, and will continue to cry out until that need is met! You can hear that baby crying in your mind, can’t you? But a weaned child, a child that has drunk deeply and fully – that is a picture of true satisfaction! Calmed. Quieted. Utterly at rest. That, David says, is what he does for his soul.

Notice that David is the one who acts to quiet his soul. He must choose to quiet himself and calm his own heart. This is the invitation for this sixth day of lent: God is inviting you to calm and quiet your heart and be like a weaned child. But how do you do that? The answer is in the verses before (v1) and after (v3). There is something we must choose not to do, and something else we must do instead. Psalm 131 is a pilgrimage song. A tune that God’s people were meant to sing as they went up to Jerusalem. That meant leaving their normal routine behind and fixing their minds ahead on the truth of who they were going to worship.

So as we go to the Lord today, we must first consider what we must choose not to do, what we must leave behind. Verse 1 says, O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

What David is expressing here that some things are not for him to know, and he has chosen not to get preoccupied with them. Do you ever get preoccupied with the why’s of life? At times we feel that God owes us an explanation, and we have a right to know. But as Scripture elsewhere says, ““The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever” In

other words, what God has meant for us to know He has revealed to us in His Word, and His word is sufficient for what we need. Are we content with what He has shown us of Himself and His plans? David was, and therefore he avoided the sin of thinking God owed him anything.

Instead – and this is the second way – David implored his people to hope in the Lord now and forevermore (v3). So, if we desire a quieted soul today, David says, don’t let a proud

heart make demands of God – no – instead hope in Him! He has given us every reason to trust in Him and His plans!

### **Question to Consider:**

Is there some matter you’ve been preoccupied with that is preventing your soul from being quieted? What about God inspires you to hope in him today?

### **Prayer Prompt:**

Is your soul quieted? As you go to Him in prayer think of all that God has done for you. Tell your soul why you should hope in Him today.

## **Wednesday, February 25**

### **Day 7 – Hebrews 4:12–16 // God’s Word revealing what lies beneath // Dahlia Orth**

The season of Lent invites us to slow down long enough to notice what is happening beneath the surface of our lives. Not just what we believe, but what we carry. Not just what we say we trust, but where trust has grown thin or weary. Hebrews 4:12–16 meets us in that quiet, honest space and invites us to stay there a little longer.

“The word of God is living and active” (v. 12). God’s Word is not static or distant—it is present and at work. It moves toward us. It addresses us where we actually are, not where we wish we were. Lent gives us space to encounter Scripture not as something to master, but as something that searches us.

The writer describes God’s Word as sharper than a double-edged sword, able to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow. These images remind us that Scripture reaches places we cannot access on our own. It exposes the inner workings of the heart—the thoughts we replay quietly, the motivations beneath our good intentions, the fears that shape our decisions more than we realize.

This kind of exposure can feel unsettling. Many of us have learned how to keep moving, how to stay faithful and productive even when something deeper is misaligned. We know how to manage symptoms without attending to roots. But Hebrews reminds us that God is not interested in surface-level faith alone. He is attentive to the places where our lives are actually being formed.

Verse 13 presses this truth further: *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.”* Everything is uncovered and laid bare before Him. That can sound intimidating, but the passage does not frame God’s seeing as harsh or condemning. Instead, it tells the truth about reality. We are already fully known.

Lent gives us room to stop hiding from what God already sees.

Rather than pretending we are stronger than we are, this passage invites us into honesty. When Scripture reveals something uncomfortable—resentment, exhaustion, resistance, unmet longing—we are not asked to clean it up first. We are invited to bring it into the open.

And then, in verse 14, the tone of the passage shifts.

“Therefore,” the writer says, pointing us to Jesus. Because we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, we are not left alone with what has been revealed. Jesus is not detached from our humanity. He has entered fully into human experience. Verse 15 tells us that He sympathizes with our weaknesses—not from a distance, but from lived understanding.

Jesus knows temptation. He knows pressure. He knows what it is to remain faithful when obedience feels costly and clarity feels far away. This matters deeply during Lent. When God’s Word exposes what lies beneath, it does so in the presence of grace.

This passage does not rush us toward resolution. Instead, it invites a posture. *“Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess”* (v. 14). Holding firm here does not mean pretending everything is steady. It means staying connected. Remaining. Refusing to walk away from God simply because things feel unresolved. The posture of holding firmly is deeply shaped by what we are holding onto. Hold firmly to God. Hold everything else very loosely.

Then comes the invitation at the heart of this passage: *“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence”* (v. 16). Confidence here is not rooted in performance or certainty. It is rooted in access. Because of Jesus, we are welcomed into God’s presence as we are.

At that throne, we do not find judgment waiting for us—we find mercy. We find grace. Not just grace for someday, but grace for *our time of need*. Right now. In the middle of what is unfinished.

We are reminded that spiritual growth is rarely quick or tidy. Roots grow slowly, in hidden places. Health develops quietly. Fruit that lasts is formed in lives willing to be seen by God.

Making room during Lent does not mean striving harder. It means allowing God’s Word to search us and staying present with Him when it does. The God who sees fully is the God who invites us close.

### **A Question to Consider**

What part of your life have you been managing carefully, but not yet bringing honestly before God?

### **A Prompt for Prayer**

Sit quietly before God. Invite Him to help you notice what has been shaping your heart beneath the surface. Pay attention to any thoughts, emotions, or longings that come to mind. Offer them to God without needing to explain or fix anything.

## Thursday, February 26

### Day 8 – Romans 12:1–2 // Transformation through surrender // Joe Valenti

Paul's letter to the Romans has been called his magnum opus. It is packed with theology about man, sin, and of course, the extraordinary grace of God. Paul pulls no punches as he opens by communicating the depth of our depravity and the consequences of our sin. But before we plummet into despair, Romans 8 comes bursting through with the hope of grace offered freely and mercy poured out more generously than we could imagine. So, when Paul reaches Romans 12, he does not introduce a new subject so much as draw a conclusion. *“Therefore,”* he writes, in view of all this mercy, something becomes possible. Now, you can offer yourselves fully.

Paul invites us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. For many of us, the word sacrifice doesn't sound very exciting. Paul has invited us into freedom in Christ. So, isn't sacrifice a step backwards?! No, it's not! In fact, the process of sacrifice is a deeper level of freedom, deeper relationship with God, and more effective witness.

Paul tells us to present our bodies. Our bodies contain a lot of stuff. They are the place where our habits live, where our patterns take shape, where our affections are practiced day after day. Lent gives us space to notice how much of our embodied life runs on autopilot. You and I sooth ourselves in various ways that we rarely give attention and that are often unhealthy. What do you reach for when you're tired? How do you cope when you're overwhelmed? Where do you turn for comfort, distraction, or control?

Paul warns against conformity to the world. Conformity happens quietly and often without our awareness. We absorb the values, anxieties, and rhythms of the world around us simply by moving through it. Transformation, on the other hand, is the work of God—slow, intentional, and deeply renewing.

Notice that Paul does not say, *“Transform yourselves.”* He speaks of being transformed. This is something God does in us as we make room—room for new ways of seeing, new ways of desiring, new ways of trusting. Lent is not about forcing change, but about creating space where the Spirit can work.

Renewal of the mind does not happen through information alone. It happens as we dwell with God, as we bring our whole selves—bodies, thoughts, patterns, and affections--into His presence. Over time, we begin to discern what is truly good, what is life-giving, and what aligns with God's will. And this is where greater freedom and relationship are found. Each day of Lent invites us again to loosen our grip, to resist the pull of conformity to the world (or the flesh), and to open ourselves to the quiet, faithful work of transformation.

#### Question to Consider

Where in your daily life might God be inviting you to make room for renewal rather than simply trying harder?

#### Prayer Prompt

Most of my personal prayers end this way: "Help me to walk in the power of the Spirit and to obey you every opportunity that I get." Maybe you would consider making this your prayer today.

## Friday, February 27

### Day 9 – Luke 18:9–14 // *Self-reliance vs. humility* // Becca Ferguson

In this story, Jesus gives His listeners the opportunity to reflect on two men. One of them has all the appearance of righteousness—he seems to have it all together. The other has all the appearance of sinfulness—he seems like someone who should be ashamed of himself. His job even makes an appearance in the Pharisee's list of “people I'm glad I'm not like.”

But Jesus makes it clear in this parable that it is not what is on the outside that ultimately reveals someone's inner posture before God. And it is not what is on the outside that makes someone right before God, either. God is not looking to be impressed by ministry titles, financial ability, power or prestige, or by someone who checks all the right boxes in the eyes of the world. God is looking for something very different.

As Isaiah 66:2b states:

*“But this is the one to whom I will look:  
he who is humble and contrite in spirit  
and trembles at my word.”*

God is pleased when we see ourselves clearly, as He does. The tax collector in Jesus' parable asks God for mercy and identifies himself as a sinner. He sees himself honestly, and he knows he needs mercy and grace that only God can provide.

The Pharisee, on the other hand, cannot see himself clearly because of his pride. He sees himself through the lens of all that he has done for God—and he feels good about it. He tithes. He fasts. He shows up in the right places at the right times. He even has a list ready of people he believes he is better than, and he thanks God that he is not like them. This man has compiled his own qualifications for what it looks like to be right before God—and by his own standards, he's doing quite well.

And yet, it is the tax collector—the one who comes humbly to God and asks for mercy—whom Jesus says is justified.

God invites us to see everything—God Himself, the world, and even ourselves—as He does. And God tells us that His way of seeing is the true way. When we argue with God, we are ultimately arguing against reality. When we say, “I'm doing a pretty good job,” we leave ourselves unable to see things as they truly are—because we want to remain blind to reality. We would rather pretend to be self-reliant than face the truth that we can never actually be anything other than reliant on the God who made us. And when we do this, we lose the ability to see our need for—and to receive—the mercy and grace God longs to give us.

When we see our sin clearly, when our sin overwhelms us, we are also best able to see the grace and forgiveness of God clearly. When we recognize our need for Him and realize how helpless and hopeless we are without Him, we are finally able to say, “Even this, He forgives! Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saves a wretch like me!”

The tax collector, in his humility, understood himself better than the Pharisee did. He saw himself—and his God—more rightly than the religious leader did.

Jesus is making the point that anyone—truly, anyone—can turn to God in repentance. And it is not always, and does not have to be, the person we would most expect.

So in this season of Lent, let us take a moment to reflect on our own hearts. Are we prone to think God wants a list of our accomplishments in order to love and forgive us? Do we build requirements that we know we can fulfill and place them in God’s mouth? Or do we see our sin clearly and still trust that His mercy and grace are greater still?

### **Question to Consider**

Where are you prone to believe that the work you do for God is enough to earn His love or approval? Where might God be inviting you to grow in trusting that what He asks is humble repentance?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Take a moment to pray and ask the Lord to help you see Him, the world He created, and yourself as He does. Ask Him to remind you that before His throne, you do not need to pretend to have it all together. He invites you to come honestly, openly, and humbly—to repent of sin and to receive His gracious gift of forgiveness.

## **Saturday, February 28**

### **Day 10 – Isaiah 30:15–18 // *Salvation in repentance and rest* // Tony Scialabba**

I recently watched a movie that told the story of the United States being attacked by an unknown threat. As the danger became clear, authorities followed every established protocol—every contingency plan designed to neutralize an enemy. But this threat was not a person or even a known nation. It was a fast-approaching nuclear missile, already in motion and already too close. One by one, the plans failed. There was no clear solution—only the growing weight of urgency and fear.

In Isaiah 30, Judah finds itself under a similar kind of pressure. The Assyrian Empire, the dominant military power of the day, was threatening to invade Jerusalem. The danger was real and immediate. Judah responds in a way that makes sense. They look for security where other nations look for security. They turn to military strength. They pursue alliances that promise protection. They prepare to act quickly, decisively, and strategically.

But God invites Judah to respond to the threat with a different strategy.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells His people that salvation will not come through speed or strength, but through returning and resting—through repentance that leads them back into trustful dependence on Him. Strength, He says, is found not in frantic action, but in quietness and trust. Judah is not convinced. Rest feels passive. Quiet feels risky. Trust feels insufficient in the face of such a powerful enemy.

That tension is important to notice. God does not deny the reality of the threat, nor does He minimize their fear. Instead, He names a deeper issue beneath their strategy—their instinct to secure themselves apart from Him. Judah’s problem is not ultimately military; it is relational. Under pressure, they reach for control instead of returning to God.

Most of us are not facing invading armies. But many of us live with pressures that feel just as urgent—circumstances that demand action, decisions that feel heavy, situations that whisper, “*If you don’t do something now, everything will fall apart.*”

Isaiah 30 invites us to notice how quickly urgency shapes our posture. When pressure rises, rest feels irresponsible, and quiet feels unproductive. Only after exhausting every other option does trust begin to feel viable. So instead, we act. We plan with security and urgency in mind—not always because we are faithless, but because we are afraid.

Isaiah points us toward something deeply counterintuitive: resting, quieting, and trusting in the face of adversity. Rest may look like passivity, but it is a refusal to live as if everything depends on us. Quietness may appear disengaged, but it is actually attentiveness. Trust may seem like denial of danger, but it is confidence in the greater power of God’s presence.

And then comes one of the most surprising lines in the passage. After naming Judah’s resistance, Isaiah says that the Lord waits to be gracious to them. God is not rushing away in disappointment. He is not withholding mercy until they get it right. Instead, He waits. He longs to show mercy. He desires to be gracious.

This matters, especially during Lent. When fasting reveals our impatience, our fear, or our desire for control, God does not meet us with condemnation. He meets us with patience.

Isaiah reminds us that the Lord is a God of justice, and that those who wait for Him are blessed. Waiting here is not passive resignation; it is choosing to remain with God in the tension rather than escaping it. It is trusting that He is at work even when the threat feels close and the outcome uncertain.

God is not in a hurry.

He is waiting to be gracious.

### **Question to Consider**

Where do you feel pressure to act or secure control when God may be inviting you to return to rest and trust instead?

### **Prompt for Prayer**

Bring before God whatever feels most urgent or unresolved today. You do not need to solve it. Sit with Him in that place, naming what feels difficult, and allow moments of hunger or discomfort to become a quiet turning toward His presence.

## **Monday, March 2**

### **Day 11 – Psalm 20 // *False confidence and true trust* // Denise Petek**

We all face battles. Some are visible and public, while others are quiet and personal—relational tension, health struggles, financial pressure, exhaustion, grief, or fear. No matter how they appear, battles have a way of revealing what we truly rely on.

What do you do when trouble comes? Where do you turn first—before the situation is resolved, before clarity arrives, before relief is in sight?

Psalm 20 speaks to that very space. It is a prayer offered before the battle begins, not after the victory. It is not a song of celebration, but a prayer of surrender spoken in uncertainty. The people of God gather not to boast in strength, but to acknowledge their dependence on the Lord. What a beautiful picture.

“May the Lord answer you when you are in distress...” (Psalm 20:1). From the very first line, the psalm names reality: distress exists, danger is real, and human strength alone will not be enough. The Lenten season is the perfect time to reflect on where we have become self-sufficient and to bring our vulnerability honestly before God. Transformation begins not with control, but with surrender.

Throughout the psalm, the people intercede for their king, asking God to protect him, remember his offerings, and grant the desires of his heart. The king’s confidence is not in strategy or numbers, but in the Lord who receives sacrifice and gives help.

When trouble comes—and we know it will—we often instinctively reach for what feels familiar and reliable. But not all confidence is the same. False confidence rests in our abilities, experience, resources, or plans. It can feel responsible and wise, yet quietly replace our dependence on God. True trust rests in God’s character rather than our own strength. Psalm 20 invites us to examine where our confidence truly lies.

The heart of this invitation is captured in one verse: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7).

Chariots and horses represented military power—symbols of speed, security, and strength. Trusting them was sensible. Yet the people of God make a countercultural confession: our trust is not there. False confidence may feel secure, telling us that if we plan enough, prepare enough, or work hard enough, we can control the outcome. True trust does not dismiss these things, but it recognizes that it is God who saves—and His plans are often unexpected and better than anything we could imagine.

Psalm 20 speaks confidently even before the battle is won: “Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed.” This trust is rooted not in circumstances, but in relationship. Surrender is not passive resignation; it is placing our plans, fears, and future in God’s hands while still walking forward in obedience. True transformation begins when we loosen our grip on what we once depended on and rest in God’s faithfulness.

The psalm closes with a hopeful plea: “Lord, give victory to the king! Answer us when we call!” The people ask boldly—and then they wait. They trust God with both the process and the outcome.

Transformation requires surrender—not only of obvious sins, but also of the subtle sources of self-confidence we rely on instead of God. Psalm 20 reminds us that true victory is not simply winning the battle, but learning where our trust truly belongs. And when we surrender our self-dependence, we open ourselves to the transforming work of God.

## A Question to Consider

Psalm 20 says, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” What are your chariots and horses—the things you rely on for security, control, comfort, or identity apart from God? Where might God be inviting you to loosen your grip and practice true trust this Lent?

## Prayer Prompt

Ask God to reveal the chariots and horses in your life—the habits, plans, resources, or patterns of control you lean on instead of Him. Name them honestly before the Lord. Offer them as an act of surrender. Pray for the courage to release false confidence and grow in true trust. Ask God to meet you in the waiting and uncertainty, and to transform you as you rest in Him alone.

## Tuesday, March 3

### Day 12 – Philippians 2:1–11 // *The downward path of Christ* // James Fruits

I love the book of Philippians. It’s a goal of mine to memorize the whole thing. Feel free to ask me about it sometime to check my progress! Every chapter is loaded with wisdom, encouragement for living like Jesus, and challenge after challenge that always seems to meet me right where I am. Here in chapter two, we see all of that. Take a second to read this passage if you haven’t already today.

Paul invites the church toward unity and humility in the opening verses, and then he shows us what that looks like by pointing us to Christ. When he moves into verses 5 and 6, the feel of the passage shifts. What I didn’t realize for a long time is that hidden in plain sight here is a song.

Many scholars believe these verses reflect an early Christian hymn or confession—a worship-shaped proclamation of who Jesus is:

“being in the form of God...”

“he emptied himself...”

“humbled himself...”

“obedient to the point of death...”

“God highly exalted him...”

“every knee shall bow...”

There is a rhythm to these lines that I had never slowed down enough to notice before learning that scholars believe this portion of the passage to be a song. The movement of the lyrics descends and then rises.

And I love that Paul teaches this way. He’s not merely giving instructions. He’s holding up Jesus and saying, “*If you want to know what humility looks like, look here.*”

Paul writes, “*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...*”

Not, “Try harder.”

More like, “Stay close to Him. Let His way become yours.”

Jesus, though fully God, did not cling to His status or grasp for position. Instead, He “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” This is one of the clearest pictures of humility in all of Scripture.

Humility is not self-hatred or making yourself small. Humility is freedom from the need to grasp.

The opposite of humility isn’t confidence—it’s clinging. Holding tightly to control, recognition, or the need to be seen. Lent gives us space to notice where we’ve been clinging.

We live in a world that trains us to move upward: be impressive, be comfortable, stay in control. And then Jesus comes along and walks the opposite direction—downward into service and trust.

Author John Eldredge describes the “self-led life” as the default posture of the human heart—that quiet instinct to run things ourselves. Sometimes it simply sounds like, “I’ve got this.”

But Philippians 2 shows us that Jesus was not self-led. He was Father-led.

Serving was not a threat to Him because He never forgot who He was. Secure in the love of the Father, He could move downward without fear. When we forget who we are, humility begins to feel risky.

That’s why transformation requires surrender.

Surrender is rarely about giving up obviously bad things. More often, it means releasing the things we cling to for safety—our image, our plans, our need to be appreciated.

And Jesus goes all the way down: “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” This is God choosing love over self-preservation.

Lent invites us into that same life. This season is not about striving to become better Christians. It’s about making room—room to release what we were never meant to carry and to return from the self-led life to the Christ-led life. Even the theme song of our season says it simply:

“Here is where I lay it down

You are all I’m chasing now

This is my surrender...”

Philippians 2 reminds us that resurrection comes after surrender. Exaltation comes after emptying.

The invitation isn’t to try harder.

The invitation is to make room.

Jesus does not ask us to walk the downward path alone. He walked it ahead of us. And His Spirit meets us there, replacing the self-led life with the Spirit-led life.

The downward path of Christ is not a path of loss.

It is the way into freedom.

Let’s make room for more of that today.

## Question to Consider

Where in your life right now do you notice yourself grasping for control, recognition, or security instead of resting in the way of Jesus?

## Prompt for Prayer

Spend a few moments with God. Ask Him to show you what you are holding tightly. You don't need to force surrender—simply name what you see.

You may find yourself praying:

*"Jesus, I renounce the ways I try to manage my life apart from you. I choose dependence. Make room in me for your humble way."*

Sit in silence for a moment and invite the Spirit to lead you again.

## Wednesday, March 4

### Day 13 – Matthew 6:19–24 // *What we treasure shapes us* // Brenda Leisinger

What we treasure shapes us—and it reveals the condition of our hearts. You might not initially think this is true, but if you pause and honestly consider what you treasure, you may come to a different conclusion. In Matthew 6, Jesus shows us that there is a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money.

In Matthew 6:19–24, Jesus speaks about treasure, vision, and loyalty. He weaves together three images—where we store our wealth, how we see with our eyes, and whom we choose to serve—to reveal a single truth: what we treasure does not remain external to us. It reaches inward. It forms our desires, directs our attention, and ultimately shapes the kind of people we become.

Jesus begins in verse 19 by contrasting two kinds of treasure: earthly and heavenly. Earthly treasure is vulnerable—it can rust, decay, be stolen, or simply lose its value. Heavenly treasure, however, is secure and eternal, so Jesus urges us to store up treasures in heaven. Why? Not because earthly treasures are inherently bad, but because they do not last. When Jesus warns us not to store up treasures on earth, it is not only because wealth *might* be lost, but because it *will* be lost. He is warning us about misplaced affection. The danger is not having things; it is letting things have us.

Treasure is never neutral. What we treasure captures our attention, directs our energy, and shapes our decisions. Our hearts follow our investments. If we treasure success above faithfulness, we begin to measure our worth by productivity or financial security. If we treasure comfort above obedience, we avoid anything that might stretch us spiritually. If we treasure approval above truth, we slowly compromise our convictions. Over time, what we treasure becomes the lens through which we see the world—and ourselves.

Jesus then speaks in verse 22 about the eye as the lamp of the body. A healthy eye reflects single-minded devotion to God—a clear focus on His Kingdom that is not divided—and is often expressed through a life

of generosity. But when our vision is clouded, it can lead to greed, envy, a scarcity mindset, and a life oriented around money and self-reliance. Divided loyalty produces inner confusion. We may still believe the right things, but our lives feel scattered, anxious, and heavy.

Jesus' final statement brings this teaching to its conclusion: no one can serve two masters. We may try to divide our loyalties, but eventually one will win. What we treasure most will demand our obedience, shape our decisions, and define our freedom. Jesus speaks about money so frequently not because money is uniquely evil, but because it is uniquely tempting.

The good news is that Jesus is inviting us into something better—not taking something away. Treasuring God does not shrink our lives; it enlarges them. When God becomes our greatest treasure, our hearts grow anchored. Our decisions gain clarity. Our generosity increases. Our anxieties loosen their grip.

Over time, this kind of treasure reshapes us. We become people whose joy is not easily stolen, whose worth is not constantly negotiated, and whose love is not purely transactional. Our lives begin to reflect the character of the One we treasure—steady, faithful, and full of light.

Matthew 6:19–24 invites us to slow down and look honestly at ourselves. Not just at what we say we value, but at what actually commands our attention, energy, and affection. Jesus does not shame us for where we are; He simply tells us the truth about how the human heart works. And in doing so, He offers us a choice: to be shaped by treasures that fade, or by a treasure that forms us for life.

### **Question to Consider**

What do your time, energy, money, and emotional investments reveal about what you currently treasure most?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Lord, search my heart and show me where my treasures truly lie. Gently expose anything I am valuing above You. Reorient my desires so that You are my greatest treasure. Shape my heart, my choices, and my life around what matters eternally. Teach me to live with clear vision and an undivided heart. Amen.

## **Thursday, March 5**

### **Day 14 – Psalm 37:1–9 // Waiting rather than striving // Hannah Defendorf**

“Don’t worry... just relax!”

So cliché. And yet—easier said than done, right?

Most of us don’t struggle with doing nothing—we struggle with doing *too much*. We strive. We push. We worry. We hustle for control. We try to force outcomes, protect ourselves, compare our lives to others, and fix what feels broken—all while quietly growing weary, anxious, and sometimes even bitter.

Psalm 37 meets us right there. Three times in the opening verses, David tells us plainly: “Do not fret.” Not once. Not twice. Three times.

Why? Because fretting reveals something deeper—not just behavior, but heart posture. It exposes where we are striving instead of trusting.

Psalm 37 strongly affirms that God actively governs human affairs. He is not distant. He is not passive. He is not unaware. He orders events, outcomes, and timing—even when we cannot see how.

And so David gives us these invitations:

Trust in the Lord.

Delight yourself in the Lord.

Commit your way to the Lord.

Be still before the Lord.

Notice what is *not* included. There is no command to fix everything. No instruction to control outcomes.

Instead, these are not passive emotions—they are spiritual disciplines. They are active postures of surrender.

Waiting is not weakness. Waiting is strength, rooted in trust in God’s providence and submission to His sanctifying work.

Our culture trains us to believe we can—and must—control most things. Scripture gently and consistently reminds us that our lives are dust, and our hope—our present and eternal future—is found only in Him.

Striving says, “I must make this happen.”

Waiting says, “God is already at work.”

Lent invites us to pause—not just externally, but internally. It calls us to loosen our grip, quiet our striving, and allow God to mature our faith and weaken our self-reliance.

Waiting is choosing obedience without urgency.

It is trusting God without demanding immediate proof.

It is resting in the truth that He will act—in His time, in His way, for His glory and our good.

## **A Question to Consider**

What am I trying to force that God may be asking me to wait on?

What would obedience look like without urgency?

## **Prayer Prompt**

Take a moment to ask God what He is inviting you to release. Ask Him to help you wait—not passively, but confidently—in His timing.

## Friday, March 6

### Day 15 – Deuteronomy 8:1–10 // God uses hunger to teach dependence // Chris Warszawski

Moses speaks to the people of Israel as they prepare to enter the land God promised them. They have wandered in the wilderness for forty years and have experienced hardship, hunger, and danger. Soon, however, they will face their greatest test: the temptation of self-sufficiency—which would ultimately lead them to forget and betray their God. So how does Moses prepare them for this temptation?

First, he gives them a command. Actually, he gives them “*the whole command.*” This single command encompasses all of God’s expectations for His people: wholehearted devotion to Him. This generation of God’s people would not experience the life God promised or fulfill the purposes He prepared for them without complete loyalty to Him.

Second, Moses reminds the people of God’s work in the wilderness. God has led them, guided them, and provided for them. He humbled them in order to discern the motivations of their hearts and to grow them in faithfulness. He allowed them to experience hunger so that they would truly understand their need for Him. He also disciplined them—in the same way a loving parent disciplines a child—so that they might walk humbly and rightly. God wanted His people to understand that just as physical food is necessary for life, obedience to His ways is necessary for them to flourish.

God used the long years in the wilderness to prepare His people for this moment. Moses calls them to put off the faulty thinking of self-sufficiency, to humble themselves before their faithful and loving God, and to embrace joyful dependence on Him.

You and I are invited into that same joyful dependence.

Lent is a season that echoes this purposeful wandering. The Israelites journeyed through those long, arduous years, and all the while God was forming them as His chosen people—for the sake of His glory revealed to the nations.

Jesus, too, wandered in the wilderness for forty days as His heavenly Father prepared Him for the earthly ministry that would fulfill God’s promise of a Savior to the world.

And you and I, as we wander in a world marred and broken by sin, look forward to celebrating Easter—the now-realized promise of salvation through Christ, His atoning death, and His resurrection. We also look ahead to the day when we will experience the Promised Land of the new heavens and the new earth.

Until then, our faithful and loving God continues His work in our lives. He calls us to be wholly devoted to Him. He humbles us and reveals the motivations of our hearts. Where there is sin, He calls us to repent—to turn toward Him, receive forgiveness, and walk in His better way. He leads us and guides us faithfully. And like the Israelites, He allows us to experience hunger and lack so that we might embrace joyful dependence on Him.

#### Question to Consider

Where in your life are you experiencing “hunger” right now? What might it look like to embrace joyful dependence on God in that place?

## Prayer Prompt

Spend a few moments asking God to reveal areas in your heart or life where you are tempted toward self-sufficiency. Repent of that tendency, and ask Him to show you how He is inviting you to depend on Him more fully in those areas.

## Saturday, March 7

### Day 16 – Psalm 63 // *Longing for God above all else* // Ron Dick

David writes this psalm in the barrenness of the wilderness—a dry, exposed, and unforgiving setting we would not choose for spiritual growth. Yet it is there, in a season of trouble, that his longing for God becomes unmistakably clear. Most of us know something of those wilderness places—moments when life feels stripped down and our deepest longings rise to the surface.

These are the moments when desire begins to speak a little louder, when something in us knows we need more than what we have been reaching for. Sometimes this longing shows up as exhaustion or emptiness; other times it rises through hunger—physical, emotional, or spiritual. Psalm 63 meets us right there, not with quick fixes or distractions, but with a gentle picture of what desire can become when it turns toward God.

David does not begin this psalm by recounting his troubles or defending himself against those who seek his life. Instead, he starts with a declaration of longing:

*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you.*

He is physically weary, hungry, and thirsty, yet the first hunger he names is spiritual. Even in the wilderness, he directs his desire toward God. His confidence does not rise from any change in circumstance, but from remembering who God is. This is where abiding begins—not with trying harder, but with turning our attention back to the God who is already near in our trouble.

In the midst of these difficult circumstances, David's longing is strikingly clear. Instead of reaching for comfort or control, he turns his desire toward God: *“Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.”* When everything else is stripped away, he discovers that the presence of God is not a last resort, but the very thing his soul was made for.

This psalm does not shame us for desiring. It simply redirects desire. It invites us to consider that the ache we carry—the unfulfilled hunger we often try to silence—might actually be pointing us toward the God who meets us in our wilderness places. Our desires, when we allow them to surface honestly, can become signposts leading us back to the One who alone satisfies.

In a culture that trains us to numb discomfort quickly, hunger feels like a problem to solve. But Scripture often treats hunger as a teacher. Hunger reveals where we are dependent. It exposes what we trust. It brings clarity to what truly matters.

We do not shut down our longings during Lent. Instead, we bring them into the presence of God. We let hunger reveal what we trust and rely on. It becomes a doorway leading us deeper into the love of God. Lent is not a season for striving to be “better Christians,” but a season of making room—room for awareness, room for longing, and room for God to meet us where we are. And when we slow down long enough to notice our hunger, we begin to see how often we try to satisfy ourselves with things that cannot ultimately give life.

As a church, we are learning that lasting fruit for God’s Kingdom grows from deep roots. We cannot rush transformation, and we cannot manufacture impact. But we *can* make room. We can slow down. We can bring our honest hunger before God and trust Him to meet us there.

This is the quiet work of Lent.

And it is never wasted.

### **Question to Consider**

Where do you notice hunger or restlessness in your life right now, and what might it reveal about the desires shaping your heart?

### **Prompt for Prayer**

Take a few quiet moments to bring your honest desires before God—without filtering them, minimizing them, or trying to solve them. Let your hunger become a place of conversation with Him. Ask the Spirit to gently redirect your desire toward the One who knows you, loves you, and meets you in your wilderness as you grow in abiding in Him.

## **Monday, March 9**

### **Day 17 – Isaiah 55:1–9 //True satisfaction vs. cheap substitutes // Tate Stevens**

Isaiah 55 begins with an invitation, not a correction. God does not start by telling us what to fix. He begins by naming what is already true: we are hungry, and we are thirsty. Scripture assumes need; it does not shame it. God speaks directly to the ache beneath our striving—the places where we feel empty, restless, or worn down.

“Come... buy and eat... without money and without cost.” What God offers cannot be earned, and that can feel unsettling. Many of us are more comfortable working for what we receive—even with God. We labor, perform, and manage our lives, hoping it will finally be enough. And still, God gently asks, “Why do you spend your energy on what does not satisfy?” This is not condemnation; it is compassion. God is naming the places we keep returning to, even though they leave us hungry again.

This passage does not tell us to stop wanting. Desire is not the problem. Where we direct our desire is. Lent gives us space to notice how easily we reach for quick relief, control, or distraction—things that promise fullness but cannot bear the weight of our lives. God does not scold us for this. He invites us closer.

Again and again, the invitation is to listen. “Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.” Listening requires surrender. It means slowing down enough to stop trying to save ourselves. Life, Isaiah tells us, does not come from trying harder, but from staying near the voice of God.

God grounds this invitation in promise—an everlasting covenant. Even when we are inconsistent, distracted, or spiritually tired, God remains faithful. He does not withdraw when we come back empty-handed. He welcomes us. He gives without shaming. He offers Himself again.

When God says His ways are higher than ours, He is not pushing us away. He is reminding us that His mercy is larger than our imagination. Where we expect scarcity, God offers abundance. Where we assume earning, God gives freely. Where we cling to control, God invites us to trust.

Isaiah 55 does not rush us toward resolution. It invites us to come as we are—hungry, thirsty, unfinished—and to trust that God alone can satisfy what we cannot fix ourselves.

### **Question to Consider**

Where might I be living as if there is scarcity, even as God offers abundance?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Take a few quiet moments to notice any hunger, thirst, or restlessness within you. Do not try to resolve it or explain it away. Simply bring it before God, just as it is.

## **Tuesday, March 10**

### **Day 18 – Matthew 4:1–11 // Jesus fasting and trusting the Father // Rick Duncan**

Lent is an opportunity for us to join Jesus in a kind of wilderness. We can fast from food, from noise, from being hurried. Hopefully, distractions dissipate and what’s driving us will come to the surface.

Matthew tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit in the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. These details matter. The hunger, the solitude, the deprivation, and the testing were all part of God’s plan for Jesus, the One who learned obedience from the things that He suffered.

When you fast during Lent, you are entering into your own time in the “wilderness.” It’s your place of preparation.

During His 40-day fast Jesus was seeking to live fully in His Father’s love. His body was weak, but His soul was alert. The fast didn’t empty Him; it filled Him with focus. Jesus gave up what sustained the body so He could access what sustained His soul.

Temptation #1: “Command these stones to become loaves of bread.” The temptation was to meet a legitimate human need in a self-reliant way. The temptation was to grab for Himself what He may have wanted instead of receiving from the Father what He needed. Jesus refused to let a good desire take the place of godly dependence.

Temptation #2: The devil wanted Jesus to seek after personal recognition. The devil urged Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, “God will rescue You and the people will see it. They will applaud you and receive You!” This was a temptation to be affirmed and followed without the long obedience of humility and servanthood. Jesus resisted again. He didn’t need to perform for applause and approval.

Temptation #3: This temptation was an offer of power. Satan promised all the kingdoms of the world. But the cost was high. Jesus would have had to give His allegiance to someone other than His Father. This was the offer of a crown without a cross, of authority without suffering, of gain without pain. Jesus won again. He did not need the devil to give Him control. He trusted in His Father’s will and ways. He knew He would be exalted one day in God’s time.

Jesus didn’t resist temptation by a denial of desires. Instead, His desires were proven to be in perfect order. Jesus was not detached. He was not numb. His hunger for God outweighed His hunger for bread. His longing to please the Father eclipsed any desire for applause or power. He knew that what the devil was offering was temporary. He refused to exchange what was lasting for what was fleeting.

When we are tempted, we are usually not pulled to choose something that’s obviously evil. We are tempted to turn good things into ultimate things. We want comfort, affluence, affirmation, success, influence, control, and more to give us what only God can give.

This is why we need Lent. We need the wilderness. We need to empty our stomachs and our souls. Slowing down can help bring our desires into the light.

When we fast from food, media, and noise, we create space for holy noticing. Fasting doesn’t create desire; it reveals it. It shows us what we turn to for comfort, what we rely on to feel secure, what we crave when we are tired, anxious, or unseen. And once we can name our desires, we can cooperate with God’s Spirit to reorder them.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote, “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak... We are half-hearted creatures... fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us... like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.” We settle for small comforts when something far greater is being offered.

Jesus resisted the temptation because He knew the difference between the lesser and the greater. He knew what life in sync with the Father was like. He knew that waiting on the Father is never wasted.

We will not be faced with the kind of intense temptation Jesus faced. But we live with the pull toward ease, the hunger to be noticed, and the longing to be in control. After all, we’re human. And fallen. And Satan is prowling around seeking to leverage our desires to destroy us.

But Lent invites us into a wilderness - a place where our desires can be reordered, a place where future glory can be revealed to us.

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.” Jim Elliot

### Question To Consider:

What desire are you facing that Satan wants to use to degrade you? How can that desire be reordered so that God can leverage it to reward you?

### Prayer prompt:

Sit quietly before the Lord. Name a desire that seems strong in your life. Don't try to fix it. Just name it. Ask the Father to show you how that desire, if left untended, can limit you. Now, ask Him to help you trust in His will and ways - even though that often means waiting on His timing. Ask Him to give you grace to reorder that desire to launch you into greater faithfulness and fruitfulness for Him.

## Wednesday, March 11

### Day 19 – Psalm 84 // Desiring God’s presence // Becca Mueller

Psalm 84 is considered a pilgrimage psalm—it’s about a journey. The author expresses the tension of recognizing, “*I’m not in God’s presence yet, but I want to be.*” There is deep desire and genuine longing to be with God, expressed from the human heart and echoed in creation. We see a description of the journey toward the temple where God dwells, and it parallels our own journey through life.

The Levitical clans traveled from their hometowns at appointed times to serve in the temple in Jerusalem. We catch a glimpse of what this journey may have looked like in verses 5–7, with references to highways, valleys, springs, and strength sustained by God. The journey ended at Zion, where God’s presence uniquely dwelled. The author longs to be there—even if only for a single day.

Pause and imagine what that would feel like: being in God’s dwelling place, then having to return home without that same sense of nearness. Picture the joy and anticipation as you draw closer and closer to intimacy with God, followed by the ache as your steps carry you farther away. The journey to the temple was likely much easier than the journey home.

Praise God that we now have never-ending, intimate access to Him. Through Jesus, we no longer come to a building—we come to a Person. Jesus Himself is the temple. In John 2, He speaks of the temple being raised in three days, referring to His body. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too are now God’s dwelling place. What a miracle that God chooses to be present with us in this way.

As wonderful as this truth is, we would be deceiving ourselves if we said that carrying God’s presence makes the journey of life easy. We still experience valleys as well as seasons of refreshment—and God is with us through them all. On this side of heaven, there remains tension, longing, and an ache for more. While we can experience God intimately now, we cannot yet experience Him fully. That is what we look forward to at the end of the journey, when Jesus returns.

Scripture gives us a picture of that day—when God’s dwelling place will finally be with His people, when He will live among us, and we will be His forever.

Come, Lord Jesus.

## Question to Consider

Where do you feel the tension between already having access to God's presence and still longing for more of Him—and how is God meeting you on that journey right now?

## Prompt for Prayer

Ask God to open your eyes to His nearness in your everyday life. Thank Him for His presence with you now, and bring your longing for more of Him honestly before Him. Pray that your longing would grow into hope as you wait for the day His presence is fully revealed.

## Thursday, March 12

### Day 20 – Hosea 6:1–6 // *Faithfulness over ritual* // Steve James

Right here, in the middle of the book of Hosea, we are given a moment that exposes something deeply human: the difference between saying the right things to God and actually being changed by Him.

Hosea was a prophet to Israel in a time of not-so-subtle rebellion against the Most High. Of course, His children knew His rules; they paid their lip service to Him, made oaths, offered sacrifices. But their words didn't match their hearts, as evidenced by their seemingly endless cycles of faithlessness and disobedience. Again and again they broke their covenant with God and lived lives that didn't look remotely like the words they professed. They were as loyal as an adulterous bride (and God had Hosea marry a prostitute to make that very point).

Like a toddler running with scissors, good rules broken equals bad consequences. Israel is torn, struck down, wounded, and in need of true, deep, and lasting healing. The people make hollow claims that they will return to the Lord, but their supposed repentance is shallow and motivated by discomfort, not by love. God sees right through it. He says their loyalty is temporary, like morning fog that disappears as soon as the sun rises (Hosea 6:4). He is not looking for pretty words or better religious behavior; He is looking for changed hearts.

The message is clear: lip service doesn't equal heart change, and disobedience will bear its fruit.

This is where Hosea becomes uncomfortably personal. Whether we like it or not, we are just like Israel. Our hearts are often divided. Our loyalty is fleeting and fickle. Knowing what God wants does not automatically fix us. Practicing the right language does not transform our hearts. If it did, none of us would break his rules repeatedly. None of us would drift or need correction more than once. We can talk a good talk, fool our Christian friends, but we can't fool God.

In all this, God does not forsake his covenant with Israel. He is still their Father. And because He's a good one, He disciplines His children. His judgment, far from being opposed to his mercy, is actually the light that leads them away from the path of destruction and toward the path of life (Hosea 1:5). He knows Israel will fail, and yet *He still pursues*. He warns but still provides hope. He waits for them to return to Him because He is merciful. His discipline is not meant to obliterate them but to *save them*. He tears in

order to *heal*; He strikes down to *bind up*. His punishments, like his anger, only last for a moment. But his steadfast love endures forever.

What's left in the end is more certainty in who God actually is and in His unchanging character. While Israel's loyalty - and ours - is as fleeting as the morning dew, His is as sure as the coming dawn, as faithful as the spring rain.

And this brings us to the heart. The story Hosea, just like our story, is not actually about Israel's faithlessness. It's a story about God's faithFULness. It's proof that His mercy is greater than their failure, and His forgiveness is greater than their faithlessness. He is the loyal one; He is the healer; He is the light and goodness that we need. He is the way and the only way to life.

All of this points to the ultimate healing and binding up found in our Messiah - the one whose heart was never divided; who obeyed his Father not just with his mouth but with his life; who was torn and struck down for the healing of the whole world (Isaiah 53:5); who made a way for us to finally know, *really* know the Father, and for our identity to be changed from "not my people" to "sons of the living God" (Hosea 1:10, John 1:12-13). So that when we are disciplined by God our Father, we can be certain it is for our good and for His glory (Job 5:18, Proverbs 3:11, Hebrews 12:6). The wounding of the Lord is not cruel. It is for our healing. It is evidence of His love.

No matter how far you've run, how long you've been unfaithful, how deep your hypocrisy, because of Christ, to turn back to Him is to turn around and find Him already right beside you. You are not too far gone to return to him. Remember, He knows you're a child and that it takes time to grow up and trust your Father. It's a journey - one that he foresaw, failures and all, and still chooses to walk with you.

So, "*let us return to the LORD*." The phrase in Hebrew is literally "let us walk and return." It's not enough to return to Him mentally. There is action involved. In Hosea's day, before a wound could be bandaged, it was first softened by oil. We need to be softened by the holy Spirit to receive His healing, to be given new hearts and begin to be transformed - not just in word, but in action.

*"Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD."* God is looking for repentance that is rooted in relationship. Let us press on to know His heart, believing that His mercy is not limited by our faithlessness and his name is actually made great as he does the work of healing and binding up.

And the goal of that journey? *"That we may live before Him."* "That we may trust His heart and walk with Him in humble obedience - the kind of obedience that comes from abiding in Him, certain of His faithful love. And to make Who He Is known.

In Hosea, we see a God who allows space for the journey of our repentance. He does not rush transformation. He doesn't entertain lip service. He doesn't need us to try to convince him of anything through religious activity. He already knows our hearts. He wounds us, but he doesn't leave us broken. His kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). And when our hearts are finally convinced of his love, that's when the real transformation begins.

### **Question to Consider:**

Take a moment to look back on your life...where do you see God's faithfulness, even in your failure? Has there ever been a moment that a wound actually caused you to grow in your faith?

### **Prompt for Prayer:**

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where your heart may still be divided, where you may be clutching at wounded places. Invite Him to soften the places that have been torn so that you may receive true and lasting healing and begin to obey, not just with words, but in action rooted in deep and abiding love.

## **Friday, March 13**

### **Day 21 – Lamentations 3:19–33 // *Hope in the middle of weakness* // Gina Flower**

We don't often hear the word *lament* in our modern vocabulary. It refers to an expression of painful grief, sorrow, or regret. As we read in the book of Lamentations, there was much loss, death, and destruction to grieve. Jeremiah—the “weeping prophet”—stood amidst the ruins of Jerusalem, witnessing devastation brought about by the people's own rebellion. Yet in the dust of those circumstances, he made an important choice. He chose not to focus solely on the pain, but to call to mind God's enduring character.

Certainly, there have been many times in our own lives when we experience pain, sorrow, and regret. Sometimes this comes from rebellious or sinful choices we have made, or choices made by someone we love. Other times, we aren't sure of the cause at all—but the pain is significant and can feel endless, even unbearable. As children of God, it is important that we humbly and honestly face the reality of our circumstances, even when it hurts.

If the pain is due to our own sinfulness—especially repeated patterns—the enemy will often try to hijack our emotions, using shame to overwhelm us. Scripture warns us that the enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. When we are experiencing the kind of pain and regret that comes from knowing we are walking in sin, we need to remember that there is still One who loves us in spite of our weakness.

Jeremiah knew God's faithfulness not because his life was easy, but because he had seen God's words prove true in the past. He looked back in order to find the strength to look forward with hope. When God proves Himself faithful in our lives, we have much to be thankful for. That remembrance becomes especially important in seasons of trouble, heartache, pain, and sorrow. While we cannot escape the reality that suffering is part of this life, we *can* choose how we respond to it.

“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him.”

Whether suffering comes from our own actions, the choices of others, or reasons we cannot yet see, the solution is not to remain stuck, fixated on the circumstances. Instead, it is to shift our focus—to lift our gaze and intentionally remember God's goodness. That remembrance gives us the strength to move

forward in hope. Scripture reminds us that because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. When we seek the Lord in times of pain and trouble, we discover that we are not destroyed by what we face.

No matter the cause, our Heavenly Father remains consistently faithful and good—even when we are not.

### **Question to Consider**

When something painful happens in your life, do you find yourself spending more time focusing on the circumstances, or intentionally lifting your eyes toward your loving Father—trusting that He is at work even there?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Spend a few quiet moments recalling a specific time in your life when God showed His faithfulness in a tangible way. Thank Him for His goodness and mercy, and ask Him to help you hold on to hope in your present season.

## **Saturday, March 14**

### **Day 22 – James 1:2–8 //Testing that produces maturity // Dale Piscura**

In our Scripture today, James writes to believers who are experiencing many trials. As an elder brother in Christ, he has learned that God is sovereign over all matters concerning His children and that, in fulfillment of Jesus' promise, all followers of Christ will experience testing and trials in this life. His exhortation to "consider it all joy" when facing trials is shaped by his own experience, as well as the testimony of countless saints who have gone before.

James points to the spiritual benefit of trials: steadfastness, or perseverance, which leads to maturity. Maturity here means Christlikeness. Slowly but surely, God is at work behind the scenes, growing each of us through the circumstances of life. He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. As we are the clay and He is the potter, God often uses the common instrument of difficulty to shape us into the image of Christ.

James also reminds his readers that God's generosity in granting wisdom is readily available. At the throne of grace and mercy, God willingly meets us in the midst of our testing and provides divine help. He does not stand at a distance from our trials, but enters into them with us.

As a former high school teacher and coach, I gave hundreds of tests. Some measured knowledge in U.S. Government or World History. Others were fitness tests designed to evaluate an athlete's condition. These tests were challenging, but they were good for the students. They were also revealing. Through them, I could assess each student's preparation and performance. Tests of knowledge and skill helped students and athletes grow to deeper levels of ability. While exams were rarely enjoyable, they were often profitable. I don't remember students celebrating tests, but I could clearly see their progress.

God desires our development as mature followers of Jesus. In His perfect wisdom, He designs our paths to include exactly what we need for further sanctification.

An old saint expressed it well:

*“More progress is made in the Christian life through disappointment and tears than is ever made through success and laughter. The winds of tribulation blow away the chaff of error, hypocrisy, and doubt, leaving that which survives the test—the genuine element of Christian character.”*

With a biblical worldview, we learn to think differently about hardship. We may be tempted to see difficulties as bad luck or misfortune, but our minds need the constant truth of God’s Word to renew and strengthen us day by day.

### **Question to Consider**

Will you thank God for His perfect plan in your life? Will you give thanks for His loving purpose to transform you for His glory?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Ask God to use every trial as a point of growth. Ask Him to grant you spiritual understanding as you walk this journey of faith.

## **Monday, March 16**

### **Day 23 – Psalm 66:8–12 // Refined, not rejected // Fred Defendorf**

#### **A Call to Worship (vv. 8–9)**

The psalmist begins by inviting everyone to bless God. This call to worship is not made from a place of ease, but from experience. God is praised as the One who keeps His people alive and steady when they are close to falling. The language suggests moments when life felt uncertain and stability was not guaranteed.

During Lent, this reminds us that worship often grows out of dependence. To bless God here is not to claim that everything is fine, but to recognize that God has carried us through moments when we could not carry ourselves. Worship becomes a response to being sustained, even when life has been hard.

The psalmist describes God as One who tests and refines His people, like silver being purified by fire. In the ancient world, refining metal took time. Silver had to remain in the heat long enough for what did not belong to rise to the surface.

This image suggests that difficult seasons are not meaningless or random. They can become places where God is slowly shaping faith and character. Lent invites us to remain present in these seasons, even when they feel uncomfortable or confusing, trusting that God is at work in ways we may not yet see.

The psalm does not soften the pain of what the people experienced. Being caught in a net, weighed down by burdens, overpowered by others, and passing through fire and water all point to deep suffering and loss of control. These words describe experiences that are exhausting, humbling, and frightening.

In Lent, this honesty matters. The psalm gives us permission to name suffering without trying to explain it away. It reminds us that faith does not shield us from hardship, and that God's people have always walked through seasons that feel overwhelming.

The psalm ends with a quiet but significant turn. After the fire and the water, God brings His people into a wide and abundant place. This does not erase what they endured, but it shows that suffering was not the final word.

For Lent, this points us toward hope that does not rush ahead of the journey. God's goal is not harm, but restoration. The same God who allowed the refining is the One who leads His people into space to breathe again—into a life shaped by trust, humility, and deeper dependence on Him.

### **Question to Consider**

As you sit with Psalm 66, where do you sense yourself today—in the fire that feels refining and intense, in the water that feels overwhelming or disorienting, or in a longing for a more spacious place where you can breathe again? As you notice where you are, what desires, fears, or hopes are beginning to surface within you?

### **Prompt for Prayer**

Set aside a few quiet moments to come before God, just as you are. You may want to name the places in your life that feel heavy, uncertain, or still in process. There is no need to resolve them or explain them away. If words come, speak them simply. If silence feels more honest, rest there. Trust that God is present with you in both the refining and the waiting—attentive to what is unfinished and held in His care.

## **Tuesday, March 17**

### **Day 24 – Zechariah 13:7–9 // Refining fire // Jeff Ziolkowski**

Think about precious metals for a moment. Gold bars are often stamped “99.9% Pure” and labeled 24 karat. That’s the highest quality gold you can get, and it only reaches that level after going through intense refining. Gold doesn’t come out of the ground pure — it’s mixed with other metals and impurities. To separate them, refiners heat the gold to extremely high temperatures, over 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, until it melts. The unwanted metals rise and are removed. Then the process is repeated again and again until the gold reaches that 99.9% purity.

Scripture tells us our lives are refined in a similar way. The Bible uses a big word — **sanctification** — which simply means the lifelong process of God shaping and refining us. Day by day, our faith is tested. The situations we walk into today and tomorrow aren’t random; God uses them to build endurance and focus in us. He wants us locked in on His mission: love Him, love others, and make disciples. Sometimes He uses gentle nudges, and other times firmer guardrails, to keep us moving in that direction.

There will be days that feel like fire. But those are often the very moments when God is doing His deepest work.

- Are you reading this from a hospital bed? You may be a missionary cleverly disguised as a patient.
- Are you sitting in a tax office while the calculator keeps clicking? You're a missionary cleverly disguised as a taxpayer.
- Are you at school during lunch while others are talking about you? You're a missionary cleverly disguised as a student and friend.
- Are you caring for a spouse or loved one in the next room? You're a missionary cleverly disguised as a caregiver.

Wherever you are, God can use you right there.

These refining fires aren't meant to destroy us — they're meant to purify us and keep pointing us back to the mission: love God, love people, and make disciples. That's why James writes, "When you meet trials of various kinds... count it all joy" (James 1:2, ESV). Joy doesn't come from the hardship itself, but from knowing God is shaping us for His purposes and His glory.

And in the end, there is a beautiful promise: we will call on His name and He will answer. He will say, "They are my people," and we will say, "The Lord is my God" (Zechariah 13:9, ESV). Refining leads to relationship, clarity, and closeness with Him — and that is worth every step of the journey ... not matter how hot the flames may be.

#### **Question to Consider:**

Can you see your circumstances as the refining fire of God in your life? And can you engage with God to see Him use this fire to purify you and make you the man or woman of God He can use to love Him, love others, and to make disciples?

#### **Prompt for Prayer:**

Ask God to help you see your circumstances as the purifying fire brought by Him to make you a better child of God who loves Him more dearly, who loves others more deeply, and who seeks to make disciples wherever you are.

## **Wednesday, March 18**

### **Day 25 – 2 Corinthians 4:6–18 // Power through weakness // Joe Valenti**

As we've walked through the book of Mark, we've had the opportunity to watch how Jesus calls His disciples. The invitation is disarmingly simple: "*Follow me.*"

A few chapters later, the invitation sharpens: "*Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.*"

Yikes. That's a much more serious ask.

Can you imagine if Jesus had led with that on the beach? Peter and Andrew mending their nets. James and John finishing up with their father. And Jesus says, "Follow me into sacrifice, hardship, and death." It's hard to imagine anyone dropping their nets for that version of the call.

I'm grateful that Jesus starts simply. I think we often overcomplicate the gospel by assuming that following Jesus requires people to move from unbelief to fully formed, hyper-mature Christianity in the blink of an eye. But the wonderful thing about Jesus is this: He is humble enough to meet us where we are, glorious enough not to leave us there, and faithful enough to never leave us at all. We can trust Him to transform us.

And yet—transformation, according to Scripture, does not bypass suffering. It moves straight through it.

If you haven't read today's passage yet, pause here and read 2 Corinthians 4:6–18 slowly.

Take your time.

Verse 6 alone should stop us in our tracks.

Paul reaches all the way back to creation itself. The same God who spoke into the formless void and summoned light into existence is the God who spoke into your darkness, your unbelief, your resistance, your spiritual death, and said, "Live." And your heart obeyed. Come on now, that's good stuff right there!

If you see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, it is because God Himself made it so. Salvation is not the result of spiritual effort, religious instinct, or moral potential. It is an act of divine speech. God speaks. Light appears.

And then Paul says something almost startling: this treasure—the radiant, life-giving good news of Jesus—has been placed in jars of clay. Ordinary, fragile, crack-prone vessels like us. Why? In order to show that the power belongs to God and not us.

In other words, God does not protect His glory by placing it in impressive containers. He protects it by making sure no one confuses the container for the source.

That's where Paul turns toward suffering.

Paul doesn't minimize pain. He names it honestly. Following Jesus does not exempt us from pressure, confusion, opposition, or loss. But it does change what those things mean. Paul goes so far as to say that we are "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus." That's heavy language. The life of discipleship involves a steady relinquishing of control, reputation, comfort, and self-reliance. But what's the purpose? Why is suffering necessary?! Paul tells us it is so that the life of Jesus might be manifest in our bodies. What is he talking about?!

This is the paradox that Lent invites us to sit with: life comes through loss.

Glory shows up through weakness.

Resurrection power flows through surrender.

It all seems so terribly backwards, doesn't it?

But then Paul lifts our eyes beyond the present moment. This present suffering is preparing us for eternity. He isn't dismissing suffering. He just places it inside a larger story where suffering is not final, wasted, or meaningless. And so, he tells us, we too have to shift the way that he see things. the stuff we see with our eyes is temporary. The things that we can't see are eternal.

This time of making room during Lent is intended to loosen our grip on what feels urgent, visible, and immediate so that we can become attentive to what is lasting and true. This passage doesn't ask us to deny that suffering hurts. It invites us to trust that God is at work within it—shaping us, emptying us, and filling us with a life that does not fade.

The treasure is real. The jars are fragile. And God is faithful.

**Question to Consider:**

Where in your life right now do you feel your weakness most clearly and how might God be inviting you to trust that His power is being revealed there, rather than despite it?

**Prayer Prompt:**

Bring that place of weakness or weariness before God without trying to fix it. Name what feels heavy or fragile. Ask God to help you remain open and attentive, trusting that His life can meet you even here. Allow space for silence, and let yourself rest in His presence.

## Thursday, March 19

### Day 26 – Psalm 73:1–17 // *When faith feels unrewarded* // Rick Duncan

Psalm 73 starts with faith and hope. *“Truly God is good to His people.”* But the author, Asaph, doesn't stay there for long. The Psalm is a raw reflection on the reality of life.

We know what it's like when doing the right things don't lead to blessing. We live in a fallen world where following the Lord often goes unrewarded. Yes, God is good, *“but as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.”*

What caused the stumbling and the slipping? Comparison. And envy.

When the Asaph looked at what was going on in the world around him, he struggles. Bad things are happening to good people. Good things are happening to bad people.

The wicked are well off and the righteous are not. The ungodly are secure, healthy, strong, admired, and at ease. The godly seek to live in a way that pleases God; but they suffer. The disconnect is unsettling.

Most of us don't struggle too much with good things happening to bad people until the good things stop happening for us. When our faithfulness leads to hardship, the question comes: What good is it to serve God?

We begin to resent the prosperity of the arrogant. We rehearse their ease and we magnify our hurt. Our envy doesn't only distort how we see others and ourselves, it distorts how we see God. We start doubting His generosity. We see Him as distant, uncaring, and unjust.

In verses 12–14 our thoughts are exposed: *“The wicked get by with everything; they have it made... I've been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me? A long run of bad luck, that's what...”* (The Message). Sacrifice isn't worth it. Faithfulness doesn't pay.

Lent gives us permission to admit these thoughts. Pretending they aren't there and stuffing our feelings end up hurting us and our relationship with God. He wants us to bring our true selves to Him.

Say the hard stuff out loud to God. Get it all on the table. He's big enough to take anything we can dish out to Him.

Asaph didn't voice his cynicism publicly (v. 15). He didn't want to hurt the faith of other children of God. But he did think deeply about these troubling things.

But something changed. In verse 17, we see the pivot point for Asaph. "Until."

Until what? Until he worshiped the LORD. When Asaph worshipped, God gave him a glimpse of the rest of the story. When he stopped looking at the temporal and started looking at the eternal, he gained perspective.

Worship reorients us. We see that the fruit that the wicked are enjoying is fragile. What seems secure is slippery. Prosperity, apart from a relationship with God, is precarious. They are on the way to destruction.

Prosperity can numb the soul. Comfort can dull the spirit. Affluence can harden the heart. What looks like reward now can lead to ruin later. Judgment is coming.

When Asaph had his "aha" moment, he didn't gloat that his enemy's demise was coming. He repented. He admitted that envy had entered his heart and clouded his mind.

Asaph ran to God, "*I am continually with You*" (v. 23a). And God didn't reject him. God held his right hand (v. 23b). God didn't let him go. And Asaph learned that God's presence was enough, "*There is nothing on earth that I desire besides You*" (v. 25).

Good things happening to bad people and bad things happening to good people is, to be sure, a mystery. So, how does God respond? God answers that mystery with another mystery. Himself.

Elisabeth Elliot's life was shaped by profound losses. Her first husband was martyred early in their marriage, leaving her a single mother. Years later her second husband died of cancer. In her final season of life, she suffered Alzheimer's disease. In her book, *Suffering is Never for Nothing*, she points out that what we need from God are not answers. Instead, we get God Himself.

She wrote, "God, through my own troubles and sufferings, has not given me explanations. But He has met me as a person, as an individual, and that's what we need. Who of us in the worst pit we've even been in needs anything as much as we need company" (p. 23)?

God Himself becomes our portion. Not answers. Not explanations. God. Asaph's question shifts from "Why do they have it so good?" to "*Whom have I in heaven but You?*"

Lent gives us room to make the same shift. The greatest good is not a pain-free life, but a God-saturated life. When bad things are happening to you, your obedience is not wasted.

Asaph started by acknowledging God's goodness. And he ends there, too. "*The nearness of God is my good.*" His circumstances haven't changed. But his clarity has been restored.

When bad things happen to us, we can experience God's presence. Now and forevermore. Isn't that good enough?

**A question to consider:**

When are you most tempted to measure God's goodness by tangible blessings rather than by His presence?

**A prompt for prayer:**

Be still before God. Name when and how your obedience has felt disregarded by God. Tell Him where envy or resentment has crept into your life. Ask God to help you make room for His presence - to trust that nearness to Him is not a consolation prize, but the greatest gift.

## Friday, March 20

### Day 27 – John 15:1–11 // *Abiding rather than striving* // Sola Oshunniyi

The Bible often uses things that are visible and familiar to us to describe realities of eternal value. This helps us better understand what the Lord desires for our lives. In this passage, Jesus gives one of His well-known “*I AM*” statements: “**I am the true vine.**”

By calling Himself the *true* vine, Jesus implies that there are other things that may look like sources of life but are not. He alone is the genuine source. With this statement, Jesus calls us into absolute dependence on Him—a mutual relationship in which we abide in Him, and He abides in us.

Using agricultural language, Jesus explains that some branches appear to be connected to the vine but do not bear fruit and are taken away. This is not a reference to the loss of salvation. Rather, it points to people who may have the appearance of connection—who know the language of faith or are familiar with church life—but are not truly drawing nourishment from Christ. Without a living connection to the vine, there is no fruit.

A healthy connection to the vine, however, produces much fruit. What kind of fruit is Jesus referring to? Galatians 5:22–23 describes it clearly: the fruit of the Spirit. Yet our focus is not meant to be on producing fruit itself. Fruit is the natural result of abiding. The goal is not fruitfulness for its own sake, but deep, daily dependence on Christ.

Abiding in Christ is also closely tied to prayer. Jesus says that if we abide in Him and His words abide in us, we may ask whatever we desire, and it will be done for us. This does not mean God becomes a means to our wishes. Rather, when His Word dwells within us, our desires are shaped by His will. We begin to ask for things that have eternal purpose, not merely what serves our selfish wants.

We are not called to strive for the fruit of the Spirit, but to pursue knowing Christ—His will, His heart, and His purposes. Abiding means remaining close to Him, returning often to His presence, and cultivating deeper communion with Him. One clear mark of abiding is a growing love for Christ. We stay connected through His Word, which is “*a lamp to our feet and a light to our path*” (Psalm 119:105).

A high view of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—gives us a proper view of ourselves. The Christian life is not about trying harder; it is about staying connected. Apart from Him, we can do nothing.

One of the beautiful promises in this passage is that love and joy flow naturally from abiding in Christ. Love becomes the atmosphere in which we live, and joy fills our hearts—not because striving has succeeded, but because striving has ceased. Abiding in His presence brings rest for the soul.

**Song:** *Abide* – Aaron Williams

### **Question to Consider**

What would abiding in Christ look like in your daily life right now?

### **Prayer**

Lord, teach me to abide in You—to draw my nourishment, strength, and guidance from You alone. Help me remain close to You and trust You as the true source of life. Amen

## **Saturday, March 21**

### **Day 28 – Hebrews 10:19–25 // Holding fast together // Becca Ferguson**

This passage is just three (long) sentences, but those three sentences are absolutely full of rich and beautiful truths about our God and our faith.

As we read it, we are reminded that because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection - because of His blood - we are able to have confidence to enter the holy places.

What does this mean?

It's a callback to the Old Testament, where only the priests could enter into the holy places in the temple. Back then, the holy places weren't for everyone. But now, because of Jesus' blood, and because He is now our great and forever High Priest, we are able to draw near to God.

We are able to draw near to the God who loves us. We are able to draw near to the God who made us and has a purpose and a plan for us. We are able to draw near to the God who made a way for us to draw near to Him - who saw us in our sin and loved us still, and sent His Son to live and die and rise again, defeating death and sin. What great and wonderful news this is!

And our confidence in God doesn't just extend to what He has accomplished in the past. We can have confidence as well in what He is doing today, and in what He has promised us that He will do in the future.

We can trust that the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent, is working in the hearts and minds of those who love Him, helping us to become more and more like this Jesus we love and whom we serve. We can trust that one day, Jesus is coming back for His Bride, the Church, and that He will reign in eternity. We can trust that He who promised is faithful.

And because we can trust this God, we can also trust what He has called us to do - to hold fast together, to stir one another up to love and good works, to encourage and equip each other in the faith, and to meet together to worship Him and learn about Him and serve Him. God's people can trust Him and listen to and obey Him, both today and every day, until the day that Jesus will return arrives.

So what does this have to do with Lent?

In the season of Lent, we are encouraged to wait and hope in a certain type of way. Together, during Lent, we have the opportunity to seek God carefully and reverently as we look ahead to a special day - to Easter, a day when we celebrate what God did and what He is still doing - and even, as we look to eternity, what He has told us He will do.

And this passage in Hebrews reminds us that it is not only in the season of Lent that we do this watching, waiting, hoping, and praying together. To some extent, this posture of Lent is to be the posture of the whole Christian life - the posture of God's people together, the Church. We are living in this world, but we joyfully await the arrival of the new heaven and earth. We follow together Jesus now, but we patiently anticipate the day when He will return and we will see Him face to face.

So not only does Lent help us slow down and look to God in the here and now - it reminds us of the posture that we, in some ways, always hold in this life. It reminds us that we trust the Lord, we walk with Him, and we love Him - knowing all the while that the best is truly yet to come.

#### **Question to Consider:**

Where are you tempted to doubt God instead of trusting in Him? How might God be calling you to trust Him in a new way, or with a new part of your life, in this season? How might God be calling you to step into community in a new way in this season, as you seek to hold fast and encourage others in the church?

#### **Prayer Prompt**

Take a few moments to ask God to help you draw near to Him, and to His people, the Church. Ask God to remind you more and more of the reality that He has been faithful, He is faithful today, and He will be faithful tomorrow, too.

### **Monday, March 23**

#### **Day 29 – Colossians 3:1–17 // Setting the mind on things above // Joe Valenti**

I don't often get lost.

I have a pretty good sense of direction, and I tend to pay attention to landmarks. Once I've been somewhere once or twice, I can usually find my way around without much trouble. But a few years ago, on the way home from spring break, I messed up pretty badly.

We left the Charlotte area early that morning, headed back toward Cleveland. It's a straight shot—Route 77 all the way home. Somewhere along the way, I got caught up in a conversation with Linda. At some

point, I glanced up and noticed a sign telling me how close we were to Knoxville. That's when I realized what had happened.

There's a confusing interchange in Wytheville, Virginia where you actually have to exit in order to stay on Route 77. If you're not paying close attention, you end up drifting onto a completely different highway. And that's exactly what I had done.

I'm grateful we noticed when we did. Otherwise, we might have accidentally taken a second vacation in Knoxville.

Sometimes we need purposeful moments to look up from the busyness of life and pay attention to where we actually are. Lent gives us that kind of gracious interruption—a chance to pause long enough to ask whether our lives are headed in the right direction, and if they aren't, to reorient ourselves.

Colossians 3 invites us into that work.

Paul is writing to people who already belong to Jesus. He isn't questioning their faith or challenging their sincerity. He's reminding them of something foundational: their lives have been fundamentally changed by what they have received in Christ. That reality comes first. Before anything is said about what needs to change, Paul grounds everything in who they already are.

This matters because what Paul goes on to address—habits, desires, speech, attitudes—flows from that deeper reality. The doing grows out of the being. Reorientation always starts there.

When we put our spiritual lives on autopilot, we don't usually make dramatic, intentional turns in the wrong direction. We drift. We end up becoming people we never meant to be, doing things we don't really want to do, often before we've even realized what's happening. Like missing a crucial exit, the shift can feel small in the moment but significant over time.

Lent invites us to stop and take an honest look at where we've been headed.

Paul encourages that kind of attention by naming things that no longer belong in our lives—patterns of desire, speech, and anger that distort our vision and shape us in ways that don't reflect Christ. Noticing these things requires slowness and honesty. It means paying attention to what is actually happening beneath the surface rather than rushing past it.

But reorientation doesn't stop with removal.

Paul also points us toward what needs to take shape in us instead—humility, kindness, patience, forgiveness, and love. These aren't behaviors we force into existence through willpower. They emerge as our lives become aligned again with the truth of who we are in Christ. As our attention shifts, so does our posture.

Lent is not about achieving moral clarity all at once. It's about noticing where we've drifted and gently turning back. It's about letting Christ reorient our vision so that our lives begin to move, slowly and steadily, in a truer direction.

Sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is simply look up and ask, *Where am I headed right now?*

### **A Question to Consider:**

Where might your life have been running on autopilot lately, and what signs suggest that you may need to reorient your attention?

### **Prayer Prompt:**

Ask God to help you see clearly where you are right now—without defensiveness or fear. Invite Him to gently redirect your heart and to shape in you what reflects His life and love. Sit with Him in quiet, trusting that even small course corrections matter.

## **Tuesday, March 24**

### **Day 30 – Luke 24:13–27 // Slow hearts and patient teaching // Josh Hamm**

This week we are thinking about how we reorient our lives towards God and His work, and the passage we'll consider today is all about seeing. As you read the story take note when seeing or the eyes are mentioned (and I suggest reading through v32). The leading characters are two lesser known disciples who move from unseeing to seeing, from slow of heart to burning hearts. So what changed them and reoriented their hearts to God?

Well, the first thing Luke tells us is what we can't depend on. Interestingly, getting reoriented to God will not happen through our own ability. See verses 15-16.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

Their eyes were kept.... Who prevented these disciples from seeing Jesus? We call this a divine passive in Scripture— it's when God isn't named but the action could only be Him. Clearly these two disciples should have been able to know who it was that was walking and talking with them, but sometimes God keeps us from seeing the plain and obvious because He has something deeper He needs us to see first.

The fact was, they were not seeing Jesus as they were meant to. As you read the ensuing conversation you discover that even after an amazing report from some women in their group (that Jesus was alive) and a missing body corroborated by others, these two had resigned their hope because “him they did not see” (v24) There's that seeing again. Should the fact that none had yet physically seen Jesus have kept them from believing that He was in fact raised from the dead? Should the fact that you and I have not physically seen Jesus keep us from believing He really lived, died, and rose again?

There's something more we need to see. And what happens next is the point of the passage and the key for us today. These disciples found their eyes truly opened and their hearts awakened, not through a sudden epiphany, but as Jesus patiently and methodically interpreted the Scriptures for them. Passage by passage and story by story, he helped them see what had been there all along!

What does this say to us about moving from unseeing to seeing and slow hearts to burning hearts? Luke 24 invites us to recognize two things. First, change comes from being in the Word of God patiently. Sitting on it. Learning from it. Little by little. Story by story. It is a patient work. That means we need time to

regularly dwell on what we're hearing and ponder its implications for our lives. Second, change comes from being in the Word of God methodically. Jesus was a student of the Bible. He was able to interpret it because He had

carefully observed the text (words, grammar, context). Seeing rightly requires reading responsibly. This is the needed truth that both these disciples and we need to see even more than seeing Jesus face to face! If we understand what He has said and done, then we'll see and recognize Jesus – because it all points to Him! Eventually these two disciples were able to recognize Him (v31) but not until they had learned that true sight is found in the words of Scripture!

### **Question to Consider**

Everything you need to really see and believe is available to you today in God's Word. How does that encourage you in how you read the Scriptures?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Jesus is a patient teacher of his followers – thank Him for that as you go to prayer today. Then, ask him to slow your reading down so that He might open your eyes and stir your heart to new and wonderful things which it reveals about Him!

## **Wednesday, March 25**

### **Day 31 – Psalm 119:33–40 // Asking God for understanding // Tony Scialabba**

I don't think the writer of this psalm could have imagined the kinds of distractions we live with every day. We move through a world that is constantly trying to capture our attention. Our digital and media-driven world is not only attempting to shape what we see, think, and desire - it's banking on it. Over time, this forms us.

We live with more information than any generation before us. Our feeds are customized to our preferences. Our devices know what we like, what we linger over, and what will keep us scrolling. In theory, all of this should make us wiser, more thoughtful, more connected. But many of us feel the opposite. We feel scattered. Pulled in a dozen directions. Present everywhere and fully attentive nowhere.

On a fasting day, that reality can feel more exposed. Hunger slows us down and removes some of our usual comforts. In the quiet that follows fasting, we may start to notice just how restless our hearts and minds really are.

Psalm 119:33–40 gives us language for that moment. It is not a prayer spoken from a place of strength, but from a place of surrender. The psalmist is not asking God for more rules or better discipline. He is asking God to shape him.

"Teach me," he prays. "Give me understanding." There is humility here—a recognition that growth does not begin with trying harder, but with being taught. The psalmist wants more than information. He longs to live God's way with his whole heart, not out of pressure, but from the inside out.

As the prayer continues, desire comes into view. “Lead me in the path of your commandments,” he says, “for I delight in it.” This line stands out to me. The psalmist doesn’t assume delight; he names it as something God must cultivate. He knows that sustained obedience must come from a heart that has learned to love, not driven by duty alone.

Then the prayer turns more searching. “Incline my heart to your testimonies,” he asks, “and not to selfish gain.” The psalmist is honest about himself. His heart is not neutral, but tends to drift. It is pulled toward things that promise security or advantage. Rather than hiding that, he brings it directly before God. He asks for reorientation.

Next comes a prayer about attention: “Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in your ways.” What we look at matters. What we return to, again and again, quietly shapes us. Some things drain life without us even noticing. The psalmist isn’t asking to escape the world—he’s asking for eyes that are guided toward what gives life instead of taking it.

This is where fasting intersects with this psalm. When we fast, we often become more aware of what we reach for when we’re uncomfortable. So often we turn to distraction, noise, or control. Psalm 119 doesn’t deny those tendencies, but gives us words that we can bring to God when those tendencies surface.

The prayer continues with honesty about fear. The psalmist asks God to confirm His promise and to turn away the reproach he dreads. He’s not pretending that fear doesn’t exist, but is bringing his real fear into God’s presence. God’s ways, the psalmist reminds us, are good, even when they feel costly or unclear.

The passage ends with longing. “I long for your precepts,” he says. “Give me life.” The psalmist has not arrived to a superior level of spirituality, but rather is voicing his dependence on and hunger for God’s wisdom.

Fasting reminds us that longing itself is not the problem. It’s often the place where God meets us. We are not asked to form or fix ourselves. We are invited to be reoriented, to have our hearts and eyes turned by God. Let Him.

### **Question to consider**

In moments of hunger or restlessness today, what do you instinctively turn to for comfort or relief?

### **Prompt for prayer**

When you notice hunger, restlessness, or discomfort today, pause and bring that moment to God. Name what you feel drawn toward. Ask God to gently incline your heart and redirect your attention toward what gives true life.

## Thursday, March 26

### Day 32 – Matthew 11:25–30 // Rest for the weary // Denise Petek

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

What a beautiful invitation—and it comes from Jesus Himself.

As I sat down to write this devotional on the day it was due, with another meeting waiting and a long to-do list pressing in, my computer wouldn’t turn on. My phone was ringing. Texts and emails kept popping up. Maybe you’ve had days like that—when everything feels urgent and overwhelming at once. It didn’t take long for me to realize that this verse wasn’t just something I was writing about; it was something Jesus was speaking directly to me.

I had to stop in my tracks and come to Him—the author of the words I was reflecting on. I had to pause and consider what it really means to come to Jesus. To take His yoke. To learn from Him instead of pushing through in my own strength.

Lent is the perfect season for this kind of interruption. As we prepare our hearts to remember Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are invited to slow down and notice our weariness. Beneath faithful routines and busy schedules, many of us are tired in ways that sleep alone cannot fix.

Jesus begins this passage by thanking the Father for revealing truth not to the “wise and learned,” but to little children. Seeing rightly, Jesus tells us, is not about striving harder or knowing more—it is about humility and trust. Children depend. They receive. They rest in the care of another.

Think about childhood. You didn’t worry about paying bills, preparing meals, or keeping life running smoothly. Someone else carried that weight for you. Jesus is inviting us into that same posture with God—not self-sufficient, but humble and dependent.

This raises an important question: What is shaping the way I see God and myself?

Our vision is constantly being formed—by pressure, expectations, guilt, perfectionism, and even our attempts to be faithful. At times, we strive to be good Christians in our own strength, living as though our salvation depends on us. We may believe in grace, yet live as if we must constantly prove our devotion. When faith becomes performance instead of relationship, weariness is the result.

Jesus speaks directly to that exhaustion: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Notice who is invited—not the strong or put-together, but the weary. Weariness is often a sign that we are carrying burdens we were never meant to bear alone.

Jesus does not remove responsibility, but He changes how we carry it. “Take my yoke upon you,” He says, “and learn from me.” A yoke is shared. To take His yoke is to lean on His strength and follow His direction. Jesus describes Himself as gentle and humble—not demanding or harsh, but patient and kind.

The rest Jesus offers is deeper than stopping activity. It is rest from striving, from proving, from trying to earn God's approval. It is laying down perfection and control. It is receiving forgiveness instead of carrying shame. His burden is light because He is with us.

His invitation remains simple and compassionate: Just come.

**Question to Consider:**

What am I carrying today that Jesus is inviting me to lay down?

**Prayer Prompt:**

Ask Him to help you release your striving, and rest in His grace.

## Friday, March 27

### Day 33 – Ezekiel 36:24–28 // *New hearts, new Spirit* // Chris Warszawski

I remember visiting a friend in the hospital years ago, just before he underwent heart surgery. As we talked and prayed together, his surgeon came into the room to explain the procedure to him and his family. What struck me most in that moment was the sense of humility and gratitude that filled the room. Everyone knew the same thing: only this surgeon could do what my friend could not do for himself.

Without the surgeon, my friend's troubled heart would remain unchanged. His health would not be restored. He would not be able to go home. His hope rested entirely in someone else's skill, knowledge, and care.

That image helps us enter into the promises God makes in Ezekiel 36.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God speaks to the people of Israel at one of the lowest points in their history. The people who once lived in the land God gave them had been defeated, exiled, and scattered among the nations. They were there because they had rebelled against God—turning to idols, growing violent, defiling the land, and even bringing dishonor to God's name among the surrounding nations.

And yet, though the people had abandoned God, God had not abandoned them.

God explains that their exile was not meant to destroy them, but to discipline and ultimately restore them. In Ezekiel 36, He promises to do for His people what they could never do for themselves.

God promises to gather them from the nations and bring them back into their own land. In the ancient world, a people separated from their land often appeared abandoned by their god. But the Lord makes it clear: He has not lost sight of them. He does not say, "*Find your way back to me.*" Instead, He says He will come for them. He will gather them. He will restore them.

God promises to cleanse them. He does not say, "*Make yourselves clean and then return.*" He says, "*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean.*" Forgiveness is God's work before it ever becomes our experience.

God promises to give them a new heart—to remove their heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. Forgiveness alone is not enough; transformation is needed. Just as my friend could not operate on his own heart, we cannot change the condition of ours. Only the Great Surgeon can do that work. Only God can soften what has grown hard and reshape our desires and affections.

God promises to give them a new spirit—His Spirit—so that they can live in obedience, not through sheer willpower, but through divine empowerment. What they could not sustain on their own, God would now supply from within.

Finally, God promises relationship: “*You shall be my people, and I will be your God.*” It’s easy to become focused on the gifts God gives—healing, restoration, security—while forgetting that God Himself is the gift. In Him alone our souls find rest. As Augustine once wrote,

“You have made us for Yourself,  
and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

Israel walked away from God, just as we all have in one way or another. But God did not walk away from them—or from us. Instead, He pursued reconciliation. “*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). Through Jesus, God has done everything necessary to find, forgive, cleanse, transform, and restore His people.

These promises find their fulfillment in Christ. And one day, God will gather His people from every nation and bring them into the place He has prepared. There, at last, we will be fully His—and He will be our God—forever.

### **Question to Consider**

Which of God’s promises do you find yourself needing to cling to today?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Transformation is an ongoing work. Ask God to reveal an area of your heart—an attitude, motivation, or affection—that needs His healing touch. Invite Him to do the work only He can do.

## **Saturday, March 28**

### **Day 34 – Micah 6:6–8 // *The kind of life God desires* // Gina Flower**

The book of Micah captures a moment when God confronts the Israelites—not out of anger, but out of a longing for His people to return to Him, to turn their hearts back to the God who saved them. This same desire echoes through time to us today. The life of deep faithfulness God desired for past generations is the very same life He desires for us and for those who will come after us.

In Micah 6:6–8, God addresses the Israelites’ attempts to appease Him through religious ceremony. They ask, “*With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?*”

God's response cuts through superficial tokens of devotion. He makes it clear that He is not looking for extravagant gifts or impressive sacrifices. He does not want mere external compliance; He desires faithful obedience that flows from a transformed heart. We learn here that a changed heart is worth far more than any offering placed on an altar.

So what is the life God desires?

Through the prophet, God gives a clear and simple answer:

*“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Micah 6:8)

This threefold call defines a life aligned with the heart of God. To act justly means treating others fairly and seeking what is right. To love mercy means extending grace and kindness, just as God has extended grace to us. To walk humbly with God means living with a continual awareness of our dependence on Him in every step we take.

If we tried to live this way in our own strength, it would be impossible. How could we consistently act justly, love others well, or walk faithfully with God without failing? We cannot.

But because of God's perfect faithfulness to us, we are able to live lives of faithfulness in return. Jesus Himself lived out justice, mercy, and humility in every interaction. And through His presence and power at work within us, we are invited to do the same—not through sheer willpower, but through abiding in Him.

Today, we live in a fast-paced, “instant-fix” world. Our desire for immediate results can quietly shape our spiritual lives as well. But this is not how God invites us to relate to Him. He desires—and deserves—our unhurried attention. When we slow down and give Him our focus, our hearts begin to follow.

Whether you feel you have wandered far from God, like the Israelites did, or you have simply allowed busyness to crowd out the quiet spaces of your life, God's invitation remains the same: return to Him with your whole heart—just as He called His people to do thousands of years ago.

### **Question to Consider**

When have you found it difficult to treat someone justly or extend true kindness because you were trying to do so in your own strength? What might that look like if you approached it from a place of abiding in Christ's strength instead?

### **Prompt for Prayer**

Spend some time reflecting on how God has made you aware of His desires for your life through His Word. Thank Him for the work He is doing in your heart as you learn to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.

## Monday, March 30

### Day 35 – Psalm 118:19–29 // *Entering with trust and praise* // Joe Valenti

At the center of this section of Scripture is verse 22 - "the stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone." What was once thrown to the side and seemingly unusable has now become the most important stone in the lot. This is an interesting turn of phrase and unless I'm thinking incorrectly, there are only two options for what happened here. Option #1 is that there was a problem with the stone that was miraculously fixed. The stone, initially, was unusable, unhelpful, the wrong shape or size or type. And for one or many of these reasons the builders toss it to the side, rejecting it from use. Option #2 is that the builders were seeing the stone incorrectly. What they initially judged as useless was, indeed very useful, they just didn't see it as such.

This statement is not just about rocks and foundations, but is a prophetic reference to Jesus. In fact, Jesus quotes Psalm 118 to describe why the Jews want to kill him. It's not because there is something wrong with him (the stone), but there is a problem in their perception. The religious leaders are not rejecting Him because He is flawed, insufficient, or unworthy. They are rejecting Him because He does not fit their assumptions about power, holiness, and success. They are looking for a Messiah who confirms their categories, not one who confronts them.

Lent invites us to consider whether we might be capable of the same kind of misperception. I don't know about you, but I carry expectations about how God should work, where He should show up. We are often very good at recognizing God when He aligns with our preferences and surprisingly quick to overlook Him when He does not.

What if part of making room during Lent is allowing God to correct our vision?

Seeing Jesus rightly changes everything. Worship follows perception. Trust grows where clarity emerges. And transformation begins not when Jesus becomes something new, but when we finally see Him as He truly is.

Lent gives us space to slow down enough to ask whether we have been misreading the stone—whether the cornerstone has been present all along, waiting not to be fixed, but to be recognized.

#### Question to Consider

What might God be inviting you to see differently in this season?

#### Prayer Prompt

Thank God for His faithfulness, even in places that feel unresolved. Ask Him to help you trust His work in ways you may not yet understand.

## Tuesday, March 31

### Day 36 – Isaiah 53:1–6 // *The suffering servant* // Joe Valenti

During my years in youth ministry, I collected a handful of icebreaker questions that could be pulled out when needed. One of the most reliable was, “*If you could have any superpower, what would it be?*” I’ve heard plenty of answers over the years—strength, speed, invisibility, flight—but no one has ever described anything remotely close to the way Jesus is described in Isaiah 53.

Superheroes are admired, not despised. They are powerful, not acquainted with grief. They are celebrated, not ignored. And they certainly don’t suffer quietly, much less die... or do they?

Isaiah tells us that the Servant of the Lord was “*despised and rejected*,” a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering. There is nothing flashy or impressive about Him by the world’s standards. No spectacle. No applause. Just quiet faithfulness and costly obedience.

In just a few days, we will gather together for our Good Friday service. Over the past several years, we’ve adopted the practice of a Tenebrae service. Tenebrae is an ancient tradition—its name comes from the Latin word for “*darkness*” or “*shadows*.” It is a simple, reflective service where we read, pray, and sing as we walk slowly through the night Jesus was betrayed, scourged, and crucified.

Each year, as we sit with these texts, I find myself overwhelmed by a strange mixture of grief and gratitude. Grief, as we hear again what was done to our Lord. Gratitude, as we remember why He endured it. Jesus did not resist. He did not retaliate. He did not turn away. He bore suffering calmly and courageously in order to purchase our redemption.

It is in those moments that my definition of a hero begins to change.

Isaiah 53 invites us to see strength differently—not as dominance, but as love that absorbs pain for the sake of others. It calls us to reconsider what faithfulness looks like when it costs something. Lent gives us space to linger here, to resist the urge to hurry past suffering toward resolution, and to remain with Jesus in the shadows.

Matt Redman captures this mystery beautifully:

“Blood and tears, how can it be  
That there’s a God who weeps,  
That there’s a God who bleeds?  
Oh, praise the One who would reach for me.

Hallelujah to the Son of Suffering!”

#### Question to Consider

How does Isaiah’s picture of Jesus challenge the way you tend to think about strength, success, or faithfulness?

## Prayer Prompt

Spend a few moments with Jesus as the *Man of Sorrows*. Bring Him your grief, your gratitude, or your unfinished thoughts. You don't need to explain or resolve anything—simply remain with Him and let His presence meet you there.

## Wednesday, April 1

### Day 37 – John 12:23–26 // *Life through surrender* // Kristy Klasa

I've heard it said about self-esteem that some people think too much of themselves, and others think too little of themselves—and both types of people are thinking of **themselves** too much. I've certainly found that to be true.

For as long as I can remember, I've been deeply driven to please other people. As I get older, I can see how that's served me well in some ways. But I'm also growing to hate this about myself. More and more, I'm realizing that some of the decisions I make as I follow Jesus are not pleasing to others. And I wrestle with those decisions far more than I probably should—for all the wrong reasons.

What will people think of me if I make that choice?

Would others say I'm living a successful life?

What will people say about my life when I'm gone?

These questions have caused a lot of distress, especially in recent years. And as I wrestle with them, the Holy Spirit brings me back to the real issue—the choice I need to make. In those moments, I have to decide who I'm living for. Fear and shame are close by. Pain is probably around the corner. But the choice remains the same: hold onto my life, or surrender it to my Heavenly Father.

In Matthew 26, we see a glimpse of Jesus facing His own moment of surrender. He is fully God and fully human. During His time on earth, He experienced real human limitations—hunger and exhaustion, fear and anguish. He knows the cross is coming. And the weight of what lies ahead brings an intense internal struggle as He faces a torturous and humiliating death. In that moment, Jesus has a choice—to preserve His life or to give it away. And thankfully for all of us, He surrenders to His Father's will. Through His death and resurrection, and through the sending of the Holy Spirit, His life and influence are no longer limited.

We, on the other hand, are limited—even at our very best. Our bodies, our minds, our attention spans all have finite capacity. No matter how strong or smart, driven or focused we might be, we cannot produce anything of eternal value on our own. Only God can do that. And in His kindness, He invites us to surrender—to let Him be in charge and let Him have His way. That kind of surrender costs us everything we want to cling to, including the things we think make us important or successful.

Notice that the seed has to fall into the ground and die before it can produce fruit. That exchange has to happen for there to be a harvest. In much the same way, my plans, preferences, and priorities have to die if I'm going to find life in Christ and be used by Him to bear lasting fruit. As much as I don't enjoy wrestling with my own thoughts, this kind of wrestling has to happen. There's no way around it. There is no surrender without a battle first. And until Jesus calls me home, there will be more battles like this. In

those moments, the question will still be there: Who am I living for? Who am I really trying to please? Jesus is clear in Matthew 6—we can't serve two masters.

Enough about me. Way more than enough about me. What about you?

### **Question to Consider**

What area—or areas—of your life are you currently clinging to, trying to control, or wrestling with God over? Are you willing to surrender it to God?

### **Prayer Prompt**

Jesus, thank You for surrendering to the Father's will. Thank you for giving up Your life so that I can live. Help me do the same for You. Holy Spirit, show me those areas that need to be surrendered to You.

## **Thursday, April 2**

### **Day 38 – Psalm 22:1–24 // Honest suffering before God // Dale Piscura**

The psalm represents a heartcry from the sufferer to His God. His agony and His desperation are expressed without reservation. He experiences a sense of being forsaken. Forsaken-abandoned, forgotten, deserted. The help that has always been sufficient and on time has vanished. His cries are not carefully edited, to be acceptable language. His brokenness speaks to God who has always been faithful to His people. (Verses 3-5)

This Psalm, this Psalmist teaches us a principle of authentic relationship. No pretending here. Clear and real communication about his desperate condition. He declares praise as well as sorrow. He suffers truthfully. He suffers faithfully. He knows his God is great and good.

Most of us are familiar with verse 1 as one of Jesus' final words from the cross. His saving the world was agreed upon before the founding of the world yet at Calvary the man Christ Jesus cried out. His despair was like no other. In His perfection He prayed this way. Since human suffering is inevitable and we have the perfect man to model ourselves after let's pursue His likeness.

True praying whether petition, praise, confession or sorrow is done with all our faculties. Our minds form our thoughts, but our affections reveal our feelings. Our words spoken may sound like prayer without being so. Since we are told in James 5 to pray with fervency to connect with God and His power, some praying may be only words. James declares some prayer is effective, meaning some prayer is not. Jesus corrected the prayers of leaders that prayed in public for all the wrong reasons. True prayer is intimate, a person and their God communing together. So very significant are the descriptions of Jesus found in the book of Hebrews, "In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a son, he learned obedience through what He suffered."

Perhaps we can all examine ourselves.

### **Question to Consider:**

Are we as honest and transparent before God as the psalmist and Jesus? When we are suffering do we allow our true feelings to be mixed in with our praise?

**Prayer Prompts:**

Lord, I am broken because.....

Lord, I know you love me but.....

Lord, I need you to...

Lord, I want to share all my life with You, help me.

### **Friday, April 3**

#### **Day 39 (Good Friday) – Romans 6:1–11 // Alive to God // Josh Hamm**

We have entered into a “death and life” situation! Not “life and death” – but “death and life”! The difference here is everything according to Paul in Romans 6.

Before we knew Jesus it was truly “life and death.” What I mean is, our life always had death looming over it, lingering behind the curtain while we danced on the stage called life. When might the curtain drop and our show end? Perhaps we learned to ignore it and lived distractedly to numb the pain of it, but no matter how hard we might have tried to distance ourselves from it, death is never that far away. Our lives are like grass the Bible says, one day thriving, and the next day gone. But what’s worse – the real reason our lives were “life and death” – is that with death comes judgment for sin. God is so holy he cannot accept even the slightest infraction to His unstained glory. One lie – one arrogant thought – one selfish deed - would bar us from Him and His dwelling forever. And we have mountains of such sins. I cannot imagine a situation more dire than the one we were in: Life now – but death (and judgment) to come.

But that’s not how it is anymore. For those in Christ Jesus a great reversal has taken place. For you and I, it is now “death and life!” Notice Rom 6:4

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (italics mine)

Our story is death now – but life to come! But what does that mean, death now? And why does it matter? What Paul explains in this passage is that when we are united to Christ by faith the sinful part of us dies – it dies because Christ died. And because Christ now lives we also will live too. As death no longer has dominion over Jesus – it also has no dominion over us! You’ve been made alive to God! And your future is secure – you will be raised to life again.

Why does this matter today? For Paul in Romans 6 this is the reason we could never tolerate an attitude that uses grace as an excuse to continue sinning. We should never think sin is okay because grace will abound! No. Christ died for that. And we died with Him. So, “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (v11).” This is our focus for this 39th day of Lent. It involves two actions:

1) Count yourself dead to sin. When you are tempted today tell your mind, this doesn't own me any longer. What more, don't feed the old life – starve it. Is there an environment, an influence, or a rhythm that needs to change for that to

happen? Don't take it lightly. John Owen once wrote, "be killing sin, or it will be killing you."<sup>1</sup>

2) Count yourself alive to God. Believe what God has now said about you: You've been seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). You are hidden in Him (Col 3:3). Nothing can separate you from His love (Rom 8:38-39). Additionally, being alive to God means being aware of what He is doing in and around you. Ask God to show you what He is doing and what your step of faith looks like!

### **Question to Consider**

We are dead to sin – the things we used to use for evil are now set apart for His purposes. You're alive to God! How can your hands, your eyes, your feet –your calendar – be an instrument you offer for His purpose today?

### **Prayer Prompt**

As you enter God's presence today, go with a joyful noise – for the great reversal that is yours in Christ – no longer life to death, but death to life! Because you're now alive to Him ask God to make you aware of how you can truly live for Him today.

## **Saturday, April 4**

### **Day 40 (Holy Saturday) – Lamentations 3:31–41 // Waiting with hope // Dean Siley**

Lamentations is not a book we rush toward. It speaks from the ruins—from grief that has not been resolved, from suffering that cannot be quickly explained. And yet, in the middle of this long poem of loss, we hear a quiet, steady insistence: "*For the Lord will not cast off forever.*"

This passage does not deny pain. It does not minimize affliction or hurry toward optimism. Instead, it holds sorrow and hope together, inviting us to remain present in the waiting. Lent often places us in that same tension. We are living between what has been lost and what has not yet been restored.

Waiting is rarely passive. In Scripture, waiting often involves endurance, honesty, and trust formed under pressure. The writer of Lamentations acknowledges that God "causes grief," and yet also insists that He does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone. This paradox resists easy answers. It asks us to make room for mystery—for the possibility that God's faithfulness is not always immediately visible, but is still real.

Hope here is not rooted in changed circumstances. It is rooted in God's character. "*Though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.*" Waiting with hope does not mean pretending things are fine. It means staying open to God even when the story feels unfinished.

Lent gives us permission to slow down and remain with discomfort rather than rushing to escape it. We often want Jesus to produce clarity or relief quickly. But Scripture suggests that waiting itself can be

transformative. It reveals what we reach for when control is stripped away. It exposes where we place our confidence. And it creates space for humility.

The passage turns inward near the end: *“Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord.”* This is not self-condemnation; it is awareness. Waiting with hope invites reflection rather than reaction. Instead of blaming God, blaming others, or numbing ourselves, we are invited to notice what is happening within our hearts and to bring that honestly before God.

To wait with hope is not to deny grief; it is to refuse despair as the final word. It is to believe that Jesus’ mercy has not been exhausted, even when circumstances suggest otherwise.

As a church, we are learning that transformation often happens in these difficult spaces. Rather than rushing through lament—as we are often tempted to do in suffering—we make room to grieve, to reflect, and to trust that Jesus is present even in pain. Waiting becomes an act of faith—not because we are certain of outcomes, but because we are choosing to remain with Jesus in uncertainty, trusting that He is at work for our good.

Lent reminds us that hope does not require resolution. It requires leaning in and waiting—trusting that Jesus is working in our hearts in ways that are often beneath the surface, often unseen, but always shaped by His steadfast love.

### **Question to Consider**

What is the condition of your heart today? What is your heart grieving? What might it look like to test and examine your ways before the Lord?

### **Prompt for Prayer**

Spend a few moments in stillness before God. You may want to name areas of grief, uncertainty, or weariness without trying to fix them. Ask Jesus for the grace to remain present and open as you wait, trusting His compassion and steadfast love even when the way forward is unclear. Lift up your heart and hands to God in heaven.