

**LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
2025**



*Media Presbyterian
Church*

**30 E. BALTIMORE AVENUE
MEDIA, PA 19063**

PHONE 610.566.3944 | WWW.MEDIAPRESBYTERIAN.ORG



Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Submitted by: Steve Buxton, Elder

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-17

I encourage you to take a minute and read it before you read this! That will help you understand the context of what I'm going to say.

Firstly, this Psalm was written by King David after having been confronted by Nathan after David's series of transgressions surrounding his involvement with Bathsheba. He pleads with God to "blot out my transgressions" and "wash me thoroughly from my iniquity". He doesn't go to the Tabernacle and sacrifice an animal to cover his sin because ultimately he knows this is a transaction that belongs to himself and God alone. We see elsewhere (Isaiah 1:11: "I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls lambs and goats" that the sacrificial system was inadequate to truly satisfy the justice of God. Secondly, David goes back to point to his having been born and even conceived in sin. He acknowledges his basic sinful nature, his "original sin". Malcom Muggeridge once said, "The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact."

We know we don't have to teach a child to misbehave, to be petulant, to throw tantrums if they don't get what they want when they want it. We have to do the opposite, they have to be disciplined and molded into productive members of society.

Finally, he implores God to "create in me a clean heart" and "renew a steadfast spirit within me". He even points to the Holy Spirit of God as the key to that. This is an Old Testament example of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Again, sacrificing an animal to cover sin would not accomplish what David is asking for. Only the work of the Holy Spirit can renew, revive, and reform.

What should we take from this? We are all sinful human beings. We are descendants of Adam and Eve, indeed conceived with a sinful nature. We sin because we are sinners, right from birth. We need to be forgiven by our Creator. The good news ("gospel") is that He has made a way for justice to be served – the cross of Christ.

The miracle isn't that there is only ONE WAY to be forgiven, the miracle is that there is ANY way for sinful human beings to be reconciled to a HOLY God. Jesus paid a price He didn't owe because we owed a price we couldn't pay!

I encourage you to use Psalm 51 as a model prayer to your Creator today. God bless you.

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Submitted by: Kate Meehan, Elder

Scripture: Exodus 5:10-23

Our Monday night Bible study group has been studying the book of Micah for several weeks. Micah is all about God's justice and mercy. In particular, God was displeased with the rulers and rich people of Micah's day who exploited and oppressed the people supposedly within their care. God condemns the exploiters and lifts up the oppressed. In this story from Exodus, we see Pharaoh and his system of slavery in peak form in their oppression of the Israelites. Not only were the Jews enslaved and treated cruelly, in this chapter we see Pharaoh strike back hard against them in petty retaliation for requesting time off to worship God.

For making that simple request, Pharaoh ordered them to gather their own straw – and maintain the same quota of brick production at the same time. If they failed, they were harshly beaten. I think most would agree that Pharaoh's decrees were unjust and cruel. In their anguish, the people cried out to God. God heard their prayers and responded in a spectacular way to deliver them (approximately 2 million in all) from slavery in Egypt. This dramatic episode reminds us that God hears our prayers, despises injustice, and will step in in our times of need and crisis. Are you experiencing an injustice of some kind? Cry out to God get near to Him in prayer, and He will deliver you.

Prayer: Holy God, you are almighty, just true and good. I know you want what is best for me. Cover me with your love and protection. I trust you and submit to you completely. Amen.

Friday, March 7, 2025

Submitted by: Tom Palmer, Elder

Scripture: Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

When was the last time you felt overwhelmed? For some, it may be a constant state of how they feel at the time. It could be the loss of a loved one. For others, it might just be a bad day. All of us have encountered this feeling. Even our young ones feel this as they start and continue in school. So much comes at us at once. It is easy to become overwhelmed. It can also be a roller coaster from the peaks of wonderful events to the valleys of just the opposite.

Being overwhelmed usually means we may need some prayer. Prayer from others and prayer from ourselves. Prayer helps to lead us where this Psalm is trying to take us, to Our Lord. Reading the words of this Psalm provides great comfort. These words also enliven the spirit inside us. When we remind ourselves of the great refuge that is Our Lord, we can begin to move through that which is overwhelming us. Prayer is one of the most direct ways of addressing Our Lord. It is a vast gift which enables us. We can pray in thanks, or we can pray in lament. Prayer covers all the bases of our concerns, joys, regrets, or praises. Psalm 91 is a verse that reminds me of the importance of prayer. Our prayer is a way of showing both our humility and our love for Our Lord, no matter what we may be praying about.

In this devotion I am committed to increasing my prayer with Our Lord. In so doing I hope to move even closer to God. I offer the same to any reader of this devotion. Make a commitment to yourself to increase how much you pray to Our Lord. You may find the result miraculous.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for Your Word and the gift of prayer. In this prayer, I ask for your strength for all who feel overwhelmed. We need your grace and strength Lord to face many of the challenges that are present in our world. Enable us to pray just a little bit more so that we can feel your ultimate refuge and salvation.

In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Submitted by: Ty Harvey, Children's and Youth Director

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, John 12:27-36

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 reminds us that there is a season for everything in life—a time to be born and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh. This passage reassures us that God is sovereign over every moment, orchestrating the events of our lives according to His divine purpose. Yet, even when we understand that seasons change, it can be difficult to accept the painful ones. In John 12:27-36, Jesus wrestled with His approaching death, acknowledging His troubled soul but choosing to glorify the Father. Saying in verse 27-28a “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” His response teaches us that in every season—whether joyful or sorrowful—we are called to trust in God’s perfect plan and seek His glory above all else. Jesus urges us to walk in the light, for darkness will not last forever. In other words, have faith today. Even in times of uncertainty, God’s light continues to shine. No season is wasted when we remain close to Christ, for He guides us through every trial and triumph. When we surrender to God’s timing, we find peace, knowing that His purposes are good. May we embrace each season with faith and walk in the light of Christ, trusting that He leads us toward eternal hope.

Prayer: God, thank you for the seasons of life, each one held in your perfect hands. When we face uncertainty and sorrow, help us to trust in your divine plan, just as Jesus did. Let us walk in Your light, embracing every moment with faith and surrender. May we glorify you in all things, knowing that your timing is always right. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Monday, March 10, 2025

Submitted by: Doug Crosby, Deacon

Scripture: Psalm 17, 1 Chronicles 21:1-17, 1 John 2-6

The Old Testament can be encouraging in our search for God's presence in our lives. Take the sheep herder, David, who through his strong faith in God, becomes the leader of Israel. There are many examples like David's accomplishments that are against all odds. Though David, like us, is not perfect, he acknowledges his sins and accepts God's punishment over being put into the hands of his enemies. David knows that he will be treated fairly by God for only He shows Mercy and Grace.

David's family legacy does not show a lineage of kings except for the one that counts, Jesus. This should bring hope to all of us that our lives will be worth living to its fullest in Christ. During this season of Lent, as in 1 John 2:1-2 (Bible Panorama), a mark of new birth is not to settle for sin. Please Christ with a habitual lifestyle. If there is sin, Christ is there to receive our confession and forgive us of our sins. This is the message that should be shared with the world!

Prayer: Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

when I speak, You hear me,
when I ask for your presence, You show me,
when I need you close, You keep me,
when I am fearful, You hide me,
when I need protection, You deliver me,
when I honor you, You bless me.

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Submitted by: Renee Erickson, Deacon

Scripture: Zechariah 3:1-10

"Jeshua's clothing was filthy as he stood there before the angel. So the angel said to the others standing there, "Take off his filthy clothes." And turning to Jeshua, he said, "See, I have taken away your sins, and now I am giving you these fine new clothes." (Zechariah 3:3, 4)
"Jeshua, the high priest, and all other priests, you are symbols of things to come. Soon I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. . . and I will remove the sins of this land in a single day." (Zechariah 3:8 , 9)

During the season of Lent, we are called to meditate more closely on our own sinfulness and the unfathomable gift of righteousness that God has given us through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Notice that God is the agent of all the action in our passage. One of my favorite Christian authors, Catherine Marshall, once had a vision similar to Zechariah's – She had died and entered a huge room filled with people she had known and loved waiting to welcome her. Then she noticed her filthy clothing and she wept. But immediately she received beautiful new clothing, the righteous of Christ Himself.

Sometimes it is helpful to have a visual to help us focus and marvel. Reading and singing the words of hymns can also vividly remind us of what happened on that cross for us.

“And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” Charles Wesley

“At the Cross” and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” Isaac Watts

“Amazing Grace” John Newton

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus. Please forgive me for every time I have forgotten what You have done for me, and for everyone else in this whole, wide world. To God be the glory.

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Submitted by: Joe Hare, Clerk of Session

Scripture: Luke 21:34-22:6

Jesus repeatedly warned his disciples during the latter part of his ministry to stay alert and be ready for his return. But what does being ready mean? Does it mean knowing the exact time of his return—the day or the hour? No, we can't know that. It is only known to the Father in Heaven. So what does it mean? It means to live with faithful vigilance, expectation, and hope for Jesus' return. He stands near and can return at any time.

When we have responsibilities to meet, supervision is vital. A good supervisor helps to keep us on track. God is the ultimate supervisor who wants what is best for us. Let us stay awake to welcome Him when He comes.

Prayer can be difficult sometimes. Remember that the strength we need to pray comes from God alone. We just need to hang in there!

During this time of Lent, we wait and watch and pray.

Prayer: Holy and righteous Father, Eternal God and Creator of the universe, work in me your righteous will to make me ready for your Son's glorious return. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Submitted by: Dana Riker Jackson, Elder

Scripture: Psalm 27; Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philippians 3:2-12
Calling on the name of the Lord, Seeking His Guidance and The Goal of Life

It is interesting that these three books and scripture verses were put together. The title you see that I have given this devotion is because what I got out of reading these scriptures is a process of how to live our best life. This is how God spoke to me.

First, Genesis 13: 1-7 demonstrates that frequently calling on the name of the Lord for guidance or help is an afterthought. We do it when we find ourselves in circumstances that are not ideal or that we do not desire. One of the descriptors in my study bible from these verses says how prayer can be our greatest time saver if we would only think to "Call on the Name of the Lord" first, before making any decisions or changes. Maybe there would be less strife.

Second, Psalm 27 needs to be our rally cry for what we are experiencing in our world right now. It would not hurt to read and pray about Psalm 27 every day for at least the next 4 years. Part of Psalm 27 is about Seeking God's Guidance and maybe not the way you might think. **Here is what my study bible says that I think is worth sharing.**

"Life is full of decisions, and if we want to make the right choices; those that glorify God and benefit us and others; we need God's guidance. The following seven words will help us in seeking His direction.

1. **Cleansing.** We need to ask God, Is anything in my life hindering me from hearing what You are saying? If so, what is it? Cleansing comes from confession (1 John 1:9)
2. **Surrendering.** We must submit to whatever God instructs us to do. Sometimes we find it difficult to move ahead because we want to know step two before we complete step one of God's will. However, we must surrender ourselves to His timing and guidance. Obeying the will of God is both humbling and an uplifting experience. (1 Peter: 5-6)
3. **Asking.** James 4:2 reports, "You do not have because you do not ask." God promises that when we ask according to His will, He hears us. And when we know that He hears us, we know He will answer. (1 John 5:14,15) Here is the hard part...even though the answer may come over a long period of time.
4. **Meditating.** The more time we spend in communication with God, listening for His word to us, the clearer our path will become.
5. **Believing.** In Mark's Gospel, we learn that when we ask, we must believe He is going to give us what we ask as long as it is in alignment with His will. (Mark 11: 22-24) Therefore, trust that He will show you what to do.
6. **Waiting.** This is very hard for me and why I need to work on trust. God promises that he acts on our behalf when we wait for Him. (Is. 64:4) If we run ahead of Him and try to fix things on our own or manipulate circumstances, we will most certainly be disappointed. However, if we wait on the Lord, then our sovereign, divine, omnipotent God will act on our behalf. It is our choice, and I will add, we must own that.
7. **Receiving.** When we obediently seek the will of God, we can be sure that He'll hear us and give us the wisdom we need to make the right choices. (Matthew 7:7, 8; James 1:5) And once we know His will, we have a responsibility to embrace His direction and obey Him completely."

This list is not easy to do, but so incredibly powerful. Which leads me to the last scripture in Philippians 3 that in my bible is entitled "The Goal of Life." The first verse says to rejoice in the Lord. Then it comes with some warnings about putting your faith and trust in the flesh. This scripture tells us that what is more important than your outward appearance is what your heart communicates. Do we portray God's wondrous mercy and grace that we receive when we are saved?

I will end this devotion with Philippians 3 verse 4 “If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more.” This is how my study bible explains this verse. “When Paul writes concerning the flesh, he is speaking of our human nature, our earthly desires, inclinations, and carnal strength. Our flesh does not follow God. In fact, it is often in complete opposition to Him (Romans 7) Rather it seeks after pleasure and finds importance in accomplishments, wealth, beauty and so on. The Spirit on the other hand, always directs us to becoming more like Christ through obedience. Paul underscored the fact that true religion is never a matter of carrying out traditions and rituals but is always based in a genuine an intimate relationship with God.

The other lesson here is also how adversity can bring us closer to God and how God will use adversity to grow our faith.

Prayer: Jesus, help us to remember to call on your name first with everything we think, say, or do. Help us to take the time to seek Your guidance and wisdom. To truly listen and then trust and obey what we hear you telling us. Lord, we desire a growing and intimate relationship with you so that we can be your beacon of light and hope that this world so desperately needs. Amen.

Friday, March 14, 2025

Submitted by: Dana Riker Jackson, Elder

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

Psalm 27 – Our rally cry as Christians. I really am going to start to read this everyday to start my morning devotions. Especially during times like these.

Genesis 14:17-24 – The message I get from this scripture is that we must remember the source of all our blessings is God. And, when we are victorious or successful, to acknowledge those that God put into our lives to help us to be victorious and recognize them. Do not become prideful, saying “Look what I accomplished.” God knows. I know I must work on this as recognition is more important to me than it should be.

Philippians 3: 17-20 – What jumps out at me the most with this scripture is verse 20 – “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” I love what my study bible lesson says because it is how I have been feeling and the

encouragement I need....”As believers, sometimes the way the world functions may seem strange, even unconscionable. And often, we may be persecuted for our relationship with Jesus and the stand we take for what is right. (Mark 13:13, John 15: 18-20, 1 Peter 4:12, 13 and John 3: 13 But do not be discouraged – we are not home yet. (John 14:2, 2 Cor. 5:8, Hebrews 11:13

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being in control. Help us to trust and to have faith that you will be victorious over the enemy who has way too much power and influence right now. We need you Lord more than ever. Use us to be your feet, your hands, and your heart to shine the light, the hope, and the love that exists in your care. You will be victorious! Amen!

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Matthew 23:37-39

Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”) is a traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. It does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

Follow the four steps;

1. Read the scripture;
2. Meditate on the meaning of the scripture;
3. Pray for God’s word to be revealed to you;
4. Contemplate the Word of God and what message He might have for you.

Monday, March 17, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: John 11:4

It’s not hard to imagine the desperation of these two biblical sisters, Mary and Martha, who sent a messenger to Jesus, communicating to Him the dire condition of their brother Lazarus. It’s now or never, Lord!

You need to get here. One of your best friends is dying! They knew what they were seeing, feeling, and what everyone around them was saying. The combination of all these things created the filter through which they were processing reality. Lazarus was dying. And then Lazarus was dead. And Jesus, for whatever odd reason, “when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was” (John 11:6), rather than beating it down to Bethany as fast as He could get there. It was over. Everything was over. Right? Wrong. Because nothing is over until Jesus says it’s over.

You probably know what happened with Lazarus—how Jesus, arriving four days after the man’s body had been wrapped in a linen shroud and laid in a tomb, told someone to take away the stone from the cave-like opening. Then He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43, nasb). A dead man came to life that day on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

But do you believe dead things can still come to life, even now, in the place where you live? Because nothing is over till Jesus says it’s over—regardless of what you see, feel, or what everyone is telling you.

The illness that Lazarus faced was not going to “end in death,” Jesus said. “No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (John 11:5, niv). He didn’t say that Lazarus wasn’t going to die. He just said that in the end, Lazarus wouldn’t be dead. This ordeal that His friends and family were enduring was infused with a higher purpose that would result in God receiving maximum glory.

So hold in your hands today the lifeless remains of whatever situation in your life you’ve concluded is over—something in your family, job, health, or something that keeps hounding you from your past. You know what it is. And you may have convinced yourself that it’s never getting any better.

But not everything that dies ends in death. It’s not over until Jesus says it’s over. And He never gets over resurrecting things that can bring Him the glory due His name.

Prayer: Lord, please birth in me an increased level of faith, and help me see the situations in my life through Your eyes and Your authority rather than my own. I believe that through relationship with You, I can resist limiting my vision to what's right in front of me. Thank You that I'm not relegated merely to what I can see and feel, or what others are saying, or even what I'm thinking. I choose to base my reality on what You've said, knowing that You will be faithful to Your promises. You can do anything, Lord. I surrender my situation to Your sovereignty and goodness, trusting that You can do anything and that You will do what's best. In Jesus' name, amen.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: John 13:1-4

It was time. The hour had come—the hour for suffering and atonement. The feedings were over. No more miracles. No more healings. No more mountainside sermons. No more calming storms. All of that was in the past.

Just Jesus, in a room with twelve men who would change the world. The Upper Room Discourse was Jesus' pregame speech, the final chalk talk. Amazingly, though, knowing His time had come, the first thing Jesus said was nothing. The first thing He communicated was through action. What He did was the most supreme act of humility in all of God's Word. He washed the disciples' filthy feet.

Notice the timing (when He served). In John 13:1–2, the Holy Spirit inspired John to carefully denote the time signatures: now, before, when, hour, to the end, during. It's not just that Jesus humbled Himself; it's when He did it. He did it within 24 hours of the cross. Within three or four hours of the Garden of Gethsemane. Knowing His arrest was imminent. Knowing what was coming: the mockery, the spit, the crown of thorns, the sign over His head, the dark sky, His sorrowing mother at His feet, the sword in His side. The greatest single act of humility came at the time of greatest pressure and pain. The lesson for us is this: When it's hardest to love, humble yourself.

And notice the motivation (*why* He served). We aren't often privy to Jesus' thoughts, but here, we know exactly what He's thinking: **“that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God”** (13:3). In Jesus' mind was this: *I know how this ends. I know this won't last forever. I know this isn't my ultimate, final fate. I came from the Father, and I'm going back home.* These are thoughts of authority and identity. He knew who He was. He knew how all this would end. The lesson for us is this: The promises of God shape our present and are our future reality.

Like Jesus, look at the big picture and humble yourself. You know who you are. You know whose you are. You know how this will all end. You know where you're going. That perspective enables you to do some difficult things—like humbling yourself.

And notice the actions (*how* He served). John 13:4–5 includes seven action verbs: *rose, laid, took, tied, poured, wash, and wipe.* Jesus worked. And this was such serious, dirty work that He changed into slave clothes. This wasn't a ceremony. It was grimy, sweaty, humbling, difficult, smelly, time-consuming work.

And that's what we're called to do. To humble ourselves and serve, as Jesus did.

Prayer: Father God, teach me to serve as Jesus did. When it's hardest to love, teach me to humble myself. I know who I am, whose I am, how all this will end, and where I'm going, and that secure sense of identity frees me to serve. Teach me to humble myself and serve as Jesus did—with love and in action. Thank You for the Servant-King, Jesus, and make me more like Him, I pray in His matchless name, amen.

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Submitted by: Tom Jackson, Elder

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20: 1-22

In this passage King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah are threatened by a “vast army” of Moabites and Ammonites (and some Meunites). We're not told exactly how many soldiers either side had, but the situation clearly seemed dire for the people of Judah. Instead of seeking help from neighboring countries, devising a clever military strategy, or seeking to bargain with the enemy, the king declared a fast for all Judah. This required all of the people to get out of their daily routines, come together, and get involved.

Jehoshaphat then prayed publicly to inquire of God what they should do. The Spirit of the Lord spoke through Jahaziel, who told the king and all of the people, “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.” The people of Judah went out to face the enemy as God had directed, and He caused the enemy soldiers to turn on each other, destroying them and leaving Judah unharmed.

God’s people were constantly surrounded and outnumbered by their neighbors. The Hebrew Scriptures contain several instances like this, in which the people are threatened and face a choice as to whether to seek God’s help and obey His command, or to go their own way and seek solutions according to their own judgment. When they chose to humble themselves and seek (and follow) God’s guidance they were safe and provided for; when they chose to follow their own way, sooner or later they were defeated. To make matters worse, every time they went their own way they drew further from the one true God and became more inclined to worship other gods, eventually leading to their downfall.

We may not face challenges exactly like this in our lives, but we do face a constant choice of whether to fight our “battles” ourselves or to seek God’s guidance and follow His path to a solution. Even in times when doing things our way seems to work out OK, we still are being drawn away from the relationship He seeks to have with us.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember to approach all of my challenges and decisions with humility, bearing in mind Your word and Your Way, and that the battle belongs to You. You are all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere, so how could my solutions be better than yours? Guide my thoughts, my words, and my actions, and I leave the consequences to you.

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Submitted by: Luanne Crosby, Elder

Scripture: Psalm 63: 1-8

The landscape setting for this psalm locates David in the Judean Wilderness, where it is quite dry and barren. No better location to experience thirst!

What do you thirst for? Which of your thirsts are in need of nourishing? Which ones are damaging and in need of starvation? Where do you find refreshing water for your most profound thirsts? Psalm 63 provides powerful guidance to navigate these questions.

Every human being is spiritually thirsty. Deep thirst frequently stems from a displacement of the water we truly need by other things that falsely claim to be as good or even better than the “true water” itself. In our culture, we clearly face a daily concentration of suggested things we may purchase to satisfy our various thirsts. Unfortunately, these result in quenches that are short lived and usually replaced by another thirst with an equally disappointing outcome.

Psalm 63 declares that our thirsts go far beyond water or anything else this world can tangibly provide. God’s wonderful creation on earth and its bounty allow our physical hunger and thirst to be well-satisfied. However, it will never be enough to satisfy our deepest thirst. God wired that thirst inside of us to drive us to him and his love. Psalm 63 reminds us that we are to be an active participant in our relationship with God.

In contrast to the shallowness of many of our thirsts, the psalm emphasizes the depth of our most essential thirst by referencing the soul. The season of Lent calls us to focus our attention on our greater thirst, that which emanates from the very core of our being, and to remember that the only thing that can ever satisfy that most profound of thirsts is the steadfast love of God.

Prayer: Let us pray.

God, help us make Psalm 63 : 1-8 more and more true in our hearts and in our lives. Remind us that our spiritual survival will not be long without being fed by our relationship with you. Help us realize that your presence is as life-sustaining as water and food. God, we love you. We praise you. We worship you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Friday, March 21, 2025

Submitted by: Tom Palmer, Elder

Scripture: Psalms 63: 1-8

No matter where we are at any given time, we may find ourselves in the same position as David when this Psalm was written, in the wilderness. This Psalm is a reassurance of our faith as we travel the journey of life and beyond. Our faith is the bedrock of our relationship with God. How strong is that bedrock in your life? The first line of this Psalm takes us right to that place. "O God, thou art". It reminds us of how our faith is weaved into the fabric of everything we experience. Whether it is struggle or success, grief or joy, or simply navigating everyday life; our faith in God is at the core of how we manage all our experiences. From the moment we wake each day, it is our faith which gets our engines going. We don't know what today is going to bring but our faith in God is the enablement to go into that 'wilderness'. We can go into each day knowing we are being held up by His Hand. Some days are better than others and our faith can be tested. It is in those times especially when we must lean into our faith harder than ever before. What are we giving back? Our faith is also at the core of what we return to our Lord. Remember to give thanks and praise in every way possible, every day. The Lord is our sanctuary, here today and into eternity. All you need to do is turn towards Him. Let us remember this as we experience what the Lord brings to us each day.

Prayer: Thank you, Heavenly Father, for always being there through our joys and sorrows. In this prayer I give thanks to You and ask You for Your continued help. I need You in every moment of my life Lord. Help me to keep You at the center of all that I am and all that I do. I ask this not only for me Lord, but for all Your children.
In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Submitted by: Tom Jackson, Elder

Scripture: Isaiah 5: 1-7, Luke 6: 43-45

At the start of the fifth chapter of Isaiah, the author describes God's provision and care for his people, Israel, as tending a vineyard. After taking great care to clear the ground, plant the vineyard, and protect it, the vineyard yielded only bad fruit. The Lord asks, "What more could I have done," and concludes that there is nothing left to do but remove His protection from the vineyard and let it be overrun and destroyed. Verse 7 makes clear what caused God to consider that His work had borne bad fruit; "And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." The rest of the chapter describes more indictments of the people of Israel, particularly the wealthy, with six "woes" to punish their indifference, neglect, and injustice for the poor.

The passage from Luke's gospel echoes Isaiah's words, showing God's continuing concern for the behavior who probably considered themselves to be His people. Verse 43 says "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit." Verse 45 adds that good things come from the good stored in one's heart, and that evil also comes out of the heart. Good doesn't come from a heart with evil in it, and vice-versa.

If we desire to bear good fruit, as God intends for all of His people, we must first be sure to have good stored up in our hearts. That's not something that we can do by our own will or good intentions; we need to continually seek the Lord's guidance and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us.

Prayer: Lord, help me to "Trust in the Lord with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). That is the best, and only way, to make sure that I bear good fruit, as you intend for your children. Amen.

Monday, March 24, 2025

Submitted by: David Layton, Elder

Scripture: Psalm 39, Jeremiah 11:1-17, Romans 2:1-11

Psalm 39 reminds us that life is short, and we dwell as strangers before the Lord. David asks the blessing before his departure from amongst the living.

Jeremiah 11 speaks to the disobedience of Israel and the visiting of the curses of the covenant not kept.

Romans 2 talks of the folly of passing judgement. God does not show favoritism, and we are to be led to repentance rather than judging.

In this season of Lent, remember that God is ours and we are his.

As in Colossians 3, we are to put aside our old nature of immorality, lust and greed and put on kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Remember that our Lord went up to the Cross and died for us and our sin: so, act accordingly. Offer yourselves up to be transformed and committed to each other and the world at large.

Prayer: O Lord, God Almighty, grant us the blessings of wisdom to be new creations in your image and the strength to maintain it. Strengthen our faith in Your Son and lead us in our ways.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Ezekiel 17:1-10

Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”) is a traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. It does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

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Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Isaiah 40:21-22

Imagine a summer night, sitting on the deck with family and friends. Low in the background is the familiar hum of grasshoppers. How much do grasshoppers in the lawn affect your evening? Not much—they hardly even register. Isaiah likens grasshoppers to the entire human race before God and His awesome purposes (40:22).

While God *sits*, *stretches*, and *spreads*—the powerful verbs Isaiah uses to describe His effortless, universe-shaping work—we squeak, like a pack of tiny grasshoppers hidden in the grass. That’s a healthy dose of perspective. We might envision ourselves as critical to the Lord’s plan, but we aren’t. He doesn’t need us. He doesn’t need anyone.

When you face that sobering truth, your natural response might be, “Don’t I matter at all to God?” That’s not the point. The point is that God loves you because He chooses to.

Get rid of the twisted thinking that God loves you because He saw something in you that attracted Him. While that may be how human relationships work, don’t project those motives onto the Lord. God loves you because He chooses to.

At first that feels hard to swallow. We might think, *I want God to care for me because He really likes me*. But if He only loves us because of who we are, then we have to lie to ourselves about who we are in order to earn His love. We have to see ourselves as good and worthy, full of redeeming and admirable qualities. The Bible assures us we aren’t good (Psalm 14:3), and our “good deeds” don’t impress God (Isaiah 64:6). He doesn’t love us any more—or any less—because of who we are or what we do. He loves us simply because in His mercy He chooses to.

How freeing! There’s no risk of losing God’s love. You can’t forfeit His love because of who you are, no matter how corrupt your heart. You’re not removed from His love because of what you’ve done, no matter how vile your sins. You can never step outside the circle of God’s love, no matter who you are or what you do—because it’s not about you; it’s about Him.

Let's humbly change our perspectives. This may need to be a daily exercise so you don't default to your natural way of thinking. Remind yourself of these truths: I am loved because God loves me. What's good in me is Christ in me. Stop worrying about your performance, constantly trying to prove to God, to yourself, or to others how good and worthy you are.

Only then will you discover the freedom to love God more fully, because you understand how little any of us deserve His love. And only then will you find the freedom to love others more freely, because you are simply passing on what you've freely received.

Prayer: God of all grace, thank You for choosing to love me and for reminding me I can stop trying to earn Your love. I can never be good enough or do enough good things to impress You. When I'm honest I see that I'm small, sinful, and weak. And when I realize how much You've forgiven me, my love for You grows. Help me to live in the freedom of grace, accepting that You love me no matter what. Just as I have freely received Your grace, help me freely give grace to others—all because of Jesus, in whose name I pray, amen.

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Submitted by: Jean Furey, Deacon

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

There is a saying that says growing old is not for the faint of heart. Every time it rains or the weather changes I discover pain in joints I didn't even know I had. Then I must say that I can verify this saying. But pain is not reserved for those of us with aging "tents." Perhaps it is better said that living life is not for the faint of heart. All kinds of pain can impact us on our life's journey.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul's reference to his body as a tent reflects the physical abuse and frailty of his body during his ministry. He contrasts this to the home that awaits us, "a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." He reminds us as we are buffeted by life's trials and tribulations to keep our eyes on the prize. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." While we may weaken physically, we grow spiritually. "Therefore we do not lose heart." We press on.

Prayer: Heavenly Father,

We thank you that as we carry the burdens of this life that You walk with us. We thank you that our suffering helps us to prepare the way for your Eternal Glory. Help us to be a light to others along the way. Thank you for your Son Jesus, who lights the way for us. Amen.

Friday, March 28, 2025

Submitted by: David Kolva, Choir Member

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:6-15

In the season of Lent, we reflect on the journey Christ made to the cross for our redemption. This passage from 2 Corinthians reminds us that we live as citizens of God's kingdom, even while we are still on earth. In this life, we live by faith, not by sight. It is a reminder that Lent is not just a time for personal reflection but also for reorienting our lives to the truth of the Gospel and the eternal hope we have in Christ. Just as Christ gave His life for us, we are called to live not for ourselves, but for Him who died and was raised for us (v. 15).

Paul's words also remind us that while we are temporarily separated from God by our earthly existence, Christ has already reconciled us to the Father through His death and resurrection. We are no longer strangers or enemies but are called into a new relationship with God and with one another. As we reflect on Christ's sacrifice this Lenten season, we are reminded that the heart of Christian living is not about fulfilling our own desires, but about seeking to please God, following His will and sharing His love with others.

In living by faith and not by sight we emphasize the importance of trusting in God's promises, especially when we do not see the full picture. We remember that our faith is not based on what is immediately visible but on the unseen reality of God's kingdom, as revealed in Christ.

Paul writes that Christ died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:15). Lent is a time to examine how our lives reflect Christ's self-giving love.

Prayer: Lord, during this season of Lent, help us to be fully aware of the sacrificial love of Christ. May His love compel us to live not for ourselves, but for Him. Teach us to live by faith and be ambassadors of reconciliation, bringing peace and hope to those around us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Submitted by: Steve Buxton, Elder

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

This devotional is based on Luke 15:1-10. This provides us the account of Jesus accepting the 'rejects' of that culture coming near Him. Tax collectors were despised, harlots were abhorred, and even the commoners were largely ignored or scoffed at by the religious leaders of the day. They were astounded that Jesus would be not only allowing these people to come near Him, He even would eat with them!! How does Jesus respond? He provides multiple examples of things they could relate to. A shepherd would leave the flock to look for one lost lamb. If they/we misplace a coin (insert any item of value! they/we will look and look until we find it – we will be frustrated or even haunted until we find it!

Jesus said, ""In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

What can we learn from this passage? This should cry out to us how important each and every one of us is to God. Think about it – our almighty, all powerful, all knowing Creator is concerned about anyone and everyone He is not reconciled with. Down through the ages He has been reconciled to seemingly billions of people by now, but that's not enough. He still is out there actively seeking any who are lost! He values everyone who has placed their faith in Him, but is not satisfied. The love of God is incomprehensible.

What does He ask? We see the word “repent” – a word we rarely hear in pulpits anymore! The word repent means to “do a 180” – turn and go in the opposite direction you’re headed behaviorally. The woman caught in adultery was told by Jesus that He did not condemn her, but to “go and sin no more”! We cannot do anything to merit our forgiveness, Jesus paid for it all on the cross. However, what we can do is to demonstrate the genuine nature of our faith by changing our behavior – by repenting!

We are God’s instruments, His vessels for seeking out and rescuing His lost sheep. We are His witnesses, we are His ambassadors, so we should be available for Him to use.

I suggest you pray to the Lord and offer yourself to be used by Him to seek those in your orbit who are lost and wandering, perhaps even unaware of the danger they are headed for. Tomorrow is promised to none of us, the time is short, maybe shorter than we all realize. Raise you hand today, and say to the Lord, “Here I am, use me”!

Monday, March 31, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Psalm 53

Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading” is a traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. It does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

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Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

The Christian life is both a crisis and a process. It begins in a crisis called conversion, and continues through a process called sanctification.

Sanctification is the progression by which God takes one of His forgiven children and daily transforms him or her into the image of Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 describes it: **“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”**

Throughout this transformation there is a continual cycle of crisis and process. Our sinful hearts wander lazily from God, and He graciously uses the crisis of some painful circumstance to bring us back. At other times, we stubbornly refuse to be changed in a particular area and God’s abundant goodness brings us to our knees. As Romans 2:4 depicts: **“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”**

Each of these crisis points could easily be described as a time when God shakes complacency and compromise from our souls. Like hymn writer Robert Robinson penned in 1757, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it / Prone to leave the God I love.” How immensely grateful we should be that God continuously reaches out and takes hold of us again, and again, and again.

Do you long to remain within the joyful confines of a vibrant relationship with Christ? If your answer, like mine, is a resounding “yes,” let these questions probe your mind, heart and will:

- *Am I increasing in my knowledge of God and His Word?*
- *How much power does God’s Word have over my life? Can it change my opinion?*
- *Am I allowing a particular sin to exist in my life for days, weeks, or months?*

As a follower of Jesus Christ, don't lay your head on your pillow tonight without getting these matters right with God. Say, "Anything You want to teach me, Lord, I am willing to learn. Anything You want to change in me, I am available to receive."

Christians are God's people 'in process'. Salvation rightly dispels our fear of hell, but may we also be shaken from complacency, walking in holy fear and bold freedom with the living God.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, that You are passionate about my transformation. Please forgive me for resenting and resisting Your attempts to change me. I choose now to cooperate fully with your desire to transform me. Thank You for loving me enough to make me like Jesus, in whose name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday April 2, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Genesis 25:21-22

Everyone is born with a disposition, but it doesn't always show up as dramatically as twins warring in the womb. Maybe it's putting the knives point-up versus point-down in the dishwasher. Or recharging through being alone as opposed to being in a big group. Regardless of how it manifests, your disposition is something God gives you. It's your natural mental outlook; your predominant tendency or leaning; your prevailing point of view.

God intends it for good, but because of our sinfulness, our disposition gets bent. When this happens, what were neutral tendencies can lead to strongholds.

Notice the word struggled in Genesis 25. The Hebrew word means crushing or oppressing. This implies that the children were warring inside Rebekah which, needless to say, is not typical baby movement. Here's what I want you to get from this: Disposition affects every relationship and every decision. It's the filter installed on your thinking through which you process reality. It's the reason four people on a street corner can all watch the same accident and have different opinions about it.

When Rebekah gave birth to her twins, “The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau’s heel” (Genesis 25:25–26).

Why was he holding his brother’s heel? Because he wanted to be born *first*. The name *Jacob* means *heel catcher* or *heel grabber*. It’s the idea of wanting to find a way, even if it involves deception. *Jacob* can also mean to get ahead of the other.

Do you see how their dispositions were already right there? God’s Word is not saying, “Oh! How interesting! How random! He was holding onto his heel. Isn’t that funny?” No. That’s not what the Bible is saying at all. It’s revealing that what they will become is present in the womb and in their delivery. Later we see the boys’ dispositions end up influencing the fact that Esau sold his birthright to his brother for a bowl of stew.

If you want to think differently and break out of strongholds that plague you, you have to examine your own disposition. Do you see that you were born with a way of thinking that you have battled your whole life? It’s easy to slip into thoughts like, This isn’t a way; this is the way. This isn’t a good way; this is the right way.

How you process what happens in your home, kids, marriage, finances, work, church—it all goes through the filter in your mind. That’s where the strongholds, arguments, and lofty opinions begin to take up residence.

Dispositions are God-given, but Satan always tries to distort what God intends for good. So take a moment and let this truth settle in your heart: You cannot change your disposition. Nor does God want you to change it. You are perfectly suited for what God wants you to do. Instead, become aware of strongholds that have developed out of your disposition, and make it your daily goal to take your thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. That’s the key to discovering and destroying the strongholds of disposition.

Prayer: Father, thank You for purposefully knitting me together in my mother's womb. Please give me wisdom and understanding about my disposition, and open my eyes to destructive strongholds in my life. Remind and empower me to take my thoughts captive before You, and grant me the willingness to be changed. Thank You, Lord, for always finishing what You start, and for being faithful to complete Your work. I pray this in the Name that is above every name—the matchless name of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Submitted by: Susan Kassab, Elder

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

Psalm 126 is a song of joy and restoration, reflecting on God's faithfulness in bringing His people back from exile. It acknowledges the pain of past suffering but rejoices in the promise of renewal. Isaiah 43:1-7 reassures God's people that they are chosen, loved, and protected. Despite trials, He is with them, leading them through difficulties and calling them by name. Philippians 2:19-24 highlights Timothy's example of selfless service and faithfulness in caring for others, emphasizing the importance of humility and genuine concern in our Christian Walk.

As we journey through Lent, these passages remind us of the themes of restoration, trust, and service. Just as God restored Israel's fortunes and promised His abiding presence, He calls us to trust Him in our seasons of waiting. Lent is often a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal. We may sow in tears, as Psalm 126 describes, but God promises that joy will come in due time.

Isaiah 43 reassures us that God is with us no matter what we face—rivers of uncertainty, fires of suffering, or the pressures of the world. He calls us by name and reminds us that we are His. In moments of doubt or difficulty, we can hold on to this truth: our identity is found in Him, and He is always working for our good.

Paul's words about Timothy in Philippians challenge us to live with selflessness and faithfulness. During Lent, we are invited to examine our hearts. Are we serving with humility? Are we genuinely concerned for the well-being of others? Like Timothy, we are called to reflect Christ's love in our daily lives.

Be encouraged – God's provision never fails!

Friday, April 4, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Luke 11:1-2

Roughly 60 percent of Americans claim they pray daily. Another nearly 20 percent claim to pray weekly. Those statistics suggest that all kinds of praying is going on, yet there also seems to be evidence that what we call “prayer” doesn’t really fit God’s definition or expectations. If we dig under people’s reports about praying a lot, we would discover that many are going through the motions, treating prayer the same way they approach rolling dice. As we develop the core disciplines of a sincere faith, we must include work on prayer. Even those of us who have grown up around praying people need instruction. Who better to talk to us about prayer than Jesus Christ.

The twelve disciples spent three years hanging out with Jesus. They watched Him, traveled with Him, and listened to Him. As far as we know, the disciples’ request was, **“Lord, teach us to pray.”**

Jesus had a habit of retreating from the demanding crowds and spending time alone with His Father in conversation, as seen in Mark 1:35. **“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”** Not surprising that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, eternally in perfect communion with the Father, prioritized prayer. Jesus responded to the disciples’ request by introducing what we now call the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:2–4, see also the longer version recorded in Matthew 6:9–13).

Before He even gave them the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer, He graciously encouraged them with the words, **“When you pray.”** Not “if you pray” but “when you pray”—Jesus knew the disciples would pray. Driven by circumstances or as a spiritual discipline, the disciples would be talking to the Father in prayer.

They needed that expectation as much as we do. Our failure to pray rarely rises from lack of technique or subject matter. We often fail at prayer because we don’t keep at it. We try prayer but quickly give up. Yet prayer is the breathing of our spiritual life. Just as we can’t afford to stop pulling air into our lungs, so we also can’t survive spiritually without the healthy respirations of prayer.

When the disciples asked Jesus, “**Lord, teach us to pray,**” that simple request was in and of itself a prayer. Make that your persistent prayer for a few days. Ask Him out loud. If a specific direction or thought doesn’t come to mind, then read and reflect on the Lord’s Prayer. Spin off from certain lines of Jesus’ prayer, and expound with your own words. By giving us a model, Jesus wasn’t inviting rote repetition; He was offering a healthy pattern. Just as He taught His disciples to pray, so He is willing to teach us all things (John 14:26)—including how to pray.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray. When I open my eyes in the morning, teach me to pray. When my head rests on the pillow at night, teach me to pray. When troubles, successes, sadness, and joy come my way, teach me to pray. When I fear, teach me to pray. When I am calm and resolved, teach me to pray. When I plan and when I fail, teach me to pray. And when I consider how very little time I have left on this earth, O Lord, teach me to pray. In Jesus’ name always, amen.

Saturday, April 5, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Mark 10:13-16

The day the overzealous disciples decided to play bodyguards for Jesus, they picked the wrong people to exclude. “Get back!” the disciples warned the children, chasing them away. Jesus’ reaction was strong and indignant. Not only did He welcome the kids, but He also invited them close. He “**took them in his arms and blessed them**” (10:16). That combination of physical touch and life-giving words must have marked those kids for life. And we can do the same for the kids in our lives.

The Hebrew word *blessing* means literally *to bow the knee*. The blessing is a formula of words that express fondness for, confidence in, and recognition of a specific person. The blessing was a bestowal of favor, a transaction that gave material and spiritual benefit to the recipient. It happened as a process—a person grew up receiving words of blessing. But then, at a certain time in Jewish families, there was a ceremony to give the blessing. While special emphasis was placed on the firstborn, every child in a family received this blessing (Genesis 48:1—49:27).

The father would call together some of his friends, and they would form a circle around this son or daughter. In bestowing the blessing, a Hebrew dad would speak into the life of his teenager, affirming the child and offering wisdom about life. At the conclusion, the father would awkwardly take the son or daughter up on his shoulders and dance around the room in celebration, saying publicly in front of his peers, “This is my beloved son [or daughter], in whom I am well pleased.” You might recognize those words as the same ones God the Father used to bless His Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). The significance of the blessing is modeled in the Father-Son relationship in the Trinity. Blessing is not a generic compliment or shallow affirmation, as in, “Boy! You’re a good soccer player,” or, “Wow! Daddy’s girl looks pretty today!” Rather, blessing is parental bestowal of favor, acceptance, and goodwill, rooted in *who the person is*—not just the child’s appearance or accomplishments but in his very personhood. As parents or significant people in a child’s life, we can have a powerful ministry by speaking words of blessing.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that You are a God who holds us close and blesses us. Thank You for modeling that when You spoke words of favor over Your Son. Thank You for the example of Jesus, who did not withhold blessing from the neediest but drew them into His arms and spoke life-giving words over them. Open my eyes to see children close to me who crave and deserve to be blessed, and teach me to follow Your example. In the name of Jesus, Your beloved Son, with whom You are well pleased, amen.

Monday, April 7, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Hebrews 10:19-25

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Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Ephesians 5:18

You can never wring quite as much refreshment from a week's vacation as you anticipated in the months leading up to it. You can never maintain the thrill and excitement of a big weekend football game, not at the level you felt it in those final, nail-biting moments. You can never make quite as much room as you'd like for another helping or two of your favorites from Thanksgiving dinner.

But when it comes to experiencing life with the Holy Spirit, who lives right there on the inside of you, there is no way to get too much of Him. He is unlike any other filling you think you want from any other source. You especially recognize this distinction whenever you seek satisfaction from a sinful pleasure or indulgence. Sin advertises itself as a sure, long-lasting solution to whatever you seem to be missing. It claims to be as inexhaustible as your thirst for feeling better. But in the process of gravitating there, you find yourself not only losing control to it but eventually dragging the bottom of it. You went too far, you fell for the promise, and you discovered again—as all of us do—why each and every sinful substitute is always so lacking.

But there's no such thing as too much in the matter of the Holy Spirit. You can't want Him too much, can't talk about Him too much, can't put Him in charge of too much, and can't enjoy His peace and presence too much. Even when you forfeit His filling by living counter to His wise and truthful direction, by grieving and quenching Him, by resisting His management of your life, you can be filled back up with Him in a moment by simply returning in repentance and surrender.

I've been preaching on the Holy Spirit for as many years as I've been a pastor, which is getting to be a really long time now. And every time I do, even if I'm focusing on Him for the entirety of the message, I'm left only barely scratching the surface . . . because what can be learned of the Spirit never ends. What can be observed of His constant working and ministry is more than anyone can fathom. Nothing that's become torn and divided in your life or relationships is beyond His unifying capabilities. The places the Spirit of God can reach through His loving conviction and transform through His life-giving power are as deep as any addiction that has entwined itself around your heart.

So why attempt to live another day without doing it under His complete empowerment? Trying to live the Christian life without Him is like trying to run a marathon without water, like trying to turn on a lamp without electricity, like trying to operate a car without gasoline. To live without the filling of the Holy Spirit is absolutely impossible.

But nothing is impossible to the one He fills and permeates, controls and influences.

And that's a lot more than we can say for everything else.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to make me a new person from the inside out. And thank You for proving all other things to be insufficient at providing what I truly want and need. In all those places where You know I've been resisting Your presence and not trusting Your loving commands, lead me to surrender and discover the truth—that Your Spirit is more than enough for me. Now and forever. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

Submitted by: Kate Meehan, Elder

Scripture: Luke 18:31-34

When there's something important happening on the highway that requires drivers to shift lanes – road work, break downs, accident, and so forth, road crews set up a pattern of warnings well in advance of the trouble spot. This allows drivers to safely merge over before their lane is blocked. Nevertheless, there are drivers who don't see or ignore the signs directing them to shift lanes, and inevitably end up stuck at the ultimate barrier, waiting for the last chance to merge in.

In today's reading, Jesus is telling his disciples what will happen to him in the coming days. But this is not the first time prophecies about the Messiah's fate were given to the Jewish people. Did you know that the Old Testament is full of references to Jesus and what would happen to him? Steve Buxton has been leading a great class on Christology (the study of Christ) – you can check it out under recorded teachings online: <https://www.mediapresbyterian.org/spiritual-formation>

The predictions Jesus references in this passage are also found in the Old Testament: Psalm 41:5-9

(Jesus' betrayal), Isaiah 53:4-7 and Psalm 22:16-18 (the crucifixion), and Psalm 16:10 (the resurrection). Yet the disciples did not know what he was talking about. They missed the important signs. Those signs are important for us in retrospect to support our faith by showing how Jesus' life and death fulfilled those prophecies, and therefore, he must be the Messiah. The signs help us to trust that what the Bible says is true. It should also help us to believe that biblical prophecies of what is yet to come are also reliable. We need to pay attention to the important signs there to guide us the right way.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you that you are trustworthy and reliable. You have never failed to fulfill your promises. My faith is weak. Help me in my unbelief. Amen.

Thursday, April 10, 2025

Submitted by: Tom Palmer, Elder

Scripture: Psalms 31: 9-16

As I read this part of Psalm 31, I felt these words were about finding some reassurance after we fail in the eyes of Our Lord, which we all do.

While we are all individuals and unique as God made us, we all share a common trait (burden?) of being sinners. The extent of our iniquities may differ, but all of us need the cleansing power of God's mercy and forgiveness. When we reveal ourselves and our iniquities to the Lord and ask for His help, we receive His gifts of mercy and forgiveness. God knows all and is everything. Therefore, He knows of our shortcomings and when they get the best of us, He always has known this about us. When we encounter challenges that cause us to stumble, Our Lord looks to us to turn towards Him. These are the times when our faith weakens, when we are distracted or angry. God knows all these things. All we need to do is turn *towards* him.

The world is full of distractions that can weaken our faith. We can easily be consumed by these distractions, even in the name of faithful service. We can become blinded by what is in front of us. The words in this verse help us to see, to remember with all things to start with Our Lord so His mercy and grace may fill us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your mercy and grace. My life is full of both wondrous and not so wondrous things. I ask for Your help to start with You in all things. I know that when I have You with me, the sorrows are more bearable, and the joys are more wondrous. Lord, help me to not only seek Your sanctuary, but to start each day within it.

Help me to keep You at the center of all that I am and all that I do. I ask this not only for me Lord, but for all Your children.

In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, April 11, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: John 17:17

If you were to look around from your seat in church, I hope you'd see a lot of familiar faces. But most likely, if you looked a little closer, you might also realize that a familiar face is missing.

Perhaps it's not someone you knew very well. You'd spoken; you'd introduced yourself; you'd had one or two conversations; you knew a little bit about them. But mainly you were just accustomed to seeing them there, and now they're gone. Do you wonder where they went?

People wander from church for a number of different reasons. Some are prodigals—both young and old—who willfully, stubbornly become tired of being told what to do. Some are pleasure seekers who've simply found something else in life that makes them happier and seems like a better use of their time. Some are *wounded*, complete with a detailed story of how a person failed or disappointed them, leaving them disillusioned about God, the church, and Christian people. Some are *ashamed*, convinced they could never face the folks at church anymore because of what they've done. Some are just *distracted*. They were never really all that interested and hadn't plugged in too deeply anyway.

But if there's one common denominator in what causes people to stray, the book of James says it's that they wander **“from the truth”** (James 5:19, esv)—from what is both now and eternally true. And therefore they wander into darkness.

They may not realize it yet, if their house of cards is still standing. If you were to go talk with them, you'd probably hear all the reasons and rationalizations, all the blame-shifting explanations for why they're not in the fold right now. That's because the darkness that exists outside of the truth can sort of be navigated for a little while. People can learn to adapt. They can think it's exciting for a season.

But if something important was ripped away from them—if one of their kids were to be hurt in a car accident, or if they were given a bad piece of personal news from the doctor—they would immediately begin to realize they no longer knew which way was up. They would suddenly start flailing for a way to get out of the darkness.

It's often at that point that people will remember the person who cared enough to go looking for them. They'll remember the friend who came and reminded them of the truth, even when they didn't want to hear it. Jesus asked the Father to sanctify His people by the truth, saying:

“Your word is truth.” The psalmist said, **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”** (Psalm 119:105)—truth in the darkness. So when you notice that a familiar face is missing, one who perhaps woke up this morning or went to bed last night feeling lost in the dark, try to find out where they are. Go to them. And tell them the truth—about a God who loves them, a Father who seeks them, and a brother or sister in Christ who cares enough to go after them.

Prayer: Father, how Your heart longs for those of Your children who've wandered from the truth. Thank You for proving this reality in my own life by how You've loved and sought me in my wandering. I pray today that my heart would be in tune with Yours, that You would give me a passion not only for loving Your truth myself, but also for loving others enough to remind them of its strength and beauty. Please give me the courage to carry Your light into the darkness. In Jesus' name, amen.

Saturday, April 12, 2025

Submitted by: Jean Furey, Deacon

Scripture: Psalm 31:9-16

In Psalm 31 David is consumed by anguish from within and without. He asks for God's mercy in dealing with his own sins and afflictions which have rendered him weak with sorrow and without strength. In verses 9 and 10 we can hear his distress as he describes eyes weak with sorrow, a grief of soul and body, life consumed by anguish and years of groaning which he contributes to his own shortcomings. So, it is a time for David when he is beset by inner turmoil.

But David also feels an onslaught of forces outside of himself. In verses 10-13 he describes this attack. He experiences the “utter contempt of his neighbors” and is “an object of dread to my closest friends.” People flee from him on the streets, conspire against him, and plot to take his life. David is truly experiencing anguish from all sides. It is probably the lowest of all times for him.

In verses 14-16 we hear that David does not despair. He trusts in the Lord. He trusts that his times are in the Lords hands and that he will be delivered from his enemies. He asks for God's face to shine on his servant and save him in unfailing love.

Have you ever been in a time of total despair from within and without? A time where the weight of your burden is crushing to your soul?

Remember David's words:

You are my God.

My times are in Your hands,

Let your face shine on your servant.

Save me in Your unfailing love.

Prayer: Dear Lord Father God,

Thank you that in our worst times our hope remains in You. Thank you for carrying us in Your loving hands when we are too weak and broken to carry ourselves. Help us to trust in your goodness and timing. Thank you for sending Your son to carry our sins. Help us to continue on our way in Your service.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

Monday, April 14, 2025

Submitted by: Pastor Wanda Ford

Today, read and contemplate Psalm 36:5-10, Psalm 65:8, and Psalm 118:24

Thank and praise God for this day:

Father God, I thank you and praise you for this day you have made.

You joyfully create each day and spread your joy throughout the earth.

Everywhere that morning dawns and evening fades, you call forth

songs of joy. I praise you for the whispering wind that cools and

refreshes, for the songs of birds I hear singing in the trees, for the sun

with its warmth and brightness which reminds me of your unfailing love,

for the sweet scent of flowers as I breathe in their delightful fragrance,

for the water that quenches my physical thirst and the living water of

Jesus that quenches my spiritual thirst, for the food I eat that nourishes

my physical body, and for the spiritual food from your word that feeds

my soul. I praise you for the gift of family and friends. Thank you for

the companionship of pets. Thank you, God, for giving me life to enjoy

this day with you. Amen.

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

Submitted by: Eric MacDonald, Elder

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Foolishness, Part 1: When was the last time you paused to truly reflect on the heart of the Gospel? If I were to summarize it, I might say this:

A just and holy God cannot ignore sin, yet His love for us is so great that He sent Jesus—Himself part of the triune God—to take our sins upon Himself and die on the cross. Three days later, He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven. And one day, we will stand before Him in His full glory—if we have accepted this incredible gift and turned our hearts toward God.

Now, let's think about this using our modern, logical minds. By worldly standards, it seems foolish. And yet, our faith and experience tell us otherwise. What appears to be foolishness is, in fact, divine wisdom. As Scripture reminds us, God has made foolish the wisdom of the world, and His wisdom far surpasses human understanding.

Foolishness, Part 2: And who am I that God would use me? The "foolishness" of the Gospel isn't just that Christ died and rose again—it's that He did so *for us* and now works through *us* to share this good news. God chooses the weak, the overlooked, the seemingly unqualified. Who does that? Don't we, as humans, prefer experts? The wise, the wealthy, the successful?

Of course, God can use anyone. But the power of the Gospel shines brightest when He works through ordinary people — molding, shaping, and using us for His purposes. We cannot boast in ourselves, but through the Holy Spirit, we are strengthened to carry out this incredible calling. Those of us who have embraced this "foolish" Gospel know, both in our hearts and in our minds, that *this* is true wisdom. We are redeemed in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and sent forth to share God's message. God alone is the source of our life in Jesus Christ — *true* life. Amen!

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the sacrifice of Jesus, who redeemed us and made us one with You. Despite our foolishness, empower us through Your Holy Spirit to share Your love with those around us, both in our words and in our actions. In Your hands, our weaknesses become strengths so that we may bring glory to You. Amen.

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Dr. James MacDonald, JamesMacDonaldMinistries.org

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4-9a

Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading”) is a traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. It does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

Follow the four steps;

1. Read the scripture;
2. Meditate on the meaning of the scripture;
3. Pray for God’s word to be revealed to you;
4. Contemplate the Word of God and what message He might have for you.

Thursday, April 17, 2025

Submitted by: Tom Palmer, Elder

Scripture: Psalms 116 1-2, 9-16

Sin, forgiveness, and faith are three related elements of our spiritual journey. These are elements in all our lives which also challenge us. The last time I checked, we are all still sinners, at least in the eyes of Our Lord. This makes His Forgiveness so powerful in our lives. His Forgiveness restores and strengthens our faith.

I try not to sin, but I haven’t yet mastered anger and emotion. When I get angry, sin has a way of creeping around the scene, ready to pounce. This is where faith is so important to me. Faith beyond the anger that I may be feeling. Anger can be healthy if it leads to faith. Forgiveness is the other part of this trio. Whether I am the sinner or affected by the sins of another, forgiveness is the essential ingredient. It is unconditional forgiveness that frees us from the chains we put on ourselves. Those are the chains that keeps us from getting closer to God.

I believe our commitment to work on our faith helps us with sin and forgiveness. Faith is the means that we can return in our commitment to God. Living a life of increasing faith will help to fulfill the words in this Psalm. It enables us to return those gifts which have been given to us, especially through thanks and praise.

The joyful celebration of faith in God, whether alone or with others is among the greatest gifts Our Lord has bestowed upon us. Let us all give thanks every day for all the gifts which the Lord has provided. Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for Your Word and all that You have given us. Among those greatest gifts is my faith in You for which I am so grateful. You have given me the means to be with You. In this prayer, I ask that through my life my journey continues to lead me to You. I know there will be challenges. Help me to bring those challenges to You. There are no challenges which bind me when I am with You. I pray for the strength and grace that allows me to come closer to You.
In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Friday, April 18, 2025

Submitted by: Steve Buxton, Elder

Scripture: Hebrews 10:16-25

This devotional is based on Hebrews 10:16-25. I recommend you review it before reading this devotional. Ironically, we have no certainty of who wrote it! However, Hebrews is one of the most theologically rich New Testament books. This particular passage is an example of that - it provides several significant theological insights in just a few verses, and points to so many more.

It begins by quoting the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah in which he foreshadows the “New Covenant” God will make with His people. God reveals to Jeremiah a future time when He will imbed His law into the hearts and minds of His people. No longer will they be governed by external law (Mosaic Law), rather the “laws” of God will be internally driven. Furthermore, with this “New Covenant” God says He will “remember no more” the sins and iniquity of His people. God cannot forget, because He is omniscient – but He can CHOOSE not to remember.

In Old Testament days, nobody except the appointed Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and approach the presence of God. He could only do it once per year to sprinkle blood from a sacrifice to God to cover the sins of the nation. This pointed to the absolute holiness of God, and the sinfulness of man -- even supposedly, the most obedient of men. There were additionally a multitude of other sacrifices for the sins of the people. Then the atonement of Jesus Christ paid the full price for all our sins! This has led to us being purified to the extent we can approach our Holy God in a way even the Priests could not. We use the term "Justification", which means God views us "just as if" we had never sinned at all.

Finally, in this passage we are encouraged to practice fellowship and communion with other believers. This provides and establishes community, encouragement, as well as discipleship with fellow Christians. In our culture many people neglect assembling with other believers. This is detrimental to the individual and the Christian community. How we commune with each other has evolved in our society, but the primary need to gather with each other as believers, in whatever format we do it is imperative.

In summary, in Old Testament days God's people were instructed to do their best to obey the Mosaic Laws. God promises to them a future day when these external laws would be over-ridden by a New Covenant whereby God would implant His laws in the hearts and minds of His people. This was accomplished when Jesus while on the cross exclaimed, "it is finished", and the subsequent receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Pray with thanksgiving to our God of incredible grace! You and I haven't done anything to earn, deserve or merit the forgiveness God has offered us. He has invited (even implored) us to come into His presence, into personal relationship -- unlike the old covenant. Never forget how much God loves you -- He was willing to die for you, and in fact did.

Saturday, April 19, 2025

Submitted by: Rev. Dr. David Cagle

Scripture: Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24, 33

"I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath; he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light." (v 1-2) During the 36 hours from Good Friday to Easter morning, the Christian Church has celebrated the Easter Prayer Vigil. This can be a time of prayer and meditation, thinking about the darkness and devastation of Good Friday and the pain of grief in the world. It can be a time focusing on hope and anticipation of joy. Still others take the opportunity to look back over the mission and ministry of Jesus and discover new ways to emulate him in their own lives.

Theodicy is the theological attempt to reconcile our belief in a good, loving, all-powerful and all-knowing God with the reality of evil and suffering in the world. I cannot begin to answer the vast number of issues concerning theodicy in this brief Lenten Devotion. Very simplistically, I will say that sometimes our suffering is a consequence of our sinful actions, but other times our suffering is a consequence of the sinful actions of others. I personally believe that there are other times when our suffering is a result of our living in an imperfect world. While I believe in a Sovereign God who is actively involved in the course of history, guiding creation to God's intended future, I also believe that God has granted humanity and God's creation free will. We are free to make decision outside of the sovereign will of God's intended future. The Laws of Nature are also free to act outside of God's intended future, and when this happens cities burn, homes are flooded, and children die of cancer. In our scripture reading, the poet at first blames God as the source and the cause of his suffering. "He (God) has driven me and brought me into darkness without any light." (v 2) Perhaps there has been a time in all our lives when we too have felt that way. But ultimately the poet remembers, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The Steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end." (v21-22).

During this Easter Prayer Vigil, I hope you will ponder the darkness and devastation of our world today, but I pray you will also find hope in the joyful anticipation of Easter. On Good Friday, our Lord Jesus Christ took upon himself all the darkness and all the devastation of our sinful world, but on Easter morning death was defeated. God chose to be with us in our suffering and grief, ultimately to bring us back into God's intended future. But I also encourage you to look back over the mission and ministry of Jesus and discover new ways to emulate him in your own life, bringing hope and relief to the suffering and grief of others.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for being with us in the midst of our suffering. Thank you for suffering with us. May we in turn bring the light of your love to the suffering of others. Amen.