

# Journeys



JUDSON BIBLE LESSONS | Spring 2022 | Vol. 1.3



# TESTIFY!

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6-9



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American Baptist Home Mission Societies

# Journeys

JUDSON BIBLE LESSONS | SPRING 2022 | VOL. 1.3

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## About the Quarter

This quarter begins within the first week of Lent and takes us on a journey through Eastertide up to Pentecost. It is a season of deep prayer, repentance, reflection, and recommitment to the God we love. Themes such as **TEMPTATION**, **SUPPLICATION**, **HOPE**, **TRUST**, and **BELONGING** will help us purge those weights, sins, and habits that hold us back and keep us bound. Through Christ's **REDEMPTION**, we are able to experience **RESURRECTION** power, spiritual **RESILIENCE**, and the **TRANSFORMATION** we need to make us **RESOLUTE** in our **DISCIPLESHIP**, as we go forth **WITNESSING** for Christ and sharing God's mercy, love, and grace. We are delighted to welcome back some of our favorite JOURNEYS writers from the past. **PEACE** be with you!

## About the Writers

**The Reverend Erica Wimber Avena** is an Interim Ministry Specialist serving American Baptist and United Church of Christ congregations in the Connecticut region. She is a former General Board Member for American Baptist Churches USA, former President of American Baptist Churches of Connecticut, and has served on numerous boards and committees

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# TEMPTATION

## focusing on God and goals

Jesus answered him, “It is written,  
‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

—LUKE 4:8

### Introduction

Luke’s Gospel introduces the story of Jesus’ public ministry with an account of his temptation experience during forty days in the wilderness. Although we know that Jesus is the Son of God, what kind of Son of God he would be was put to the test. After all, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, who had been adopted by Julius Caesar, was called “son of the god” during his lifetime. Yet, Jesus and Caesar could not have been more different. Luke sets Jesus’ story in a worldwide context and shows how Jesus was faithful to his calling even as his way led him to the cross.

### Lesson Objectives

- To gain a deeper understanding of Jesus’ humanity by reflecting on his temptation experience.
- To reflect on how Jesus drew strength and guidance from the Hebrew Scriptures.

#### Luke 4:1-13 NRSV

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” 5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” 9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11 and ‘On

their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”  
12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

## Into the Scripture

Traditionally attributed to Luke, “the beloved physician,” the Gospel of Luke is part of a two-volume work that includes the Acts of the Apostles. Together they tell the story of God’s Holy Spirit at work in Jesus of Nazareth and in the men and women of the early church. While we cannot be certain when or to whom the Gospel was written, we know that the original readers spoke Greek, that they probably had at least some familiarity with the Scriptures in Greek translation (the Septuagint, abbreviated LXX), and that they were most likely already Christians (see Luke 1:4).

Luke begins his Gospel by explaining to Theophilus (“friend of God”) that he has written an ordered account of Jesus’ story based on what eyewitnesses had handed down to those who had not been privileged to witness the events themselves (Luke 1:2). The Gospel of Luke

was probably written between AD 80 and 90 to assure Christians of their common story. Luke sets his story in a worldwide context. Jesus’ birth is placed within a census in the Roman Empire. And whereas the Gospel of Matthew traces Jesus’ lineage back to Abraham through David, Luke

shows how Jesus’ story goes all the way back to Adam, who represents the beginning of all humanity.

The story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness following his baptism by John the Baptist intentionally recalls Israel’s formative wilderness experience during the Exodus generation. Jesus’ responses to the devil are taken from Deuteronomy, quotations that are set within the context of Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness. Jesus’ forty days of solitude recall the forty years

“

Luke shows how Jesus’ story goes all the way back to Adam, who represents the beginning of all humanity.

of God’s people moving from slavery in Egypt towards the promise of a land where they would find freedom in community with God and one another.

The devil’s first temptation (4:3) suggests that Jesus turn stones to bread: “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Luke tells us that while Jesus was in the wilderness these forty days, he fasted. His need for nourishment was real, but Jesus refused to put his own needs first. He responds (4:4) to the devil with a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 which puts life’s needs in the proper order: “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

In the second temptation, the devil holds out the lying promise of worldly power (4:7) in exchange for Jesus acknowledging the diabolical ownership of the world’s kingdoms: “If you, then, will worship me, it will



all be yours.” The temptations attempt to confuse Jesus’ clarity of vision about His mission. Jesus was challenged to accept that this is the way the world works, and to embrace it in order to accomplish great things for God. Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

Finally, the devil leads Jesus to a high place atop the temple in Jerusalem. Satan urges Jesus to jump off the temple and even quotes from Psalm 91:11-12. This temptation represents the attempt to force God’s hand to do *our* will. It is moved by the opposite impulse of that expressed in Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane: “Not my will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). In answer to the final temptation in this series, Jesus again responds by quoting Deuteronomy: “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Deuteronomy 6:16).

## Into the Lesson

Some readers will remember the very popular game show “To Tell the Truth,” which began in 1956 on the CBS television network. It ran for many years in various formats and on different networks since then. The original version involved a central character with an interesting backstory of some kind and two impostors. The central character in each round of play was obliged to tell the truth. But the impostors would try to fool the celebrity panel of four by lying. The panelists would each ask questions of the three contestants: “Number One, did you . . . ?” “Number Three, have you . . . ?” As time ran out for that round, the panelists would vote for the contestant whom they believed to be the real John Smith or the true Jane Doe.



It was not often easy to tell which man or woman was TRULY the person she or he claimed to be! Who was for real? Who was an impostor? The moment of truth came at last as the host said: “Will the real Jane Doe please stand up!” Then the truth was revealed.

The stakes are higher when nominees for high office appear before a Senate confirmation committee. We sometimes learn that there is a question as to whether the nominee’s public and private behavior line up. As we are presented with differing descriptions of the character of the nominee, naturally the question is raised: “Which is the *real* person? In a crisis, which person is likely to emerge and make the crucial and sensitive decisions that need to be made?”

In the temptation experience, the devil confronted Jesus with the question: Who are you “if you are the Son of God?” the devil whispered. Most English translations render the Greek word as “if” while a few others use “since” instead. In either case, the question is put to Jesus: What does it mean to be the Son of God? What kind of Savior will you be? Jesus answers each of the temptations by addressing a different, more fundamental question: “*Whose* are we?” Though hungry, he would not turn desert stones to bread because human beings do not live by bread alone. We are meant to live by the Word of God our Creator. And Jesus would not stoop



Jesus would not stoop to the ways of the rich  
and powerful in our world.

to the ways of the rich and powerful in our world in order to amass political power. Though he came to save humanity, he knew that when the world goes low, God's Son must go high: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

The third temptation represented the all-too-human desire to force God's hand to do our will rather than the other way around. "Jesus, just jump off this building and let the angels catch you." In 1987 the famous televangelist Oral Roberts shut himself up in a prayer tower and told the public that unless he raised some large sum of money by a certain deadline, God would take his life. Some donors, alarmed by the language, were worried that Roberts intended to harm himself. Although his projects had produced some good results, this sensationalist fundraising method seemed to many people to draw attention away from the God that Oral Roberts sought to serve. At its heart, it was an attempt to force God's hand to do Roberts' will.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have learned of congregations that decided public health measures were unnecessary for them. Surely God will intervene to make maskless, in-person worship safe, they said. Some even appealed to Psalm 91, the very words which the devil quoted to Jesus. Jesus' response in the desert long ago is just as on target today as it was then: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Remember *whose* we are!

Jesus was led by God's Spirit through the wilderness temptations. Steeped in the Scriptures and keeping his eyes focused on the Heavenly Father, Jesus did not allow himself to be distracted by the devil's "If you are . . ." challenges. Jesus remained clear about whose he was and what he was to be about.

At the end of Luke's temptation narrative, there is a foreboding of the cross. Luke reverses Matthew's order of the second and the third temptations, which leaves Jesus in Jerusalem, where the drama of redemption on the cross and in the subsequent Resurrection will play out. In verse 13, we read: "When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time." Temptation was over, but just for now. Luke is telling us, his readers, that there would be more temptations and struggles to come. On the night when Jesus was arrested, the devil's opportune time arrived. Jesus exclaims in Luke 22:53 to those about to seize him: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!" Jesus had worked through the

temptations and had emerged clear-minded about whose he is and where his path will lead him.

## Into Discipleship

My wife and I attended seminary in Berkeley, California, in the 1970s. We lived in seminary housing in a first-floor apartment that in an earlier time had been the manager's apartment. Every time someone buzzed in a friend, it buzzed in our wall. Each time that heavy front door slammed, we felt it in our apartment. There was the constant sound of traffic wending its way past our Berkeley apartment. University students living across the street would sometimes open the windows of their apartments, turn up the volume on their stereos and share their music with the neighborhood. Once a disturbed person set fire to a car parked across the street from us. Standing nearby, he clapped his hands delightedly as the car burned. There soon followed the sound of sirens as firefighters came to the rescue. There was never a dull moment in that neighborhood and rarely any quiet!



I began to understand why Moses, Elijah, and Jesus spent time in the wilderness away from the constant background noise and distractions.



Following graduation, we moved to Western Colorado to serve a church in Grand Junction. Our new neighborhood at the edge of town was very quiet. After the noise in Berkeley, it was difficult at first to get used to the quiet. One day I drove a few miles from town, parked my car, and walked out into the desert. It was a windless day, and I stood still, surrounded by quiet. Suddenly, I heard a faint sound: “Scritch . . . scritch . . . scritch.” I looked around me and then down at my feet. There on the ground, making his way across the dry and sandy soil, was a large ant, making the faintest of sounds as he passed in the desert quiet. I began to understand why Moses, Elijah, and Jesus spent time in the wilderness away from the constant background noise and distractions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us were separated from family, friends, and co-workers. We may have grown lonely, but how often were we truly alone and open to God’s voice? We are caught up in the twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week news cycle. Many live from moment to moment on social media. Disciples of Jesus need time away if we are to listen for God’s voice. Susanna Wesley, the mother of the Methodist founders, John and Charles Wesley, had nineteen children. She could not go on retreat in the desert. In

order to carve out a time for herself to commune with God, Susanna Wesley would sometimes sit in a chair and pull her apron over her head!

Earlier generations of Christians emphasized the importance of Scripture memorization. My mother memorized many Bible verses and even had a list of favorite verses in alphabetical order. In her later years, I learned that when she could not fall asleep, she would begin working through her list beginning with “A” and working through the alphabet until she fell asleep. Today we can easily look up Scriptures on sites like Bible Gateway or use a Bible app on our phones. In today’s text, we see that Jesus was grounded in the Hebrew Bible. But Jesus did not read the Scriptures seeking proof texts for what he already believed or wanted to do. He had not only memorized the words; he had taken the meaning to heart. Even the devil quoted the Bible in the encounter with Jesus in the wilderness. We are told that it was the Holy Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness for this time of quiet. For a Spirit-led Jesus, the holy Scriptures were part of his life conversation with His Heavenly Father. This is a way to live out the words we say each time we recite the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.”

## Reflection Questions

### Into the Scripture

The beginning of today's passage talks about how the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. We now know that it was for Jesus to exercise his judgement and rely on the Holy Spirit to defeat the temptations of the devil. His success helped him begin his ministry with a sense of confidence and clarity concerning challenges that would come his way. When you reflect back on moments in your life, can you recall a time when retrospectively you realized that the Holy Spirit had led you to go somewhere or accomplish some purpose? Share anecdotally what happened and how you know God was behind the scenes leading and guiding you.

### Into the Lesson

Jesus quotes Scripture when confronted by temptation. However, in the third scene, the devil weaves a Scripture passage from Psalm 91 into his temptation. Scripture has sometimes been used to justify unjust systems such as slavery, for example, or to legitimize wishful thinking. What are some ways that we can hold one another accountable in our use of the Bible?

### Into Discipleship

Luke tells us that Jesus fasted when he was led into the wilderness. During the season of Lent, many Christians give up something such as watching television, impulse spending, eating junk food, or holding grudges. If you are fasting in some way this Lenten season (and are comfortable sharing with your class), tell how you decided to take on this discipline and how it is going so far.

### Closing Prayer

Loving God, be our unseen friend during this season of Lent. When we live as though we are all alone in life, change our way of thinking about ourselves and your world. We believe the Good News, O Lord. Help us with our unbelief. We thank you for sending Jesus, who walked the way of the cross and died for us so that we might live. Help us always to listen for your voice and so follow Christ in faithful discipleship. In his name we pray. Amen.

## Resources

### Helpful Books for Your Lenten Journey

<https://www.judsonpress.com/AdvancedSearch/Default?Filter.aspx?SearchTerm=lent/>

- **Journey with Jesus Through Lent**  
by Glenn E. Porter Sr.
- **Let Us Pray-Lent-Easter DIY: Contemporary Prayers for the Seasons of the Church**  
by Israel Galindo



## Songs to Consider

### *A Mighty Fortress*

The words in Martin Luther's beloved hymn *A Mighty Fortress* reflect on the temptations we face and the help we receive from God to overcome. You may choose to read (or sing) this hymn together. Here is a link to a YouTube version by Michael W. Smith:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZwFSBxyL5c>

Two stanzas are provided here.

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe does seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal.

And though this world, with devils filled, should  
threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to  
triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.

### *Yield Not to Temptation*

*Yield Not to Temptation* is another great hymn of the church. You can find the lyrics at [hymnary.org](http://hymnary.org):

[https://hymnary.org/text/yield\\_not\\_to\\_temptation](https://hymnary.org/text/yield_not_to_temptation)

## Devotional Scriptures

### Year C First Sunday in Lent

### Week of 03/06/22

#### **Sunday 03/06/22**

First Sunday in Lent

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;  
Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

#### **Monday 03/07/22**

Psalm 17; 1 Chronicles 21:1-17; 1 John 2:1-6

#### **Tuesday 03/08/22**

Psalm 17; Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21

#### **Wednesday 03/09/22**

Psalm 17; Job 1:1-22; Luke 21:34-22:6

#### **Thursday 03/10/22**

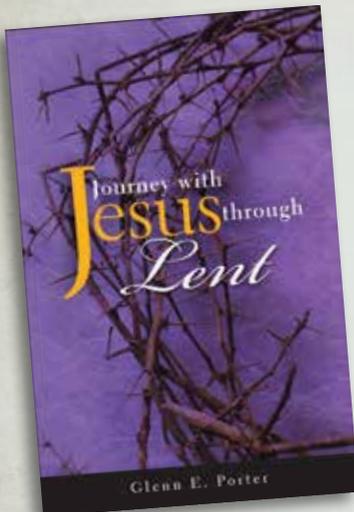
Psalm 27; Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philippians 3:2-12

#### **Friday 03/11/22**

Psalm 27; Genesis 14:17-24; Philippians 3:17-20

#### **Saturday 03/12/22**

Psalm 27; Psalm 118:26-29; Matthew 23:37-39



## **Journey with Jesus through Lent** by Glenn E. Porter

Consisting of seven weeks of meditations, each day's devotion begins with a Scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke and an African proverb or other saying, followed by a meditation, and concluding with a biblical prayer focus.

**“Using Christian history, cultural heritage, Holy Writ, and internal reflection, Dr. Porter has handily laid a path that's conducive to our spiritual formation.”**

—Rev. Dr. Bernadette Glover, Senior Pastor, Saint Paul Baptist Church, and Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship, New Brunswick Theological Seminary

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# DISCIPLESHIP

## being present for God and others

Then from the cloud came a voice that said,  
“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

—LUKE 9:35

### Introduction

The story of the Transfiguration is a strange tale of the unnerving experience that Peter, James and John had one day on a hike with Jesus. However, under the shadow of the cross, the meaning of this story comes into sharp focus and poses a challenge: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” During this season of Lent, as we hike up the mountain of remembrance, we are called to follow Jesus in faithful discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed in *The Cost of Discipleship* that when Jesus calls someone to discipleship, he calls that one to come and die. But it is a dying that spreads hope and plants seeds of new life.

### Lesson Objectives

- To gain deeper insight into Luke’s portrayal of Jesus as Son of God.
- To engage Luke’s Transfiguration narrative as a call to faithful discipleship.

#### Luke 9:28-36 NRSV

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to

him!” 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

## Into the Scripture

In last week’s lesson, we learned that the authorship of the Gospel of Luke is traditionally ascribed to Luke, a physician and co-worker with the Apostle Paul. Although the Gospel itself does not identify the writer, the “we” sections in Acts suggest that an eyewitness to Paul’s journeys stands behind the narrative. Taken together, Luke and Acts account for over a quarter of the New Testament writings.

All the first disciples were Jewish, but by the time Luke was written, the early church had become a diverse group of Jews and Gentiles. The Gospel narrative grounds Jesus’ story firmly in the witness of the scripture and connects God’s work in Jesus and the early church with the experience of God’s people in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses promised the people that the Lord would raise up a prophet like Moses

in the future: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.” Luke shows how Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus in the Transfiguration account reminds us of Old Testament themes and connects Jesus’ life

and ministry with the prophetic tradition of Israel. For example, both Moses (Exodus 24:15-18) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8-13) had mountaintop encounters with God. While Matthew, Mark and Luke all recount the Transfiguration story, only Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah were discussing Jesus’ departure with Him. The Greek word translated “departure” in this context may

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When Jesus calls someone to discipleship, he calls that one to come and die.

also be rendered as “exodus.” Here is another indication that Luke intended to connect Jesus’ story with God’s earlier work with Israel.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, the author relates Jesus’ story to the scriptures, and at the end of the Gospel, the risen Christ explains to the disciples that the scriptures pointed towards him (Luke 24:44-45). The importance of Jesus’ practice of prayer is emphasized throughout the Gospel of Luke and is highlighted at crucial moments in Jesus’ ministry. For example, Luke tells us that following his baptism, Jesus was praying when the heavens opened, the Spirit descended, and the heavenly voice declared to Jesus: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). Before choosing the twelve, we are told that Jesus spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12). Luke 9:28 informs us that the Transfiguration experience occurred while Jesus was in prayer: “Now about eight days after these





sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray” (Luke 9:28). In their account of the Transfiguration, both Matthew and Mark use the expression “and after six days” to set the chronology. There is no scholarly consensus regarding Luke’s change to “about eight days after.” However, only Luke tells the readers that Jesus’ purpose in ascending the mountain was to enter into a time of prayer.

In the passage that immediately precedes the Transfiguration account (Luke 9:21-27), Jesus warns his disciples of his death and resurrection and the cost of their discipleship. In this passage, Luke continues to bring Jesus’ identity as Son of God into sharper focus. Jesus’ own words about the meaning and requirements of discipleship in Luke 9:23-26 serve as background to God’s challenge spoken to the disciples from the cloud: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (Luke 9:35b). In addressing the disciples directly, God is calling Peter, James, and John to follow Jesus in faithful discipleship.

## Into the Lesson

The summer before we were married, my wife and I went backpacking in Yosemite National Park. Each morning would start out beautifully with clear skies, crisp air, and beautiful vistas! But each afternoon the clouds rolled in, and the rain began pouring down. Early in the trip, as we were hiking up yet another mountain, we suddenly moved above the tree line. As we trudged through the soaking rain and up the trail that had become a muddy stream, lightning flashed, and thunder boomed. I suddenly realized that we were now the two tallest things

in the area! Struggling up that mountain, I remember having an almost overwhelming sense that I was watching the Creator’s love at work with the rest of Creation.

We cannot predict these moments of insight, awe, and a sense of the holy. They come to us as both gift and challenge, perhaps with a mixture of insight, fear, and even some doubt thrown in. We cannot manufacture these moments when a glimpse of God’s presence and purpose are disclosed to us. All that we can do is to put ourselves in the place and in the time and in the position where God can hand us this gift. Sometimes the most important thing we can do is to show up! The disciples accompanied Jesus up the mountain for a time of prayer and saw their master’s face changed before their eyes. Luke also tells us that when the disciples were overshadowed by a cloud and heard a voice, they were terrified! That heavenly voice called them to faithful discipleship: “This is my Son . . . Listen to him!”

With the appearance of Moses and Elijah, we are reminded that the fellowship of God’s faithful servants extends backwards and forwards in time. It is no accident that when God met Moses at the burning bush, God said: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). The God of past generations, the God who was faithful



God is calling Peter, James, and John to follow  
Jesus in faithful discipleship.

in the past, is forever doing new things. Whatever clouds may overshadow you today, the God who has been faithful in your life in the past will break through surprisingly to bring some new life tomorrow. The God of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebekah, and Peter, James and John, and Mary and Martha, and so many others since, and so many yet to come, is bringing something new out of what has gone before!

Luke's Transfiguration narrative is first of all about the person and the work of Jesus, the Son of God. This is a story of initiation into the mystery of who Jesus is for us and the world. Beyond that, however, this is a discipleship text. In words that remind us of Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone," the voice of God challenges Peter, James, and John from the cloud: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" For a disciple, to listen to Jesus means to hear and to obey.

Jesus had just said some very difficult things to the disciples in Luke 9:23-24: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." Connecting this call to discipleship with Jesus' Transfiguration, today's text begins with the words: "Now about eight days after these sayings." During this otherworldly experience, a cloud came and overshadowed the disciples. It was a frightening experience, but within the reduced vision of that cloud, God's voice was heard. God's Word is spoken not only in the brightly lit occasions of life but sometimes within the shadows and cloudy times as well.

Several years ago, our family was camping on Cape Cod near Provincetown. One night near midnight we hiked to the beach where we lay on our backs and looked up at the stars. Suddenly someone exclaimed: "Shooting star!" Not everyone had seen it, but now we all began to watch intently. Soon there was another shooting star! And another! On that beach far from the lights of a big city, there in the midnight darkness, we were treated to the light of a meteor shower.

God's light in our lives isn't always bright and blinding. Sometimes it is more like a shooting star moving across our own night skies, appearing briefly and then gone for a time. It is precisely in those midnight times of our lives, when all light seems to have left us, that God's light may flash again through our lives as a reminder.

And in those shadow times beneath the cloud, we may once again hear God's voice calling: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

## Into Discipleship

During the ten years that our family lived in Rhode Island, I was a member of a running club. It was a friendly group of people who would miss you if you didn't show up and would call to find out how things were going. Whenever we went on a group run together, the faster runners could run as fast as they liked, but we never left anyone behind. The frontrunners would circle around and pick up the slower runners at the back of the pack. And when a member of that club missed several weeks and put on some extra pounds, there was a lot of good-natured teasing! We helped each other stick with the discipline, and we left nobody behind.

In the life of Christian discipleship, we have training partners who walk up the mountain with us. Not all moments in the Christian life are created equal, but half of this Christian life is often just about showing



God's Word is spoken  
not only in the brightly  
lit occasions of life but  
sometimes within the  
shadows and cloudy  
times as well.



up! Much of the life of Christian discipleship is about putting ourselves in a position where God's presence and purpose can break through the clouds from time to time and do something new with us.

The disciples in our story found themselves in a position to receive this strange Transfiguration experience by walking with Jesus up that mountainside together. They did this in spite of the anxious and confused feelings that they must have had after hearing their teacher just days earlier talk about what lay ahead for him! Look at Luke 9:21-22:

[Jesus] sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

The Christian disciplines are time-tested ways that God has provided for Jesus' disciples to show up. The list may include worship with the Christian community, fasting of some kind, seeking God's guidance by engaging in prayer and Scripture study, and charitable giving (almsgiving) of time and money to relieve some of the human need around us. These are some of the practices that we disciples do whether we feel close to God or not.

If we practice Christian disciplines in season and out, we will be ready for God to surprise us!

On that hike up the mountain, the disciples not only stood together with one another. They also stood together with those from the past who had been faithful like Moses and Elijah. It is no accident that when God met Moses at the burning bush, God said: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). God was promising: "Yes, I am the God of the present. But I am also the God who was faithful in the past and the God who will meet you in the future." We do not know what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future! The communion of God's people extends not only around the world into all people and cultures but backwards and forwards through time as well.

Under the shadow of his cross, Jesus invites us each new day to remember his life-giving sacrifice—to look back in time with all disciples. And he also invites us to look forward in hope to that day when the dream of God's peaceable kingdom becomes a reality. In Luke 21:17-18, we recall the promise: "Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'"

## Reflection Questions

### Into the Scripture

While the appearances of Moses and Elijah along with Jesus represent the offices of priest, prophet, and king, how does Jesus incorporate and represent all three roles in one person?

### Into the Lesson

Has God spoken to you in a dark or cloudy time in your life? What issues were you facing? How did God's guidance get through to you?

### Into Discipleship

While there is no definitive list of Christian disciplines, fasting, prayer, Scripture study, and almsgiving (acts of charity) are included on most such lists. Over the centuries, actively seeking to meet human need has been an important discipline in both Jewish and Christian practice. Can you recall a time when you were in great need, and somebody helped you? How did they deliver aid to you? What was the effect on your sense of dignity and belonging? What extra action would you like to take during Lent to help others in need?

### Closing Prayer

Gracious God, reduce the background noise of our daily lives, we pray. Throughout this season of Lent, help us once again to hear your challenge to Jesus' disciples long ago: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!" Turn down all lesser lights of the world around us that we might better see the light of your presence in our lives. Grant that, as faithful disciples, we might always be doers of your word and not hearers only. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

## Resources

### The Transfiguration in Art

Images throughout this lesson are taken from the Vanderbilt University "Art in the Christian Tradition" website. Compare and contrast the images in the lesson and discuss how the different artists created varying depictions of the Transfiguration.

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-search.pl>

- What do you see as the suggested meaning behind the interwoven symbolism and images?
- What did the artists choose to include and what did they omit?
- How does the use of color play into their interpretations?



## Song to Consider

*King of Glory* Music Video

Sung by Michael W. Smith and CeCe Winans

<https://youtu.be/8JGS9WICtIg>

You can find the lyrics at

<https://www.invubu.com/music/show/song/Michael-W.-Smith%7CCeCe-Winans/King-of-Glory.html>

Here are the first two verses:

Yes, the world will bow down and say You are God  
Every man will bow down and say You are King  
So let's start right now  
Why would we wait?

### CHORUS

King of Glory, fill this place  
We just wanna be with You  
Just wanna be with You  
King of Glory, fill this place  
I just wanna be with You  
I just wanna be with You

Yes, the world will bow down and say You are God  
Every man will bow down and say You are King  
So let's start right now  
Why would we wait  
We can praise You now  
In victory

## Devotional Scriptures

Year C Second Sunday in Lent

Week of 03/13/22

### Sunday 03/13/22

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1;  
Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

### Monday 03/14/22

Psalm 105:1-42; Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12

### Tuesday 03/15/22

Psalm 105:1-42; Numbers 14:10b-24;

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

### Wednesday 03/16/22

Psalm 105:1-42; 2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31

### Thursday 03/17/22

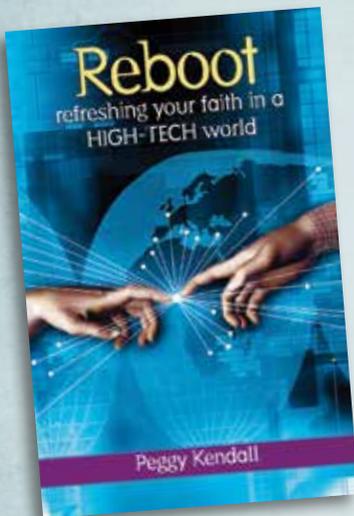
Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 3:19-30; Revelation 2:8-11

### Friday 03/18/22

Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 12:1-4; Revelation 3:1-6

### Saturday 03/19/22

Psalm 63:1-8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45



## Reboot: Refreshing Your Faith in a High-Tech World by Peggy Kendall

*Reboot* explores three areas where “our unexamined choices regarding technology may unintentionally be altering our fundamental operating system”:

- Our values
- Our relationships
- The way we view our Creator

“*Reboot* is anything but another thinly veiled, quasi-negative book about technology salted with biblical proof-texts and preachy admonitions. It isn’t about disconnecting. It’s about staying connected the right way.”

—from the foreword by Robert Parham, Baptist Center for Ethics

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# RESILIENCE

## keeping hope alive

Seek the Lord while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near.

—ISAIAH 55:6

### Introduction

The original readers of Isaiah 55 were exiled in Babylon. Many leaders of Judah had been carried off into captivity in 587 BCE while the poor had been left behind to fend for themselves. Both people and land languished. Those living in distant Babylon longed for their homeland in Judea and for the holy city, Jerusalem. They particularly mourned the loss of the temple, which had been a place to seek and to experience the presence of God. Where is God to be found when everything has changed? With that exile generation, we, too, are invited by today's text: "Seek the Lord. . . ."

### Lesson Objectives

- To reflect together on Isaiah's enduring message of hope to God's people living in unsettled times.
- To let Isaiah's question of priorities challenge me during this season of Lent: am I investing my time and energy in the most important things in life?

### Isaiah 55:1-9 NRSV

1 Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. 3 Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. 4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. 5 See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. 6 Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and

to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

## Into the Scripture

For centuries, the Book of Isaiah has been much loved by both Christians and Jews. In fact, it is the most frequently quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament (85 times from 61 separate passages). Authorship was traditionally ascribed to Isaiah of Jerusalem, who prophesied during the 8th century BCE, when the Assyrian empire was dominant in the Middle East. As early as the twelfth century CE, however, Rabbi ibn Ezra expressed some doubt about the unity of the book of Isaiah. Scholars have noted that the language and apparent historical setting of Isaiah 1-39 belong to the Assyrian period in the 8th century BCE. In 587 BCE Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylonian invaders, and many inhabitants of the land of Judah were carried into exile. Chapters 40 through 55 seem to come from a later period, when the Babylonian Empire was coming to an end and Persia was rising. Cyrus the Great, the Persian

emperor, is mentioned three times in Isaiah (44:28, 45:1, 45:13).

In the twentieth century a scholarly consensus formed around a three-part division of Isaiah—First Isaiah (chapters 1-39), Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55), and Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66). However, as scholars have increasingly come

to recognize the interwoven nature of the prophecies and poetry within the entire book of Isaiah, aspects of this three-part division have been questioned. Chapters 40 and 55 serve as bookends to the middle section of Isaiah, a section whose tone is one of hopefulness, where the universal nature of God's redemptive work is stressed. In the face of the great national disaster of the Babylonian

“

God's redemptive work among the returning exiles will attract the favorable attention of other nations.

Exile, Isaiah 40 begins with the stirring words: “Comfort, O comfort my people.” The time of great national pain and confusion was coming to an end.

Isaiah 55:1-2 announces a coming renewal of life, saying: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! says your God.” The renewal that is promised represents more than hope for an end to spiritual dryness. It holds out hope for people who have been suffering want of every kind brought on by war and social unrest. And it promises renewal of the land itself which had languished. This hopeful message stands in sharp contrast to the woes announced in Isaiah 24:4-5: “The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants. . . .”



Those who had been carried off to Babylon in 587 BCE, as well as those left behind in much changed circumstances, wondered whether God was still Lord of history. Where is God now that the Temple has been destroyed? What sense can we make of this exile experience? The response to these questions is twofold. First, despite appearances, God is near and available: “Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. . . . Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.” Second, God’s ways in the world are not transparent to us: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”

Our text emphasizes God’s continuing care by a promise to extend the Lord’s covenant faithfulness towards David in an earlier generation to the people as a whole: “I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” Further, God’s redemptive work among the returning exiles will attract the favorable attention of other nations: “See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.”

## Into the Lesson

In the Babylonian exile experience, God’s people wondered, “Where is God when we are living in the wrong place and time?” But God was about to do something new. In Isaiah 55:6 the exiles were challenged to look for God’s presence where they were rather than where they



“Isaiah with Two Angels,” by Starnina, Gherardo, ca. 1354–1413.

wished to be: “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. . . .” In a different place and in another time, to seek the Lord often meant going to the Temple in search of God’s presence and guidance. But through the prophet, the Lord assured the people that God was present with them even in the exile experience.

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021, we lived through a strange and troubled time in a kind of exile of our own. Many congregations worshiped together online when it was not possible to worship face-to-face. Separated from each other by physical distance, we found ways to meet in worship, watching and listening on our computers, tablets, and phones. Yet life in the post-pandemic time is not merely a return to the way things used to be for us. Things have changed. The word from Isaiah 55:6-7 originally meant to encourage those living through the Babylonian exile is spoken to us as well.

“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. . . .  
. . . Let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”



The exiles were challenged to look for God’s presence where they were rather than where they wished to be.

We cannot always live in a familiar place and a comfortable time. But Isaiah's God comes near in every place and at all times in life and urges us to seek the divine presence in our lives and in the life of our community.

There was a serious drought in the western United States in 1977, when our family moved to Western Colorado. When we arrived with our newborn daughter, water was being drawn from the river. When we filled the tub for a bath, it was murky and full of silt. The water was safe to drink, but it tasted and looked disturbing. Then someone in our church told us about a nearby farm that had an Artesian well—pure, naturally filtered water. We brought a 5-gallon container with us as we drove to the farm. How much would it cost, we wondered? We were greeted by a husband and wife, and the husband filled our container and put it back in our car for us. We asked his wife how much we owed them. She looked into the car and saw our baby sitting in her car seat. “Oh! You have a baby! That will be 25 cents.” Without money! Without price! What a generous gift that was, neighbors giving water to their neighbors! Today's text is surely one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture. It begins in verse 1 with an invitation to those who have no money to come and to enjoy the renewing, life-sustaining water of life that God offers: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” When it seems that we are living in the wrong place and the wrong time, it can be difficult to see beyond our own problems.

Yet, in our text, God calls God's people to be witnesses to God's redemptive presence in a troubled world. Look again at verses 3-4: “I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.” The promises that God had made to King David centuries earlier were extended to the whole people of God. But it was not enough for God's people to focus on their own well-being. They were called to be a source of blessing to the neighbors: “See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.”

When we are living through difficult times, trapped in places where we would rather not be, God reminds us that we are people of hope! We are urged to look up and to look around at others nearby and to invite the neighbors to enjoy the pure Artesian water of God's love that we have experienced, without money and without price. The Book of Isaiah extends the promise of shalom, God's peace and community, and wholeness, and the joy that comes with it, is ours for the taking!

## Into Discipleship

Those times in life when we are separated from the places and people that we love can be stressful. When we are unable to participate in the routine activities of our lives, it is natural to feel a sense of loss. The original readers of Isaiah 55 were living in exile in Babylon, both geographically and emotionally far from home. A military deployment or incarceration or long illness are often painful times of separation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, family and friends were visited virtually from a safe distance. Worship was pared down to the essentials on Zoom or some other online platform. Many of us missed the uplifting experience of voices raised together in musical praise in the same worship space.

These separation experiences invite us to explore what it is in our lives and in our Christian discipleship



God calls God's  
people to be witnesses to  
God's redemptive presence  
in a troubled world.



“By the Waters of Babylon,” by De Morgan, Evelyn, 1855–1919.

that matters most. Isaiah 55:2 throws out the challenge to God’s people then and now: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” Even when we are not living through a time of enforced separation, the season of Lent is a period in the church year when we are encouraged to reflect on the things with which we fill our lives. Which of my relationships need tending? Am I spending the time and money entrusted to me in a God-ward direction? Am I investing my emotional energy in the most important things in life? Are there things that I routinely do that I need to leave behind in the coming months?

First the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, and then the Persians—one great military power after another swept through the Middle East between the beginning of Isaiah until the time of Isaiah 55. We can almost hear the questions on the lips of God’s people. Why does God allow the powerful to trample the weak? In times of great suffering or injustice, believers have asked these questions. Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds the people that God has a long view: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

When we are in great pain or outraged at the injustice in the world around, this answer is not always satisfying. But where answers are sought, it has been said that we prefer mystery to inadequacy.

Since our text is one of hope, however, it does not merely leave us with the great unanswered question of God’s justice. Instead, the original readers and we are called to act in verses 6 and 7: “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts.” Reflecting on the response of faith in difficult life experiences, the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Faith is more a verb than a noun. We are called to step out in faith in a God-ward direction, even when we cannot see our way forward.

Finally, today’s text reminds us that Biblical faith is inviting faith. When God’s people embody God’s love and compassion for the world around, the neighbors will notice. Isaiah 55:5a says: “See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you. . . .” Do the neighbors see the beauty of Christ in us? Does the life of our congregation speak hope to the world around? During this season of Lenten reflection, these are questions posed to us by today’s text.

## Reflection Questions

### Into the Scripture

Today's scripture references spending money in ways that are not helpful or productive. Discuss some of the lures of culture and society that invite us to be poor stewards of our resources, inviting us to waste what God has given us. Beyond tithing, how can the church teach stewardship of finances as well as that which goes beyond our pocketbooks?

### Into the Lesson

God's people exiled in Babylon were confronted with the fact that things weren't what they used to be. Older members of your church may have similar feelings about church life. At the end of 2019, the Pew Research Center reported that in the previous ten years, the percentage of Americans identifying as Christian had dropped from 77% to only 65%. What are some ways that your congregation can live hopefully in this time of ongoing religious change in the United States?

### Into Discipleship

Isaiah 55:6 says: "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. . . ." Times of suffering, whether our own or that of others, sometimes drive

people away from God. Can you recall a period in your own life when troubles seemed overwhelming? Were you able to seek God's presence in the midst of difficulty? If so, what helped you to call upon the Lord and to stay connected with God's people?

### Closing Prayer

Most merciful and compassionate God, in the dry times of life, call us once again to receive your living water. Help us always to seek you, whether in joy or in sorrow. When life's troubles threaten to overwhelm us, and we feel that we are exiled far from where we would like to be, draw us closer to you and to one another. Daily renew the hope that is within us as Easter people. Make our lives so shine that the neighbors will be drawn to you, O Lord. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

## Resources

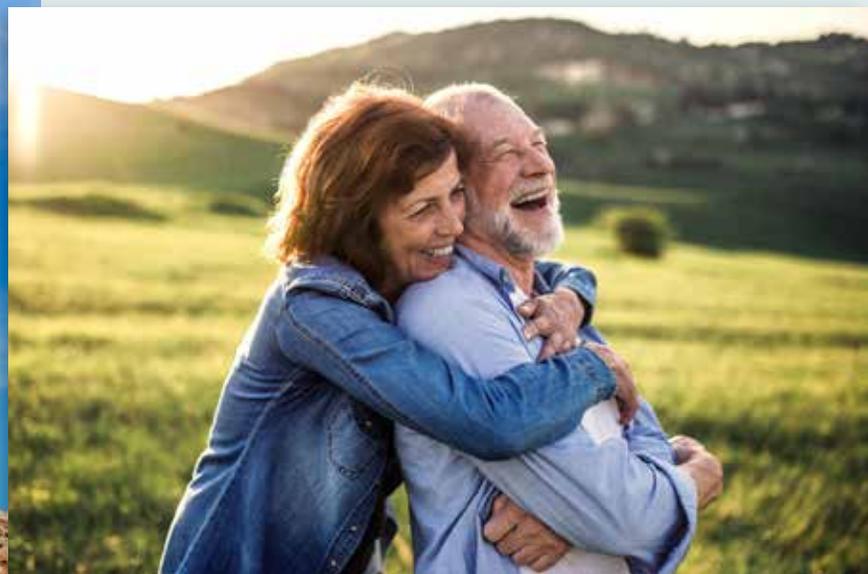
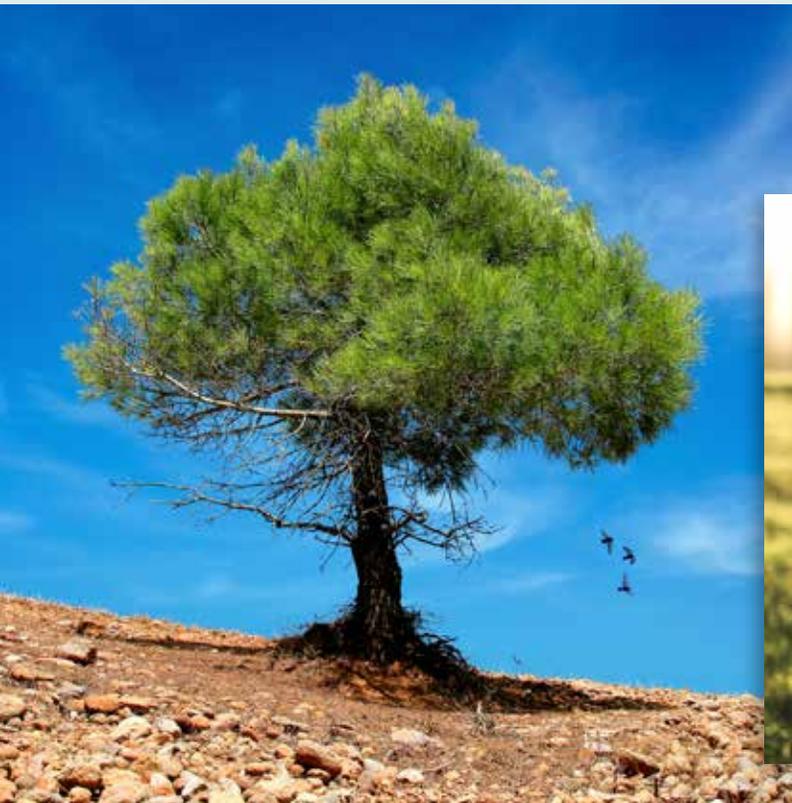
For more historical background on the prophet Isaiah and the time periods to which the section of the Book of Isaiah apply, read the commentary by the International Bible Society at the following link:

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-isaiah/>

### Books to Consider

<https://www.judsonpress.com/Products/CategoryCenter/JPBKS/Books.aspx>

- **From Sacrifice Celebration: A Lenten Journey**  
by Evan Drake Howard



- **More Litanies for All Occasions Lent/Easter** (PDF)  
by Garth House
- **Money on Purpose: Finding a Faith-Filled Balance**  
by Shayna Lear
- **40 Days to a Life of G.O.L.D.: God-Ordained Life Development**  
by Ed Gray

## Song to Consider

*Rock of Ages* Music Video by Chris Rice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qqDJVGPRdg>

Here are several verses of lyrics:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;  
Let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side  
which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make  
me pure.  
Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's  
commands;  
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever  
flow,  
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and thou  
alone.  
Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling;  
Naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for  
grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.  
While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyes shall  
close in death,  
When I soar to worlds unknown, see thee on thy  
judgment throne . . .

## Devotional Scriptures Year C Third Sunday in Lent Week of 03/20/22

### Sunday 03/20/22

Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13;  
Luke 13:1-9

### Monday 03/21/22

Psalm 39; Jeremiah 11:1-17; Romans 2:1-11

### Tuesday 03/22/22

Psalm 39; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16

### Wednesday 03/23/22

Psalm 39; Numbers 13:17-27; Luke 13:18-21

### Thursday 03/24/22

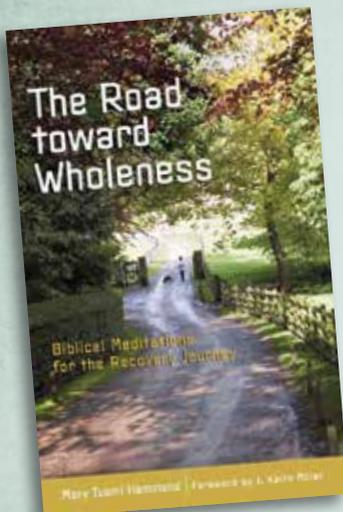
Psalm 32; Joshua 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

### Friday 03/25/22

Psalm 32; Joshua 4:14-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-15

### Saturday 03/26/22

Psalm 32; Exodus 32:7-14; Luke 15:1-10



## Road Toward Wholeness: Biblical Meditations for the Recovery Journey

by Mary Tuomi Hammond

Do you strive to live the “servant life” only to feel burned out from over commitment? Do you continue to say “yes” to requests to do more, believing it’s what Jesus commanded?

Hammond addresses our faulty perceptions about who we are and who we are supposed to be as Christians and guides us in looking at the way Jesus struggled with the same problems that often drive us to distraction.

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# TRANSFORMATION

## living a new reality

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

—2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

### Introduction

If we are ever tempted to imagine that the early church was more loving and less conflicted than our congregations today, a close reading of the Apostle Paul's letters to the Corinthians should correct that impression. The Corinthians brought their diverse backgrounds—some Jews and some Gentiles, some affluent, others poor—into their church life. Their old patterns of behavior led to conflict among themselves and with their founding pastor, Paul. Seeking reconciliation with this church he loved, Paul helped the Corinthians to understand that, in Christ, they were called to a new way of living.

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore Paul's letters to the Corinthian church as expressions of his pastoral care for a church he founded.
- To consider ways in which our life in Christ calls us to the ministry of reconciliation today in our polarized society.

### 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 NRSV

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

## Into the Scripture

In the Apostle Paul's time, Corinth was located on the Isthmus of Corinth in the Roman province of Achaia in Ancient Greece. The city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BCE but rebuilt in 44 BCE. It was a maritime city with two harbors at the time Paul founded the church there. Acts 18:1-17 relates how Paul, working together with Priscilla and Aquila, founded the church in Corinth around 50 CE.

Although we have only two of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, we know that he wrote to them on at least four separate occasions. Apparently in response to questions from the Corinthians, Paul wrote the church a letter before 1 Corinthians was penned (see 1 Corinthians 5:9). The second letter is what we have as 1 Corinthians. A second, sorrowful letter was written "with many tears" following 1 Corinthians (see 2 Corinthians 2:4). Following this third letter, Paul wrote what we know as 2 Corinthians. Because of the very different tone between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13, some scholars have speculated that chapters 10 through 13 may be part of the "tearful letter" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:4. However, from very early the Corinthian correspondence was known only in the format in which we have it today.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians were written in an attempt to deal with conflict and misbehavior in the church. Additionally, there were some who questioned the validity of Paul's ministry as an apostle. These letters were

part of Paul's efforts at pastoral care with the church he had founded that was experiencing difficulties. The key theme in today's text is that of reconciliation: between Paul and the congregation, between members, and fundamentally between God and humanity. Paul relates the fact of God's reconciling work in Christ to the need for reconciliation within the church. In verses 18 through 20 some form of the verb "to reconcile" occurs five times. In verse 20 Paul affirms the connection between his ministry with them and God's work in Christ when he writes: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God

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These letters were part  
of Paul's efforts at  
pastoral care with the  
church.

is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

In Christ God has done a new thing. Paul's phrase "in Christ" occurs frequently throughout his writings. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" When we are "in Christ" we have been made new persons. Our life in community must reflect this new life in Christ, as well. Therefore, we must no longer judge others merely by external standards as the world tends to do—that is, "from a human point of view" (verse 16).

Although the Revised Common Lectionary begins today's text at verse 16, verses 14 and 15 together with verse 21 serve as bookends for this text. In verse 21, Paul writes: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Paul's discussion of reconciliation is set within the context of a reflection on the meaning of Christ's saving death on the cross for us. Christ fully immersed himself in our human condition. The Rev. Leslie Weatherhead used to say that, while we know what it means "to wash our hands of someone," we have no expression for the opposite thing. Yet it is this "opposite thing" that Christ has done for us on the cross!





## Into the Lesson

The Apostle Paul had been misjudged by the Corinthians. Some had questioned his credentials as an apostle. They had challenged his behavior and motivation towards them. A gulf had opened up in the relationship between Paul and this church that he had founded! And so, he was writing to them to try to win them back.

“Who knows the real me?” Paul was asking. In verse 16 he points out that they have given up looking at Jesus Christ from an external point of view in order that they might know who He really is. They should look beyond the externals with each other, too: “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view. . . .”

This experience of being misjudged was painful for Paul, and he didn’t pretend that it didn’t bother him. But he reminds himself and the Corinthians that God is the only one who really knows us truly. Just as God has reached out to us in Christ, so Paul, entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation, reached out to the Corinthians seeking to bridge the gap between them. Paul reminded the Corinthians in verse 16 that we don’t settle for a superficial judgment of who Jesus is. In verse 17 he states the key promise of this whole passage: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

But can we—or anybody else—ever really change? This is the question Nicodemus posed to Jesus in John 3:4: “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb

and be born?” How we answer that question affects how we see ourselves, and it conditions our expectations of others.

We come in all different conditions when we are drawn to Christ, and he begins with us where we are. So, in some areas of our lives, we will not be as good as somebody else who is not even a Christian. Just as it is a mistake to judge ourselves and others by merely human standards, so it is wrong to compare ourselves with others, whether for better or for worse. When Christ draws you into his life, then the Apostle Paul’s claim becomes true for you: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.”

A key phrase in today’s text is “in Christ.” Verse 17 says: “If anyone is in Christ.” And verse 19 says: “That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.” And verse 21 says: “So that in Him [that is, in Christ], we might become the righteousness of God.” If we are in Christ, we can experience new life! And it all began from God’s side when God reached out to us in Jesus Christ. Other people may still misjudge you or may evaluate you in terms of what you used to be, but when you commit your life to Christ, God begins a new work in you and regards you already as the new person that He is forming.



The church in Corinth had brought all the divisions of their world outside into the church.

Paul's phrase "in Christ" refers not only to my relationship with Christ. It also refers to our relationships with each other within the church. We together participate in the resurrection life of Jesus, and we together participate in the forgiveness which flows from his death on the cross. We are called to look upon one another through the eyes of Christ.

The church in Corinth had brought all the divisions of their world outside into the church. A congregation with diverse backgrounds, they were still using old standards instead of new in their relationships with Paul and one another. They were deeply divided as a congregation, and they needed to be reconciled to one another. The gap between one member and another needed to be overcome, and that could only happen if they lived as new persons in Christ.

In Christ God has begun to make us new. We are called to relate to one another out of that new life in Christ rather than out of the old wisdom of a world that is running away from God. In fact, it is a contradiction to affirm our new life in Christ and then to tell one another in our church board meetings that things never change and that everything stays the same. That is nothing less than a denial of the power of the cross and the resurrection. But the Corinthians, in their own way, had been doing just that. Paul reminded them that, at the time of humanity's greatest need, God had turned towards us in love through the life and death of Christ Jesus. Accordingly, Paul challenged them with the need for reconciliation: "We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

## Into Discipleship

### Looking Beyond the External

One afternoon, after what had been a very long and trying day, I looked out the window of the church I was serving as associate pastor just as an old and battered blue van drove into the parking lot. Oh, no, I thought. I don't have the energy to help one more needy person today! Of course, human need observes no office hours. Getting up from my desk, I walked out to meet the man getting out of the van. He was dressed in dusty clothing, had a ponytail tied back, and wore a Greek fisherman's cap. What would his improbable story be, I wondered?



To live in Christ means  
that we take on the  
compassionate eyes of  
Christ.

I held out my hand in welcome and asked: "How can I help you?" To my astonishment and shame, he responded, "I'm the organ repair man. I'm here to service your church's organ!" He was there to help me, rather than the other way around! I had looked out the window and had seen something that wasn't really there! I had relied upon outward appearance and had misjudged.

In 2 Corinthians 5:16, Paul writes: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way."

Paul's opponents in Corinth said that he didn't look much like an apostle. Perhaps he didn't have a commanding enough physical presence or didn't speak eloquently enough. Somehow, he lacked the marks of success by their standards, so his ministry was called into question. The eyes of faith look beyond the clothing or tattoos that we wear, beyond the way we wear our hair, and beyond the kind of car that we drive. When we allow the risen Christ to give us his eyes, that change extends to how we respond to those we meet from day to day. To live in Christ means that we take on the compassionate eyes of Christ, driven by his love for us and other people.

### The Ministry of Reconciliation

In 2 Corinthians 5:18, the Apostle Paul talks about the ministry of reconciliation: "All this is from God,



who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Two of the most divisive issues in American society in recent decades have been the issues of abortion and sexual orientation. Add to that the increased political polarization around such issues as gun safety, pandemic response, and racial justice. These conflicts manifest themselves not only in our communities but sometimes in our congregations as well. The debate can become so poisonous that we can do no better than agree to disagree.

Out of the abortion debates in the late 20th century, some in the Roman Catholic Church developed the Common Ground process. American Baptists have

experimented with this process in some settings with the debate over sexual orientation in the church. By design, a safe environment is created for a few days in which participants are able to be who they are and to voice their convictions without anyone trying to convert them to the other side. The Apostle Paul wrote that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, and the Bible makes it clear that we cannot claim to be fully reconciled to God while we are estranged from one another. Reconciliation requires work and entails risk. Of course, some who refuse to participate will see such effort as a compromise of principle. But, like the Apostle Paul, we who are in Christ are called to this ministry of reconciliation.

## To Live in God: Daily Reflections with Walter Rauschenbusch

by Dennis L. Johnson

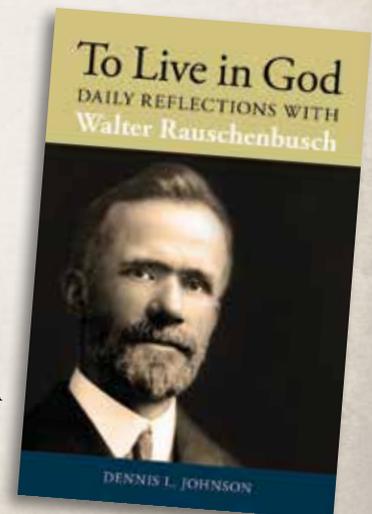
From Walter Rauschenbusch, the founder of the Social Gospel, comes this inspirational collection of 180 daily reflections about the spiritual life.

“Johnson has created a spiritual resource for the ages. Not for the faint of heart who crave only devotional ‘baby formula,’ *To Live in God* invites us to a robust feast of prayer and reflection to strengthen us in courage and compassion for the way of the cross to which Jesus calls us.”

—Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary Emeritus, American Baptist Churches USA

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## Reflection Questions

We know that the Apostle Paul wrote at least four letters to the church in Corinth as part of his effort to answer specific questions and to deal with conflict and misunderstanding. Delivery of letters back and forth between Paul and the Corinthians took many weeks. Today we have many options for rapid communication. How do you imagine Paul might have used our modern communication tools in his work with the Corinthians? When dealing with misunderstanding or conflict, what are some advantages and dangers of our modes of communication?

### Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for reaching out to us in Jesus to bridge the gap between us. Forgive us for living so often out of the old rather than claiming your promise of new life. We are prone to misjudge others and ourselves, O Lord. Grant that we may come to know ourselves as new persons in Christ. Help us to so order our church life together that we may truly claim the power of Jesus' cross and resurrection. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Resources

For additional background on Paul's letters and interactions with the Corinthians visit:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Letter-of-Paul-to-the-Corinthians>

Using the map at the above link, discuss the significance of Corinth's geographical prominence in regard to the first century Mediterranean world.

- Discuss how Corinth's location would lend itself to much cultural and social diversity.
- What issues does Paul raise concerning secular behavior of members of the church?
- Trace Paul's missionary journeys as outlined on the map and how they intertwined with his engagement with the church at Corinth.

For resources on the Common Ground process, referenced in the "Into Discipleship" section of this lesson, visit: <http://commongroundnetwork.org>.

### Song to Consider

The Rev. Carolyn Winfrey Gillette has written numerous hymns based on lectionary readings. If your class enjoys singing, consider using Rev. Gillette's hymn titled "All Those Who Live in Christ Jesus" based on today's text. The suggested tune is LOBE DEN HERREN 14.14.4.7.8 ("Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty"). The words can be found here: [http://carolynshymns.com/all\\_those\\_who\\_live\\_in\\_christ\\_jesus.html](http://carolynshymns.com/all_those_who_live_in_christ_jesus.html).



## Devotional Scriptures Year C Fourth Sunday in Lent Week of 03/27/22

### Sunday 03/27/22

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21;  
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

### Monday 03/28/22

Psalm 53; Leviticus 23:26-41; Revelation 19:1-8

### Tuesday 03/29/22

Psalm 53; Leviticus 25:1-19; Revelation 19:9-10

### Wednesday 03/30/22

Psalm 53; 2 Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9:10-17

### Thursday 03/31/22

Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:1-7; Philippians 2:19-24

### Friday 04/01/22

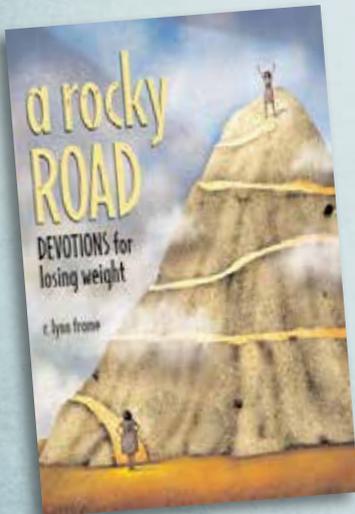
Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:8-15; Philippians 2:25-3:1

### Saturday 04/02/22

Psalm 126; Exodus 12:21-27; John 11:45-57

“

When you commit your life to Christ,  
God begins a new work in you.



### Rocky Road: Devotions for Losing Weight

by R. Lynn Frame

The effort to lose weight and become healthier is not just a physical struggle, but also a spiritual one. Through daily devotional readings combined with commonly accepted medical wisdom, dieters will learn about the principles, perspectives, and prescriptions that will help them make positive lifestyle changes in their determined efforts to shed those unwanted pounds.

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# SUPPLICATION

## praying through a storm

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

—PSALM 126:5

### Introduction

Psalm 126 celebrates good news for a specific group of people: those who have tasted disappointment. This is a psalm of surprised joy—as the people’s circumstances improve, they give thanks to God. Gratitude is sweeter when one has known distress. Joy is at once remembered and anticipated. Themes from this psalm are widely reflected in the New Testament and in the life and teachings of Jesus. The Scriptures come alive when we read them with the humility that life experience has taught us—from the point of view when we have been most vulnerable.

### Lesson Objectives

- To learn about the historical uses of the Book of Psalms with its distinctive voice in the biblical canon and to understand how other people of faith have used it.
- To appreciate that there may be phases of the journey of faith which may be uncomfortable such as orientation/disorientation/new orientation, and to accept others and ourselves in that continuum of change.
- To encourage a life of faith that reflects the kind of Messiah that Jesus is—“proleptic”—neither stuck in history nor fixed beyond us in the future. Instead, he is available to us in the present, connecting past and future by fulfilling what has gone before.

### Psalm 126 NRSV

1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” 3 The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. 4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. 5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

6 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

## Into the Scripture

The entire book of Psalms has been a cherished prayer book or hymn book used by the early church and then emphasized again in medieval times as well as in rabbinic Judaism. The Psalms were used in public and private worship. Psalm 126 is “a song of ascents” meaning that the tradition places it among those psalms used in worship. Traditionally it has been thought to be written upon the return of the children of Israel from Babylonian captivity. Like other psalms of ascent, it has an opening statement “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream . . .” that gives way to prayer.

### Echoes of Antiquity

This psalm uses agrarian imagery which echoes the tensions and the influences between the children of Israel and the communities they came into contact with that worshipped other gods. In the old religious myths of Ugarit and Egypt (communities the children of Israel lived alongside beginning in Genesis and Exodus), seedtime was associated with the death of the god of fertility, and harvest was associated with his revival. The ancient tradition associates sowing with grief (weeping)

and joy (laughing) with the harvest (carrying their sheaves).<sup>1</sup> The psalmist adapts this tradition using the language of the faith of the children of Israel. As New Testament Christians, we can also see this psalm through the lens of the resurrection. In doing so, an even more hopeful outcome is pre-figured:

Jesus’ resurrection is a harvest of joy, a joy that has already happened and which continues to happen in our lives. Jesus is resurrected; faith is alive—in the present and continuing into the future.

### What Language Shall I Borrow?

In the mid-fourth century, at a synod in Laodicea in Phrygia, it was declared: “It is not permitted that

“

The Psalms grew to be the mainstay of Christian daily prayer, both private and communal.

privately composed psalms or non-canonical books be read out in Church . . .”<sup>2</sup> This implies that up until that time people were writing their own psalms and sharing them in worship. For reasons that were clearly causing problems at the time, but are lost to us now, this was identified to be something to bring under control. The solution was to encourage the people to use only the 150 Psalms that make up our psalter today. This historical detail is a reminder that there has been countless people—unknown to us now—praying these words and inspired by them to compose and create their own prayers and psalms echoing their own experience.

With the rise of monasticism and ascetical piety during the fourth century, the recitation and chanting of the Psalms grew to be the mainstay of Christian daily prayer, both private and communal, in the churches of the Mediterranean world; meditation—the quiet, ruminative “chewing” on the words of the Psalms—was recommended by many spiritual guides as the most effective “spiritual weapon against inner demons, a medicine for diseased thoughts.”<sup>3</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria and Basil of Caesarea suggest that . . . “whatever the rest of the Bible has to offer—narratives of God’s great deeds of the past, prophetic warnings, moral teachings,

even foreshadowings of Christ—can be found, in poetic form in the book of Psalms. What is distinctive about the Psalter in relation to other books is its more personal, emotional element, which allows the reader to identify the message with him or herself.<sup>4</sup>



## Into the Lesson

The Psalms as we have them in our Bibles, give us words we can use to pray to God in a wide range of emotional tone. These words have been spoken by generations of faithful people, likely dating to the first Temple period. (The first Temple was completed in 957 BCE). Some of the Psalms appear to have been used in worship.<sup>5</sup> In joining in praying and studying the Psalms, we connect to the whole history of God’s people, and to the living hope of the fulfillment of promises in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### Begin Where You Are

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann shares in an essay about his faith journey that he feels one of his most meaningful contributions to scholarship is his insight into the Psalms about their perspective. He says that they reflect three forms of prayerful awareness: “orientation/disorientation/new orientation.”

“What is possible in biblical interpretation of the text is closely linked to our sense of ourselves as interpreters . . . “The double grid of ‘pre-critical/critical/post-critical’ and ‘orientation/disorientation/new orientation’ has been important for me as I am able, with some self-awareness, to see how my life has been a living through of such realities . . . that taxonomy concerning

the Psalms . . . is driven by an innocent intimacy with the Lord Jesus who was crucified (disoriented) and raised to new life (new orientation).<sup>6</sup>

Brueggemann encourages us to lean into our experience and to trust the unfolding journey of faith. When we cultivate a practice of reading scripture, we bring our own life experience, and as we read the text, the text begins to read us. The Bible reads differently at different points in our lifetimes, at different points in our own understanding, and it resonates differently in different communities—politically, economically, and geographically.

He encourages us to understand the Psalms through the lens of Jesus’ interpretation and the witness of his life—as the fulfillment of what has gone before, the resurrection of hope. As we read this psalm today are we oriented to it? Disoriented by it? Or do we have a new appreciation of it as we look at it again? These three perspectives on scripture are all part of the unfolding journey of faith.

### Watercourses in the Negeb

The restoration that the Children of Israel remember and hope for is compared to “watercourses in the Negeb” which is also translated in English: “like torrents (of water) in Negev.” This refers to the period of rains which



We bring our own life experience, and as we read the text, the text begins to read us.

hit the desert region of the Negev, the arid district to the south of Judah, where the brooks and rivers are dried up for much of the year. When the rains come, the water gushes over the hardened parched earth, creating a new landscape: the desert appears to come alive in the rainy season, to rejoice and bloom.

This encourages us to understand our moments of “disorientation” (to use Brueggemann’s language), despair, and lament as critical to the process of renewal. This means that while we walk through seasons of longing for better circumstances, the groundwork is already being laid for renewal and restoration.

## Echoes of Jesus

The writer of the Gospel of Luke identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of the Psalms twice in the Gospel and once in the Book of Acts (Luke 20:42, Luke 24:44, Acts 1:20). The most quoted part of the Old Testament in the New Testament is Psalm 110:1 “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’”<sup>7</sup> Jesus is the one who fulfills these hopes—those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

Jesus begins his ministry confronting both the legacy and the current problem of the suffering of his community. It is this suffering that his ministry will surprise with joy—with his healing touch, his miracles, his unexpected teaching, and ultimately his resurrection. Yet the people will grapple with what kind of justice they want for their suffering. Is it a political answer? Is it revenge? Instead, Jesus invites us into the very heart of God. With Jesus we are invited to be healers, healed, and healing; teachers, taught and teaching; lovers, loved, and loving. We are invited to participate in this work even while it is still being formed in the world. We are wounded healers, we are teachers with unanswered questions of our own, and we are loved children of God, learning to love as Jesus loved.

## Into Discipleship

Today Psalm 126 is widely used in worship in two seasons: Thanksgiving and Lent. Heard in that context it emphasizes that the Christmas and Easter seasons are best approached with the humility of repentance, that we may fully grasp “what great things the Lord has done”:

the gift of Jesus’ birth and resurrection. These are gifts that have already been given but continue to be received.

## Orientation/Disorientation/ New Orientation

We are likely to recognize and agree that churches are places which teach beliefs. However, given the spiritual journey that Walter Brueggemann describes for readers of the Psalms: “orientation/disorientation/new orientation,” instead churches might do well to re-brand themselves:

- safe places to ask questions of faith
- safe places to lament
- safe places to name systemic injustice as it is negatively impacting the community, and to imagine various solutions
- safe places to give thanks for hopes which have not yet come to pass

By honestly naming our circumstances we allow for the real journey of faith to have its way with us. It opens up conversation in the community, the possibility that others will overhear us and be in a position to take appropriate action, and by admitting that we do not have all the answers already.



By honestly naming  
our circumstances we  
allow for the real  
journey of faith to have  
its way with us.



We can reinforce that the church is a place of educational and spiritual growth rather than restriction. How would our lives be different if we allowed ourselves to accept: orientation/disorientation/new orientation as ordinary routine? How would churches be different?

### The Proleptic Language of Faith

Verse three of the Good Friday hymn, O Sacred Head, Now Wounded says:

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee,  
dearest friend,  
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting  
be,  
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.

This is attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux in 1153. Like Psalm 126, this is an example of joy—both remembered and anticipated, held together with an acknowledgment of the real suffering of Jesus on the cross. “Let me never, never outlive my love to thee” gives utterance to the poet’s current love for Jesus, which anticipates a lifelong love, and invites us to consider the length of our love. Jesus was not the political Messiah that many of his contemporaries hoped he would be. Instead, Jesus offers an already/not yet invitation to discipleship

which is described as “proleptic.” Prolepsis means that the outcome is already manifesting before it comes fully into view, meaning the future is already accomplished or the past is still being anticipated. The Bible remembers events from long ago and re-purposes them in prophecy as when the prophet Jeremiah says: “Rachel is weeping for her children”<sup>8</sup> which can describe the past, present, and anticipated future.

Jesus is a “proleptic messiah” inviting us to live into our hopes, to lean into faith and justice, expecting that the resurrected Lord will meet us in the world according to promise. By taking steps in faith, we are reassured that Jesus walks with us past, present, and future—according to promise and the logic of faith.

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#### Notes:

1. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Psalms*, James L Mays, John Knox Press, 1994, p. 400.
2. *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen Davis & Richard Hays, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, p. 81.
3. *Ibid.*, quoting *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Alphabetical Collection 198.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
5. There are many references to corporate worship in the psalms, for example, “Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar” Psalm 118:27.
6. *I (Still) Believe: Leading Bible Scholars Share Their Stories of Faith and Scholarship*, John Byron, Joel Lohr, eds., Zondervan, 2015.
7. Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:43; Acts 2:35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; Hebrews 10:13 . . .
8. Jeremiah 31:15.

## Reflection Questions

- Do you agree or disagree that the Psalms speak to every aspect of the human condition? Why?
- If you were voting at the synod of Laodicea in Phrygia in the fourth century, would you allow original psalms, composed by members of the community to be shared in worship, or would you prefer to limit them to the 150 that we have in the Book of Psalms? Why or why not?
- Share a psalm or part of a psalm which expresses something important about the state of your soul. If you do not find the words in the psalms, describe your idea for your own original psalm in your own words.

## Book to Consider

**The Gospel of Trees: A Memoir** by Apricot Irving, the daughter of American Baptist missionaries to Haiti reflects on her life and her parents' work with sensitivity, compassion, and intelligence in a time when Haiti was in tremendous turmoil. As she describes her childhood and coming of age, we see her grapple with the rubric of orientation/disorientation/new orientation between her



parents' generation, her own perspective, and the changes taking place in Haiti. She says: "If, like my father you suffer from a savior complex, Haiti is a bleak assignment, but if you enter it unguarded, shielded only by curiosity, you will find the sorrows entangled with a defiant joy."<sup>1</sup> Included are excerpts from interviews with numerous American Baptist missionaries active 1982+ providing a sweep of reflection on missionary work, intercultural identity, and generational divides.

## Closing Prayer

O God, author of life and sculptor of souls, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty and majesty of our world, for all things speak of you in many and various voices. Awaken our thankfulness for every creature, for the renewal of spring, for the balance of nature. Give us the grace to understand ourselves to be spiritually joined to everything that is in the wide mystery of your love. May your Word of life take root in our souls and grow to a thing of beauty, valued, and guarded in our lives. Amen.

## Online Resources

Online map of the Negeb

[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Southern-Israel-and-Mitzpe-Ramon-environ-Source-the-authors\\_fig1\\_329067765](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Southern-Israel-and-Mitzpe-Ramon-environ-Source-the-authors_fig1_329067765)

How to Write Your Own Psalm: There are many online resources that give direction to help you write your own psalm. Here are three to get you started.

- <https://annarborvineyard.org/participate/spiritual-formation/writing-a-psalm-of-lament/>
- <https://mysonginthenight.com/songwriting/how-to-write-a-personal-psalm/>
- <https://www.citybeautiful.ch/blog/how-to-write-a-psalm>

## Songs to Consider

- *Bringing in the Sheaves* by Islington Baptist Church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ad54bH-nQTM>
- *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded* by Fernando Ortego: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgkVTtT-0xg>

Note:

1. *The Gospel of Trees: A Memoir*, Apricot Irving, 2018, Simon and Schuster, p. 247.

## Devotional Scriptures

### Year C Fifth Sunday in Lent

### Week of 04/03/22

#### Sunday 04/03/22

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14;  
John 12:1-8

#### Monday 04/04/22

Psalm 20; Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25

#### Tuesday 04/05/22

Psalm 20; Judges 9:7-15; 1 John 2:18-28

#### Wednesday 04/06/22

Psalm 20; Habakkuk 3:2-15; Luke 18:31-34

#### Thursday 04/07/22

Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 53:10-12; Hebrews 2:1-9

#### Friday 04/08/22

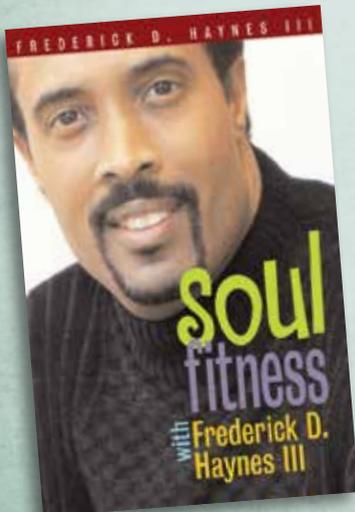
Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 54:9-10; Hebrews 2:10-18

#### Saturday 04/09/22

Psalm 31:9-16; Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13

“

We are wounded healers, we are teachers with  
unanswered questions of our own.



### Soul Fitness by Frederick D. Haynes III

Senior pastor of the 9,000-member Friendship-West Baptist Church, Rev. Dr. “Freddy” Haynes offers readers:

- High energy, upbeat inspirational advice on bouncing back and overcoming adversity
- Soul fitness tips on resistance training, thinking like a champion, and not going down without a fight
- Real life inspirational examples of those who have “fought back,” “kept it real,” “anchored themselves in God,” and “not settled for less”

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# RESOLUTE

## the big reveal

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, . . .

—LUKE 19:37

### Introduction

This scripture contains the spiritual architecture of our faith. It is the eye-witness account of the full dimensions of who Jesus is. At one moment in the story of his life, they recognized him and welcomed him. In contrast to the political authorities of the day Jesus animates and fulfills the Messiah prophecy: from the past, in the present, and for the future. It all came together in a jubilant day when he rode a humble beast into Jerusalem. Surprise!

### Lesson Objectives

- To identify the nature of the threat to the political and religious authorities that Jesus' triumphal entry created at the time.
- To reflect on the fulfillment of prophecy and why that is important to Jesus' identity.
- To consider the multiple perspectives in the account of that day.
- To enhance the architecture of the reader's own spiritual frame of reference by reflection on the expansiveness of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.

#### Luke 19:28-40 NRSV

28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt,

its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

## Into the Scripture

Bethphage and Bethany are villages just east of Jerusalem where Jesus sends two disciples to find a colt that has never been ridden—sacred animals are often those that have been previously unused for other purposes. When sent to retrieve the colt the disciples are charged to give the explanation “The Lord needs it.” Which could be interpreted to mean either Jesus (their lord), or God (The Lord) needs it. The repetition of the instructions to the disciples in verses 30-31 and the account of their following it through in verses 32-34 highlights that the action was carried out as instructed by Jesus in the moment, and in fulfillment of prophecy. The intentional repetition reinforces that these optics are not accidental focusing our attention on what will happen next.



An account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is included in all four Gospels,<sup>1</sup> indicating to us that this was important to those who remembered and re-told the story of Jesus’ life. The scripture indicates there were a large number of eyewitnesses. Jerusalem had been conquered many times in history prior to Jesus’ entry, and it has continued to be conquered numerous times since.<sup>2</sup> So this was not the only triumphal entry citizens of Jerusalem experienced.

“

An account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is included in all four Gospels.

There are similarities to other political leaders and also important differences.

John Dominic Crossan has made the case that while many of our Bibles caption this section “The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem,” at the time it was perceived by those who witnessed it as just the opposite of a triumphal entry. He says “it was actually an anti-triumphal entry, a calculated alternative to imperial normalcy with a prophetic pedigree going back to an oracle added to the book of Zechariah . . . (which) created a very deliberate contrast with how Alexander of Macedon had entered cities like Tyre and Gaza after devastating sieges . . .



(and) . . . especially, with how he had entered Jerusalem when it finally decided not to resist but to submit and throw open its gates to the conqueror.”<sup>3</sup>

In the manner of his entry—a peaceful, nonthreatening one—Jesus is doubly subversive. He is at once lampooning the triumphal entry of a political conqueror, and he is fulfilling prophecy, which is an important theme in the New Testament. By showing that Jesus fulfills prophecy, Jesus himself provides the continuity between what we know today as the New Testament and the Old Testament. Zechariah 9 is in the background of Jesus’ actions, and at least some of those who witnessed his entry would have been remembering these words:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the warhorse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle-bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall command peace to the nations;  
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.  
—Zechariah 9:9-10

## Into the Lesson

### What Kind of Authority?

Jesus is signaling that he claims another kind of authority—spiritual authority that may be political at times but is not strictly political. When “the whole multitude of the

disciples began to praise God joyfully” they said: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” (Luke 19:38). This is the title, “King,” that gets used in the charges against him when he is brought before Pilate. Jesus confronts two kinds of authorities when he enters Jerusalem:

1. Jesus is perceived to be undermining the political authority of Rome in that he allows his followers to identify him as their king. As Jesus rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road (verse 36). Likewise, this has an earlier precedent as a recognizable way that Kings are welcomed into a conquered city: “Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, ‘Jehu is king’” (2 Kings 9:13).
2. Jesus undermines the religious authority of the Sanhedrin, who were the power brokers in the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus’ next action in Chapter 20 is to drive out the money changers from the Temple, cleansing it of their corrupt leadership.

“As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen . . . (verse 37).” Here we are invited to consider what each person witnessing



Jesus is perceived to be undermining the  
political authority.

this event brings to it. What deeds of power were in their memories? Which ones did they give voice to? They could have lifted up other prophecies, they could have given voice to their own hopes. It all comes together in their words:

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!  
(verse 38)

Although these words may sound spiritual to those of us who hear them in church, these are words that confronted the existing leadership. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out”(verse 39-40). The Pharisees could either be taking offense at his reenactment of prophesy and the words of his disciples, or they could be worried for his well-being in Jerusalem as his followers welcoming their “king.” Either way, his response is to echo prophesy again, this time from Habakkuk 2:11: “The very stones will cry out . . .” In other words, you cannot stop the truth from coming out.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus’ entrance was risky: it was both laden with obvious meaning and subversive. The strength of his confrontation is also in his peaceful vulnerability. He gives the authorities in Jerusalem a common reason for concern. This leads ultimately to Jesus’ crucifixion. So, we can see even in this account of Jesus’ entry into the city the issues that he will carry with him to Golgotha in one short week.

### How Many Disciples?

Luke uses the phrase “the whole multitude of the disciples” meaning those who were followers of Jesus were a multitude. Earlier, in Luke 6:12-16, Jesus chooses twelve disciples specially and names them apostles. Scholars indicate that the exact list of 12 varies slightly among the four Gospels and in the Book of Acts. Peter and John and other major figures are constant, but there is variety in each group named.

While it is tempting to seek to name their identities with certainty, instead we are to understand that Jesus had many disciples, some of them he named specially and chose them to represent him. (Possibly he did this more



## The exact list of 12 varies slightly among the four Gospels.

than once for different missions of healing and exorcising spirits.) Furthermore, in Acts, Paul (who never knew Jesus before his crucifixion) is identified as an apostle. The scriptures refer to many disciples, but the election of apostles is a distinct group. The question which remains to be seen is who among them will remain disciples, and where do we find ourselves in this crowd?

### Into Discipleship

#### On the Edge of Jerusalem

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem contains accounts of different perspectives coming together: “the whole multitude of the disciples,” the crowd, the Pharisees, the Roman authorities, and Jesus himself. Imagining yourself in Jerusalem that day, which perspective do you identify with? Are you drawn to one over another? Which perspective would you want nothing to do with? Why?

Jesus has given us the example of a vulnerable Messiah. This does nothing to prevent authorities from a variety of perspectives, ancient and contemporary, to seek to read their own ideas into his actions and to seek to use his work as a kind of cover for their own agendas. This has remained a problem for Jesus’ followers as it was for Jesus himself in the year 30 AD. When faith enters the political sphere, it can quickly become coopted for other purposes. Yet, Jesus entered Jerusalem willingly, and engaged the authorities of his day.

One of the questions we can ask ourselves on Palm Sunday is who do we see riding into Jerusalem? Is Jesus a



spiritual leader or a political leader? Do you see a Messiah or prophet? Is Jesus a solution or a threat?

### The Architecture of a Spiritual Home

Reflect on the spiritual architecture that you inhabit – the shape, the height and depth and breadth of the spiritual house you dwell in, and compare it to the one that Jesus, the son of a carpenter, constructed and built for us when he entered Jerusalem. Is your spiritual home more expansive or more restrictive than Jesus'? Do you have a solid roof on? (Do you get all wet when a new idea comes along?) Is your spiritual house built on the fulfillment of what has gone before by re-purposing older ideas, or do you prefer to ignore what has gone before and use all new materials? Is your spiritual home too warm or too cold? (Does a window need to be closed because of a draft of doubt?) Or does a door need to open to let the sun (son) shine in? Are there people in your spiritual house with you, or are you in there alone with the door closed tightly against the world? What accommodations do you need to create sustainable spiritual support? How will you inhabit a spiritual home that allows you to thrive?

Spiritually speaking, a wealthy person can be living in spiritual poverty like Zacchaeus the tax collector; and

the poorest person, such as the widow making her offering at the Temple, can be living in spiritual splendor. Jesus marveled at her faith saying, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."<sup>5</sup>

The crowd that gathered to welcome Jesus may contain all these perspectives. And it is all part of the journey of faith. While the events in Jerusalem are still to come, we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

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#### Notes:

1. Mt 21:1-9; Mk 11:1-10; Jn 12:12-18.
2. <https://israeled.org/jerusalem-timeline/>.
3. *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*, John Dominic Crossan, Harper Collins, 2007, p. 132.
4. Fred Craddock says: "that stones would shout is, of course, a figure of speech, but the expression does remind us that in biblical understanding, the creation is involved in events that we tend to think affect humans alone. Genesis says that the sin of Adam and Eve caused the earth to produce thorns and thistles; Isaiah sings of a reign of peace on earth when cows and bears will graze together and the lion and the lamb will lie down side by side . . . Of course, if we are silent, the stones will cry out." *Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching Luke*. John Knox Press, 1990, p. 279.
5. Luke 21:1-4.

## Reflection Questions

- If you were joyfully praising God with the multitude of the disciples, what deeds of power would you name for others to hear?
- How do we pray for things that are beyond our own biases and perspective?

### Litany of Confession

(Adapted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison, After Ten Years)

We can truly share only in a limited measure in the suffering of others.

We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christians it means that we are to take part in Christ's greatness of heart,

in the responsible action that in freedom seizes the hour and faces the danger,  
and in the true sympathy that springs forth not from fear  
but from Christ's freeing and redeeming love for all who suffer.

Inactive waiting and dully looking on are not Christian responses.

Christians are called to action and sympathy not through their own firsthand experiences but by the immediate experience of [others] for whose sake Christ suffered.

It is infinitely easier to suffer in obedience to a human command than in the freedom of one's very own responsible action. It is infinitely easier to suffer in community with others, than in solitude.

It is infinitely easier to suffer publicly and with honor, than in the shadow and in dishonor.

It is infinitely easier to suffer through putting one's bodily life at stake than to suffer through the spirit.

Christ suffered:

In freedom,  
in solitude,  
in the shadow and in dishonor,  
in body and in spirit.

Since then, many Christians have suffered with him.

We confess that we have chosen ease over the cost of discipleship, indolence over action, we have turned away from injustice, all the while knowing that Christ's hands and feet are our own.

Lord, have mercy on us.



## Resources

- A timeline of Jerusalem, including key dates when Jerusalem was conquered:  
<https://israeled.org/jerusalem-timeline/>
- New Testament scholar, John Dominic Crossan describes the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (first 5 minutes).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdEnJtvBi84>
- New Testament scholar Amy Jill Levine, describes how Jesus enters the Passion Week, including details from all four gospels (9 minutes).  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aR9iN\\_jcmOs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aR9iN_jcmOs)
- The Baptist Joint Committee <https://bjconline.org/> represents and is supported by a wide group of Baptist organizations. Check their website to find current information (articles, podcasts, and other resources) on issues that straddle the political/spiritual divide.

## Songs to Consider

Using your church's hymnal, analyze the lyrics for your congregation's favorite Palm Sunday hymns. Is it triumphal or anti-triumphal language? Is it obvious or subtle? What kind of Messiah/King is welcomed? Name the attributes you see and compare them to attributes of a political king. What prophecies are named?

## Devotional Scriptures

### Year C Palm Sunday

### Week of 04/10/22

#### Sunday 04/10/22

Liturgy of the Palms  
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40

Liturgy of the Passion  
Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11;  
Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49

#### Monday 04/11/22 Monday of Holy Week

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15;  
John 12:1-11

#### Tuesday 04/12/22 Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31;  
John 12:20-36

#### Wednesday 04/13/22 Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3;  
John 13:21-32

#### Thursday 04/14/22 Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1  
Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

#### Friday 04/15/22 Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or  
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42

#### Saturday 04/16/22 Holy Saturday

Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24;  
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66  
or John 19:38-42

## Tempted to Leave the Cross: Renewing the Call to Discipleship

by Ernest R. Flores

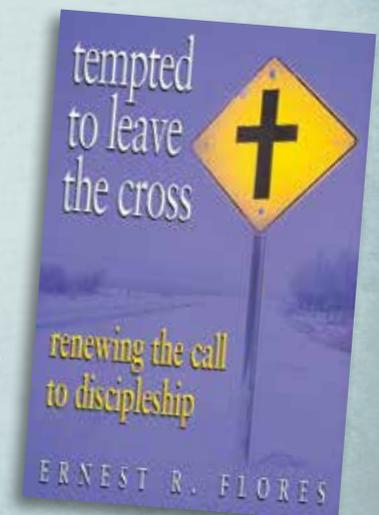
Offering solid biblical study in a conversational style, Flores embraces the cross as more than a symbol of personal salvation but as a call to kingdom service. This rich collection of meditations challenges today's Christians to:

- Center our beliefs and actions in the cross
- Value the high price that Jesus paid for our salvation
- Be selfless and sacrificial in our pursuit of justice in the world

Complete with "Cross Examinations" for small-group use, this prophetic discipleship resource is ideal for Lenten study or reflection throughout the year.

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# RESURRECTION

## Christ is risen indeed!

The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

—LUKE 24:5

### Introduction

The first Easter suggests what will later be revealed to be true: that Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead. The discovery of the empty tomb is not conclusive proof that Jesus is risen, that will be proved later by those who encountered the risen Christ. For now, we read an account of how the women visited the tomb where his body had been laid. Instead of encountering the grim reality of death, they encountered another alternative entirely. Surprise!

### Lesson Objectives

- To explore the role of faith and memory as they relate to the events of the first Easter.
- To appreciate that the familiar Easter story, in context, as part of a larger narrative that the Gospel writer is communicating about all of the disciples and witnesses to Jesus’ life and resurrection.
- To reflect on what absence and presence may reveal about someone who is important to us.
- To understand that the resurrection has implications for interpreting all of Scripture.

### Luke 24:1-12 NRSV

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” 8 Then they remembered his words,

9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

## Into the Scripture

In this last chapter of the Gospel of Luke, the writer is pulling the whole Gospel story together, revealing who Jesus was, and how the account of his life fulfills what has gone before and how it redeems what follows. Initially this is too much for the first witnesses to take in and it may be for us also. The Gospel unfolds gently, inviting us to be drawn into the action: “On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared” (verse 1).

This is an ordinary beginning to a sad day; they are on their way to attend the dead body of Jesus, according to the customs of their time. The Sabbath is over, and they arrive as soon as they may without breaking the Sabbath: at first dawn. They found the stone rolled away

from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body” (verse 2).

Fred Craddock says: “Of course, an empty tomb in and of itself does not present a persuasive argument for the resurrection; an empty tomb means the body is not there. The burden of the Christian proclamation was on the

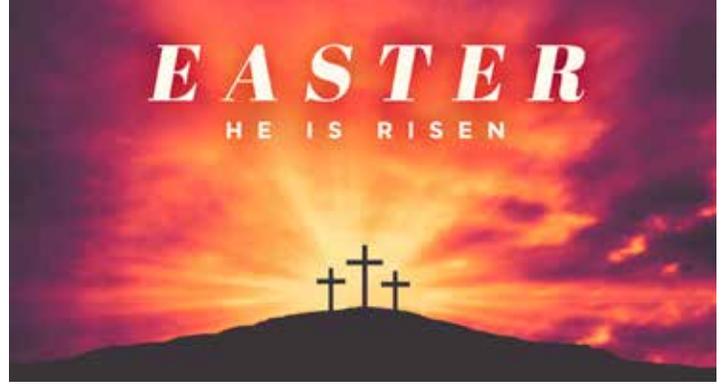
experience of the risen Christ by his followers, as Luke was to say later: Jesus’ life and death—all of you know, but that God raised him from the dead, “of that we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32; cf. 3:15).<sup>1</sup> The empty tomb is the first inkling that Jesus is elsewhere in the world, the first clue that this is different from other deaths, and that the story of Jesus’ is one of joyous surprise.

“

The empty tomb is  
the first clue that  
this is different from  
other deaths.

The text goes on to report that two men (angels in other translations) said, “why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you . . .” The men in dazzling clothes (angels) are addressing the women, this emphasizes the case that Luke is building that these women are part of a larger group of disciples whom Jesus has already prepared for this day, having told them that he would be betrayed, crucified, and raised from the dead. Here the women remember Jesus’ words in life, and return from the tomb, telling “the eleven and . . . all the rest.”

Luke is building the story “enlarging the circle of disciples to anticipate Acts in which the group gathering in prayer and awaiting the Holy Spirit includes the eleven, Mary the mother of Jesus, his brothers, and the woman, in all about 120 persons (Acts 1:12-15).”<sup>2</sup> The



Apostles are a special group, but the experience of the risen Christ is not limited to their group alone. Others will be able to do powerful things in Jesus' name. We are encouraged in Luke's gospel not merely to understand what happened, but also to be a participant in the continuing story of the church made up of believers, men and women together, some of whom knew beforehand, and others are still coming to grasp the surprise.

## Into the Lesson

The faith and witness of the first witnesses at the empty tomb unfolds in three stages:

1. The encounter of the empty tomb (discovery): Although the women see the evidence of the resurrection at first, there is no immediate understanding. There could be another explanation, someone might have taken the body, and how did the stone get rolled away from the entrance? They are puzzled.
2. The word of the two messengers, or angels (communication): The women were initially terrified of these men, which is a consistent human reaction recorded in the Bible to encounters with angels—sheer terror. The angels remind them of what they already know. "Remember how he told you. . . ."
3. Their remembrance of Jesus' words (memory): This third area is remembrance: where experience and faith meet. We cannot remember what we never knew. In order to understand the meaning of the empty tomb, the women needed to have already known Jesus' teaching about it. This asks them to look backwards to what

they already know of Jesus, in order to look forward and understand the resurrection.

## The Scriptures Open in Light of Easter

The writer of the Gospel of Luke goes on to describe how the risen Jesus later appears to the disciples at Emmaus and helps them to understand the Scriptures. He says: ". . . These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures." (Luke 24:44-45)

All of the scriptures are opened by the resurrected Christ. Richard Hays has written that all of scripture needs to be read with "a hermeneutic of resurrection."<sup>3</sup> Meaning, all of scripture can be read in light of the empty tomb on Easter morning: Old Testament law, prophets, writings, the Psalms, New Testament Gospels and letters makes sense ultimately when read in light of the resurrection of Christ. Resurrection is the key that unlocks the meaning of the Bible. It is also the key that can unlock our own memories, lives, and futures.

When Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures he opened their minds to



The risen Jesus later appears to the disciples at Emmaus and helps them to understand the Scriptures.

understand truth in a whole variety of types of literature, as well as to see its application for their own day. The Bible contains: history, law, poetry, prophesy, prayers, proverbs, sermons, parables, genealogies and census reports, polemics, letters, affirmations, allegories and eye-witness accounts; some of it written in good times, other parts written during deep persecution.

All of it is true, all of it attests in some manner to God. Jesus opened their minds to this. To the truth of it all, how it fits together, how the old prophecies are fulfilled, how God's purpose has been the same from the beginning, how he himself went through his life and suffered death for this: to call a people to himself. And the fact that the tomb was empty—is the first implication to the fulfillment of the scriptures' promises—past, present, and future. The life of Jesus can be interpreted in light of his resurrection, and we are invited by the reality of an empty tomb to understand our own life history in light of future resurrection. Living a life of faith means living into that moment when the scriptures opened every day.

If the tomb is empty and Jesus is risen, you will understand that the prophecies are being fulfilled, that the parables are a guide to living, that the Law is good, that the history of God with a covenant people has mattered, that the polemics are for Christ's sake, that the letters are for the up building of the body of Christ, and that the poetry still carries divine truth. If we understand all this, it is not because we are smarter than other people. It is a gift; part of Jesus' promise to come to us, not to leave us alone, to give us what we need to be the body of Christ today—even all the way out in our neighborhood. We are witnesses to these things. It is true. Right where we are, Jesus is close.

## Into Discipleship

Sharing the story of Jesus relies on preparation which happens in ordinary day to day events: like regular church and worship attendance, thoughtful conversation with those in your circle, and a spiritual practice that includes scripture reading. These routines and habits prepare us to remember Jesus' words for ourselves, and to be able to put together the big story of faith within the story of our own lives and experience. We do not need to discover the empty tomb, or speak to angels, but we can remember what Jesus taught if we have learned it already. Knowing about Jesus allows us

to apply Jesus' teachings to our present life and circumstances. When we do this, we also bear witness to the risen Christ, just as the women at the tomb remembered his words, understood what was happening in light of what they already knew, and went to tell the others so they would know as well.

## Bearing Witness to What We Know

Did this truly happen, just the way Luke tells it? What we have are accounts of the witnesses. Each of us is witness to our own truths. We know what we know about our families, about festering injustice, we know in our hearts certain overlooked truths—some recent, some long ago. And while we are not asked to witness Jesus' empty tomb, we are asked to bear witness to injustice and the suffering of others and hold it up against the hope of resurrection. Each of us is eyewitness to what God is doing in the world.

For example, it does not happen all the time, but sometimes it may happen in a worship space: people come in, they are not sure what to expect, and worn out from some major issues they've been carrying, frightened. Some arrive with what life has taught them: more fear than faith. Then as they move through the service, something happens. In song, in prayer, in scripture and meditation, there is a presence—mysterious, inexplicable, but nevertheless real. You cannot say for certain that something will move in peoples' hearts, but often something does. When you are away from your usual worship



Knowing about Jesus  
allows us to apply Jesus'  
teachings to our present life  
and circumstances.



space, separated by illness or travel, a worship space may seem all the more obviously sacred because of the way that the Spirit spoke to you there. This is the value of a habit of worship. Worship creates these opportunities.

What does the recent pandemic mean in light of resurrection? What does the Black Lives Matter movement mean in light of resurrection? What do your previous mistakes (all of them—big and small) mean in light of resurrection? What does the death of a loved one mean in light of resurrection? All regrets, disappointments, failures, and yes the worst mistakes

are subject to resurrection. Resurrection puts them in perspective, you might say resurrection level-sets our lives. For a person of faith, resurrection means that even our worst past mistakes can be bent towards future blessings by a living God.

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Notes:

1. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Luke*, Fred B. Craddock, John Knox Press, 1990, p. 281.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 282–283.
3. *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen Davis and Richard Hays, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, p. 237.

“

Even our worst past mistakes can be bent towards  
future blessings by a living God.

## Reflection Questions

- Many people report a shared spiritual experience with a pet or animal in their yard or home—an unmistakable or unexpected presence in their lives, reminding them of God’s unpredictable wildness, or God’s abiding love. A bird appears where there was nothing, and something about its surprising presence . . . reminds you . . . of someone, or something important . . . When have you been surprised by an unexpected presence?
- Can you think of a time when the absence of something or someone reminded you of their presence? What does someone’s absence reveal about them?
- The kinds of people who have spiritual breakthroughs are the people who pay attention in their world, and wrestle over issues, situations, and concerns. What does Christ’s resurrection mean for your own hopes this year?

## Resources

### Easter Greeting

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!



## Songs to Consider

Have a look at the lyrics of the Easter hymns that are your favorites. What is implied by the empty tomb? What connections do the lyrics make for us? What connections do you make?

## Say It with Flowers

Easter flowers have been popular nearly as long as people have celebrated Easter.

- The white Easter lily represents purity. The flower is also in the form of a trumpet, which might trumpet the news of Christ’s resurrection.
- Daffodils, tulips, hyacinths and other bulbs re-grow annually from their bulbs underground, symbolizing a new resurrection from the earth.
- The dogwood flower has four petals with a spot on each which is said to represent the wounds of Christ.



(Image from Unsplash photos for everyone)



(Image from Unsplash photos for everyone)

What symbols mean Easter to you? Which ones are you drawn to? What do you think the effect is of sharing these symbolic flowers?



## Online Resources

- The Late Rev. Dr Gardner C Taylor preaches “It Is Finished.”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCoZ-Qo3Zpk>
- Memory and problems with dementia can create substantial barriers for quality of life and staying connected with loved ones. We cannot remember what we do not know. Dementia Friends sponsors programs to help support those whose loved ones have a variety of memory impairments with classes, education, and training available online or in person. This is a fruitful area for discussion in a small group setting. Many people struggle to care for those with memory impairments or even just maintain a good relationship with them. There have been enormous strides made in understanding and caring for those with dementia in recent years. Look at their website for ideas for conversation and available resources  
<https://dementiafriendsusa.org/>

## Book to Consider

James Cone, **The Cross and the Lynching Tree**, Orbis, 2013. James Cone reveals and explores the connection that generations of people of color have made between Jesus’ crucifixion and the lynching tree in the American experience, e.g. “The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree” (Acts 5:30). Cone articulates how the cross and the lynching tree represent the worst in human nature, and at the same time the desire to not let the worst moments determine a final meaning on our lives. This hugely

influential book is a hard read, but they are important words for anyone grappling with the problem of evil and its legacy—for anyone gazing directly at the cross before Easter morning.

## Devotional Scriptures

### Year C Easter

### Week of 04/17/22

#### Sunday 04/17/22

Resurrection of the Lord  
Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;  
1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18  
or Luke 24:1-12

#### Monday 04/18/22

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Joshua 10:16-27;  
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

#### Tuesday 04/19/22

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Judges 4:17-23; 5:24-31a;  
Revelation 12:1-12

#### Wednesday 04/20/22

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 2 Samuel 6:1-15; Luke 24:1-12

#### Thursday 04/21/22

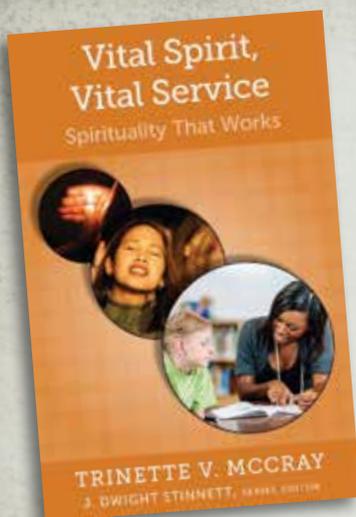
Psalm 150; 1 Samuel 17:1-23; Acts 5:12-16

#### Friday 04/22/22

Psalm 150; 1 Samuel 17:19-32; Acts 5:17-26

#### Saturday 04/23/22

Psalm 150; 1 Samuel 17:32-51; Luke 24:36-40



## Vital Spirit, Vital Service: Spirituality that Works

by Trinette V. McCray; Series Editor J. Dwight Stinnett

In a society where we’re inundated with 24-hour news, unfiltered social media, hundreds of TV channels, and more, McCray urges the people of God to seek a vital spirituality—not a contemplation that withdraws from the world, but a spirituality that inspires us to answer Jesus’ call to service and social justice.

*Vital Spirit, Vital Service* explores the teachings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jitsuo Morikawa, and determines seven principles of formation and transformation ministries.

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# WITNESSING

## standing up for Jesus

... Peter and the apostles answered,  
“We must obey God rather than any human authority.”

—ACTS 5:29

### Introduction

The Book of Acts is significant in that it documents many of the actions of the early church, often in the face of opposition. Both the zeal and commitment of the new disciples are evident in their persistent efforts to share the Good News. Without their faithful witness in the midst of growing persecution the Gospel could not have spread as quickly as it did. For the Gospel to be heard today, the responsibility is on us as disciples to do our part in sharing news about God’s love and grace in a society that has become less religious over the years.

### Lesson Objectives

- To reflect on Peter’s words to the High Priest “we must obey God rather than any human authority.”
- To appreciate how the gospel message was shared by the first witnesses to the risen Christ.
- To be encouraged that the important work of the church is moved forward by many unseen witnesses acting humbly and faithfully in their own lives.

#### Acts 5:27-32 NRSV

27 When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. 30 The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

## Into the Scripture

Many Biblical scholars agree that the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is written by the same writer that wrote the Gospel of Luke, likely several decades later in order to continue the story. There are many supporting reasons for this, including the opening words of each: “I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus . . .” (Luke 1:3) and again, “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning . . .” (Acts 1:1). In Greek “Theophilus” means someone who loves God, or someone who is dear to God. This name could either be the name of an individual who goes by “Theophilus,” (Theo, for short), or it could refer to a group who loved God at the time that the early churches were forming. Either way, both the Gospel and the Book of Acts are dedicated to people who want to know the story of Jesus and to follow the story of the apostles and those who came afterwards. The Gospel writer indicates that care has been given to create an orderly instruction for the readers’ edification.

Acts begins with Jesus’ command which will give shape to the whole book “. . . You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), which is followed by his ascension. Acts chapter 2 is the story of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit descends on all of those gathered in Jerusalem. In chapter 3, the disciples begin a preaching and healing ministry in Jerusalem empowered by the Holy Spirit, which leads to their imprisonment

and to the stoning death of Stephen. Peter and John appear before authorities in chapter 4 and are released again, and then in chapter 5 they are imprisoned again. However, “during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.’ When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went



## The witnesses’ accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus get out into the world anyway.

on with their teaching” (Acts 5:20-21), which is where the temple police find them, and bring them back to the High Priest for questioning.

Peter is a witness to what God has done in the life of Jesus, and to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. He is a witness to this, but so are lots of others, mostly unnamed people. Peter has been in prison, prevented from spreading the Good News of Jesus. Stephen was stoned to death a couple of chapters ago, and Peter isn’t doing the work anymore. The last chapters of Acts are an account of Paul’s long stays in prison and his appearance before Jewish and Roman authorities. However, the witnesses’ accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus get out into the world anyway. Some of the main characters upon whom the spread of the early church depended were hindered or prevented from doing that work. Some offer short accounts of their faith to the authorities and Paul writes letters from prison, but they are often restricted in their movements. How much more could they have done if they were free?

Peter offers a courageous response to the high priest who is questioning him: “We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:29-32).





## Into the Lesson

Although Gamaliel will help to get Peter and John released from prison later, Peter bears witness to Jesus before the authorities in Jerusalem. Sometimes you have to disobey one authority in order to obey a higher authority. Peter says: “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” Peter has a big message to share and is determined to get the word out—already Jerusalem is filled with this teaching. The high priest is concerned that the message will reflect badly on the temple leaders and Jewish community living under Roman rule, saying, “you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.” Jerusalem is in a state of turmoil and the high priest does not want any more trouble than they already have had.

### A Sermon to a Congregation of One

While readers may be interested to look at the historical question of who was ultimately responsible for Jesus’ death, that is not a question that the text dwells on. Peter identifies the high priest as being responsible for Jesus’ death, revealing his identity, yet there is no blaming or guilt language. Although Pilate had publicly washed his hands of the situation, Pilate was the governor at the time and is also fully accountable for the crucifixion. Jesus was crucified under Roman law, not Jewish law. The early chapters of Acts reveal how the leaders of Israel were trapped in a conspiracy to execute Jesus, even though many of the Jewish leaders seem to regard Jesus highly.<sup>1</sup>

Peter goes straight into a redemptive message: “The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus . . . God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” This is a message that the high priest will be able to agree with,

these are the hopes of Israel that they hold in common as Jews together under Roman occupation. Peter is persuading the high priest that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy, the expected Messiah, the Consolation of Israel whom they have hoped for through millennia. Peter interprets Jesus’ identity and healing ministry and gives testimony to a Savior who forgives and redeems.

Peter’s focus is on what happened, and that there is good news for all, beginning in Jerusalem and going out into the world. In life, Jesus’ message of forgiveness was consistently non-judgmental; he accepted everyone from lepers to tax collectors to prostitutes. And to the woman caught in adultery, he says “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (John 8:11).

### Authority Issues

One of the Bible’s themes is how the humble are exalted. “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). Peter and John are described as “uneducated and ordinary men,” yet their words persuade authorities, and their experience of the living Christ is one they cannot deny. Without pretending to be anyone other than who they are, they appear before the highest authorities in Jerusalem and speak confidently of what they know.

At the urging of a crowd the authorities in Jerusalem had allowed the crucifixion of an innocent man. Jesus,



Peter is persuading the high priest that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy.

who could legitimately claim authority, entered Jerusalem just a week previously humbly on a donkey, with palm leaves symbolizing peace waved by the crowds by the roadside. This man who was betrayed to the authorities is now exalted in resurrection. And the authorities are left to live with their consciences and the consequences of their actions. This calls to mind other biblical stories like David's fight against the giant Goliath and Queen Esther's unlikely leadership—in each case the humble is triumphant, and the story of faith moves forward.

What does it mean “to obey God rather than any human authority” in a complex culture with many authorities? Peter and John were willing to put themselves at risk. What are you willing to risk? What is too much to risk? Who is vulnerable and who needs to be lifted up?

## Into Discipleship

Those who wear the mantle of leadership are not the only ones doing the critical work. The church moves forward through the faithful diligent work of the whole body of Christ—many members with many gifts. Most of the names have been lost to us now, but we know there were others who played an important role in nurturing the early church. Otherwise, all these years later we would not have churches to the extent that we do.

Acts transparently shares about the apostles' thwarted attempts to spread the good news of the Gospel as well as how they succeeded in the end. But if you read carefully through the chapters you will see other names, both Greek and Hebrew names, tucked into verses maybe for the benefit of the first readers of the Acts of the Apostles. Maybe Theophilus knew them, maybe they were Theophilus themselves. Scholars believe that these people whose full details were known only to those who knew and loved them during their lives were the ones who helped make the Gospel message known beyond a small group of witnesses. Let's thank Gaius, Jason, Lydia, Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila, and James, the brother of our Lord who was the leader of the Jerusalem congregation after Jesus died.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus reveals the absence of faith where it should exist and identifies faith where no one expected it to be. Likewise, we can look for faith in the world today among those who are vulnerable and suffering. We can find our risen Lord in service to them. Jesus goes about identifying faith among the poor, the



Those who wear the mantle of leadership are not the only ones doing the critical work.

outcast, and the most unlikely of people. A tax collector who is shunned by his community, a woman who has bled for 12 years, non-Jews like Samaritans, one out of ten healed lepers—the one who returns to acknowledge what has happened and to speak a word of gratitude. These outcasts have more faith than some born to faith. Jesus welcomes all; nonetheless, sometimes it is the person on the margins who recognizes most the blessings that are connected with knowing Jesus.

In what unlikely moment did you step forward in faith, glimpse the risen Lord out of the corner of your eye, in your life? Is it a moment that has stayed with you, or is it one you choose to push out of your mind? The logic of faith is that sometimes real faith is found in the most unlikely of places: among the most unlikely of people, at unexpected moments.

Bear witness to what you see of the Holy Spirit's work; bear witness to the work of God in your life, bear witness to growth you are in a position to recognize in the life of someone else. You will find that as you bear witness, as Peter did, you will see more, and you will be able to say more. There will be more surprise witnesses joining their voices to yours. God is alive in the world. Surprise!

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Note:

1. Acts 5:13b-14 “. . . the people held them in high esteem. Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women . . .”

## Reflection Questions

- What cause or person have you remained committed to over time? Why?
- What have you witnessed or experienced that other people may not readily understand?
- When have you regretted following an authority? Have you had an experience of feeling like obeying God puts you at cross purposes with a human authority?

## Closing Prayer

As God is my witness, help me to be a witness to your Good News, even as I carry my burdens into the week ahead. I give thanks for the life of Jesus and that I have heard the story of Jesus who redeems us and has given us an example of a faithful life. O God, I give thanks that your spirit is at once known and unknown, working in me and working beyond me, witnessed and mysterious. Amen.

## Songs to Consider

- *Pass it On* can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovdKx6lQ8OM>
- *Here Am I Lord* can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcXOkht8w7c>
- *To Obey is Better Than Sacrifice* is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GS7vml271Ts>

## Online Resources

- Rabban Gamaliel is mentioned in Into the Lesson. He was an important historical figure, related to Rabbi Hillel and is Paul's teacher. Read about Gamaliel at the following link: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gamaliel-I>

- An **Outline of the Book of Acts** is available on the following site: <https://bible.org/article/study-outline-acts>
- **Religious Leaders** play an important role in the Gospels and Book of Acts. For more information on priests and the high priest, check the following site: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/priests-and-levites-in-the-first-century-ce>

## Devotional Scriptures Year C Second Sunday of Easter Week of 04/24/22

### Sunday 04/24/22

Second Sunday of Easter  
Psalm 122; Esther 7:1-10; Revelation 1:9-20

### Monday 04/25/22

Psalm 122; Esther 7:1-10; Revelation 1:9-20

### Tuesday 04/26/22

Psalm 122; Esther 8:1-17; Revelation 2:8-11

### Wednesday 04/27/22

Psalm 122; Esther 9:1-5, 18-23; Luke 12:4-12

### Thursday 04/28/22

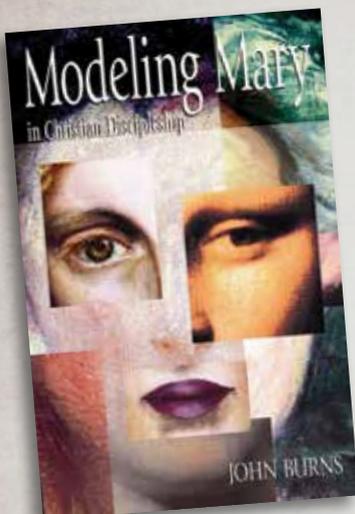
Psalm 30; Isaiah 5:11-17; Revelation 3:14-22

### Friday 04/29/22

Psalm 30; Isaiah 6:1-4; Revelation 4:1-11

### Saturday 04/30/22

Psalm 30; Genesis 18:1-8; Luke 14:12-14



## Modeling Mary in Christian Discipleship by John Burns

### *Seeking a Role Model for Spiritual Growth?*

Although the biblical references to Mary, the mother of Jesus, are not overwhelming in number, they are profoundly reflective of the stages of discipleship that each of us must pass through on our way to spiritual maturity. Through ten passages from the Gospels, Burns offers a look at pondering, suffering, and refocusing in our journey of spiritual development as well as an understanding of the role grace plays in our becoming disciples of Christ.

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# TRUST

## trusting God when your trusting muscles are tired

I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,  
and did not let my foes rejoice over me. O LORD my God,  
I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.

—PSALM 30:1-2

### Introduction

Trust isn't always easy to come by. You can't force someone to trust you. It cannot be bartered for or picked up at the mall. In our modern world, we are taught—rightly—not to automatically trust. As children we are instructed about “stranger danger,” and as teens and young adults encouraged to “listen to your gut.” When abuse, neglect, or other significant pain is inflicted on us, particularly as children, we believe that trusting others is foolish. Even those of us blessed with “normal childhoods” may still find it hard to trust others for many reasons. Trusting God—someone that we never see—is a challenge for many Christians. But God longs for us to bestow such trust knowing the benefits we can expect—peace, joy, hope, and more—when we do.

### Lesson Objectives

- To encourage believers to trust God, even when it feels foreign or too hard to do.
- To become increasingly aware of God's presence in our daily lives.
- To use practical tools to help us trust God more.

### Psalm 30 NRSV

1 I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. 2 O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. 3 O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. 4 Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. 5 For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. 6 As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.” 7 By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a

strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed. 8 To you, O LORD, I cried, and to the LORD I made supplication: 9 “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? 10 Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper!” 11 You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, 12 so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

## Into the Scripture

The Book of Psalms is one of the most emotionally expressive books in the Bible. Written in large part by King David,<sup>1</sup> it explores the darkest depths of humanity and hopelessness and the highest heights of God’s love, strength, and magnificence. David was a poet and musician as well as a skilled warrior and leader. Throughout the Psalms he uses captivating language and beautiful, sometimes stark, analogies to help bring us closer to God and God’s true nature. If the Book of Psalms were a modern-day novel, it would be a sweeping love story, a heartbreaking tragedy, an action-adventure thriller, and a literary work all in one.

Psalm 30 explores the highs and lows of the human

condition. “Throughout this Psalm, there are indications that David had been greatly afflicted, both personally and relatively, after having, in his presumption, fancied himself secure,” says *Charles Spurgeon’s Bible Commentary*. “When God’s children prosper one way, they are generally tried another,

for few of us can bear unmingled prosperity,” Spurgeon states.<sup>2</sup> Joys must be mixed with the pain of experience, he explains, for believers to learn from both.

### The Setting of Psalm 30

Like any great story, David’s has many arcs. And like any well-rounded protagonist, David has many flaws in addition to his strengths. He is referred to as “a



Joys must be mixed  
with the pain of experience  
for believers to learn  
from both.

man after God’s own heart” by Luke in Acts 13:22 and also “a worm and not a man” by himself in Psalm 22:6. In Psalm 30, David recounts many states of mind in a single passage—leading some Bible scholars to believe that this Psalm was drawn from the diaries of the king, and not written to recount a single incident.<sup>3</sup> For example, Adam Clarke, from the *Adam Clarke Commentary* noted seven different states of mind David experienced in Psalm 30:

1. David was in great distress (v. 1).
2. He extols God for preserving him from his enemies (vv. 1-3).
3. He enjoys great prosperity, forgetting to depend solely on God (vv. 4-6).
4. David endures a sense of loss and fear when the God hides God’s face from him (v. 7).

5. Stung by his conscience, David prays earnestly (vv. 8-10).
6. David is restored and feels great joy (v. 11).
7. Trusting God and giving Him glory forever is David's purpose (v. 12).

“As it is impossible for any man to have passed through all these states at the same time; it is supposed that the Psalm, like many others of the same complexion, has been formed out of the memoranda of a diary,” says Clarke.

### Joy in a Fallen World

Considering this background information, do the words in Psalm 30 take on a different meaning? “You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,” it says in verse 11. The imagery here applies to many instances in our life here on earth. It is also reminiscent of the second coming. Then, the Book of Revelation tells us we will live in heaven where there is no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying.

And we, as Christians, can experience some of that joy now, here in a fallen world. We have been given a gift of great price, one which cost Jesus everything he had to give. But sometimes grace and gifts can be hard to accept. Let's look further into this passage and how God's grace is greater than even our biggest fears, including true intimacy with the Holiest of Holies.

### Into the Lesson

Verses 1-3 of Psalm 30 speaks of David's being saved. We do not know if this is from a terrible illness, from his enemies, or from his own sin which would lead him



down into the pit. We can see that more than once, the words “drawn me up” are used. This is powerful imagery. Picture being in a pond or other algae-coated body of water. Seaweed tangles around you, making it hard to move. You're gasping for air, blinded by the water in your eyes. Suddenly, strong hands grip your arms, pulling you free. The same hands that hold you strip away the clinging, strangling seaweed, and pull you to shore. That “drawing up” is one way God saves us when we are drowning in life's circumstances.

Along with being drawn up by God, David said God healed him and delivered him from Sheol. Would this have been possible for David if he did not trust God? David, like us, chooses his response to the love God freely offers. This is not based on what we can or cannot do, but on who God is.

### Our Response and God's Promises

In verses 4-5, David outlines a believer's response:

- Grieve in a godly way—call out to God in our sorrow
- Wait for the Light, even during the dark times
- Sing praises to the Lord
- Be faithful to God
- Give thanks to God's holy name



Revelation tells us we will live in heaven where there is no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying.

What does David know and trust about God?

- That God's anger will be brief
- That God's favor will last a lifetime
- That we will experience joy again

David does not do these things in solitude, though. He encourages other believers to join with him. "They are urged to give thanks to the memorial of his holiness," says The Wycliffe Bible Commentary.<sup>4</sup> We are built to worship God together. Doing so helps us to remember that we are not only part of God's kingdom with other believers, but also that we are part of something bigger. God's plan affects all humanity and praising God together brings us strength, peace, and hope for the days ahead.

## Mourning and Joy

Mourning is part of life unfortunately. There is physical death that separates us from our loved ones. The process of healing takes time and work. It is often helped by being surrounded by people who love us and take care of us when everything inside feels broken by grief. Sadness also comes when we fall—or turn—away from God's will. Like children who purposefully misbehave, David suffers the consequences of his actions. The weeping and sadness though are short-lived. Joy comes in the morning—the hope that never runs out from a holy well that never runs dry.

## From Self-Sufficiency to Godly Providence

We do not know exactly what David's "great distress" was. Perhaps it was a physical illness or a spiritual ailment. Before this time, however, it was likely that David felt self-sufficient. He was prosperous, enjoyed good health, and was established in his kingdom. However, it was when he struggled that David began to understand God's providence more fully. In verses 6-10, we see a picture of David falling from his worldly net of provision and comfort. He cries out to God, and pleads humbly, asking what benefit there can be from his death. He asks God to be gracious to him and to be his Helper.

Jesus promises this same help to all who follow him. In John 14: 15-17, he tells His followers to keep his commandments if they love him. And he reminds us that he will ask the God who will send the Spirit to be with us forever. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (verse 16).

## Sackcloth Turned to Joy

In Psalm 30, God's response to David's pleas is favorable. In verses 11-12, David's mourning has turned into dancing. The Lord replaced David's sackcloth—typically uncomfortable material worn during periods of grief in biblical times—and clothed him instead with joy. Picture that for a moment: the relief that you would feel trading in your scratchiest, tightest, least comfortable suit or dress for your favorite shirt or softest sweater. And our favorite clothes cannot come close to the joy that God brings!

David is renewed and shouts his praise. And he does not stop there. He will continue to give his thanks. This is an important point. David does not offer up a quick, "thanks" and then move on with his life. No, verse 12 tells us that he will forever thank God for God's mercy and grace. Do we do the same? How many prayers do we offer up when we are struggling with a problem or afraid of an outcome? And does that come close to the number of prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude when help comes from God?

## Into Discipleship

Trust is an important theme of Psalm 30. An initial reading may lead us to believe that "justice" is a better theme. After all, God gets angry. He does not however stay that way. This is part of the overarching arc or message of the Old Testament. The books of the Old



Some Christians believe in God and God's promises in theory but have a hard time depending on God.



Testament point us to the hope of the New Testament: the promise of God sending God's Son to save us—Jesus, taking on the form of man and becoming a sacrifice and the ultimate atonement for our sins.

In David's time, literal foes surrounded him plotting his downfall. For us, they might be more subtle: bad habits we cannot kick, sinful pursuits that we are enslaved by, a critical voice that berates us and keeps us from living a full life. Yet, no matter what our foes look like, these verses promise God's help when we cry out to God. They not only offer help but healing. This may or may not result in physical healing, but healing will come—the kind that God knows we need most of all.

### Trusting in God's Grace

Whether consciously or not, many Christians struggle to trust God. Perhaps it came from bad situations in our early life. Or it might be that we lived in a “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” sort of family, where asking others for help or depending on them was frowned upon. Others may feel that they are unworthy of all the good things God wants to give them. “If I just work harder,” they might think, “then I'll deserve God's love and acceptance.” Some Christians believe in God and God's promises in theory but have a hard time depending on God in times of trouble.

But what if our children treated us the way we treat God. Imagine giving a young child in your life—your

own or a niece, nephew, or young cousin—a new toy. And then imagine them taking it reluctantly and then asking you every few minutes, “Are you sure you want me to have this?” or “Do I have to give it back now?” Chances are after an hour or two of this, we would begin to feel bad. Of course, we want them to have the gift—it is why we gave it to them. And to insinuate that we would snatch it away from them means that they do not trust us. But the Bible tells us things about God that help us to trust in Him. God is love. We are reminded of this in 1 John 4:8. “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” God's compassion for us God's children, is not dependent on us. It is dependent solely on God and God's very character. It will never run out, be spread too thin, or leave us unfilled. We can trust God just as we trust that gravity will hold us to earth and that the sun and moon will continue to light our world.

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#### Notes:

1. “Psalms” Insight for Living <https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-wisdom-books/psalms>.
2. “Psalm 30 Commentary”, Charles H. Spurgeon's Treasury of David <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=spur&b=19&c=30>.
3. “Psalm 30 Commentary”, Adam Clarke Commentary <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/acc/psalms-30.html>.
4. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Old Testament) and Everett F. Harrison (New Testament), *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 506.

## Strengthening Our Receiving Muscles

If we struggle to trust God, how can we learn to strengthen those muscles? Consider adding one or more of the following practices into your day:

- Begin with prayer—ask God for help to become more aware of the thoughts telling you that you are not “good enough” or “Christian enough” to matter to God.
- Be transformed by the renewing of your mind—work on replacing these lies/misleading thoughts with what God says about you in the Word. Trust that over time you will be made new.
- Look for signs that God loves you and wants to commune with you. Sunsets, a child’s drawing especially for you, the first flowers of spring—there are signs of God’s love for us everywhere. Use these “Easter eggs” in your day to thank God for the trust bond building between the two of you.
- Memorize Bible verses that remind you to trust God.
- Buy a paperweight, sign, or other visual reminders that say positive and inspiring words. Whenever you

see those objects, thank God for God’s greatness and never-ending love.

### Art Activity

Bring in typing paper and/or construction paper, a pile of old magazines, crayons/markers, pens and pencils, glue sticks, and any other playful art supplies. Give the class a time limit and ask that each student decoratively create the word “Trust” on their paper. Have each of them artistically add their favorite memory verse about trust. Let them discuss their choice of scripture while they are decorating their artwork. Encourage students to keep their copy where they will see them throughout the week ahead. Each time they notice their trusty work of art, ask students to recite the verse, giving thanks for God’s trustworthiness.

### Closing Prayer

Holy Father, thank you for your grace, your love, and the fact that you never change like the shifting shadows. Father, we’re so grateful that we can put our full trust in you, our Creator, and holy Maker. We know and accept that you are Love and that your perfect love drives out all fear in our lives. Help us today to embrace this amazing gift. In your name, we pray. Amen.

### Song to Consider

Look up and play *Your Hands* by J.J. Heller:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_loRcLE5AIo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_loRcLE5AIo)



## Devotional Scriptures Year C Third Sunday of Easter Week of 05/01/22

### Sunday 05/01/22

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:1-6, (7-20); Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14;  
John 21:1-19

### Monday 05/02/22

Psalm 121; Ezekiel 1:1-25; Acts 9:19b-31

### Tuesday 05/03/22

Psalm 121; Ezekiel 1:26-2:1; Acts 26:1-18

### Wednesday 05/04/22

Psalm 121; Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11

### Thursday 05/05/22

Psalm 23; Ezekiel 11:1-25; Revelation 5:1-10

### Friday 05/06/22

Psalm 23; Ezekiel 20:39-44; Revelation 6:1-7:4

### Saturday 05/07/22

Psalm 23; Ezekiel 28:25-26; Luke 12:29-32

“

We can trust God just as we trust that gravity  
will hold us to earth.

### 40 Days to a Life of G.O.L.D. (God-Ordained Life Development) by Ed Gray

Gray takes readers on a challenging and insightful 40-day journey of faith development.

“Few books say it better or simpler than this one—a must read for all those who are serious about success and inspired by the Word of God.”

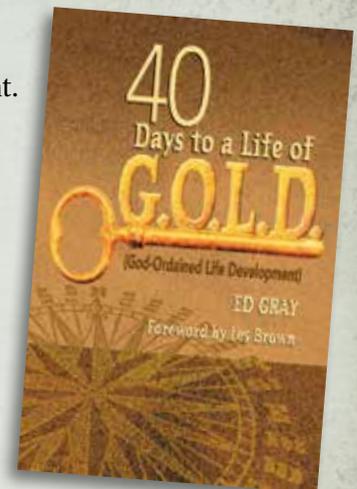
—George C. Fraser, author of the best-selling *Success Runs in Our Race*

“Mr. Gray’s writing reminds me of Bishop T.D. Jakes’ in that he uses thoughts, experiences and everyday occurrences to relate to what is going on in the spiritual realm.”

—Cheryl Dickens, *The Pensacola Voice*

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# BELONGING

## being known by God

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

—JOHN 10:27

### Introduction

Belonging can be hard to find in today's modern world. Our society is focused on "cocooning." Being part of a community isn't as essential as it was in past generations. Spending time online means we are automatically divided—physically and often emotionally—distanced from the people in our lives. It is easy to feel invisible. But God knows us. We have a God who knows the number of hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7) and who loves us with a never-ending love. In our busy-busy, hurry-up world where it is easy to feel overlooked, unimportant, and never good enough, it is refreshing to understand on a soul level God's great knowledge of us and everything about our lives.

### Lesson Objectives

- To encourage believers to take the time and make the space to listen for God's voice.
- To remember and focus on the fact that we belong to God who created us for community—with God and other believers.
- To understand that living "in the world but not of the world" requires ongoing realignment of the culture's voice with God's voice.

### John 10:22-30 NRSV

22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter,  
23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; 26 but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. 30 The Father and I are one."

## Into the Scripture

“Are you, or aren’t you?” It is easy to imagine the fingers pointing at Jesus as he walks through Solomon’s porch in the temple (verses 22-23). In 165 BC,<sup>1</sup> Jesus is accosted by a group of Jews who cannot stand the suspense any longer . . . or perhaps, cannot stand that Jesus is being referred to as the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus was in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Dedication—in today’s language that is Hanukkah, which is observed near Christmas. This holiday celebrates the rededication of the temple, liberated after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 or 165 BC. Antiochus had tried to force his Greek philosophy and religion on the Jewish people.<sup>2</sup> An interesting parallel to what the Jews questioning Jesus were trying to do: force their beliefs, their strict mandates, and God’s Law on Jesus. This was not the first time that Jesus was badgered by Jewish leaders. And as in other scripture passages, he responds in subtle but hard-hitting truth . . . if your ears are tuned to his voice.

### “Can You Hear Me Now?”

Responding to this particular group of Jewish believers, Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong



to my sheep” (verses 25-26). Obviously then, if the irate Jewish leaders did not hear Jesus’ voice, or refused to listen to it, they had their answer. Jesus goes on to say that his sheep know his voice and follow him because of that recognition.

Clearly, we are not talking about an audible voice here, but the voice of

God whispering to our souls. As Psalm 42:7 so beautifully puts it, “Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me” (ESV). Jesus is referring to God’s Spirit calling to the spirits of God’s children. Some hear the voice and responded immediately. Some come later, frightened and with much to lose. And others turn away, believing more



## The Feast of Dedication is Hanukkah and celebrates the rededication of the temple.

in the laws and “doing the right thing” than responding “yes” to the Son of God.

### Not Being with God, Not Doing for God

This is still happening today. It is likely not religious laws holding us back, but our belief that we have the inside scoop on religion, having grown up in the church. Maybe rather than pointing fingers on the outside like the Jewish leaders may have done, we are pointing them on the inside, allowing differences and biases to keep us from a true community with other believers. Where we live, our occupation, our race, gender, age, political affiliation—these are just a handful of the traits that easily separate us from other believers and God.

One way to nurture that connection again is to be certain that God is front and center—not what we are doing for God; not our volunteering; not our service in the church; not the accolades that we receive or believe we are due from helping. But our relationship with God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. From that point of peace, anchored in the love and will of God, we listen for Jesus’ voice. What would Jesus have us do . . . or not do? Where would he have us go . . . or not go? What would our lives look like if we lived convinced in his love for

us and his desire for our lives? Expect to find true union in that place. Expect to be fully seen and known by the living God of the universe. And expect to hear God’s still small voice calling to your soul.



## Into the Lesson

It is easy to feel invisible or at the very least, unimportant in today’s modern world. Approximately one out of three seniors in America now lives alone, according to the Health Resources and Service Administration.<sup>3</sup> This loneliness and social isolation occurred before the pandemic and is as dangerous to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, says the article “The Loneliness Epidemic” published by the organization.

It is not better for the younger generation. Statista refers to Gen Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2015) as “the most isolated generation.”<sup>4</sup> According to a 2019 survey, 79 percent of Gen Z study participants reported feeling alone and 71 percent of Millennials (born between 1981-1996) said the same. And it appears that loneliness is continuing to grow. While 54 percent of respondents indicated that they were lonely in 2018, that number rose to 61 percent in 2019. Christians though—those who know and hear Jesus’ voice are immune, right? Sadly, that is not true. Barna Research in 2020 indicated that even before the pandemic, 34 percent of practicing Christians stated that anxiety and depression were their greatest commonly faced challenges.<sup>5</sup>

## More Than Community

While this lesson is not focused on mental health and wellbeing, it is important to know what we as Christians are up against. Feeling lonely, anxious, and

depressed does not mean we are “bad Christians” but rather that we are struggling in our human walk here on earth. This is not a new phenomenon either. In biblical times there was more community, that’s true. But that did not mean that every believer lived in a perfect utopia of love, support, and acceptance. Accounts of believers like the woman with the issue of bleeding, the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, and Zacchaeus remind us of the dark side of community—being ostracized or looked down on while physically close to others.

When Jesus looks at us though, he does not look at the benefits we bring to the table. If that was the case, then these Jewish leaders would have been at the front of the line. Instead, he looks at our hearts. Scripture says that God saw us and knew us before we were even formed in the womb (Psalm 139:16). God calls to our hearts from God’s love. God knows that we need community, belonging, and a sense of connection. “It is not good for the man to be alone,” he said in Genesis 1:18. Likewise, it is not good for us to try to force belonging in our lives through outward deeds and action. Like the Pharisees, it is easy to get caught in the trap of trying to live up to things God never intended us to live up to—being “perfect” Christians, showcasing our lives and even our faith in just-right Instagram-able moments.



Feeling lonely, anxious, and depressed does not mean we are “bad Christians” but rather that we are struggling.

## Where Are You Starting From?

None of these things brings glory to God; they only bring glory to us. Each of these actions is based on working from a starting point of self. And by keeping ourselves and the people we want to impress at the center of our lives and our hearts, we are excluding God from the space that is intended for God. It also makes for a noisy life, one in which the voice of the Shepard is drowned out, overlooked, or ignored. When we are focused on what is flashiest, loudest, and more attention-grabbing, Jesus' message for us goes unheard.

The fact that Jesus himself struggled with human expectations and the temptation to make life easier, brings relief. This is one of the reasons he retreated to quiet, desolate places so often to pray. Jesus knew the danger of slipping into the mindset of the world. He knew the temptation of living for others rather than living out the will of God. And he knew the danger of living for his work in the world rather than his Father in heaven. In Mark 8:31-33, Peter tries to correct or reprimand Jesus who is predicting his suffering, death, and resurrection. "Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. 'Get away from me, Satan!' he said. 'You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's'" (verse 33).

Like a boat, our faith requires continual course corrections. Imagine launching a ship and knowing where you would like it to end up, pointing it in that direction, and expecting to arrive on the shores without any effort. Ship captains know that it takes thousands of small tweaks and larger maneuvering of the wheel throughout their journey to arrive where they are aiming.

The same is true in our faith walk. To fully know and understand God's deep love for us and God's acceptance of us, we must constantly line up our route with God's. We need to stay open to God's voice which often sounds quite different than the culture around us. We must ask for the strength and fortitude needed to stay on God's path, in God's will for our lives. There, we will find the sense of belonging and the acceptance that we so deeply crave, and that God rejoices in sharing with us.

## Into Discipleship

So, how do we apply this to our everyday lives? Recognition of a problem is a great start, but it is most useful when it propels us toward change. Most individuals fall

into one of two groups. Some find it easier to add a new habit or practice into their lives. And there those of us for whom it is simpler to let go of an existing habit or practice that does not draw us toward our goals. Considering that, let us look at two sets of ways we can get this lesson from scripture into our lives.

Consider adding:

- Rest—an hour, a half-day, or full day each week. It is easier to hear God when we are not exhausted.
- Meaningful time spent in Scripture reading, praying, and reflecting on what you believe God is telling you.
- More of whatever draws you closer to God. Maybe that is a nature walk, creating music, journaling, or making art. Perhaps it is time in absolute silence, listening to your breath. Or maybe it is sitting with a lit candle and your Bible. We all worship God in different ways. Make more time to worship in whatever way God has made you to connect most easily with God.

Consider subtracting:

- Time on social media—while there are many great opportunities for Christians to meet virtually with other Christians online, there is also a greater chance for you to fall into the comparison trap, get angry at people with different beliefs, and end up feeling more alone. Consider a fast of a week or month. Bonus



We need to stay open to  
God's voice which often  
sounds quite different than  
the culture around us.



points if you use that time in prayer or reflecting on God's presence!

- Being social in person is great, but it is not easy hearing God's voice if we are constantly surrounded by other people. Consider letting go of a single social obligation this week and allow yourself to become quiet and listen for the Shepard's voice.
- Striving for perfection. Whether online or in real life perfect is never going to happen. Trying to make yourself/your family/your job/your life perfect not only is a recipe for frustration and disappointment but it can also subtly draw you away from God. Look for signs of God at work rather than perfection this week.

## Keeping it Central

What are some ways that you can keep this idea of belonging and being seen by God front and center in your mind? Here are a few practices to reflect on this idea and help ground it in our lives.

- Buy a small model ship or toy boat to remember that like this vessel, we need to constantly adjust our minds and hearts to stay close to God and hear His voice.
- Find a small stuffed lamb or use a picture of a sheep as your computer's wallpaper. Memorize the verse, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me" (v. 27).

- Set aside a little time this week to research shepherds in Biblical times. Contrast that with the research you do on raising sheep today. How are they different? How are they the same?
- Write a poem about God as your Shepard. If you need inspiration, read through the psalms.
- Journal about all the times in your life that you've recognized Jesus' voice. What was the situation? What was the outcome? Consider taking keywords from this journaling exercise and create a collage that you can see daily.
- Paint a stone or purchase one with the word "belonging" or "belong" on it. Keep it where you can see it regularly. When you do, thank God for the fact that you belong to Him.

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### Notes:

1. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Old Testament) and Everett F. Harrison (New Testament), *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 1095-1096.
2. "Bible Commentary: John 10:22-30," Sermon Writer, <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/john-1022-30/>.
3. "The 'Loneliness Epidemic'," Health Resources and Services Administration, <https://www.hrsa.gov/news/past-issues/2019/january-17/loneliness-epidemic>.
4. Maria Vultaggio, "Gen Z is Lonely," Statista, February 4, 2020. <https://www.statista.com/chart/20713/lonlieness-america/>.
5. "Christians Struggled with Relational Health Prior to the Crisis—So What Has Changed?," Barna Research, September 23, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-relational-health/>.

## Reflection Questions

- Take 10 minutes and have your class meditate on the different ways God speaks to them and they hear the Holy Spirit. Then have each person share one way that they hear from God along with a corresponding anecdote if they are comfortable doing so. What do the differences in the shared stories tell us about God? What do those differences tell us about each other?
- Are there times when we pray without ceasing about a situation, and yet we feel that God is silent? Ask participants what they do in those moments of seeking? Then when we have some time and distance from those moments, retrospectively what did we learn about God? Did we see spiritual intervention happen regardless to the silence? Discuss what it means to trust God even in the silence.

## Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, you are eternal in the heavens even as your love for us is eternal and unconditional. Thank you for your providential care—for blessings seen and unseen. Of all the gifts you give to us, the greatest is fellowship with you through the Holy Spirit. Open our hearts and minds to be conscious of all the ways you are seeking to connect with us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.



## Resources

- Lectio Divina is a wonderful spiritual practice that allows individuals and groups to listen deeply for God's message through slow, deliberate readings of scripture. Consider choosing a portion of today's Scripture, or a Scripture passage of your own and practice Lectio Divina with the class. There are many Lectio Divina resources on the internet. Here is one to get you started:  
<https://www.soulshpherd.org/lectio-divina-groups/>
- Video clip: Brendan Manning, "God loves you just as you are, not as you should be"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWnRBgyZTEs>
- Books: **Invitation to Solitude** and **Silence or Sacred Rhythms**, both by Ruth Haley Barton
- Poem: *The Blue Eyeball* by Lucy Shaw:  
[http://www.lucishaw.com/poetry\\_blue.html](http://www.lucishaw.com/poetry_blue.html)

## Devotional Scriptures Year C Fourth Sunday in Lent Week of 05/08/22

### Sunday 05/08/22

Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17;  
John 10:22-30

### Monday 05/09/22

Psalm 100; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Revelation 15:1-4

### Tuesday 05/10/22

Psalm 100; Ezekiel 45:1-9; Acts 9:32-35

### Wednesday 05/11/22

Psalm 100; Jeremiah 50:17-20; John 10:31-42

### Thursday 05/12/22

Psalm 148; Ezekiel 2:8-3:11; Revelation 10:1-11

### Friday 05/13/22

Psalm 148; Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15

### Saturday 05/14/22

Psalm 148; Daniel 7:27; Revelation 11:16-19

# HOPE

## are you ready for a fresh start?

And the one who was seated on the throne said,  
“See, I am making all things new.”

—REVELATION 21:5a

### Introduction

It is easy to get so caught up in the day-to-day struggles and challenges that we lose sight of the possibilities God offers us. Society tells us that we should not have to suffer or struggle or be uncomfortable. But as Christians, we can know and expect difficulties . . . and hope for something better. Believers tend to fall into two camps: those who focus entirely too much on the troubles in this life and those who spend all their time trying to avoid all unpleasantness. How can we live amid struggle and pain without losing sight of our Savior?

### Lesson Objectives

- To seek God in helping us be transformed here on earth.
- To understand that change can be a spiritual battle and must be fought with spiritual weapons.
- To acknowledge that no struggle to change, however challenging, is greater than God’s transformative power.

### Revelation 21:1-6 NRSV

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” 5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

## Into the Scripture

The Book of Revelation was written in approximately 95 AD.<sup>1</sup> While there is some debate surrounding the author of this book, most believe it was written by John the apostle who had been exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the Good News in Asia.<sup>2</sup> The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic, meaning it contains many symbols and speaks of future events. Revelation is believed to explain Christ's ultimate triumph over the devil and all dark forces, and Jesus' revealing a new heaven and new earth for His followers. It also describes the persecution that most Christians believe will come in the end days before Christ's triumphal return.<sup>3</sup>

### The Book of Revelation, the Island of Patmos, and the Death of John

The apostle John was not unfamiliar with hardship or transformation. John and his brother, James, were nicknamed, "Sons of Thunder," by Jesus (Mark 3:17)—no one knows quite why but it could have been that the brothers shared explosive tempers or perhaps boisterous personalities. Yet John wrote the epistles of John 1, 2, and 3, and throughout these books is woven an almost singular message: One of love. Loving God and each

other—that love should be our focus as believers. John went through a spiritual transformation—from a "Son of Thunder" to being known as the apostle focused on love.

So, how did John end up on Patmos? After Jesus was crucified, he entrusted the care of his mother, Mary, to John. Later, after Mary died, John went to Ephesus and wrote the three epistles for which he is so well known. Following that and while preaching in Asia, he was exiled

to Patmos where he fell into visions and wrote the Book of Revelation. John eventually made it off Patmos and back to Ephesus where he died in his old age, sometime after 98 AD.<sup>4</sup>



We are reminded of the deep work that God is doing both in us as God's children and in heaven.

### Transformation in Revelation and John's Life

This passage of Revelation is about God's transformative power. Look at verse 5a in particular, "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'" And in verse 2, we are told that a holy city, a new Jerusalem comes down from heaven through God, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The TV station, TLC, produces a show called "Wedding Day Makeover" in which two brides work with a team of stylists to "transform them into the picture of perfection," according to the show's description. The transformation captured in Revelation—and the Bible itself—goes far beyond the superficial. In this passage, we are reminded of the deep work that God is doing both in us as God's children and in heaven preparing for our homecoming.

As a fisherman, John did not have an easy life. In biblical times, fishermen would have been considered rough around the edges. They certainly were not men who led easy lives of leisure or who had free time to spend in thoughtful conversation, study, and philosophical reflection. Perhaps, that is why Jesus called fishermen, to be four of his twelve disciples.<sup>5</sup> These men were already familiar with long, exhausting hours of work, frequent disappointment, and worked in all types of weather—the hottest summer sun to the coldest winter nights. So, how did John transform from a "Son of Thunder" to the

apostle focused on love? John's time spent with Jesus, the long conversations, listening to his teaching, and allowing himself to accept a new identity were key.

## Into the Lesson

"It is easier to change a man's religion than to change his diet," Margaret Mead once said. Certainly, creating lasting change is challenging. As we get older, it sometimes becomes an even greater battle. We have become either too comfortable with the status quo or feel so overwhelmed by what we have struggled to change for so long that it feels out of reach. Because of Jesus and his sacrifice, we are promised that we are a new creation. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we read, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (NLT). Yet on a day-to-day basis, this promise can feel far removed from us.

### Are You Struggling to Change?

Most of us are trying hard to change in some way. Maybe it is losing those thirty pounds you have been carrying around for the past ten years. Perhaps you know that your anger habit needs to be addressed. Maybe you want to stop playing the comparison game with others on social media. Change is something we all struggle with—even as Christians—and often takes work beyond surface-level habits.

When we are struggling with the following:

- An addiction to pornography or food or alcohol or shopping
- Our behavior toward a rebellious child
- Ingrained patterns of criticism and perfectionism
- Feelings of worthlessness or brokenness



- A competitive spirit that ruins relationships
- Feeling disrespected or ignored by our spouse

. . . it is easy to feel that things will never change. And Satan loves to reinforce that idea, offering us examples of ways we have tried and failed repeatedly in the past. Whispering questions to us that make us doubt is one of the devil's best tools. He even tried this with Jesus during his great temptation. Twice, he tells Jesus to prove himself. "If you are the Son of God . . ." If Satan used this tactic to try to sway Jesus, it makes sense he would use it on us as well. He also quoted scripture to Jesus, trying again to make him prove that he was God's Son.

### Being Christian Does Not Mean Change is Easy

Have you believed that you are doing something wrong as a Christian because you cannot change? Because you struggle with the "same old thing" and go to God with it again and again? You are in good company if so. Not only do millions of other Christians feel the same way but even one of the Bible's most zealous Christians, a man who wrote much of the New Testament.

Paul was not always the man who taught about the grace and freedom he focuses on in books like Galatians. Instead, Paul—previously Saul—was a legalist



It is not meant to be a utopia here on earth, rather a way of transforming—through God's power.

who hated Christians and took pleasure in seeing them locked up for their beliefs.

But when Saul met Jesus, he was transformed. He believed—had his heart changed—in a way that would alter his life forever. Yet even with this miraculous redemption story, we know that Paul still struggled to give up his old self. “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate,” he says in Romans 7:15. Being a Christian does not automatically make life all sunshine and rainbows. It is not meant to be a utopia here on earth, rather a way of transforming—through God’s power—into who we are meant to be. But change is not always easy. It is often hard. But it is possible. Like John Newton, the slave-trader-turned-Christian-composer who wrote “Amazing Grace,” we can be transformed. No matter how far we get in the process here on earth—whether we experience a partial or full transformation—all of us will be completely transformed in heaven.

## God is the Beginning and the End of Everything

When everything is gone, when this earth passes away, that is a new beginning. Then, we are promised in this passage of Revelation, God will show us the new Jerusalem, our new place to live. He is tenderly preparing this place for us now, with as much thought and love as a bride puts into her appearance for her new husband. In this new place, we will live with God and there will be no more death or pain or sadness or tears. The old things will “pass away” and we will learn a new way to live in a beautiful, perfect, loving new world. Our God will make all things new, just as he promised. God is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, the Start and the Finish of our lives here on earth but also of everything that ever was, is, or will be.

## Into Discipleship

How do we live a transformed life here on this old earth though, while we are waiting for the new one? Our modern culture lauds quick fixes, easy hacks, and overnight successes. But God’s way is much different than the world’s way. The first and most important step begins with connecting with God. Is God asking us to make this change? Has whatever it is that is causing us distress become an idol in our lives? Or are we wanting



## Everyone needs the support that community offers.

to change something that God honestly is not concerned about—something that we want to change because it will benefit us, or we believe it will make us happy?

Getting clear on what the change is that we want to make and what—and who—is motivating it is essential. Next, we need to remember who God is. Reflecting on the attributes of God, praying about them, thanking God for them is a great way to put our strains and struggles in perspective. After that, consider partnering with another believer (of the same gender) and asking that they hold us accountable. Or join a group specific to our area of weakness. Everyone—Christians included—needs the support that community offers.

Reading stories of other Christians who have experienced powerful transformations, memorizing Scripture verses that remind us of God’s power to transform us, and filling our hearts and minds with messages of hope and positivity are other ways that will help us change. Perhaps working with a counselor, your pastor, or a Christian mentor would help as you navigate the waters of transformation.

## Using the Gifts God Has Given You

If possible, use whatever God has gifted you with to help you on your journey. If you love being out in nature, make time for that regularly and let it draw you closer to God and God’s will for you. Perhaps you are a musician. Taking time to create music or practice old favorites can open a door in your heart and help you connect with God. Because of life circumstances maybe you have not been able to enjoy silent time for prayer and meditation. If so, try to plan a one- or two-hour retreat or an entire weekend if you can manage it.



This time spent seeking and communing with God on a soul level gives us the strength that we need. Think of your struggle to change as a battle. In ancient days, soldiers had to take time to drink, eat, and sleep on their way to the battlefield. If they had not, they would have died of natural causes long before the enemy got them.

It is the same for us. Preparing our hearts, spirits, and minds for transformation comes from spending time with God, being aware of God’s presence, and strengthened by God’s power, not our own. If it is helpful, create a bulletin board collage, put a painting on the wall, or buy a postcard depicting a battlefield. The enemy is working hard to create doubt, fear, and disbelief—in God and God’s power to help you. The image of a

battlefield will remind you that God is with you, for you, and fighting on your behalf no matter how hopeless you may feel in a single moment.

Notes:

1. “Book of Revelation,” Bible Study Tools, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/revelation/>.
2. Chuck Swindoll, “Revelation,” Insight for Living, <https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-apocalypse/revelation>.
3. “Book of Revelation,” Bible Study Tools, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/revelation/>.
4. Ryan Nelson, “Who Was John the Apostle? The Beginner’s Guide”, Overview Bible, February 6, 2019, <https://overviewbible.com/john-the-apostle/>.
5. Ray Vander Laan, “They Left Their Nets Behind,” That the World May Know, <https://www.thattheworldmayknow.com/they-left-their-nets-behind>.

## To Live in God: Daily Reflections with Walter Rauschenbusch

by Dennis L. Johnson

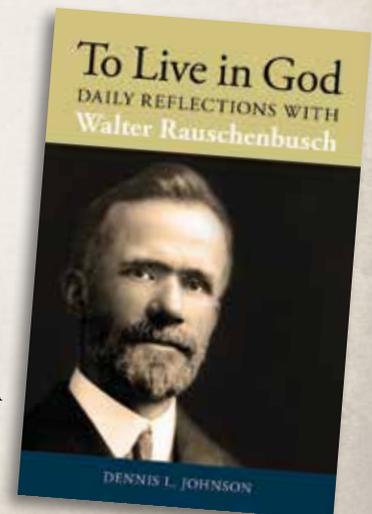
From Walter Rauschenbusch, the founder of the Social Gospel, comes this inspirational collection of 180 daily reflections about the spiritual life.

“Johnson has created a spiritual resource for the ages. Not for the faint of heart who crave only devotional ‘baby formula,’ *To Live in God* invites us to a robust feast of prayer and reflection to strengthen us in courage and compassion for the way of the cross to which Jesus calls us.”

—Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary Emeritus, American Baptist Churches USA

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## Group Activity

Very often conversations about eschatology are avoided by Christians because we feel we may not fully understand the sequence of events as they will unfold in the end times. Nonetheless, today's Scripture tells us the most important part of what we need to understand.

- Put up large sheets of newsprint and focus on all the details in chapter 21 of Revelation.
- Have students draw the description of the new things as someone reads the verses aloud.
- List other things that will be present in the scene that you may not be able to draw.
- Reflect on the images and the lists.

## Reflection Questions

- What are your observations about the scene as you consider all the details?
- What are the things that we can learn from this image that give us certainty about what will happen in the future?

- Ask participants to discuss the extent to which focusing on this chapter can spiritually strengthen them and give them hope when times are bleak.
- Have participants explain how these images undergird our faith in the resurrection.

## Closing Prayer

Dear God, we look forward to the day when Christ will come again. We find strength and assurance of your love as we consider the eternal home for which you are preparing for us. Help us live faithful, diligent lives now as disciples, so that the light of Christ can shine from us and draw others to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Resources

- Mini documentary on John Newton's life and the story behind "Amazing Grace": <https://youtu.be/738-231XkkQ>
- Michelle Williams': a Story of Faith: [https://youtu.be/84f2qEY\\_EcU](https://youtu.be/84f2qEY_EcU)
- Five Biblical Helps for Overcoming Addictions: [https://youtu.be/HTwGDqSAe\\_A](https://youtu.be/HTwGDqSAe_A)
- Renewing the Mind Tools by Barb Raveling: <https://barbraveling.com/renewing-of-the-mind-tools/>
- Book: **Just One More: When Desires Don't Take No for an Answer**, by Edward T. Welch



## Devotional Scriptures Year C Fifth Sunday of Easter Week of 05/15/22

### Sunday 05/15/22

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6;  
John 13:31-35

### Monday 05/16/22

Psalm 133; 1 Samuel 20:1-23, 35-42; Acts 11:19-26

### Tuesday 05/17/22

Psalm 133; 2 Samuel 1:4-27; Acts 11:27-30

### Wednesday 05/18/22

Psalm 133; Leviticus 19:9-18; Luke 10:25-28

### Thursday 05/19/22

Psalm 67; Proverbs 2:1-5; Acts 15:36-41

### Friday 05/20/22

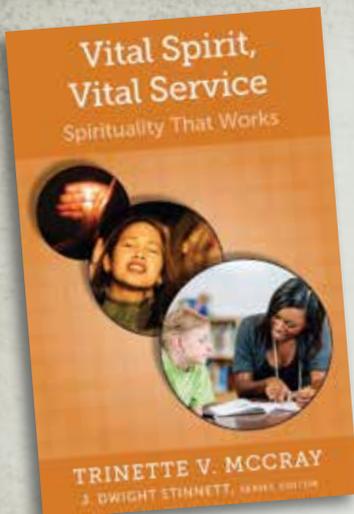
Psalm 67; Proverbs 2:6-8; Acts 16:1-8

### Saturday 05/21/22

Psalm 67; Proverbs 2:9-15; Luke 19:1-10

“

Communing with God on a soul level gives us  
the strength that we need.



### Vital Spirit, Vital Service: Spirituality that Works

by Trinette V. McCray; Series Editor J. Dwight Stinnett

In a society where we're inundated with 24-hour news, unfiltered social media, hundreds of TV channels, and more, McCray urges the people of God to seek a vital spirituality—not a contemplation that withdraws from the world, but a spirituality that inspires us to answer Jesus' call to service and social justice.

*Vital Spirit, Vital Service* explores the teachings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jitsuo Morikawa, and determines seven principles of formation and transformation ministries.

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# PEACE

## peace be with you

But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

—JOHN 14:26

### Introduction

If you have ever traveled to a foreign country or part of your own that you have never been to before, you know the value of having a local to guide you. Not only will they know what places to visit—and which to avoid—but they provide insights, information, and guidance that you cannot get from any travel guide. As we go throughout life here on earth, God has blessed us with God’s holy Guide. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our “Advocate,” sent in the Father’s name to teach us everything and remind us of all that Jesus taught. Resting in and relying on that Counselor will change our perspectives, insights, and lives. The Holy Spirit also fills us with supernatural peace, no matter our circumstances.

### Lesson Objectives

- To experience more of God’s peace through the Holy Spirit and be assured that we are never alone.
- To understand more fully the role of the Holy Spirit as our Guide and Counselor.
- To create an environment where God’s peace is more readily available to us because we are aware of it and tuned in to His presence.

#### John 14:23-29 NRSV

23 Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. 25 “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. 28 You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away,

and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

## Into the Scripture

Jesus’ time on earth was ending. Urgently, he spoke again to his disciples, trying to prepare them for what was to come. In this passage, he reminded his followers—those physically present and those who would come later—that they will never be alone. A Guide will follow Jesus’ departure from earth, a Spirit to counsel and bring peace to his children.<sup>1</sup>

As we read this passage, it is easy to fall into incredulity at the disciples’ hard-headedness. Like reading a book before watching a movie, we already know the outcome. But imagine what it was like for Peter, James, John, and the others of the 12 at this time. They had given up everything they had to follow Jesus. When he tells them that he will be leaving them (verse 3), they do not get it. Thomas says outright (verse 5) that they do not know where Jesus is going, so how can they follow

Him? And Philip wants Jesus to show them God (verse 8) . . . not realizing he is talking to him at exactly that moment. Their hearts are likely troubled, too, at the idea of losing Jesus.

### Political Unrest

During this time in history, there was a great deal

of political unrest. Maybe this sounds familiar? During Jesus’ time on earth, this unrest was largely between the Jews and Romans. Jews traveled to Jerusalem for Passover, and this would have drawn a huge crowd. Jesus had a history of challenging the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders who were—falsely—teaching that *rule-following* was the path to God. Jesus had enemies among Jewish leaders in high places. They were determined to have

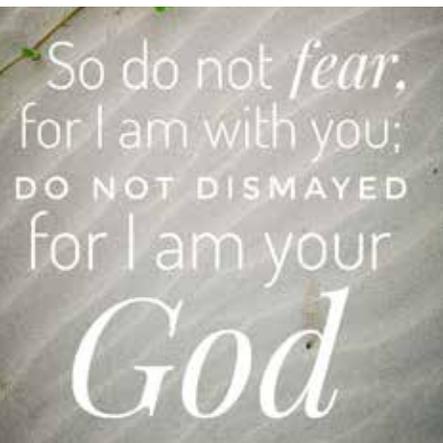
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We are blessed with  
an Advocate to guide us  
and who will never  
desert us.

him killed, but how could they do so without letting his followers know? They did not want a riot that would then alert and involve the Romans. Their solution was to arrest Jesus at night in Gethsemane. Then, hardly any of his followers would know what was going on. Jesus, knowing what was about to take place, spoke urgently to his disciples about his death, encouraging them not to give up hope because they would not be left alone. He was sending his Spirit.

### Peace in Times of Uncertainty

Jesus tells his followers that he is leaving them with his peace, giving it to them to help them throughout the struggles and challenges that lie ahead. Although our circumstances today are quite different, as Jesus-followers we too are guaranteed this same peace. We are blessed with an Advocate to guide us and who will never desert us. The Holy Spirit who was promised to the disciples is also promised to us as God’s children.





## Into the Lesson

Does it ever feel like the more you try to study your Bible and learn, the harder it is to retain the information? If so, you are not imagining it. According to an article via Learning Solutions, we learn—and then forget—a vast amount of new information daily.<sup>2</sup> The article’s author, Art Kohn, calls this syndrome “the forgetting curve,” and notes that within an hour of a training, people have forgotten 50 percent of what they have learned. Within a week that number has risen to approximately 90 percent!

### Finding God’s Peace

“Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid,” Jesus says (verse 27b). This is extremely challenging to do on our own. There is no way that we can experience this type of deep, never-shaken peace without Jesus in our lives. When sickness comes to someone we love, when job loss looms, when our child rebels and makes scary decisions, how are we supposed to find peace during these times? Because of the Holy Spirit living in us, we are guaranteed God’s peace. It is not conditional—if *you have enough faith, you will get this peace*. It is not meted out to those of us who are “good enough” to receive it. It is not something that God withholds when God is displeased with us when we mess up or even when we give in to anxiety. Our human instinct is always to fear. That is probably why not giving into it is mentioned 365 times in the Bible.<sup>3</sup> That is one verse for every day of the year. Jesus knew that being fearful

and feeling anxious was part of the human experience. But through him, we were set free from a life of fear, worry, and dread.

### Because He Lives . . . We Can Have Peace

In the famous hymn, “Because He Lives,” composers Bill and Gloria Gaither remind us that “Because he (Jesus) lives, all fear is gone. Because I know who holds the future. And life is worth the living, just because he lives.” This song was written in 1971, a time in United States history that was rife with social upheaval, the threat of war, and an overall dissolution of trust in the government. Assassinations, drug trafficking, and potential war were yelled from newspaper headlines.<sup>4</sup> God knew that we were going to need help in the peace department. The Holy Spirit—our Advocate and Guide—is always with us, ready and willing to offer reassurance and guidance. Sometimes though, doubt, uncertainty, or busyness make it hard to hear God. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will “remind us” of all that Jesus said to his followers.

Today, we are at a disadvantage in that we do not have Jesus here in the flesh with which to walk and talk. But God still uses the holy Word, the Bible, to speak



The Holy Spirit will “remind us” of all that Jesus said to his followers.

to us. And his “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12) can be heard when our hearts and minds are tuned to God. The trick is often being quiet enough to hear it. At times it might seem impossible to experience peace here on earth right now, amid political upheaval, societal unrest, factions, and finger-pointing. If we look to each other, our leaders, or self-help gurus, we will be disappointed. True peace and lasting freedom from the troubles of this world will only ever be found in Jesus.

## Peace Which Surpasses All Understanding

In Philippians 4:7, the apostle Paul says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Note that we do not have to understand God’s peace—where it comes from, how it is created, why it works in our hearts and minds—to accept it. Enjoying its benefits is something we are promised as God’s children. For a more tangible example let us look at wind. Can we see it? Can we explain it fully to someone else—where it comes from, where it goes, how it starts, or why it ends? We do not need to have the answers to any of those questions to experience what it is like to be affected by the wind. We have felt it blowing on our faces, bending tree branches, and whipping at our hair or coats. It is okay to accept without understanding. If you find it difficult to do so, cling to this verse. Remind yourself that God is God and you are human. Some of God’s gifts and actions will go unexplained. Rest in the knowledge that God’s peace is for you, whether you can define it completely or not.

## Into Discipleship

Peace can be hard to come by in a fallen world. The news and other media outlets scream at us daily to fear—worry, be afraid, distrust—everything the Bible teaches us on which not to focus. So, how can we strengthen our “trusting” muscles and develop more of God’s peace in our lives? Here are a few ways you can get started this week:

- Pray and ask God to help you be more aware of God’s peace. Pray for others that they will experience God’s peace and ask them to pray the same for you.
- Listen often—cutting out the noise of our everyday life is the first (and hardest) step. Consider a fast from



True peace and lasting freedom from the troubles of this world will only ever be found in Jesus.

the news, from social media, even from TV, or your favorite playlists to create a quieter frame of mind.

- Reflect on what you can add to your week that will bring you more peace—a quiet nature walk, a bubble bath, time to read your Bible deeply each morning? Journaling, prayer walking, and even fishing can be a time that brings you more of God’s peace.
- Make a conscious choice to turn your worries over to God throughout the week. Often our fears are swirling in our brains without us paying much attention to them. Experiment and see how many times you can thank God for taking those worries from you and replacing them with God’s peace.
- Create a reminder that God is in charge, the Holy Spirit is here with you, and God’s peace knows no end. Write it out on an index card and put it where you will see it. Make a bookmark, create a mini collage, or set your phone’s wallpaper to feature a Bible verse about God’s peace. Or create a reminder on your phone to check in daily and thank God for guidance in your life.

## Are You Trusting God . . . or Yourself?

In our “me first” modern-day culture, it is easy to trust ourselves rather than God. Here are a few key questions to ask if you are struggling to find God’s peace.

1. When did I last experience God’s peace? What was I doing differently at that time in my life?



2. When I am worried what is the first thing I do? Is that working for me? If not, how do I change that reaction into one that will bring me closer to God?
3. Are there others in my circle of friends/church members/family who are worried about things outside their control? How does God want me to support them? Does God want me to ask them to support me as well? If so, am I willing to do that?

Because we are followers of Jesus, we are guaranteed His peace. It is not a maybe or a might happen, but a certainty. If we are finding it hard to experience that supernatural peace, the first place to start is talking to God about it. Listen to God's response. And then move forward one step at a time into a life lived with more

peace and greater understanding. God promises us God's presence through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, our Guide and Counselor, brings peace.

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Notes:

1. "Bible Commentary: John 14:23-29," Sermon Writer, <https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/new-testament-john-1423-29/>.
2. Art Kohn, "Brain Science: The Forgetting Curve—the Dirty Secret of Corporate Training," Learning Solutions, March 13, 2014, <https://learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/1379/brain-science-the-forgetting-curve-the-dirty-secret-of-corporate-training>.
3. Katherine Weber, "Rick Warren: Why God Encourages Christians to 'Fear Not' 365 Times in the Bible," Christian Post, April 30, 2016, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/rick-warren-why-god-encourages-christians-to-fear-not-365-times-in-the-bible.html>.
4. C. Michael Hahn, "History of Hymns: 'Because He Lives,'" June 2013, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-because-he-lives>.

“

The Holy Spirit also fills us with supernatural peace,  
no matter our circumstances.

## Activity

Along with prayer, practicing relaxing our bodies, mindfulness and breathing techniques can help put us in a healthier disposition to receive God's peace. There are many breathing and mindfulness exercises on the internet. Here are several to get you started:

- <https://medicine.umich.edu/sites/default/files/content/downloads/Relaxation-Skills-for-Anxiety.pdf>
- [https://uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/breathing\\_exercises\\_0.pdf](https://uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/breathing_exercises_0.pdf)
- <https://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/pdf/my-anxious-mind-sample-pages.pdf>

## Closing Prayer

Dear God of peace and joy, lead and guide us by the Holy Spirit to take time to lie down in green pastures and rest by quiet streams. May we take advantage of the beauty in nature you have given us so that we can enjoy your presence on a grand scale. You seek to renew our souls daily. Help us to make time to allow you to do so. We thank you that we are never alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Resources

- *Pray as You Go* is a wonderful audio meditation app. It is free of charge and includes scripture reading, a daily reflection, and inspirational music: <https://pray-as-you-go.org/>
- *Because He Lives* performed by Crowder, Johnnyswim, Tori Kelly: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La9Zy917JcQ>

- Blog post via Joyce Meyer, "God's Peace is for You": <https://joycemeyer.org/everydayanswers/ea-teachings/gods-peace-is-for-you>

## Devotional Scriptures

### Year C Sixth Sunday of Easter

### Week of 05/22/22

#### Sunday 05/22/22

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9

#### Monday 05/23/22

Psalm 93; 1 Chronicles 12:16-22; Revelation 21:5-14

#### Tuesday 05/24/22

Psalm 93; 2 Chronicles 15:1-15; Revelation 21:15-22

#### Wednesday 05/25/22

Psalm 93; 2 Chronicles 34:20-33; Luke 2:25-38

#### Thursday 05/26/22

Ascension of the Lord

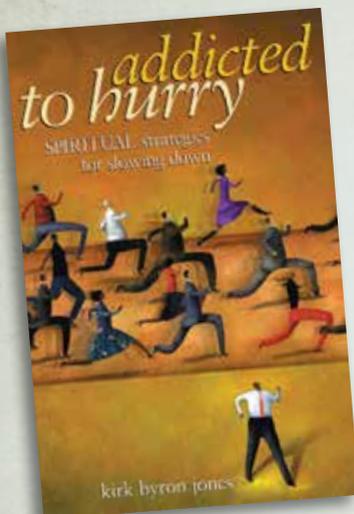
Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47 or Psalm 93; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

#### Friday 05/27/22

Psalm 97; Exodus 33:12-17; Revelation 22:6-9

#### Saturday 05/28/22

Psalm 97; Exodus 33:18-23; John 1:14-18



## Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down

by Kirk Byron Jones

"Jones has done an excellent job of giving us insight into taking the time to savor all that life has to offer based on sound biblical principles and life-changing exercises. The fact that the book is short and straight to the point is an added bonus, although after reading it, many may want to go back and savor the book's insight and wisdom and re-examine their own lives more closely."

—Chandra Sparks Taylor, QBR (the Black Book Review)

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# REDEMPTION

## standing on the promises of God

They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus,  
and you will be saved, you and your household.”

—ACTS 16:31

### Introduction

Redemption is something we frequently sing about on Sunday mornings. But is it something that we reflect on deeply when we are not in church? It is defined by Dictionary.com as, “the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil,” and “the action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment or clearing a debt.” Redemption is a powerful word. How can we saturate ourselves in God’s gift of redemption and share it with those around us?

### Lesson Objectives

- To understand more fully what redemption means.
- To cultivate a spirit of forgiveness in our Christian walk.
- To find practical ways to incorporate the practice of redemption into our days.

#### Acts 16:16-34 NRSV

16 One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. 17 While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” 18 She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour. 19 But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. 20 When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews 21 and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them

into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. 34 He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

## Into the Scripture

Paul and Silas were on a whirlwind tour—picture a modern-day, world-famous band traveling to different countries back-to-back, and you will get the idea. They had visited Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi, an important city in Macedonia (v. 12). Previously, the duo had toured Phrygia and Galatia, and Troas. Imagine the lives being changed as Paul and Silas spoke God's word! Everywhere

they went, people were hearing and accepting God's gift of salvation. Lydia, a businesswoman, was saved and this chapter of Acts tells us that those in her household were as well. You can almost picture the excitement in the air, the tears on people's cheeks, and the glorious praises being lifted to

God—here on earth and in heaven. If this were a movie, the hallelujah music would be cued, and the closing



“

In our lives today, where  
is the need for God's  
redemption strongest?

credits would begin to roll. Unfortunately, a period of stress, trial, and darkness awaited Paul and Silas.

### Job Loss . . . and Spiritual Gain

During this time in history, slaves were prolific in the Roman empire.<sup>1</sup> It was as common to have one slave, or several, as it would have been to enjoy water



through the Roman aqueduct system. Slaves were sometimes treated as respected members of a household, serving in the role of managers, tutors, or bookkeepers. Other times, they were treated more like farm animals, required to do heavy manual labor for long hours a day, and beaten for minor infractions.

In this passage, we are introduced to a slave girl with the spirit of divination residing in her. Because of this spirit, the girl tells others their fate . . . and makes a lot of money for her masters.

While there is little said about the girl after the demon is cast out of her body, we can imagine that she came to know the one true God. After all, God redeemed her. But what else might have changed in her life following this impactful meeting with Paul? Did her masters keep her, assigning her different duties in their household? Or sell her because she was of no more use to them financially? While this girl lost her job, she gained something so much greater. An interaction with the true God through Paul and the exorcism he performed in Christ's name.

### From Total Loss to Complete Gain

Following this event, the stress, trials, and darkness that awaited Paul and Silas were upon them. After Paul called out the demon in Jesus' name from the slave girl, her masters were furious. The scripture passage says that when they realized that their source of income was lost, they dragged the two men into the marketplace before the authorities. There, Paul and Silas were tried and convicted, beaten, and thrown into prison. At around

midnight, the apostles were singing and praying—not something many of us would do while nursing our wounds. An earthquake shook the ground, and the doors of the prison cells flew open.

At this time in history, jailers were put to death for allowing a prisoner to escape.<sup>2</sup> The jail keeper, in the typical tradition of the times, had drawn his sword and was ready to kill himself. Paul, however, shouts at the jailer to stop, that none of the prisoners have left the facility. The man reacts emotionally, falling to his knees and asking what he must do to be saved. Paul and Silas share God's Good News with the man. He, in turn, brings them to his home, cleans and binds their wounds, and gives them food, praising God all the while.

### Into the Lesson

Have you ever done something, been filled with regret, and then asked for forgiveness? Many children and teenagers experience this when shoplifting. At the moment, it might not seem like a big deal to steal a pack of gum or a tube of lip gloss. Afterward though, with a seared conscience, we wish we could take back our action. In our lives today, where is the need for God's redemption strongest? Is it with a secret sin like looking at porn



Nothing we have ever done or ever will do can take  
God's love away from us.

online when the house is quiet and dark, or bingeing on cookies or too much wine after a party? Do we struggle most with forgiving ourselves from things we did before we came to faith in Christ? Do we long for a “do-over” of our childhoods or young adult years that will never come? Or do we struggle with a critical, judgmental spirit that keeps us isolated from fellow believers? “He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.” That’s the promise of God in Psalm 103:12 (NLT). There is nothing we have ever done or ever will do can take God’s love away from us. We are God’s, forever and always, redeemed and transformed by the work that Christ did on our behalf.

### Are You Ready to Be Redeemed?

In the passage in the fifth chapter of John, Jesus asks the paralytic man who is lying by the side of the pool if he wanted to be healed. It seems a silly question: Who would not want to be healed? Did Jesus not know that the man had been paralyzed for years? But in the passage, it clearly states that Jesus *knew* the man had been there for a long while. “When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’” (verse 6) So, why ask? Perhaps Jesus wanted the man to realize that he, too, played a part in his healing. He needed to acknowledge that he did want to be healed, to be whole.

Do we ever ask God for forgiveness, only to not accept the redemption when it comes? Is not t that what we are doing when we pray for forgiveness and then choose to rehash our mistakes or poor choices after we receive it? When addicts are ready to change—really and truly change—they are said to have hit “rock bottom.” The same can be true for us. As believers, we need to come to the end of ourselves and our way of thinking to truly accept the redemption God offers. Following God’s forgiveness, we need to make a point to remind ourselves frequently of that grace and that Jesus did everything required for our redemption on the cross when he sacrificed himself for us.

### Reminding Ourselves of Redemption

Our enemy loves nothing more than to get us to question God’s love and promises to us. Remember that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). Any skilled

liar knows that the most believable lies to tell are those that are laced with truth. Once we have asked God for forgiveness and tried our best to make amends with any other individuals involved, our job is done, right? Not exactly. This next period involves some of the toughest, most essential work in our spirits. We must make practicing forgiveness a habit, one that we build toward ourselves and others. Forgiveness is rarely a “one and done” type of event. Instead, it takes many hours of prayer, retraining our brains, and releasing the old hurts and pain in our hearts to God.

Thankfully, God can turn any situation around, can redeem any bad choice or mistake. In our modern culture, it is easy to fall into the trap that if we just “do things right” good things will always follow. In reality, we can do all the right things and still get outcomes we do not want. That is just part of life in a sin-filled world. So, if you are paralyzed by fear over making a wrong choice or failing, rest assured that God can redeem any situation, just as God can redeem any person. And if you are continuing to beat yourself up for bad choices or mistakes you made in the past, stop. It might require a thousand prayers a day or months or even years of retraining. But you can be free because God promises it in the Word. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed,” it says in John 8:36 (NIV).



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## Into Discipleship

Practicing the acceptance of redemption can be an interesting process. Here are several ideas to use as you begin to cultivate a new mindset (and heart set) around redemption this week:

- Choose one area of your life where you have been redeemed by God. Make or buy something small—a butterfly, a bird, a Christian fish symbol—to keep on your desk or counter where you will see it frequently throughout the day. Each time you see the item, praise God for redeeming you.
- Create a Redemption Journal. Start writing out all the promises in the Bible that deal with redemption and God’s saving power.
- Memorize scripture verses that speak about God’s redemption. Speak them aloud, if possible, when you are struggling to get your feelings to match up with God’s truth.
- Pray for someone who has hurt you. This can be a big or small hurt. Take the person and the painful situation to God in prayer throughout the week. Note if your thoughts and feelings about this person have changed at all by the end of the seven days.
- Listen to the song, *Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)* by Chris Tomlin. If you can, try to make time

to listen to this song in quiet, allowing the words to sink in. “My chains are gone, I’ve been set free, My God my Savior has ransomed me, and like a flood, his mercy reigns, unending love, amazing grace.”

## Redemption: A Single Gift that Keeps Giving

Chances are you have heard the marketing slogan “the gift that keeps giving.” Have you ever considered that same idea when it comes to redemption? God only needs to redeem us once. But by redeeming us through Christ, we are saved, fully and completely, and can enjoy our salvation. But God’s generosity does not end there. We are then allowed to be redeemed, again and again, every time we stray from God’s will for us or God’s laws. Redemption is a beautiful gift, bought and paid for by God when God sent God’s own Son into this world. It is a freely given gift for every believer. All we need to do is open our hearts and hands to accept it.

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### Notes:

1. Katy E. Valentine, “Slavery in the New Testament,” Bible Odyssey, <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/slavery-in-the-new-testament>.
2. “Acts 16:27,” Bible Hub Commentary, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/16-27.htm>.

## Reflection Questions

- How is the theme of redemption shown throughout this book?
- How does the redemptive practice in Biblical times relate to our modern-day society?
- Are there any characters in this book who reflect God's redemptive grace?
- If so, who and how do they mimic the redemption God offers?

### A Story of Redemption

- The Book of Ruth offers a beautiful portrayal of redemption. It is also a short book and one that is easy to read. If you have time for deeper Bible study this week, consider reading it, praying that the Holy Spirit will open your spirit, heart, and mind up to the themes of redemption found within its pages.
- Another option is to watch a short, informative video on this book by the Bible Project. Consider taking notes as you read/watch:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0h1eoBeR4Jk>

### Closing Prayer

Gracious God, Lover of our souls, we are so grateful that we are saved by Jesus and sealed by your Holy Spirit! You have set us free from sin by your power of redemption. You have made us joint heirs forever with Christ. We are blessed to be a part of your Kingdom. Help us to share the gift of salvation and grace in Jesus with those we meet that they, too, will come to know your redeeming power. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Resources

- The music video *Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)* by Chris Tomlin:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-4NFvI5U9w>
- "God's Story of Redemption in Christ" video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGxjhUz9Y9c>
- Book: **Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry** by Mike Wilkerson, who looks at the idols in our modern-day society and how God redeems us from slavery to these things that take God's place in our lives.

## Devotional Scriptures

### Year C Seventh Sunday of Easter Week of 05/29/22

#### Sunday 05/29/22

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

#### Monday 05/30/22

Psalm 29; Exodus 40:16-38; Acts 16:35-40

#### Tuesday 05/31/22 Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth

Psalm 29; 2 Chronicles 5:2-14; Acts 26:19-29

#### Wednesday 06/01/22

Psalm 29; Ezekiel 3:12-21; Luke 9:18-27

#### Thursday 06/02/22

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Isaiah 32:11-17; Galatians 5:16-25

#### Friday 06/03/22

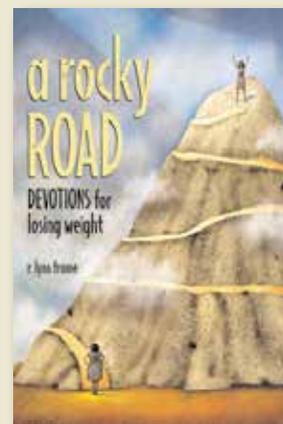
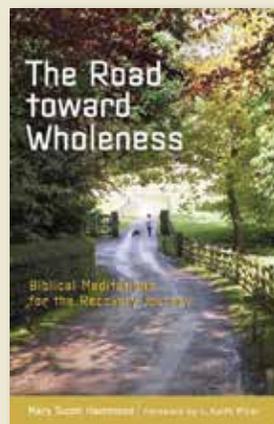
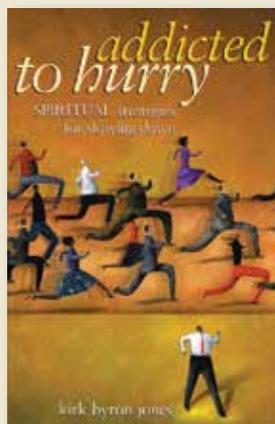
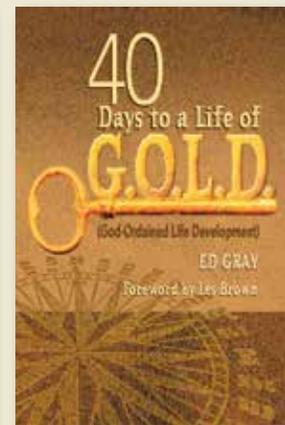
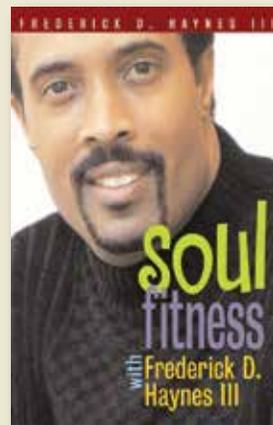
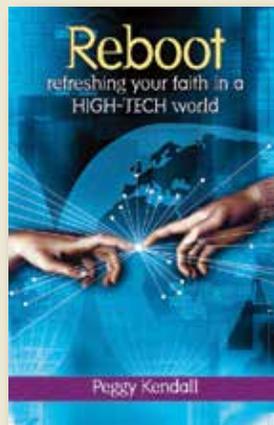
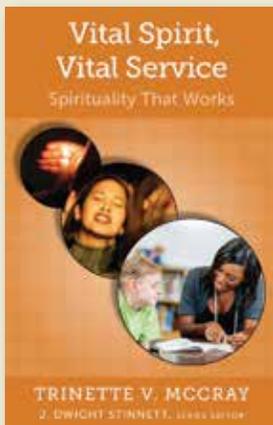
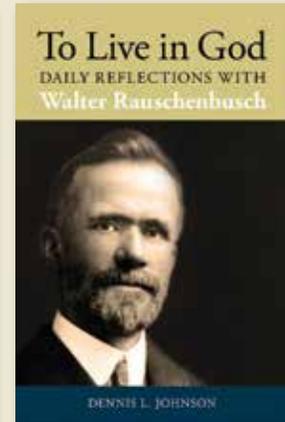
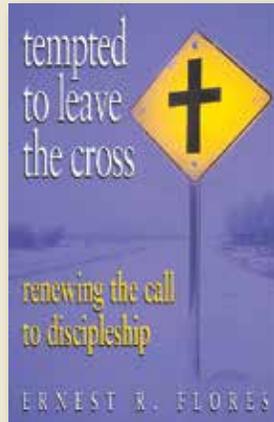
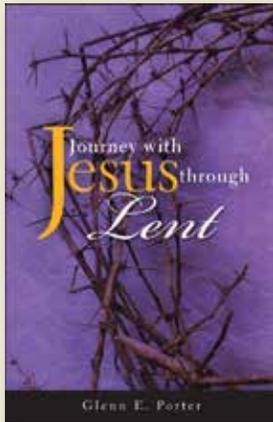
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Isaiah 44:1-4; Galatians 6:7-10

#### Saturday 06/04/22

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 2 Kings 2:1-15a; Luke 1:5-17

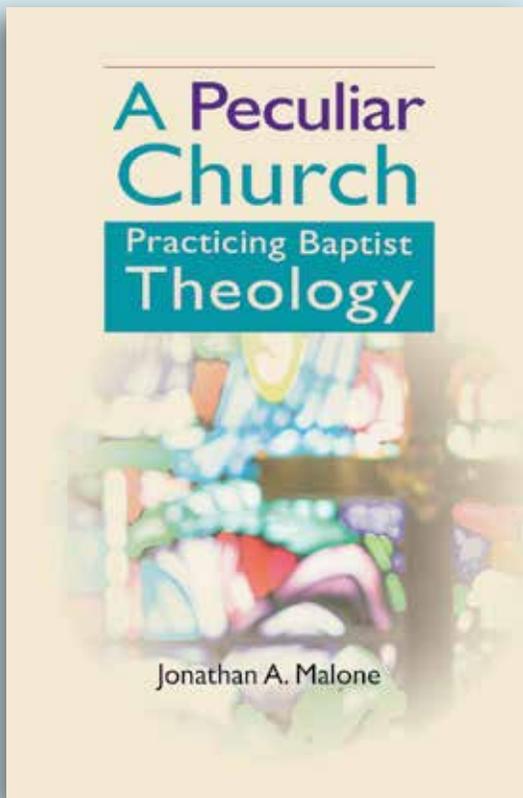


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