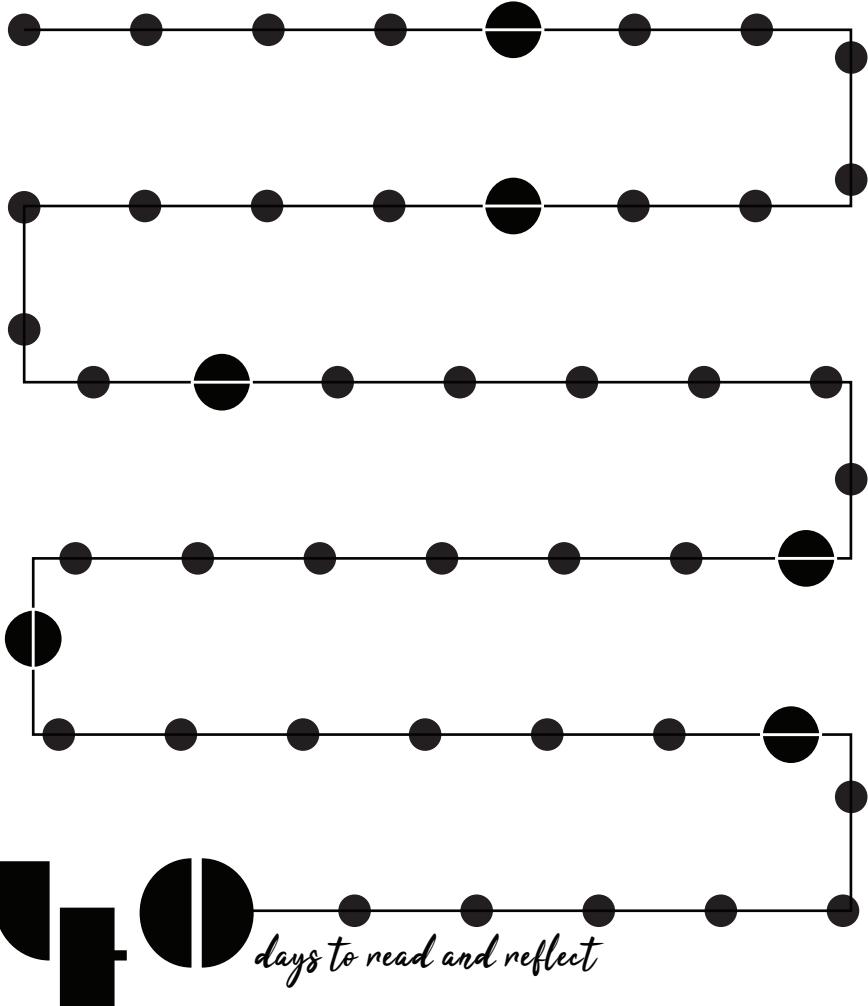


FORTY



MATT BEHRENS

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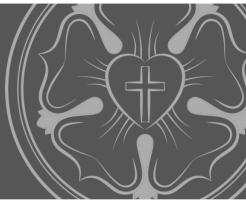
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Author's Introduction

The forty days of Lent are historically linked to the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness and the temptations he endured there. Jesus spent one day in the wilderness for every year the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. (We'll get to that story in a couple weeks.) They fell into temptation time and again. Jesus withstood. Where Israel failed to live up to God's calling, Jesus would succeed. He came to fulfill all which God's people are unable to accomplish.

That's commonly the story connected with Jesus' 40 days of fasting and temptation. As we read through the other stories of 40 days and 40 years, we'll see there are more connections to the stories of God's people. There's a sense of completeness indicated by 40. There's also a sense of cleansing or preparation linked to many of the Old Testament stories of 40. The cleansing was necessary because of sin. The presence of sin among God's people and God's wrath against sin is linked to these stories as well.

This reading plan and reflection questions will guide us through a consideration of Bible stories linked together by the number 40. We begin Ash Wednesday with Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days. From there, we'll go back to the very first 40 reference, the 40 days of rain which mark the flood at Noah's time. Story by story, we'll work through the Old Testament references to 40 until we reach the time of Jesus once again.

Each story from the Old Testament raises questions of man's sin and God's willingness to tolerate sin. God sets limits on sin. He desires to preserve his people, but his people are mired in sin. How can God's love for his people and his hatred of sin be resolved? The death and resurrection of Jesus is the answer. Our Lenten journey will bring us to Easter, and 40 days of resurrection appearances by Jesus. It's the final 40, and it meets the needs exposed by all the previous stories. It's the completion of the cleansing required for all of God's people.

I am thankful to take this Lenten journey with you.

Peace in Christ,
Matt Behrens, Pastor
here for you

What to Expect & How to Use this Book

Ash Wednesday and each Sunday during Lent will begin a new focus as you read through this devotional. An opening devotion will help you enter into consideration of a new story with a 40 reference. The days following each story will invite you to read sections of scripture with thematic links to the main story.

A reflection question is provided along with each daily reading. Take time to slow down as you answer the questions. If you're reading by yourself, journal your responses and challenge yourself to find wording which would be understood by someone else. If you're reading this devotional with someone, you'll more naturally need to do this. Taking our thoughts and putting them into words helps us think more deeply. It's a form of meditation which helps us focus on God's word and our response.

Because each week centers around a new story, it's easy to start this devotional part-way through Lent. Feel free to invite others into this journey and share a copy of this devotional with them. If you picked this up and Lent is already underway, pick up on the appropriate week. The introduction above will help give enough context for you to know what to expect.

Finally, there are 40 days in Lent, but the Sundays don't count. The days of Lent are traditionally days of repentance and reflection on our need for a Savior. The Sundays during Lent (and throughout the year) are celebrations of Easter. Every Sunday God's people gather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. Throughout this devotional, the Sundays are intended to feel different for this reason. We experience these little Easters on our way to the full Easter celebration which marks the end of these 40 days.



40 DAYS IN THE WILDERNESS

Day 1

Ash Wednesday

Matthew 4:1-4

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted for forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” 4 But He answered and said, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God.’” (NASB)

Verse 2 is possibly the greatest understatement in Scripture. “After He had fasted for forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.” No doubt, Jesus was hungry! The temptation was real. It may not be the most cunning move the devil has ever made, but he starts by testing Jesus with the most obvious temptation.

What are the cravings most apparent in your life right now?

Matthew 4:5-7

Then the devil took Him along into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and he said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written:

‘He will give His angels orders concerning You’;
and

‘On their hands they will lift You up,
So that You do not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

7 Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written: ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (NASB)

This second temptation is less obvious to us. Jumping from a high place just so angels can scoop you up can sound as if the temptation is to mimic a trapeze artist falling into a net. It sounds like a temptation to thrill-seeking. But that's not quite what's at stake here.

The devil is inviting Jesus to wonder about his relationship with God. By becoming a human being, the Son of God has changed – permanently. He's no less God, but he's now human as well. The devil is attempting to plant seeds of doubt between the Son and his Father. Do the promises of God still stand? How can you be certain?

In what ways does Satan tempt you to doubt your relationship with God?

Matthew 4:8-11

*Again, the devil took Him along to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus *said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’” 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to serve Him. (NASB)*

The third temptation is an apparent shortcut. It's a way for Jesus to win the world without going to the cross. It's an easier way to win back the lost relationship God had with his children. It's a less demanding way, but it comes at a price which Jesus will not pay.

What are the “shortcuts” which tempt you?

As Lent begins we are entering a “wilderness season.” In scripture, when people enter the wilderness their dependence on God is brought to the forefront. Often, that means some comforts have been removed and past patterns have changed.

What will this Lent mean for you? Are there comforts you intend to give up? Are there patterns you will change over the coming 6 weeks?

The 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness are a picture of what God did for us by becoming man. He entered the “wilderness” of this world damaged by sin. He suffered need and he subjected himself to difficult choices. He did this for you. He endured for all the times your strength gives out. His time in the wilderness is a smaller picture of his life in this world. He is God, but he became a man. He became your substitute and your Savior.

As you move through these daily readings and reflections, pray over the things you've written down. Ask Jesus to give you strength to endure the temptations which come your way. Thank him for resisting temptation and living a perfect life in your place. Ask forgiveness for the times you've given into temptation, and thank him for the promise of forgiveness to all who confess their sins.

Day 2

Thursday

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-10.

Israel's journey to the promised land is a foreshadowing of the Church's journey toward the promised new creation.

How do you see God's provision in your life foreshadowed in the ways he cared for Israel?

Day 3

Friday

Read Deuteronomy 6:16 and Exodus 17:1-7.

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 in response to Satan's second temptation. That verse references the Massah story from Exodus 17.

How does Israel's sin at Massah parallel Satan's temptation?

Day 4

Saturday

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-13.

Deuteronomy records the words Moses spoke to Israel at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. As they are about to receive the promised land, he reviews their journey and reiterates who they are as the people of God. All three responses Jesus gives to the temptations of Satan (see Wednesday's story) come from Deuteronomy.

What connection is Jesus making between Israel's wilderness journey and his own?

 40 DAYS OF RAIN 

First Sunday

The story of Noah and the flood is recorded in Genesis 6-9. This week's readings will highlight sections of that story. If you have time, you may want to read beyond what is listed for each day in order to read the entire account.

Genesis 7:1-5

Then the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate,³ and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. 4 For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.”⁵ And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him. (ESV)

Prior to these verses, God had told Noah the flood was coming, and he had given instructions for building the ark. Now, the flood is imminent. How do things change for you between the time you know a deadline is coming and when the deadline becomes imminent?

What mix of emotions might Noah and his family be experiencing?

What is it like to grieve for things (and people) which are lost while taking comfort in the salvation you have in Christ?

Day 5

Monday

Read Genesis 6:9-22.

Forty days of rain were coming.

What would those forty days mean for the world?

What would those forty days mean for Noah and his family?

Day 6

Tuesday

Read Genesis 7:11-16 and 1 Peter 3:18-22.

In Genesis 7:16 God seals the door of the ark. In the early church, baptism was sometimes referred to as a seal (cf Ephesians 1:13).

How is God's work in Noah's life like his work in your life?

Day 7

Wednesday

Read Genesis 7:17-24 and Matthew 24:36-39.

Jesus tells us what the world experienced at the time of Noah is a foreshadowing of what will happen when Jesus returns. The world was oblivious to what was coming, even as Noah built the ark. Similarly, our world is oblivious to what is coming.

God gave Noah direction for how he would prepare. What direction has God given to us, his church?

Day 8

Thursday

Read Genesis 8:13-22.

God promised to keep Noah and his family safe (as well as the animals with them). In these verses we see that God kept his promise.

What other promises can you name which God has kept?

Day 9

Friday

Read Genesis 9:1-17.

God gave the rainbow as a sign to remind us of his promise.

What other signs remind you of God's promises?

Day 10

Saturday

Read Isaiah 54:7-10.

God's activity summarized in verses 7-8 are "like the days of Noah." It reminds us that the flood is a pattern of what still happens, not the final transformation our world needs. There was consequence for sin, but salvation and restoration were also provided by God.

What consequences of sin are present in your life (sickness? grief? anger?)?

Where do you see salvation and restoration in our world?

According to Isaiah 54:10 which will outlast the other—sin's consequences or God's salvation?



40 DAYS ON THE MOUNTAIN

Second Sunday

Deuteronomy 9:9-11

When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the Lord made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. 10 And the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the Lord had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. 11 And at the end of forty days and forty nights the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. (ESV)

When 40 appears in the Bible we often see God's plans and calling juxtaposed with the mess of sin in people's lives. There is both hope and sorrow.

While he was on the mountain, Moses received instructions for building the Tabernacle, consecrating the priests, and establishing the tools through which God will bring forgiveness to his people (Exodus 24-31). This is how God would make his people holy. During these same 40 days, as Moses received God's plans, the people of Israel proved their unholiness. They built a golden calf which they worshipped, and they gave themselves permission to cross moral lines in celebration of their new god. (Exodus 32:1-6) There is a conflict in this forty day period between God's plans to make his people holy so they can be near him, and his people running away from his holiness.

God still wants to bring people near to himself. This requires that people are made holy, which is what God does for us when we are forgiven. Why do people still run from holiness? What are some reasons people will avoid forgiveness?

In response to their sin, God threatened to destroy Israel and start over (Deuteronomy 9:13-14). Moses lays down and pleads to God on behalf of the people for forty days.

Deuteronomy 9: 25-27

So I lay prostrate before the Lord for these forty days and forty nights, because the Lord had said he would destroy you. 26 And I prayed to the Lord, 'O Lord God, do not destroy your people and your heritage, whom

you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 27 Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (ESV)

Notice that Moses does not try to tell God that these people deserve a second chance. The only reason Moses gives God for acting in mercy is the previous actions of God. In other words, the only reason Moses or Israel could expect anything good from God is that God had previously promised to be good. It's the only reason we can give for God showing us mercy, as well.

What good things has God promised you? What might your prayers sound like when you hold God to his promises??

Deuteronomy 10:10

I myself stayed on the mountain, as at the first time, forty days and forty nights, and the Lord listened to me that time also. The Lord was unwilling to destroy you. (ESV)

Moses spent an initial 40 days in God's presence. After Israel's sin, he spent another 40 days before God. Moses was a great leader for God's people, but he could not be a savior for God's people. The 40 day increments will not repeat, but the pattern of God's calling, Israel's sin, God's forgiveness and renewed call will repeat itself over and over. They needed more than Moses.

How does Israel's repeated pattern show up in your life?

How has Jesus given us hope for an end to this cycle?

Day 11

Monday

Read Psalm 106:19-23.

Psalm 106 highlights the repeating cycle of God's love for Israel, Israel's sin, and God's restoration. (Read the whole psalm if you have time.) In verse 23 Moses is part of the restoration because he "stood in the breach."

Moses prayed for Israel. How might you stand in the breach? Who can you be praying for today?

What are the breaches in your own life where others have stood?

How does Jesus stand in the breach for you?

Day 12

Tuesday

Read Exodus 32:1-14.

Moses knows the character of God, and he uses that in his prayer as reason for God to show mercy. Moses references God's reputation before Egyptians and his faithfulness to Israel.

In our setting, what reputation does God desire among non-Christians, and what does his faithfulness to Christians entail?

Day 13

Wednesday

Read Mark 9:2-8.

Jesus brings together Moses and Elijah, because both of these men were forerunners of Jesus and foreshadowed his place in God's plans. They represent the whole of the Old Testament and stand as symbols of the Law and the Prophets. This summit means a great deal for believers in Jesus and how we understand the Old Testament.

How do Bible events prior to Jesus relate to us now that Jesus has come?

Day 14

Thursday

Read Exodus 33:12-23.

These events take place between Moses' 40 days of intercession on Israel's behalf and his second trip up Mount Sinai.

How does this gift from God prepare Moses and the people for that second trip up the mountain? How would it help Israel wait on Moses' return?

Day 15

Friday

Read Psalm 90.

This psalm was written by Moses. If you know the stories of Moses leading Israel, you can imagine all kinds of connections behind the words and phrases he chose.

In light of other themes within the psalm, what does it mean for God to “establish the work of our hands”?

Day 16

Saturday

Read Hebrews 3:1-6.

According to these verses, Jesus is a new and better version of Moses.

List the things Moses did well. Then, explain how Jesus does each even better.

 40 DAYS OF SPYING 

Third Sunday

God brought Israel out of Egypt where the descendants of Abraham had been made slaves to the Pharaohs. He parted the Red Sea and defeated the Egyptian army by drowning their chariots. God led them to Sinai where he established patterns for them by which he would teach them what it meant to be chosen and holy and loved. Then he brought his people to the borders of the promised land. Here's the instruction he gave to Moses as the people came to the land God told them would be theirs.

Numbers 13:1-2

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them.” (ESV)

God himself states that Canaan is the land “which I am giving to the people of Israel.” That's important. God doesn't lie. God doesn't make mistakes. Unfortunately, we'll find out that Israel lost sight of this. They struggled to believe what God said.

Numbers 13:17-20

17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, “Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, 18 and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, 19 and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, 20 and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. (ESV)

God was going to give this land to Israel. But God also expected Israel to be active in taking the land. They would be expected to cross the Jordan River and take the land from the people already there. This is why spies were sent to scout out the land and bring back news about the people living there.

Numbers 13: 25-28

At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people

of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. (ESV)

They spend 40 days spying. What happens in those 40 days? They learn a lot about the land. They learn about its inhabitants. They clearly identify the goal and they take stock of all the obstacles. But, they lose sight of the promise. Those 40 days spent in the promised land caused these men to doubt the promise.

The report from the spies basically tells Israel the land is great, but the people living there are intimidating. The land is wonderful, but it's out of reach. It's not possible for Israel to take this land. They lost sight of what God had told them. They knew their limits and they assumed God had the same limits.

When have you mistakenly placed limits on what you thought God could do?

Numbers 13:30-33

30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” 32 So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. 33 And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” (ESV)

Caleb remembered and trusted God's word to Israel. He tried to remind the people of what God had promised. Unfortunately, they would not listen to him.

Which voices in your life remind you what God has promised?

Have you been that voice for someone else? If so, when?

Day 17

Monday

Read Ephesians 3:14-21.

As Paul closes this prayer for spiritual strength, he gives God glory for being able to do more than we could ever imagine. Imagine something big that would fit God's desires for you and for the people you love. He can do even more than that.

What would it take for you to pray for bigger things from God? What might come of it?

Day 18

Tuesday

Read Ephesians 6:10-20.

According to verse 11, we are to “stand against the schemes of the devil.” The devil’s schemes are always aimed at casting doubt on the promises of God. Ten of the spies in Canaan fell prey to this spiritual attack.

How does this section from Ephesians help you “stand against the schemes of the devil”?

Day 19

Wednesday

Read John 20:24-29.

Thomas had limits to what he would believe about God. Jesus broke through those limits and called Thomas to faith.

Who do you know that needs Jesus to break through the limits they've set? Pray for them today.

Day 20

Thursday

Read Psalm 106:24-27 & 44-48.

The story of Israel's lack of faith was summarized and preserved in a psalm for the sake of reminding God's people of this event. We would often prefer to erase failures from our memory.

What good can come from reminding one another of times we have failed? (Hint: Look to verses 44-47 for the psalm's "call to action.")

Day 21

Friday

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

In the face of fear and doubts, Caleb spoke up to remind Israel of God's promises. Paul writes to the church and calls us to remember God's promises, too. Ephesians opens with reminders of what God has done, and what he's promised to do for us.

Which reminders from Ephesians 1 mean the most to you today?

Day 22

Saturday

Read Deuteronomy 1:34-40.

In light of Israel's lack of faith, God declared that they would not enter the promised land – not yet. One generation would pass away before he allowed them to take the land. This was the consequence of their sin. God would not leave them, but he would discipline them.

What consequences have you experienced for your actions?

What comfort do you take, knowing that God does not leave you or disown you for any sins?



40 YEARS OF WANDERING

Fourth Sunday

Last week we read the story of the spies sent to Canaan and the report they brought back to Israel. They had forgotten God's promise to give them the land and saw only their own limits. This week we begin with God's response to the people's lack of faith.

Numbers 14:26-34

And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 27 "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. 28 Say to them, 'As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: 29 your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, 30 not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. 32 But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. 33 And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. 34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.'" (ESV)

That had to be hard to hear. Israel had come to the border of the land which was to be their new home, but because of their lack of faith in God's promise, this generation would miss out. It was bad news for the adults, but there was hope for their children. They would go back to the wilderness for 40 years, but after that time of preparation their children would enter the land. After 40 years had passed, as that next generation was about to receive the land, Moses had this to say:

Deuteronomy 8:1-5

"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. 2 And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in

the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. “ (ESV)

One of the specifics from the last 40 years which Moses mentions has to do with manna, the bread or grain substance God miraculously provided for his people. Moses says God “let you hunger and fed you with manna.”

God let his people hunger before he fed them. Why do you think he let them feel hunger first?

Punishment and discipline can both change behavior. One uses fear to simply stop bad behavior, and the other uses boundaries, consequences, and rewards to shape good decision-making.

How was Israel’s time in the wilderness a form of discipline instead of punishment?

What has God’s discipline meant in your life?

Day 23

Monday

Read Psalm 95:1-11.

The people of Israel who did not trust God are the negative example at the end of this psalm. Once you know this, what added depth do you find in the earlier verses?

Day 24

Tuesday

Read Hebrews 3:7-14.

This reading begins with a quote from yesterday's psalm. Once again, the generation which died in the wilderness is the negative example and warning for us.

According to verse 13, where does the writer to the Hebrews suggest we can find help in remaining faithful? What might this look like for you?

Day 25

Wednesday

Read Numbers 21:4-9.

There are several stories recorded from the 40 year period of wandering. This is one of the many stories of rebellion and restoration from that time.

How is God's response a form of discipline instead of punishment?

How does this story point forward to Jesus? (see John 3:14 if you're not sure)

Day 26

Thursday

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

Israel fell to temptation when their situation became difficult or uncomfortable. When Paul writes that our temptations are those which are "common to man," Israel's story provides examples of common

temptations. They believed they were forgotton by God, forsaken by him, lied to by Moses, following the wrong diety, and at one time thought they could choose better leaders for themselves. As we face similar temptations, Paul's assurance in verse 13 is "God is faithful."

How is God's faithfulness central to the "way of escape" from every temptation?

Day 27

Friday

Read Psalm 107:1-9.

This psalm is not making specifc reference to Israel's 40 year journey, yet that is one point of connection for these verses. At first glance, God's provision of food in the dessert might seem to fit the description in verse 9. However, it's not the hungry belly being fed but the hungry soul.

What is a hungry soul?

What good things does God provide for hungry souls?

Day 28

Saturday

Read Joshua 1:1-9.

As Israel came to the end of their 40 year sentence as nomads, Joshua received the leadership role which Moses had filled for so long. Three times God tells Joshua to "be strong and courageous."

Given the experiences Israel and Joshua have had, how would you describe the strength and courage God is emphasizing?

Where does this kind of strength and courage come from—for Joshua? —for you?

40 DAYS OF TAUNTING

Fifth Sunday

1 Samuel 17:3-11

And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. 4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. 7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him. 8 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." 10 And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together." 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. (ESV)

There is a 9-foot tall warrior challenging the armies of Israel to send out their best fighter so they can do battle. The stakes are high – the loser's army become slaves to the the victor's forces. Apparently, there was nobody among God's people who felt up to the challenge. You can imagine a bunch of soldiers looking from side-to-side, hoping that someone else might be willing to fight this nightmare in front of them. The army was frozen with fear.

What fears have you had to face—sickness? loss? injury? financial ruin? embarrassment? failure? death? What was that like?

As we continue reading, David is introduced, and then we find this reference to 40.

1 Samuel 17:16

16 For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening. (ESV)

Israel endured 40 days of taunting from the giant Goliath. That experience had to demoralize an army. Day-after-day they would listen to this intimidating figure as he mocked their army and their king.

What does it feel like to be mocked, ridiculed, or bullied?

Where do you see the people of God taunted or demeaned today? Have you experienced this for yourself?

After setting up the story in this way, David is brought to the center of the action. He arrives with food for his brothers who are serving in the army. He hears about Goliath and his daily taunts, and he recognizes this enemy as an enemy of God.

1 Samuel 17:26

And David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (ESV)

In David, God provided a champion for Israel. Instead of joining the fear of Israel, David got offended at the audacity of this enemy. That energy excited others and soon David was brought to King Saul as Israel's answer to Goliath.

When Israel's army was immobilized by fear, how did God provide for them? How did the army deal with the taunting of Goliath? (The army didn't deal with Goliath, they trusted the one God had sent to do that.)

How is David's role in this story an image of the role Jesus plays in battling your fear? If your role is similar to that of Israel's army, how are you to deal with the enemies which taunt you? (You trust the one God has sent.)

Israel's army endured 40 days of taunting before their hero appeared. For some, that probably felt like an eternity. How can this waiting aspect of the David and Goliath story help you endure?

Day 29

Monday

Read Matthew 5:3-12.

I doubt the army of Israel felt blessed while Goliath was ridiculing them each day. Yet, God saw them differently from how they saw themselves. They felt belittled, devalued, and weak. God saw them as loved, chosen, and protected.

How is God's perspective on your life different from your own? (If you have trouble answering, ask a friend who can help remind you.)

Day 30

Tuesday

Read Nehemiah 4:7-23.

Nehemiah was taunted and threatened by enemies as he led the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. He taught the people to be equipped and prepared. They kept weapons with them while they worked at construction, and they made plans to help one another should an attack come.

What threats do God's people face today, and what does it mean for us to be equipped and prepared?

Day 31

Wednesday

Read Revelation 6:9-11.

Those who have been martyred for their faith are waiting to know that justice has come. They're waiting and longing for Jesus to return to his creation as Judge and King to set all things right. And they're told to "rest a little longer" because the wait is not yet over.

Those who have died for the faith are waiting with us for Jesus to return. How does this reality affect your experience of waiting?

Day 32

Thursday

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Peter's opening is very positive. He's encouraging God's people because they are under attack. Verse 6 gives acknowledgement to the difficulties they face, and he'll address those more pointedly later in his letter. As he begins, he's realistic about their setting, but invites them to focus on the gifts they have in Christ instead of the trials they have in this world.

What hope and encouragement speaks most strongly to you from these verses?

Day 33

Friday

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-54.

You and I are not called to be David in this story as much as we're intended to see David as a picture of Jesus. David announces that he will be victorious so that the whole world knows the true God, and so that the army of Israel knows their God "saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's..." In other words, God was going to show Israel's army that success was not dependent on their ability in warfare, but on God providing victory.

How does it feel to know that David is not a role model you're called to emulate, but a foreshadowing of Jesus who provides your victory?

Read 1 Peter 5:6-11.

We get into trouble when we attempt to “restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish” ourselves. Peter encourages us to humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God” so that he can lift us up in his timing. In his time, our God will “restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish” us.

What will it mean for you to be restored? Confirmed? Strengthened? Established?

One way to wait in hope is to thank God for these promised gifts now, before you've received them. How could that be a helpful practice?

 40 YEARS AS KING 

Palm Sunday

The reign of each of the first three kings of Israel was 40 years. Saul reigned for forty years (Acts 13:21). David reigned for forty years after him (1 Kings 2:10-12). Solomon also reigned for forty years (2 Chronicles 9:29-31). These were the only kings to rule over a united Israel. After Solomon, the kingdom was quickly split between Israel in the north and Judah in the south, each with its own succession of rulers.

The prevalence of 40 in this line of kings once again brings to mind a completeness, but it also suggests something may be broken. All of the 40s we've seen have included a mix of God's plans and sin's destruction. Israel's kings are no exception. They were enthroned by God's choice. They were charged with caring for God's people. They were to use their power on behalf of the powerless. However, these men were broken and damaged sinners, and their reigns as kings exposed this.

Saul rebelled against God and lost favor with God as a result. The throne was taken from him and given to David. David was Israel's great king. He was described as a man after God's own heart, and he did much good for Israel. He also had his sins – adultery, murder, lies – and that's just one story from his reign! Solomon took the throne after David. His rule was a time of peace and economic prosperity for Israel. He oversaw the building of the Temple and was remembered for that gift to Israel. Solomon was faithful to God for a time, but by the end of his reign the king who built God's temple was also building shrines for foreign gods and bringing idol worship to Israel.

What mix of good and bad do you remember in your own parents?

What mix of good and bad do people likely see in you?

We can't study all three kings today, but we'll read the account of David giving the throne to his son Solomon. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of this week our readings will focus on Saul, David, and Solomon, respectively. We'll read about all three from David's perspective. David was gifted to write as a prophet, and some of the things he said about Saul and Solomon can help us see how God was at work through these faulty examples of royalty.

1 Kings 1:28-40

Then King David answered, “Call Bathsheba to me.” So she came into the king’s presence and stood before the king. 29 And the king swore, saying, “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, 30 as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, ‘Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,’ even so will I do this day.” 31 Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, “May my lord King David live forever!” (ESV)

David had committed to handing the rule of Israel to Solomon his son, but David was old and mostly bed-ridden at this point and had not yet given up the throne. Another of his sons had publicly claimed the throne for himself, which prompted David’s oath above.

Why do you think David had delayed this succession up until now?

32 King David said, “Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.” So they came before the king. 33 And the king said to them, “Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34 And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the trumpet and say, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ 35 You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.” 36 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, “Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, say so. 37 As the Lord has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.”

38 So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule and brought him to Gihon. 39 There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, “Long live King Solomon!” 40 And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise. (ESV)

Why would the people be “rejoicing with great joy” at the anointing of a new king? What might they be expecting?

Solomon riding into Jerusalem forshadows Jesus arriving at Jerusalem in the same manner. If the people who saw Jesus at Palm Sunday remembered this story, what expectations would it stir in them?

Jesus will come again to rule as King. What expectations do you have for that day?

Day 35

Monday

Read 2 Samuel 1:17-27.

David wrote this lament after hearing of the death of King Saul and his Son Jonathan. David recalls the good in Saul’s role, his character, and his rule as king. Three times David writes, “How the mighty have fallen!”

How does the phrase “How the mighty have fallen!” carry more than one meaning as it relates to King Saul?

Day 36

Tuesday

Read 2 Samuel 23:1-7.

David summarizes his own reign in what is recorded as his last words.

Who gets credit for ruling well in verses 3-4?

How do verses 3-4 apply to parents, supervisors, or other roles of responsibility and/or authority?

Day 37

Wednesday

Read 1 Chronicles 28:9-21.

In verse 20 David charges Solomon to “be strong and courageous,” the same command given to Joshua as he became leader of Israel. Joshua was about to launch a military campaign. Strength and courage seem fitting in his context. Solomon is about to begin building a temple.

What type of strength would Solomon need? Why might he need courage?

What type of strength do you need in the roles in which God has placed you? Why might you need courage?

 40 DAYS ON THE RUN 

The prophet Elijah had a showdown with the prophets of Baal on top of Mount Carmel. The true God proved himself superior (not a big surprise to you and I – nor to Elijah). Elijah should be celebrated, but not everyone is pleased with this turn of events.

1 Kings 19:1-4

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” (ESV)

If Elijah’s life has a low point, this is it. He’s ready to be done. He has no fight left in him. He can’t see that any good has come from his efforts, and he’s done trying.

Where have you worked hard and struggled to see any good for it? Have you experienced this in family? Church? Elsewhere?

1 Kings 19:5-8

And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. (ESV)

God expected Elijah to travel. He expected him to go far. But, he didn’t expect Elijah to go in his own strength. He didn’t expect Elijah to find the ability or desire or resolve within himself. God expected

to provide all that Elijah needed. God would provide all that was necessary for Elijah to do all that God expected.

It's true for you, too. God will provide all that is necessary for you to do all that he expects. In what aspects of your life do you need that reminder?

Elijah travelled 40 days and nights on the strength of the meal which the angel brought him. It's a long journey. It's also another 40, and it's another case where there's a preparation taking place. Elijah is about to meet God. Horeb is another name for Sinai. It's the mountain where God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. It's the mountain where Moses spent 40 days talking with God (twice!). It's the mountain where Elijah is sent on the strength God provided through a supernatural meal.

Today is Maundy Thursday. On this day, among other things, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and provided a means for us to receive his body and blood, and the gifts which these impart. It's a miraculous meal. It's a meal which strengthens us. It's a meal where we meet with God.

God met Elijah at his lowest and provided a meal. How is this like God meeting us in the Lord's Supper?

What other allusions to the Lord's Supper within Elijah's story are interesting or helpful to you?

 40 DAYS TO REPENT 

Jonah is the Old Testament prophet sent by God to Israel's enemy, Nineveh. Jonah wanted no part of this assignment, so he set sail in the opposite direction. However, God wouldn't let Jonah off the hook. God sent a storm, and eventually Jonah found himself thrown into the sea where God provided a great fish which swallowed him. Jonah spent three days inside that fish before being spit out on land. God told him to go to Nineveh, and this time Jonah did as he was told.

If we hear reference to Jonah's story on Good Friday, it's usually as a foreshadowing of Jesus in the tomb. Christ himself said, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). However, Jonah's story foreshadows Jesus in other ways as well. And, Jonah's story includes a reference to 40. It comes after the episode with the fish.

Jonah 3:1-5

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. (ESV)

Nineveh's warning was a 40 day countdown. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown!" It was the warning of God's judgement. It was a call to repentance for their sins. Possibly, the most amazing part of Jonah's story is that the people of Nineveh listen to him. They repent, and they don't wait until day 39. They wear sackcloth and they fast as part of their repentance. They go beyond saying they're sorry and take actions to grieve for their own sinful lives.

When did you last tell God you were sorry for your sins? What was that like?

It's said that fasting won't change how God sees you, but it might change how you see God and how you see yourself. What is your experience with fasting or other practices of repentance? What could such practices offer?

Our reading from Jonah closed with those practices of repentance and made mention that these were done by all – “from the greatest of them to the least of them.” Part of their repentance included a recognition that all the people of Nineveh were on equal footing. As you and I stand before the cross on Good Friday, the same is true. Before the cross of Christ, all the people of this world are on equal footing.

What are the things which bring about inequalities among people—whether real or perceived?

How does the cross of Christ function as an equalizer?

Jonah prefigured Christ by the three days he spent in the dark of a fish’s insides. But Jonah also foreshadows Christ as he calls Nineveh to turn away from their sins. Maybe that’s why Luke records Jesus as saying, “For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation” (Luke 11:30).

 40: A PSALM FOR WAITING 

Day 40

Holy Saturday

This day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is a day of waiting. Psalm 40 (appropriate for this Lenten theme) is a fitting prayer as we wait. There is a long tradition of reading the psalms as both prayers offered by Christ, and prayers given to us.

As you read Psalm 40, what meaning does it hold if spoken by Christ?

What meaning does it also hold as a prayer of your own?

Psalm 40

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
And He reached down to me and heard my cry.
2 He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the mud;
And He set my feet on a rock, making my footsteps firm.
3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;
Many will see and fear
And will trust in the Lord.*

*4 How blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust,
And has not turned to the proud, nor to those who become involved in
falsehood.*

*5 Many, Lord my God, are the wonders which You have done,
And Your thoughts toward us;
There is no one to compare with You.
If I would declare and speak of them,
They would be too numerous to count.*

*6 You have not desired sacrifice and meal offering;
You have opened my ears;
You have not required burnt offering and sin offering.*

*7 Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
It is written of me in the scroll of the book.
8 I delight to do Your will, my God;
Your Law is within my heart."*

*9 I have proclaimed good news of righteousness in the great
congregation;
Behold, I will not restrain my lips,
Lord, You know.*

*10 I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;
I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation;
I have not concealed Your mercy and Your truth from the great
congregation.*

*11 You, Lord, will not withhold Your compassion from me;
Your mercy and Your truth will continually watch over me.*

*12 For evils beyond number have surrounded me;
My guilty deeds have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see;
They are more numerous than the hairs of my head,
And my heart has failed me.*

*13 Be pleased, Lord, to rescue me;
Hurry, Lord, to help me.*

*14 May those be ashamed and humiliated together
Who seek my life to destroy it;
May those be turned back and dishonored
Who delight in my hurt.*

*15 May those be appalled because of their shame
Who say to me, “Aha, aha!”*

*16 May all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;
May those who love Your salvation continually say,
“The Lord be exalted!”*

*17 But I am afflicted and needy;
May the Lord be mindful of me.
You are my help and my savior;
Do not delay, my God. (NASB)*



40 DAYS OF RESURRECTION

Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. 2 And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. 3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 The guards shook from fear of him and became like dead men. 5 And the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6 He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. 7 And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

*8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to report to His disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Rejoice!” And they came up and took hold of His feet, and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus *said to them, “Do not be afraid; go, bring word to My brothers to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.” (NASB)*

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen, indeed!

Alleluia!

Jesus is risen from the dead! It's the solution to all of the problems we know. It's the restoration of all that's been corrupted. It's healing to all which is broken.

Jesus wanted to be seen by his friends. He wanted them to know what he had done. He appeared to the women at the tomb, and he sent a message to his disciples letting them know where they would meet. He had overcome death, and he had to let them know what this meant.

The resurrection of Jesus is the final answer to all of the questions raised by every 40 in scripture. We know the number is significant. We've learned to look for God's activity when that number appears. We also noticed that an imperfection lurks behind and sometimes overtakes the significance of that number.

There is one last occurrence of 40 in the Bible. It's a resurrection occurrence. Actually, it's all of the resurrection occurrences.

Acts 1:1-5

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (ESV)

After those 40 days, Jesus would ascend. There are 40 days of resurrection as response to all the other sets of 40. There are 40 days of resurrection which finally stand as God's perfect answer where all the other occurrences of 40 were tainted by sin.

How will you celebrate the resurrection today?

There is just one week's worth of readings left in this plan. The intent is to launch you into the 40 day celebration of Easter, but this guide will not carry you all the way through. The stories you read in the coming week all took place during those 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. These are the things Jesus was teaching his disciples as they learned to celebrate his resurrection. It's a good place for us to learn, too.

Many people give something up for Lent; maybe you did this year. In a similar way, it would be fitting to add a daily celebration for the 40 days of Easter. That could mean sharing a piece of candy, or calling a friend, or giving a small gift or encouragement to someone.

What do you think of celebrating Easter for 40 days as a counterpoint to 40 days of abnegation during Lent?

Monday

Read Luke 24:13-35.

Jesus does all his teaching while his identity is hidden.

How might that have made his travel companions better listeners?

Tuesday

Read John 20:19-29.

Thomas refused to believe his friends. Yet, as his believing friends gathered, Thomas was welcome to be with them. (Thomas felt welcome enough to be there as well, it would seem.)

How do you make non-believers welcome among your believing friends?

The final words of Jesus in this story share a blessing which looks beyond Thomas. What does that blessing mean to you?

Wednesday

Read John 21:1-14.

Jesus provides the fish the disciples pull from the lake. He also provides the fish cooking on a charcoal fire as they arrive on shore. He invites them to bring some of the fish they caught (which he provided) to the fire for cooking. Jesus gets credit for all the fish, but he invited the disciples to take part in catching them. I doubt Jesus was teaching the disciples about catching fish. He was teaching something about what it means to be his church.

How would you explain what Jesus is teaching?

What questions do you have about it?

Thursday

Read John 21:15-19.

The stories we have from the 40 days following Jesus' resurrection are real events that the disciples and others experienced. For them, there was personal meaning. However, the stories were written and shared for us. What Jesus did with individuals following his resurrection was meant to teach his church.

What can we learn about being church from today's story?

When should we see ourselves in Peter's place in the story? When should we see ourselves in Jesus' place? Are we ever in Jesus' place? (consider yesterday's story as you think about this)

Friday

Read John 21:20-25.

Each of us is called to differing roles in God's work. Our lives will not all encounter the same trials, nor will we experience the same joys.

What situations make it difficult to accept this seeming inequality?

Jesus meets Peter's question about equality with a call to focus. Where does Jesus invite Peter to keep his focus? How will this help Peter?

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

Jesus speaks this word of encouragement, sending, and promise to his 11 disciples. It's not a role given to one person, but a commission given to the church. We carry out this work, which is really the work of our Savior (see Wednesday's story), as a community.

What roles do you fill in the community of church?

The words of Jesus begin with a declaration of his authority, and they conclude with an assurance of his presence.

How do his authority and his presence work together to encourage you?

How do these work together to encourage the church in mission?

Find more resources for your church at SparkHelpsChurches.com.



