

Lent Devotional 2024



Welcome to our Lenten devotional for 2024! Our prayer is that you will dive into this special 40-day season of transformation by setting a time of reading a devotional and prayer each day, except on Sundays. We invite you to join us for worship either in-person or online.

This is a season in the Christian year to say “No” to food, bad habits and thoughts, vices, people, desires, and other things so we can ultimately say “Yes” to God. As we deny ourselves of the aforementioned, we have to replace it with something righteous; therefore, we suggest prayer, reflection, Bible / spiritual reading, acts of mercy and kindness, worship, and giving. You might be asking, “What is the difference from what I would do naturally if it were not the season of Lent?”

One, as you engage in this season of denial of self and strengthening your desire for God, you will be engaging in this collectively with Christian brothers and sisters around the world. Also, you will be engaging with your brothers and sisters locally at First UMC Burleson, that together we might encourage and pray for one another while on this journey. This can be a powerful experience of combined faith in action building the Kingdom of God on earth.

Two, it’s a denial of 1-3 things in your life that you really love and believe you cannot do without. Some people choose to give up food or drink, or negative language or the negative company they keep. Some others choose an “add-on” approach, such as adding a time in their lives for attending Sunday school, or one of the many Bible studies we offer, or joining the mission work of the church. Whatever it is—whether giving up or adding on—your ultimate goal is to prove to God and yourself that you love and need God more than whatever you crave most; that God is your truest source of satisfaction and strength.

I pray that you will meet the Lord Jesus Christ on your journey!

Your Brother in Christ,
Pastor Kyland

Calendar of Events

Weekly Worship Schedule:	Saturday Family Style Dinner @ 5p, worship @6p Sunday Connect Worship @ 9a Sunday Traditional worship @ 11am
Wednesdays at First(weekly):	Kid Connection (grades K-5) 3:30p-5:00p Free Community Meal 5:15p Pastors' Bible Study 6p First Youth (grades 6-12) 6p Grow the Garden Group 6p Glory Ringers Handbells 6p Chancel Choir 7p
First Youth (grades 6-12)	Sundays 5:08p-7:08p
Weekly Bible Studies	Monday Nights in the Word 6:30p G.I.F.T. (Tuesdays) 9:30a Sunday School Groups 10:00a
Special Events	Lent noon communion 12:00p (youth building) Pancake Dinner 2/13/24 5:30p Ashes to Go 2/14/24 7a-9a 12 hours of prayer & fasting 7a-7p Ash Wednesday Ash Wednesday Service 6p Ash Wednesday Meal 7p Seder Meal 3/28 6p Good Friday Service 3/29 7p
Easter Weekend (3/30-31)	Family Style Meal 3/30 5p Family Style Egg Hunt 3/30 5:30 p Family Style Worship 3/30 6p Sunrise Service 3/31 7a Connect Worship 3/31 9a Traditional Worship 3/31 11a

Week 1 Theme: FOLLOW ME

Day 1 - February 15, 2024

Scripture: Luke 5:27-32 ~ *After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

Written by: Pastor Lizz Bridges

Tax collectors were seen as traitors who worked for the Roman empire, taking money from people in excess and ruling over them in abuse and exploitation for their own gain. So why did Jesus, after performing miracle after miracle for those who are in need of physical healing, call out a tax collector to be one of his followers? It was because Levi needed healing of his heart and spirit. He was sick because of the way he treated people, put himself first, and made money his idol. Jesus came to heal those who are physically and spiritually sick, so Levi was definitely on the list of who needed Jesus the most. What was significant about Levi's response to Jesus' call was that it was immediate. He left everything he had been collecting that day. And the first thing he did was have a party! He was needing to share Jesus and his own healing. Levi, immediately faithful, was just the kind of disciple Jesus was looking for. He got up, and he followed.

Reflection: How can we get up and follow immediately, every morning, in a way that we leave all else in the dust compared to what we do to follow Jesus?



Day 2 - February 16, 2024

Scripture: John 13:34-35 ~ *'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

I have a magnet that says *Walk the Talk* and for me it symbolizes exactly what this scripture is describing. We can talk about being Christians and Jesus followers but

talk is cheap. We are called to love one another. Full stop. Notice Jesus doesn't put any qualifiers on that commandment. It's not "love everyone that's easy to love" or "love everyone who thinks, acts and looks like you". Nope. He commanded us to love one another. Jesus looks past our flaws and mistakes and loves us. We are called to do the same. Is it always easy? NOPE!! But as Jesus followers we must walk the talk and love as He loved us if we are ever to reach the unchurched. Do you know how many people are afraid to step foot in a house of God because of the way they have been treated by Christians? Loving others WHERE THEY ARE is the only way we will ever counteract that fear and win people to Christ.

Reflection:

How can you do a better job of walking the talk? How can you love more like Jesus?



Day 3 - February 17, 2024

Scripture: Mathew 19:16-22 ~ *Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?' 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.'* 'Which ones?' he inquired. Jesus replied, 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself. 'All these I have kept,' the young man said. 'What do I still lack?' Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

This passage of scripture is often referred to as the story of the rich young ruler. When preaching or teaching on this scripture, the connection is made that one must be willing to give up possessions to follow Jesus and that this young rich ruler was not willing to do this because he walked away sad because he had many possessions. However, we do not know that this young rich ruler did not follow Jesus. He may have grieved the loss of his possessions because he decided to follow Jesus. Perhaps he was grieving because he spent so much of his life pursuing the wrong things. We don't know what the rich young ruler decided to do. We do know that to follow Jesus means we leave something behind. We have a change in priorities. Life will never be the same. There are growing pains that we go through. However, a life with Christ is worth all that we leave behind.

Reflection: What has been the most difficult thing to let go of in order to follow Jesus? What was the most helpful for you during that time?



Day 4 - Sunday February 18, 2024

There is no devotion on Sunday. Instead we recommend that you rest, reflect on the week and regroup as you prepare for the week to come.



Day 5 - February 19, 2024

Scripture: Luke 14:26-27 - *Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

“Really, Jesus? Really!? Well I think I’ll just quit following Jesus if I have to hate my family, hate my life, and carry a cross.”

That’s what I said to myself when I came across this passage at an age I thought I could understand it. In fact, I interpreted it literally too. Later after seminary, I realized that I wasn’t completely wrong for interpreting it literally, nor was I completely right, for Jesus was speaking literally and hyperbolically. I realized that Jesus was and is serious about following him.

For some of us, following Jesus may come down to moments of separating from family or family values, friends, denying ourselves comforts and pleasures to which we’ve grown accustomed, or even giving our lives for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know, it’s a scary thought, but think about people like Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero, or Manche Masamola, and countless others who did so that you could experience religious freedom and the ability to worship without persecution. Thank God for those saints and martyrs who said, “I’ll carry the cross for those who will come long after me so that they may know Christ.” (If you don’t know these people mentioned above, look them up and be surprised at how they lived a cross-bearing life dedicated to Christ.)

But following Jesus should mean everything to you. Nothing, and I mean nothing at all, should come between you and your relationship with Jesus Christ. Not money, not status, not politics, not family, and not even personal desires. Following Jesus demands everything of us—that’s what it means for Jesus to be Lord of our lives. He’s either Lord of all or not Lord at all. And here’s the thing, this doesn’t happen overnight, but it takes time. And here’s another thing: we can’t and won’t be able to do it alone—we have the Holy Spirit to help us. We have a community of other faithful

disciples who are on the same journey, and we encourage each other to develop our faith muscles to carry the cross.

Reflection:

What kind of sacrifices do you think you may be called to make? What has the highest priority in your life? How might you begin to shift your priorities to make God and your relationship with Him your highest priority?



Day 6 - February 20, 2024

Scripture: John 8:12 - *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

Jesus called individuals to follow him, but Jesus also made the invitation to anyone who was listening. In this verse, Jesus is inviting those to come out of the darkness and into the light. Jesus extends this invitation to the people who might remember the words of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah begins Chapter 9 by speaking to the Jewish people who have experienced hard times, are living in darkness and have uncertainties. Isaiah tells them that a great light has shined upon them. A few verses later, it is revealed who will bring this light. A child will be born, a son given to us, whose name shall be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. God always keeps God's promises. Those who will follow Jesus will leave the darkness for good, and will always have the light of Christ. What a wonderful invitation to a promise kept.

Reflection: Darkness can be overwhelming and paralyzing. This is true of physical, emotional, mental or spiritual darkness. The best way out of darkness is to follow someone to the light. What or who has helped you find your way out of the darkness and into the light?



Day 7 - February 21, 2024

Scripture: Psalm 23 - *The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my*

head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Written by: Pastor Alan Clark

The Lord is my shepherd...

The sheep in a flock are led by the shepherd. They depend on him for their safety and to be led to pastures where they can eat and drink. We, too, follow a Shepherd who takes care of us, and loves us. We can trust this Shepherd.

Psalm 23 has brought comfort and inspiration to God's children for many, many years. Here is a version of it that you can sing. The tune to use is the familiar melody of "Amazing Grace."

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
in pastures green; He leadeth me
the quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
ev'n for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;

for Thou art with me, and Thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

A table Thou has furnished me
in presence of my foes;
my head Thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me;
and in God's house forevermore
my dwelling place shall be.

Reflection: What does it mean to you that the Lord is our shepherd? Psalm 23 is a well known psalm - has it meant something special to you in your lifetime? Or is this your first exposure to it?



Day 8 - February 22, 2024

Scripture: Luke 5:3-6, 11 - *He [Jesus] got one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to push out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Push out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break....When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him [Jesus].*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

If you are a growing and inquisitive Christian, the last statement in verse 11 of this story should raise a few questions. It says, “...*they left everything and followed him.*” What was so compelling that they left *everything* and followed Jesus? Was it really about the abundance of fish they caught? Surely there was more, right? Of course there was more because with any encounter with the Lord, there is *always more!*

I like to believe that Simon, James, John, and the other fishermen (v. 10) who began following Jesus after this amazing catch of fish were all searching for something more in life...something more fulfilling, deeper, and meaningful but they didn't know how or where to get it. Might that be you too? Jesus comes along and says, “*Push out into the deep*” and it changes everything. That is a beautiful metaphor for us that, if heeded like the disciples, can change everything in our lives. The metaphor is this—you have caught all you can in the shallow waters so push out into the deep. You'll never experience the depths of God's blessings in shallow waters. You'll never experience the depths of God's presence with a shallow prayer life, devotional life, worship life, giving life, and serving life. If you want a deeper and abundant experience with God for your life, push out into the deep...and it'll be so good that you'll want to leave everything too *and follow him.*

Reflection: What prevents you from pushing out into the deep with God? Are you willing to follow the Lord in that way? How can the pastoral leaders help you do so?



Day 9 - February 23, 2024

Scripture: John 10:14-15, 27 - *I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep....My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*”

Written by: Jessica Wasson

I grew up raising and showing animals, including sheep. And when I tell you that sheep are not the most intelligent of the farm animals, I mean it. But one thing that is very unique to sheep is that they are able to pick out their shepherd's voice. In Jesus's day there weren't sheep pens holding sheep - shepherds did that out in the fields. You could have multiple flocks of sheep being watched by multiple shepherds. But when it was time for a certain flock to move, that flock's shepherd would call for them and only his sheep would follow. Even if there were other voices or sounds, the sheep could pick out their shepherd's voice. It seems magical but in reality it's because those sheep have spent their entire lives listening to their shepherd and so

they know his voice and can recognize it easily. If we are to follow Jesus in the same way, we have to spend time with him in order to hear His voice and discern it from the noise in our lives. We do that by reading the Bible, attending worship and small group sessions and by living out His greatest commandments - to love God and love others.

Reflection: Do you think you are able to hear our shepherd's voice? How can you improve your ability to hear and discern His voice?



Day 10 - February 24, 2024

Scripture: Luke 14:25-26 - *Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.'*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

If you are like me, this does not sound very Jesus-like to me. Jesus, who usually speaks about loving our neighbor, praying for those who persecute us, is saying that we should hate our family members and even life itself. How does this make sense? Jesus is reminding the disciples then and us the disciples now, that in order to follow him we cannot love anyone or anything more than him. At face value, this feels very narcissistic. However, Jesus has given us everything and all that is asked in return is that we love and follow him. Having Jesus at the center of our lives could put us at odd with others, including our family. In my family of origin, I am the only one who is a follower of Christ. I had different priorities that lead me to spend my time and resources in ways my family did not always understand. I was not always invited to events because of my beliefs. This does not mean that my family and I hated each other, but it did mean we were not always in alignment with one another and I could not compromise who I am or my beliefs to fit in. To follow Jesus means to choose Jesus first and always.

Reflection: How have your relationships with others changed because of your relationship with Jesus?



Day 11 - Sunday February 25, 2024

There is no devotion on Sunday. Instead we recommend that you rest, reflect on the week and regroup as you prepare for the week to come.



Week 2 Theme: FEAR NOT

Day 12 - February 26, 2024

Scripture: Psalm 89:9 ~ *You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

If you are a human living on earth you are going to experience some storms in your life. Some might be a light sprinkle while others might be a category 5 hurricane. But storms in life are inevitable and while that might be daunting and scary, what is also inevitable is that God is always with us in these storms. Sometimes he's carrying the umbrella and sometimes he's holding back hurricane force winds and sometimes he's carrying us through the rain and wind. Just as Jesus was with the disciples when the storm came, He is with us and it's up to us to see Him and continue to trust Him and not be afraid.

There's a song by Casting Crowns called Praise You in This Storm. It has been a staple in our lives for a while now and each time we are going through a storm of life, I listen to it on repeat and it comforts me. Read some of these lyrics:

*I was sure by now
God, You would have reached down
And wiped our tears away
Stepped in and saved the day
But once again, I say "Amen" and it's
still raining*

*Well, as the thunder rolls
I barely hear Your whisper through the
rain
"I'm with you"
And as your mercy falls*

*I'll raise my hands and praise the God
who gives
And takes away*

*And I'll praise you in this storm
And I will lift my hands
For You are who You are
No matter where I am
And every tear I've cried
You hold in Your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise You in this storm*

Reflection: Is there a time you were able to praise God in a storm of life? Were you able to hold on to the knowledge that He was there and never left your side? How does it feel to know God is with us even in the storms of life?



Day 13 - February 27, 2024

Scripture: Isaiah 41:10 ~ *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

One night while I was lying in bed, my middle daughter, Milan, had a nightmare. I heard her make yell out in fear. Next I heard her little feet hitting the ground getting louder and louder until they reached my door. It was Milan. She burst into my bedroom and climbed in my bed. With terror in her voice, she said, "Daddy I had a bad dream. Can I sleep in here with you?" I said, "Of course, babygirl." As she climbed in the bed next to me, I asked her, "Do you want me to turn on a nightlight?" She said, "No. I just need to know you're here."

Milan was about five years old when this happened. And at five years old, after having experienced a nightmare in the dark, she ran to her dad in the dark, but was confident enough to go back to sleep in the dark simply because she knew her father was with her. Now if she gets it at five about her earthly father, surely you can get it at _____ (fill-in-the-blank with your age) about your Heavenly Father who never breaks a promise to His children for God is faithful.

This is God's message from Isaiah to God's people who are afraid for their lives because of a new foreign ruler who was marching their way. They've been in this predicament before (*see Exodus 14*); they know what God can do...and so do you. So whether you face the threat of a new foreign ruler (a president in the White House of your opposing political party), an economy that is not keeping your 401k or 403b as stable as you'd like, or if you have a plain old nightmare in the middle of the night that makes you anxious or afraid for a moment, God says and promises, "*Do not fear for I am with you...for I am your God.*"

Reflection: What are you afraid of facing or experiencing in your life? Have you given it over to God and asked for faith and courage to begin replacing your fear? Who do you trust more, the thing or person you fear or God?



Day 14 - February 28, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 8:23-27 ~ *Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so*

afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

This is one of my favorite scriptures. Not for the great theological truth in it of trusting in Jesus and not being afraid. It is one of my favorites because Jesus was taking a nap and if Jesus can nap, then so can I! Honestly, it is one of my favorites for both of these reasons. Jesus could nap in the midst of a storm because of where he placed his hope and trust, which was in the One who sent him. Jesus could nap not because he knew how the situation would turn out, but because he knew that he would not face it alone. And regardless of the outcome on earth, there was life and love everlasting waiting. The disciples had not learned this lesson. They, much like us, were focused on the situation at hand, not the truth of what Jesus represented. That even in the biggest storm, we never have to face it alone. God is with us. Praise be to God.

Reflection: We all face storms in our lives. Some are bigger than others, but we cannot escape them. Do you have a “go to” verse, hymn or song that helps you remain calm in the storm?



Day 15 - February 29, 2024

Scripture: Romans 8:1 - *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Written by: Suzy Morgan

Failure. While it's a word we prefer to avoid, it's one we all certainly fear. Failure is inevitable. The emotional and mental consequences of it can be crippling. And whether we fail our spouse, our children, our employers, or even ourselves, these moments can often be followed by even longer seasons of doubt, agony, and destructive behavior.

But while the consequences of failure aren't fun, they can actually be a gift that God uses to strengthen our faith. See, as we become more acquainted with our own fallibility, we become even more reliant on our merciful God Who has never lost a battle and cannot fail.

Next time you find yourself in a place of failure, remember: **ERASE and REPLACE.**

ERASE the fear of failure, and **REPLACE** it with the promise that you can do all things through Christ Who gives you strength. (Phillipians 4:13)

ERASE the condemnation you feel from others, and **REPLACE** it with God's promise to cast your sins into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)

ERASE the voice of the accuser, and **REPLACE** it with gratefulness for your "clean record" as God removes your sins as far from you as the East is from the West. (Psalm 103:12)

ERASE the image of the sinner you see looking back at you in the mirror, and **REPLACE** it with your true identity: God's beloved child who has, through the blood of Jesus, been made righteous, blameless, and whole. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

What a glorious exchange!

Reflection: Next time you feel yourself in a place of guilt and condemnation, look into the mirror and read the below words from Samuel Gandy's 1838 hymn "What Though Th' Accuser Roar." Quietly reflect on the debt Jesus paid. Consider His great love for you! And allow the gratefulness you feel to propel you into a life of greater obedience.

*What though the vile accuser roar
Of sins that I have done
I know them well, and thousands more:
My God, He knoweth none!"*



Day 16 - March 1, 2024

Scripture: Luke 7:36-50 ~ (selected verses) - *When one of the pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*

Written by: Pastor Lizz Bridges

This woman was among those who came to hear Jesus at the dinner of a Pharisee. She was a sinner, someone who the community looked down upon. But she was not afraid—she must see Jesus! According to Jesus, the host had done none of the traditional welcoming of him as a guest. So the woman took care of Jesus in the only

way she could. She came forward, kissed his feet, washed them with her hair, and poured on her own precious oil from her alabaster jar. The woman went to the extreme, and even broke customs and was vulnerable in her tears and emotions, to show her great love and respect for Jesus. The woman's faith was big, which made her fear small. She risked everything; held nothing back. And she was saved because of her faith in the love and grace of Jesus.

Reflection: How have you been overwhelmed by God lately? And how have you responded—in fear or audacity?



Day 17 - March 2, 2024

Scripture: Psalm 118:5-9 ~ *When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord; He brought me into a spacious place. The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The Lord is with me; He is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

Every person on the planet has fears. Some fears are so extreme that they become phobias. Many fears are common, such as fear of heights, public speaking and yes, clowns. Fears can have a known origin such as fear of storms because of a traumatic experience with bad weather. Fears can exist without a conscious awareness of how that came to be. Whatever our individual fears might be, I believe that all fears are based on being out of control and feeling alone in our fear. We might be afraid because we do not know what will happen because of whatever our fear is. Along with that, we feel that no one can help us in our moments of fear. However, we have a God who is in control and will never leave us. No matter what the fear might be, we can call on God who will be with us and see us through. We do not have to be in control because we can rest in our God who is. God is with us, we are not alone. Praise be to God.

Reflection: Recall a time when you felt the presence of God during a time of fear. How did you experience God's presence? In what ways did you acknowledge what God was doing for you in that moment? How can you use that experience to help you the next time you experience fear?



Day 18 - March 3, 2024

There is no devotion on Sunday. Instead we recommend that you rest, reflect on the week and regroup as you prepare for the week to come.



Week 3 Theme: STAY FOCUSED

Day 19 - March 4, 2024

Scripture: Colossians 3:2 *Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

We live in a world full of information and technology that is meant to make our life easier. However it often turns into noise and distractions, which in some ways makes it harder than ever to stay focused on Jesus. The writer of Colossians encourages us to set our mind on things above. But how do we do that with our busy schedules and facebook and twitter, or whatever it's called now, and instagram, and trying to find time to workout, and our jobs, and families? We must be purposeful about it. Attend worship services and really engage in what is being talked about, attend Bible studies, complete devotionals (hey we helped you out with that one!), read your Bible. In some ways it is easier than ever to read God's Word. There are countless Bible apps you can install on your phone, Bible challenges that will encourage you to read a certain amount daily, and other resources that make reading AND understanding your bible easier than ever. The vital component is to make it a priority in your life. Our busy world will do everything to distract us from the things above so we have to be vigilant to stay focused on Jesus.

Reflection: How can you set your mind on things above? What is one activity you can commit to that will help you focus on Jesus?



Day 20 - March 5, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 14:28-30 - *Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

This has to be one of the most amazing stories of the Bible. Peter, a normal person like you and me, does the impossible—he walks on water. He's not able to do it because he is one of the original disciples chosen by Jesus. He's not able to do it

because he's spent most of his life on the water as a fisherman. There is nothing in his own ability that gives him the power to do this other than the ability of asking Jesus, focusing on Jesus, going to Jesus, and trusting in the words of Jesus. In short, Peter is only able to do this incredible feat because of Jesus.

It is interesting to see that at the moment Peter began to look away from Jesus, is the very moment he began to sink. Sure, the Bible says it literally, "...when he noticed the strong wind..." as the time he began to sink, but the implication is much more impactful. The implication is that Peter looked away from Jesus. He can't be focused on Jesus and the strong wind at the same time. The Bible calls it a "strong wind" but it goes by other names: layoff, forced early retirement, unexpected diagnosis, divorce, death of a loved one, a change of heart, a forced move, depression, estranged family/friendships, addiction, temptations, denial, loneliness, unfulfilled life, failures, injustices, etc. A strong wind is distracting no matter what you call it, and they are always around us. But, that's why Jesus is known as "a shelter from the storm and rain" (Isaiah 4:6). Keep your focus on Jesus, continue moving toward him, and he will keep you, protect you, and keep the winds from having any lasting effect on you.

Reflection: What have you been focusing on lately? Is it Jesus or the winds blowing in your life? How might you redirect your focus and sharpen your focus on Jesus during this Lenten season? Have you tried other spiritual disciplines to sharpen your focus or gain a new focus?



Day 21 - March 6, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 6:33 - *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

Jesus tells the disciples to seek first the kingdom of God, then all things will be given to you. I don't know about you, but that sounds rather amazing to me! Seek God and all things will be given to me. It should be a done deal! However, it is not as easy as it sounds at first. I think our human brains find this truth too difficult to believe. We can have all the things just by focusing on God? The reality is that belief in God does not solve our problems or give us what we think we want. Rather, when we focus on the kingdom of God instead of focusing on the kingdom of self, money, status, image, then we have far more than what the world can give us. We will still have challenges, but when we focus on the things of God, then everything else has proper perspective. Focusing on God will give us everything we need because what God offers cannot be

broken down or taken away. What we seek is before us, if we know where to place our focus.

Reflection: What distracts you and keeps you from seeking God's kingdom first? How do we seek God first? I suggest three ways. Daily scripture reading, daily prayer and being in community with others. Find a daily devotional that includes scripture and a prayer focus. Join a Bible study, small group and attend worship weekly. If you need help with any of these, your FUMC Burluson staff is happy to offer suggestions and encouragement.



Day 22 - March 7, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-24 - *Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.*

Written by: Pastor Lizz Bridges

After Jesus fed the 5,000 people with a miracle of fishes and loaves, he focused back in. Again, in verse 22, the word “immediately” is used. Jesus is laser-focused on what he needs to do. He sends the disciples away on the boat, and he sends the crowd home after a big day of hearing and learning the truth of God and receiving healing. It was a big day for Jesus as well—he gave a lot. And now, immediately, he went off by himself to pray. He brought it all back to God. This big day, the miracles, the healing, it was about God. And Jesus invited God's presence, needed God's presence, to be refilled, renewed... Jesus needed to focus in on what this was all about. And after many hours, he was ready to join the disciples again, for the next adventure.

Reflection: How do you bring it all back to Jesus? What does your prayer life look like—intentional time apart, or brief moments of recognition? What would you like it to look like for you?



Day 23 - March 8, 2024

Scripture: Proverbs 4:25-27 - *Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

I am reading a book by one of my favorite authors called *Warrior of the Light*. The story told in the prologue is a good metaphor for today's scripture. It tells of a young

boy who is obsessed with hearing a set of bells he is convinced is connected to treasure. When he realizes he just wants to be a boy again and forgets about the bells, it's only then that he hears them. When our focus is on the wrong thing, we often struggle to hear God's voice and feel God's nudging. To me we are all called to be warriors of light - to shine God's light in a dark world. "A warrior of light can distinguish between the transient and the enduring" (Paulo Coelho, 2003). We must be able to tell the difference between what is temporary and what is eternal. Reading our Bible and improving our relationship with God is how we can be successful at this. We must also remember that sometimes even the mundane can be eternal - the smile on a child's face that sticks with us and reminds us of God's unconditional love for example. Once we are able to stay focused on the eternal it will be easier to recognize the paths our feet should follow.

Reflection: What helps you stay focused on the eternal? What does it mean to you to be a warrior of light?



Day 24 - March 9, 2024

Scripture: Philippians 3:12-14 ~ *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

In case you haven't met me, let me share a well known fact about myself. I am the most easily distracted person you will ever meet. I find it very humorous that I am writing a devotional about staying focused. I am the epitome of being distracted. Here's an example. Once upon a time, Ben and I were rearranging furniture in the living room. We were moving our large leather sofa. He on one end, me on the other. Because we have cats, you never know what you will find underneath furniture. As we moved the couch from its resting place, I saw a gold earring I was missing! I picked up the earring to show it to Ben, who was not amused. You would think he would be happy that I found it. Problem was, I put my end of the couch on the ground because I was distracted by the earring. He was still holding his end of the couch. While this is a funny story with little consequences for my lack of focus, there are times when being distracted can have serious consequences. God calls us to stay focused on the goal of being more Christ like every day. What does this mean? For United Methodists, this means we are always working towards Christian perfection, which is loving God and loving others with all that we have and all that we are. It is a goal that requires focus

and perseverance. We can reach this goal through daily scripture reading, prayer and being in community with other Christ followers. While we may not reach this goal on earth, we are to keep moving toward it. Staying focused through life's challenges. It is not easy, but the prize of our heavenly reward is worth it all.

Reflection: What are your distractions that keep you from focusing on the goal of loving God and loving others? Seek God in prayer for help in removing the distraction so you may stay focused on the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.



Day 25 - March 10, 2024

There is no devotion on Sunday. Instead we recommend that you rest, reflect on the week and regroup as you prepare for the week to come.



Week 4 Theme: Defeat is not Death

Day 26: March 11, 2024

Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1-6 - *The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

This is one of my favorite texts in the Scriptures because it reminds me of the sovereignty of God and the depth of humility I must embrace to live with God and for God. The sovereignty of God is not a subject we discuss much because it challenges the very nature within each of us that wants to be in total control of our lives. It's been in our nature from the very beginning as evidenced with Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit. God loves us so much that God grants us free will, therefore we are bound to make mistakes. Some mistakes are harmless while others are irreparable from our limited point of view. Just when we think we have done the worst and have damaged our relationship with an all-loving God, that's when verses like Jeremiah 18:1-4 come into focus for our lives. The sovereignty of God to face and fix what we thought was irreparable. Your flaws aren't fatal.

Jeremiah gets a word from the Lord himself about going to the potter's house to "hear [the Lord's] words." But when you read the text, Jeremiah sees the metaphor of the Lord's word first that is plain to see, which is a message for you today and for all of your tomorrows as you make mistakes—God can do what God wants with you, and God is always interested in shaping you for the best purposes of life He sees fit. And even with the mistakes you make that "spoils" the metaphorical clay of your life, God is able to take the worst of you and rework it to shape it for the best of you and His glory.

Reflection: What mistake(s) have you not given over to God? If you accept God as the Great Potter and we are the clay, will you let him rework and mold you?



Day 27 - March 12, 2024

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:8 - *The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

Have you ever had a daunting task - a task that seemed so impossible why would you even bother trying? If you've ever potty trained a child your answer is yes! But seriously, we've all faced tasks or responsibilities that seem impossible. Like when Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat. Or when Joseph was tasked with interpreting the king's dreams. Or this passage in Deuteronomy where Joshua is called to lead God's people after Moses. Do you think Joshua had some fear - after all what big shoes to fill!! But Moses reassures him by telling him that God will go before him - that He in fact already has. The same is true for us. God goes before us and will never leave us.

How often do we see bible heroes try to go out on their own and do it their own way? When Peter took his eyes off Jesus, he sank. The same happens to us. When we try to do things on our own, we often get into trouble! But when we focus on Him and remember that He goes before us, our attitudes will change. Even in the midst of the most arduous task we can take heart and not be discouraged for He is with us.

Reflection: What's the most challenging task you've attempted to tackle? Did you try to do it on your own? Did it make a difference when you remembered God was with you? How can you focus on that fact in the future?



Day 28 - March 13, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 6:24 - *No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

During our day to day life, the choices we make either affirm our relationship with Christ or denies it. The actual words of denying Christ may not come out of our mouths, but our actions will speak for us. Every time we choose hate over love, selfishness over selflessness, and greed over generosity reflect our commitment to Christ. One of the easiest tells of our commitment to following Christ is what we do with our money. Don't get me wrong, having money is not wrong. But what we think about the purpose of money can get us in trouble. John Wesley, the founder of United Methodists, had an unique perspective on money. To summarize, John Wesley believed in regards to money that we should gain all we can, save all we can and give all we can. When we are not afraid to gain, save and give, we are confirming who we are as Christians. Words are not necessary for the world around us to know if we are following Christ or not. Our spending habits will do that for us.

Reflection: Money can be used as a force for good or evil. When have you witnessed acts of generosity that impacted someone else? Have you ever been able to bless someone with a financial gift? It is not the amount of money spent that is the focus, but the willingness to use it for the benefit of others.



Day 29 - March 14, 2024

Scripture: Luke 22:7-23 - *(selected verses) - When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me."*

Written by: Pastor Lizz Bridges

Jesus is in charge of this final meal. He plans, oversees, and is very intentional about the details. He prepared because it was a special and final Passover upper room experience with his most beloved disciples. Why? Jesus needed to teach the disciples about what his sacrifice of death meant for them and all humankind. He prepared a

demonstration (last supper) that would become a sacrament of remembrance so that they and generations to come would have a way to remember his sacrifice and come back to him. He found a common way to do this—they would remember him when they ate, every day. Jesus prepared in detail for this meal because he had something so important they needed to hear. We are restored to our relationship with God because Christ atoned, or paid for, our sin, which keeps us separated from God. Once our sin is wiped away, or covered, by Christ, we have the opportunity to have that gap between us and God, closed, through faith. That is our salvation. Jesus knew the magnitude of what was to be done. All of human life was on the line. And we were worth it to him.

Reflection: How is Christ's death and resurrection the beginning of something new for us?



Day 30 - March 15, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 26:31-35 - *Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.' Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.' 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same.*

Written by: Pastor Alan Clark

In an earlier devotion in this book, I referred to Psalm 23 and its depiction of God as the Good Shepherd. Now, in this scripture, we find another reference to a shepherd. This time, the shepherd is struck down and the sheep, with no one to guide them, scatter. Jesus will die, and the disciples, at first, are scared and scattered.

And then we have Peter. I love his passionate devotion to Jesus. When he says he will die rather than deny Jesus, he really means it. I want that kind of full-blown, spontaneous, impulsive devotion. And then, I join him in the "I'm only human" category of saving my neck even if it means not doing what I know is the right thing to do.

We live in a city, a country, a continent where we do not have to fear stating that we are a follower of Christ. But let's look deeper. Do we deny our Christianity in how we use our time, our money, our energy? Do we, in our daily living, in the situations and decisions we make, sometimes put aside for a moment the teachings and example of Jesus? This is a question to ponder during this Lenten season.

Reflection: Have you ever been like Peter? In what ways? In what ways can we be the enthusiastic Peter and not the Peter who denies Jesus?



Day 31 - March 16, 2024

Scripture: Titus 1:13-16 *This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

If Christians have a reputation for being a hypocrite it is because we earned it. The world around us is watching what we do and say. If we wear the label of Christian, this signals to others that we have knowledge of the teachings of Jesus and should follow in his ways. Even those who are not churchgoers believe that Jesus is love and that Christians should be about love. When someone says he/she/they go to church, there is an expectation about how that person behaves. A Christian should be kind, compassionate, helpful, joyful and generally someone others want to be around. If we say we know God, our actions must match our words. Otherwise, we are denying God. In the process of denying God, we may also be placing a stumbling block to God for others. Denying God is more than just saying the words. It is about living our life by loving God and loving others in word and deed that speak the most about our belief in God.

Reflection: When are you most likely to deny God with your actions? Could be driving in traffic, dealing with a certain person or situation in your life. When are you most displaying your relationship with Christ? What scripture helps you love God and love others the most? Write it down where you can see it when life challenges you to deny God.



Day 32 - March 17, 2024

There is no devotion on Sunday. Instead we recommend that you rest, reflect on the week and regroup as you prepare for the week to come.



Week 5 Theme: Take Care of Each Other

Day 33 - March 18, 2024

Scripture: Mark 6:37- *But he answered them, "You give them something to eat."*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

When you read this miracle story of Jesus feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, one particular verse should catch your attention. No, it's not verse 40 where Jesus miraculously got thousands of people to all sit down and did so in groups of 50s and 100s. And it's not even the miracle verses of 42-44 about the Lord's sustainable food program. It's the verse with Jesus responding to the disciples' request for him to send them (the 5,000 plus people) away so that they can go somewhere else to get something to eat. This seems harmless but Jesus says to them, *"You give them something to eat."* Wow! Can you hear Jesus' tone of disappointment and rebuke toward his disciples?

You have to remember that the disciples have been with Jesus for a short time now but during that time, they've watched him perform miracle after miracle, heard him speak words of life to thousands, and they've experienced his divine power firsthand. Feeding people with minimal resources is "lite work" for Jesus. They should know by now that Jesus is able to do the impossible, and sometimes that includes using normal people to do it. Just ask Moses, Daniel, Jonah, Sarah, David, and others you know who God used to do the impossible—privately or publicly.

So Jesus puts the onus back on the disciples when he says, *"You give them something to eat."* In other words, Jesus didn't let the disciples escape the responsibility of ministering to the people's physical wellbeing simply because they had already ministered to their spiritual wellbeing; true followers of Jesus minister wherever they discern a need. People of God shouldn't be indifferent toward others, but should make the difference in the lives of others. Why? Because God is always concerned about the total wellbeing of us all.

Reflection: To what type or group of people are you indifferent? How has this indifference prevented you from serving (ministering to) them? How might you repent for this sin of indifference? What are some ways you could begin ministering to those whom you once felt indifferent?



Day 34 - March 19, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 25:40- *The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

This month we had to say goodbye to a dear friend who was a mentor of sorts for many of us in college. Sally had the gift of hospitality and unconditional love. There were many holiday meals where she and her husband opened their home to students who had nowhere else to go. She taught us what it meant to take care of the least of these. She cooked for our college ministry program every week for years. The meals weren't necessarily fancy but they were always served with love. Sally welcomed all - regardless of status. She embodied this parable Jesus is in the middle of telling.

In Matthew Jesus is telling His disciples the importance of taking care of His sheep. Jesus shows over and over during His life on earth that the value society places on people is not always the same as the value God puts on people. He frequently fellowshiped with the least of these - the woman at the well, the leper, tax collectors to name a few. He loved them where they were and He calls us to do the same.

Reflection: How do you take care of the least of these? How have you failed to do so?



Day 35 - March 20, 2024

Scripture: Deuteronomy 24:21-22 - *When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

As Christians, we have a tendency to dismiss the Old Testament. Why would we need the old when we have the new? Didn't Jesus die for us so we wouldn't have to be burdened with the 613 laws the Jewish people had to follow? Why would we go back those books of the Bible? Well, the Bible is not two distinct halves but rather one continuous love story. Think of the Old Testament as the prequel, the back story so we can understand why Jesus. Jesus was Jewish, and what Jesus taught the disciples then and us the disciples now, came from his Jewish background. Deuteronomy means "second law" and served as a reminder to the Jewish people how they should live as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land. These verses in Deuteronomy remind the Jewish people that they were once people in a foreign land in need of help, so

they must be mindful of the strangers in their land that might need help. We hear this idea over and over in Jesus' teaching. Caring for those in need is not a "Jesus" thing. It is a God thing. This serves as a great reminder for us that at any moment, we can find ourselves as the stranger in need and we will be thankful that our God cares for us ALL.

Reflection: Have you ever moved to a new neighborhood, city, state or country? At some point, each one of us has been the "new" one. We may not have needed food, but we needed information, guidance and friendship. How can you be prepared to offer comfort to the strangers you will encounter in your life?



Day 36 - March 21, 2024

Scripture: Luke 14:1-14 - (selected verses) - *Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

Written by: Pastor Lizz Bridges

In this parable, Jesus advises the men to take the lower seat at the banquet table: never assume that you are important. Humility will keep you in a grounded place, not believing pride's lies, which is that you can be everything for yourself: this makes us think we are self-reliant, with no need for God or savior. But then Jesus takes it further—a place no one expected! He said to anyone who would host a party: actually, don't even invite anyone important! Why? Because you expect them to return the favor. That kind of thinking is about you and what you can get back from the relationship, not what you can do for others in the name of hospitality and love. So, Jesus says, invite those who cannot pay you back—the poor, crippled, lame and blind. Jesus teaches mercy; that we take care of each other. He showed this in his own actions by healing the man with dropsy even though it was Sabbath. We need hearts of humility and mercy, hearts that follow the spirit of God, humble enough to know we need our God.

Reflection: Can you think of a time you put people first without hesitation? How do you host those who need your hospitality?



Day 37 - March 22, 2024

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:11 - *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

In this passage of Thessalonians, Paul is writing about the day Jesus comes back - a day he warned would come like a thief in the night. So he urged the people of the early church to be alert and to be ready. He ends this part of scripture with an admonishment to encourage one another. Life wasn't easy for the early Christian. They didn't have bibles readily available to them, many had to meet in secret, others gave their lives just for being Christ followers. In the midst of this Paul is encouraging them to support one another and remind each other that the day of the Lord is coming. We too are to do the same. If you watch the news or social media, our world seems like it's in a dark place at the moment. Hunger, war, poverty are just some of the ailments that plague us. But we are not to be discouraged, but instead encourage and support each other as much as we can, both as a church and as individuals.

Reflection: How can you offer support and encouragement to those around you? How have others offered support to you in the past? How did it make you feel?



Day 38 - March 23, 2024

Scripture: Luke 9:1-6 - *When Jesus had called the twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: "Take nothing for the journey-no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

On New Years' Eve 2023, Pastor Lizz preached about Jesus feeding the five thousand as found in Luke 9:12-17. She referred to the verses at the start of the chapter, which are not as well known but I believe equally important in what we learn about what Jesus expects of his disciples then and us the disciples now. First of all, Jesus gave the disciples authority and power over demons and to cure diseases, to proclaim the kingdom of God and heal the sick. Notice how all caring for others' books ends proclaiming the kingdom of God. In the process of caring for others, the kingdom of God is being proclaimed. This task was given to a group of people who had no medical training, had not been to seminary and in many ways, were a bunch of goofballs who

often missed the point. Yet, these were the ones Jesus trusted to carry out the great commission of loving God and loving others. If those knuckleheads could do it, then we can too. Jesus has entrusted us to care for others and in doing so we are proclaiming the kingdom of God.

Reflection: Think about a time when someone preached the Good News to you without ever opening the Bible? When have you done the same for someone else?



Day 39 - March 24, 2024

There is no devotion on Sunday. Instead we recommend that you rest, reflect on the week and regroup as you prepare for the week to come.



Week 6 - Theme: The Power of the Holy Spirit

Day 40 - March 25, 2024

Scripture: Acts 1:8 ~ *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

The story is told about a church service that was getting started for the morning and a complication happened. The pastor got up to greet everyone and then offer an opening prayer. The custom was for the organist to play softly while the pastor prayed this first prayer. Well, for whatever reason, the organist couldn't get the organ to play. He turned on the switch; he tapped the keys; and he pressed the floor pedals but got no sound. One of the trustees saw the organist was frustrated and just gave up. He put his head down and joined the prayer...and whispered one for the organ to work. The trustee noticed that the organ had been unplugged, so he plugged it back into the power socket. The trustee wrote a quick note to the organist that read, “When the prayer is over, the power is on!”

While it may be a joke, there are a few truths in it. One, prayer changes things. Two, you can't stay turned on unless you stay plugged-in. And three, true power is beyond you but accessible for you. Jesus' words to his disciples in Acts 1:8 speak to these truths, especially about staying plugged-in and transcendent power being accessible. Jesus literally says, *“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...to be my witnesses....”* Could Jesus be any clearer?

I know that when we think of power, and gaining and using power, being a witness ain't on our list (excuse the grammar for dramatic effect). We want to use power in ways that are more superficially beneficial to ourselves; to bring ourselves more comfort, cash, influence, revenge, and other things for our satisfaction first, and then we may exercise our power to help others second. But imagine a world where every person yielded to the Holy Spirit and used their power to witness and serve others. That's God's dream and motivation to empower you.

That's also why we observe the 40-day season of Lent, and engage the various spiritual practices during the season. It helps to curb our appetite for personal power and self-gratification above all else, and to seek and seat God above all else. And the power of the Holy Spirit will grow stronger within us as we practice these disciplines. We will become more familiar with the person of the Holy Spirit, attune to Her leading, and the use of a holy power that does good in the world, including witnessing about the goodness of God. So stay plugged-in The Source of Power.

Reflection: Will you give up personal power for holy power from the Holy Spirit to do God's work? Will you become a witness for the Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit?



Day 41 - March 26, 2024

Scripture: Romans 15:13 ~ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Written by: Jessica Wasson

Hope. It's sometimes a scary word. I was watching a cop procedural show last week and one of the characters said something that has stuck with me. He said, "hope is dangerous. Cling to hope too long and it can paralyze you and get you stuck where you are, hoping things will change that never realistically can." (paraphrased) Gosh that's kind of depressing, isn't it? And maybe that is true for most worldly things, that hope is dangerous. But as believers, hope is a gift given to us to hold on to during the times of our lives when it seems lost. Hope is something we can rely on - hope for better times ahead. That hope is given to us by the Holy Spirit and it can power us through our darkest moments, if only we will hold on to it. That same cop procedural show also quoted George Iles in later seasons: "hope is faith holding out its hand in the dark." Our faith in God and everything He has done for us and will do for us is what gives us (or should) hope.

Reflection: When in your life have you had to cling to hope? Where have you seen the Holy Spirit at work as you clung to that hope? How can you help others find hope?



Day 42 - March 27, 2024

Scripture: John 14:25-26 ~ *All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

This is one of my husband Ben's favorite scriptures because it is a beautiful description of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the least talked about person in the Trinity because it is often the most difficult to understand. I once asked children to explain who is God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The best answer I ever heard came from a 7 year old who said "The Holy Spirit is God and Jesus in your heart". BAM! Mike drop! The Holy Spirit is our Advocate, to do what Jesus did for us while he was here on earth. The Holy Spirit keeps God close to us by nudging us to live and love just as Jesus did. God knew that as humans we would get distracted, confused, lazy and self absorbed without reminders. Jesus could not stay with humans forever, but we were not left to our own devices. The Holy Spirit is alive and working in and through us each and every day. Our job is to pay attention and go where the Spirit leads. I think it is wonderful that God knows us so well that God has done everything possible to help us become more Christ-like everyday. We will not achieve that on this side of heaven, but we have everything we need to give it our best.

Reflection: The Holy Spirit is present within each one of us who profess Jesus is Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit works in and through us. Take time to write down at least one story of how the Holy Spirit worked in or through you and how you knew it could only be the work of the Holy Spirit.



Day 43 - March 28, 2024

Scripture: Luke 24:36-49~ *(selected verses)- While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you.".....Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in this name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.*

Written by: Pastor Lizz Bridges

After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples. Before he left, he emphasized his role in human salvation, how people must repent and have faith, and that the disciples would receive power from on high, the Spirit of God, upon them, to

be able to do all these things. Jesus promised them they would not be alone on the journey without him—the Holy Spirit would come, offering God’s power in their weaknesses. Since Jesus now resides in heaven, at the right hand of God, the Holy Spirit indwells within those who love Jesus, to guide us in our life’s journey. Just like the disciples who needed understanding and the power of the Spirit, we do, too. As we celebrate Easter in the next week, we remember that we are redeemed, we are to repent and be forgiven, and we are offered eternal life, all because of the sacrifice of death, and the miracle of resurrection. Christ defeated death for us. All we need to do is believe and turn to him. The Holy Spirit helps us to understand that truth in our lives.

Reflection: How is the Spirit speaking God’s truth to you? Is it easy or difficult to ignore the Spirit’s promptings? How have you responded lately to God’s pull on your heart?



Day 44 - March 29, 2024

Scripture: Acts 2:1-41~ *(selected verses)*- *This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

Written by: Pastor Alan Clark

This is a portion of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. The miracle of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit has just occurred and our impulsive friend, Peter, steps up to preach to the gathering of folks. In his explanation of who Jesus is, he gets to this part where he describes the presence and power of evil people that prevailed and put Jesus to death. In our lives, we experience times when wrong prevails. It even was able to put the Son of God to death. We cannot expect to be insulated against evil if even our Savior fell victim to it. But we also have the surety that we will be freed from the agony of wrongdoing, because it is impossible (as Peter says) for it to triumph in the end. God will free us from the grasp of evil. The final word from God is that life and love will prevail, will overcome. Thank you, God!

Reflection: How do you think the people felt on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit poured out over them? What does it mean to you that we still have access to that same power today?



Day 45 - March 30, 2024

Scripture: Luke 23:50-56~ *Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.*

Written by: Pastor Margret Fields

Holy Week is the week between Palm Sunday, in which Jesus arrives as a hero in Jerusalem, to the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. We know what happens on Thursday of that week, also known as Maundy Thursday, or Mandate Thursday in which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and gave the commandment to love one another just as Jesus had loved them. We know Jesus was betrayed and taken away by Roman officials to be put on "trial" and sentenced to death on a cross. Jesus died on what we know as Good Friday. His body was laid in a tomb and then on Sunday the tomb was empty. What we don't know much about is what happened between the burial and the empty tomb. It was Sabbath, which means those who loved Jesus were prohibited from working, which kept them away. Instead, the faithful followers waited. They kept vigil. What are we doing between Good Friday and Easter. We also keep vigil. The in between can be difficult. However, God wastes nothing, and the time between death and resurrection is not wasted either. On the Sabbath, while the faithful waited, God was at work. As we wait for Easter morning, it is not idle time. God is at work in the world and in us.

Reflection: Most of us do not like to wait. It is not in our nature. Sometimes we pray for patience, which God often responds by giving us more things to wait on. It can be difficult to see how God is at work in the middle of our waiting, but we can often see it later. Reflect on a time when God was at work in your waiting. Write it down and keep it somewhere that you can find it next time you are in a season of waiting.



Day 46 - March 31, 2024 - Happy Easter!!

Scripture: Luke 24:5b - *He is not here, but has risen.*

Written by: Pastor Kyland Dobbins

If a newscaster, like Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather, or Tom Brokaw broke into your regularly scheduled television program to bring you some breaking news, you knew it was important! You and your family needed to pay attention to be in-the-know because this was likely going to affect your life in some way. Well, when God's powerful presence is manifested on earth in your life and mine, it's real breaking news—it interrupts the normally scheduled program of our lives and it changes everything for the better! When there is breaking news from God, nothing is the same anymore...things turn around from what they used to be...the crooked paths become straight...the high places become low...sinners become saints...and all wrongs become right! When God comes on the scene, it's real breaking news and you ought to pay attention to it! And what better breaking news is there than HE IS RISEN?

I imagine that the women disciples reacted like any of us would when they heard this breaking news about Jesus' resurrection. But consider the source: they heard it from the angels who not only told them but showed them the empty tomb. The male disciples certainly didn't believe the women and ran to see for themselves. In that day and age, those disciples had the testimony of angels and an empty grave. What do we have today to believe this life-changing breaking news? We have way more proof today than they did in antiquity.

So here's how I know that Jesus is risen and is alive. The easiest way for anybody to prove Jesus wasn't resurrected is to produce the dead body of Jesus Christ. Can you imagine the eternal victory that Satan and atheists would have against the people of God and The Church? But here's more to consider:

- We have found the Titanic at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean
- We have found the grave King Tutankhamen
- We have found the Terra-cotta Army of the first emperor of China
- We have found the city of Pompeii and all those thousands of years under the ashes
- We have found the skeleton of Lucy, the oldest human bone remains that challenges the Big Bang theory
- We have found a Dead Sea Scrolls
- We've found the Rosetta Stone
- We have found Hitler's hidden bunker
- We have found the ancient city of Troy

- We have even found the remains of the buried city of Jericho

We have found mostly everything in history we wanted to find. But the one thing that remains we have yet to find is the body of Jesus Christ. That would change everything. But we haven't found it. You know why? Because there is no dead body but only a risen, glorified body! Hallelujah!

Reflection: Do you believe Jesus has been resurrected from the dead? How would you prove it to others if they asked with doubt or disbelief in their tone? How do you prove other phenomenal breaking news to others?

Notes

A series of horizontal lines intended for writing notes, consisting of 25 parallel lines.

