

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BY SALEM PASTORS, STAFF AND FACULTY

# THE G.O.A.T.

JESUS, THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME







Dear friend in Christ,

What a privilege it is to read God's Word and gain strength from it! The very last verse of John's Gospel account is profoundly interesting, if not a little humorous. "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (John 21:25) Wow. Jesus did a lot of stuff! I'm thankful for all that the Gospel writers DID write down.

This devotional book is a collection of various happenings from Jesus' life. The devotions were written by present-day disciples of Jesus who all serve the Lord on Salem's campus each day. Our prayer is that you receive encouragement in your faith as we journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. May you also echo John's words near the end of his Gospel where he writes, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

A suggestion for success: You may or may not be in the habit of reading God's Word each day. We hope and pray this devotional resource can be a daily source of encouragement and a habit-forming connection to our Savior. Consider reading the daily devotions on your own or with members of your family at a similar time each day. They are short enough that you probably only need a few minutes. Sundays are not included in the forty-day Lenten journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter. We look forward to sharing God's Word with you in person at Salem or online at [saalem4u.com](http://saalem4u.com) those days. May God encourage your heart and mind as you journey again to Jesus' cross and empty tomb!



*As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.*

- Matthew 4:18-20

---

*Heavenly Father, as we read the account of Jesus calling His first disciples we are amazed by how easily it appears they dropped everything and followed Him. We confess there are times when we are easily distracted by the things of this world rather than focused on You and fishing for people. Thank You for loving us all the way to the cross and giving us the opportunity to introduce others to You. Amen*

I can only begin to imagine what I would have done if Jesus came up to me while I was at work and suggested I leave my job and come follow Him.

What Jesus suggested probably didn't make a whole lot of sense to the early disciples either. "Let's go fish for people." What?!? But that is what Jesus did. He surprised people. He said and did things people didn't expect, and it caused a bit of a stir. So why would any of these men leave their jobs to follow Jesus? It's possible His reputation proceeded Him, but up to this point He hadn't done any miracles. He had grown up in Nazareth and now John the Baptist told people this man was the Lamb of God, but what did that really mean? I suppose word may have traveled that a voice came from heaven when Jesus was baptized. Even with all of that, I still wonder what I would have done if Jesus came and asked me to leave everything and follow Him?

Every time I read these verses I find myself amazed by the last few words. "*At once, they left their nets and followed Him.*" That seems a bit crazy to me. The Bible doesn't record they had to think about it or ask a few clarifying questions. They simply followed Jesus.

In many ways, we have far more answers than the first disciples did and Jesus is calling us to do the same thing. Yet we seem to have lots of questions or reasons why we can't quite do that.

As we walk this Lenten season, my prayer is that we find ourselves amazed again by Jesus who calls us to leave everything and follow Him as we learn to fish for people.



In the Luke 2 passage, Jesus' family has traveled for the Passover Feast. His family has left to return home when his parents realize Jesus is not among them. They searched for Him for three days only to find him in the temple studying and discussing scriptures with the teachers. Even as a boy, Jesus prioritized spending time reading, discussing and helping others understand God's Word. Jesus is the living Word of God. We read this in John 1:14. So we know that every time we read or hear scripture, we are spending time with Jesus.

Knowing all of this, I realize how much I fail in this area. I spend so little time reading the Bible compared to everything else. Satan loves this. One of His greatest tools is busyness. I am so busy working, raising a family, working out, eating, watching tv, and a million other things that I don't spend nearly enough time in God's Word. Thanks be to God that I have a Savior who understands my failures and loves me anyway. He sends his Holy Spirit to encourage me to repent and to make the necessary changes. Praise God that Jesus wants to spend time with me everyday and I can find Him just by opening the pages of my Bible.

This lent, I hope you will join me in specifically seeking out ways to spend more time in His Word. This devotion book is a great start. Look for Bible studies in person and online. Ask a friend to help you be accountable. Pray and ask for the Holy Spirit's help before you read and to encourage your walk in the Word. Most of all, prioritize Jesus; take a break from the busyness and be blessed.

*"After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."*

- Luke 2:48

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

- John 1:14

---

*Dear God - Thank You for Your Word. Thank You that we have the opportunity to spend time with You every time we study the Bible, which is Your love letter to us. Help us to make reading it a priority in our daily lives. Thank You for Jesus and His forgiveness when we fail. Thank You for His example of how important the Bible is for our faith walk.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*



*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saves us, not because of righteous things we have done but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.*

- Titus 3:4-6

---

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the people you place in our lives who reflect Your love and kindness. Give us eyes to see those who need You. Lord help us love them joyfully. Jesus, thank You for my grandmother. Her immense love for her family came from You. I pray I can be a powerful influence on my grandsons, honor my grandmother's memory and do it all with kindness and a smile. Amen.*

**Kindness with a smile:** It was just the way my grandma lived and approached life. She was a strong "pull up your boot straps" kind of lady. She trusted God's provision, period. She loved her family joyfully, always with kindness and a smile. She was never too busy to scoop me up and hold me tight. Nothing filled my heart more than to be safely in her arms.

Now in this season of my life, I have a fresh perspective on how she lived. She simply reflected Jesus. Jesus was perfectly selfless in everything He did. Kindness was His lifestyle. He took notice of the needy, intentionally and consistently seeking them out even when He was tired and weary. And I'm pretty sure He did that with a smile. Jesus was kindness in the flesh. His kindness is powerful. It breaks down barriers, changes lives and situations. He redeems, He makes us whole and gives us life. His kindness takes up residence in us the minute we surrender to His love. Jesus is never too busy to scoop me up and hold me tight. He reassures me, comforts me and listens to me. My Jesus.

As my grandmother was about to meet Jesus face to face, she awoke from a deep sleep. My mom quickly called me so grandma could say goodbye one last time. You know how you can hear someone smile when they speak? Well, in her soft tired and smiley voice she told me she loved me and to take care of my little guys. In that moment we were talking grandma to grandma. Those were her last words of kindness to me, and I'm pretty sure she did it with a smile.



I love how Jesus taught us so many lessons through parables. They are stories that apply to our lives and can have very basic or very deep meanings.

Something silly happened lately that made me think of the parable of the lost coin. Over the past couple of years, my AirPods (headphones) have been lost on many occasions. Normally, it is because my son has borrowed and forgotten to return them. This past weekend, they disappeared again, and I knew it was my fault. I was searching in every room and every nook and cranny for them. I had called my sister to make sure they didn't end up at her house. After a couple of days, I was definitely losing my patience. I checked the same spot for the fourth time and they fell out of a blanket! I called my sister right away because I was so excited to have found them!

In this parable, Jesus taught about a woman losing a coin. She searched and then rejoiced when she found it. The deeper meaning comes through the lesson that Jesus taught. He compared this to the angels rejoicing over a sinner who repents. As much joy as I had over finding a lost item, I cannot even imagine the rejoicing in heaven when a person believes in Jesus. Am I searching for those who need Jesus as intently as I was searching for my AirPods? I know He spent His life seeking and saving the lost. Reflecting over this story, I need to put in a lot more effort to do the same. I want to search as intently for people as I did my AirPods. I know this can be done with Jesus' help!

*Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

- Luke 15:8-10

---

*Dear Jesus: Thank You for the many parables that You have given us in Your Word. You taught so well throughout Your life and those teachings still apply to us today. Please help us to be more like You. Show us ways in which we can seek and save as You did. Empower us to be more like the woman trying to find the lost coin. We love You, Lord. Amen.*



*And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

- Matthew 9:10-13

*Father, thank You for sending Your Son so that I could know Your love. Jesus, thank You for always meeting me where I am and loving me no matter what. Holy Spirit, work in me so that I may be loving, kind, merciful and Christlike to everyone I meet. Teach me to meet people where they are, and to love them like You do. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

I'd love to meet Jesus in a bar.

I first met Jesus before I could breathe. My parents prayed over me before I was born. I was raised knowing who Jesus was and knowing that he loved me.

I felt like I met Jesus again when I was 15. I was bedbound for months after an extensive surgery. I felt like I hit rock bottom physically, mentally and spiritually. At that time, I felt like Jesus came to meet me every day. He met me in Scripture sent by friends, in family visits, in the way my parents took care of me.

I know people who met Jesus in a hospital, on a battlefield, in prison. These are some of the places we feel most vulnerable and hopeless. But here's the thing about rock bottom: when we reach rock bottom, we reach the Rock - Jesus. He meets us at our lowest, and He promises us *"I'm here, and I love you even now."*

In the Bible, Jesus met people on their own turf. He met them at the docks, in their homes, on the road, at the market. He didn't wait for people to come to him - though many did - instead, he sought out those in need.

Today, we won't run into Jesus himself at a bar, or a hospital, or a prison. But we will run into people, and we know that each person is deeply loved by Jesus and in need of Him. The Holy Spirit works in us to make us extensions of the love of Jesus. So wherever you find yourself, I hope you know that to someone around you, you may be the only Jesus they meet that day, year, or lifetime. Love them like Jesus does, and let them meet Him through you.







*Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord," and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been so well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.*

- Luke 6:46-49

*Jesus, let this season of Lent and our remembrance of Your obedience to Your Father, obedience to the point of death on the cross, humble us as we turn our own hearts towards obedience. Father, Your Word is wisdom and Your teachings are life-giving. Thank You for not forgetting us in our foolishness. Help us to build our lives with Christ as our firm foundation. Amen.*

*"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?"* Jesus is saying here, "You are not getting it." How often do we cry out to God for help when facing a struggle or sing his praises on Sunday morning, and then live lives indistinguishable from our unbelieving neighbors? If He is our firm foundation - the rock on which we stand - then why are we tossed around by the storms we face? Why do we live separately from Him?

We all would agree that running a marathon without training is a foolish idea. Even if you are not a runner, you know that it takes significant time and training to prep for long races. In fact, training for marathons requires a period where you build up your base, or foundation, of running before you start actual training. Wise runners utilize this time well so that when it is time for racing, they are strong, less prone to injury and have done the work required for the challenge ahead.

While we choose to enter races, we do not choose when struggles come our way. Jesus knows us. He sees us in our spiritual laziness and offers us guidance; a training plan, if you will. Faith is not a gift that comes wrapped. We joke about not asking God for patience because he will answer with opportunities to be patient. Faith, too, must be nourished, exercised and anchored.

If we truly believe that Jesus is who is says He is and that He can do what he says He can do, we would be wise to live our lives obedient to Him and to put into practice His teaching so that when the storms come for us, we are ready, knowing that Christ is with us.



From the time our feet hit the floor in the morning to the time our heads hit the pillow at night, life often moves at an unrelenting pace. Consequently, we find ourselves exhausted and depleted. We hunger and thirst for rest, yet it's the last thing we make time for.

On a daily basis Jesus traveled, preached, healed, encouraged, listened, comforted, and taught, but He also intentionally took time to pray and rest in the presence of God. Regular quiet time was a vital part of His life.

Jesus knew that He couldn't minister to others unless He allowed time for God to minister to Him. He knew that spending time with His Heavenly Father would strengthen Him, and give Him direction for whatever lay ahead. Being still before God reminded Jesus of God's presence and provision in His life. Jesus modeled that rest is a key component to a successful life. Being still is something that goes against our nature, but it's something we all need. So, what can we do to follow Jesus' example when it comes to rest? Be intentional. Make a plan. Benjamin Franklin said, *"If you are failing to plan, you are planning to fail."*

Right now, take out your phone, your planner, or calendar and set aside 5 minutes a day this week to rest with God, talk with Him, listen to a worship song, or read some scripture. Next week, extend it to 10 minutes. Ease into a time frame that is comfortable and doable for you.

Be still before God and let Him speak to you. Let Him strengthen you and surround you with His presence and peace.

*But Jesus often  
withdrew to lonely  
places and prayed.*

- Luke 5:16

---

*Dear God, help us to be  
like Jesus - to spend  
intentional and consistent  
time with You. Help us  
to find contentment in  
stillness. Show us what  
habits You want us to have  
in our lives. Show us what  
responsibilities to say "no"  
to and where we might  
need to ask for help. We  
need Your help, but we can  
do all things through Your  
strength. In Jesus' name,  
Amen*



*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

*But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

- Matthew 6:14-15

---

*Heavenly Father, I trust the truth of Your word, that You remove our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). Thank You for forgiving me and bringing me back into relationship with You; for sending Your Son to die on the cross to show us the true meaning of forgiveness. Help me to show that same forgiveness to others, so they can see You living in me. Amen.*

Right after Jesus gave us the most powerful prayer we can pray, The Lord's Prayer, He gave us a command. Do you know what it is? He commanded us to forgive.

*And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. Mark 11:25*

*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Luke 6:36-37*

*If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. Luke 17:3*

There are many more places in scripture where we can find this command. Perhaps because Jesus knew it would be so difficult for us to follow!

C.S. Lewis says that everybody loves the idea of forgiveness...until they actually have to forgive someone. He was an insightful guy. Forgiveness is a tremendous spiritual truth! What could possibly be better? When we genuinely go to the Father with repentance, instead of getting what we actually deserve, He is *"faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). He *"blots out" our transgression from the record and chooses to forget our sins* (Isaiah 43:25).

Isn't that awesome? I am so glad when God forgives me! The challenge is bringing it home, to my life. You don't really expect me to forgive people who have said hurtful things to me, do you?

Sorry, but it doesn't work like that. We must understand the spiritual truth of forgiveness, accept it, and...apply it. Spend some time re-reading the scriptures above. Then pray about them. Finally, you may need to pick up the phone and call someone. Do it today.



In today's world, obedience is lacking. Many associate it to a weakness or flaw in character, but the Bible calls us to be obedient, even unto the point of death. The 4th Commandment - Honor thy father and thy mother - means to love, respect and obey them. Jesus honored his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, by helping them and following their instruction. Jesus obeyed His Heavenly Father, by being obedient to His commandments. We are called to follow and obey the Father's commandments, but many of us don't these days.

Jesus was a reliable and honest 12-year-old who went to the temple to engage in discussion with the religious leaders of the time. They were astounded by His grasp of deep religious topics. Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem when His family left the city for Nazareth. It wasn't until much later that Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was not traveling with them in their caravan. So they returned to Jerusalem and after three days they found young Jesus in the temple. Like any mother, worried sick with anxiety for her child, Mary asked him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." Jesus responded, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Jesus, being obedient to his Father, was increasing in wisdom and knowledge. Who better to talk about the Father than His only begotten Son.

So children, "Honor your father and mother" (the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Exodus 20:12).

*Jesus responded,  
"Why did you seek me?  
Did you not know that  
I must be about my  
Father's business?"*

- Luke 2:49

---

*Dear Heavenly Father,  
help us to love, respect,  
and obey like Jesus did;  
even unto death. Help us to  
obey Your commandments  
so that we too may make  
our days long while we live  
in this land before You  
call us into eternity with  
You in heaven. Let us  
be obedient to those in  
authority, and in so doing,  
show others love and  
respect. Amen.*



*But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

- Luke 18:16-17

---

Dear Lord,

*Thank You for calling us  
Your children. Help us to  
sustain a child-like faith  
as we strive to fully and  
completely rely on You and  
Your promises, no matter  
what life throws our way.  
Thank You for sending  
Your Son, Jesus, and the  
promise of eternal life  
that His life, death, and  
resurrection guarantee us.*

Amen.

Jesus said, *"let the little children come to me."* This command was given to His disciples as they were admonishing the parents for bringing their children to Jesus. In the verses following, Jesus tells His disciples and the crowd that had gathered, *"anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* In this section of scripture, Jesus' statement *"like a little child,"* is referring to one who has total dependence and trust in God and His promises.

This was one of many teachable moments for the disciples as Jesus shared with them the necessity of welcoming young children in the presence of God. Little children are more inclined to have complete trust and total dependence on their parents and other adults who care for them.

As we get older and gain more life experiences, a challenge is maintaining the child-like faith Jesus refers to in Luke 18:16. Life is a roller coaster of ups and downs. As we continue to pursue this "child-like" faith, how do we maintain the trust and dependence Jesus teaches when we are faced with adversity, disappointment, challenges, or loss?

The Bible contains the wisdom and guidance we need to preserve our total dependence and trust in God's promises.



The world presents us with a seemingly endless array of choices for everything you can imagine. Sometimes it can be paralyzing.

We sit down to watch something new on TV, scroll through everything on Netflix, Apple+, and Hulu, and still can't find anything to click on. We search for a simple item on Amazon and after scrolling through the reviews on seventeen different options we still don't know what to buy. There's a lot of good stuff out there. But what is better?

Mary and Martha faced a similar situation when Jesus visited. There were lots of things to do - preparations to be made, food to be cooked, a house to be cleaned. They were all good things, and Martha was determined to do a great job. But Mary chose something different. She sat at the feet of Jesus, listened as He spoke words of truth and life, rested in His presence. And Jesus said, "*Mary chose what is better.*" He didn't invalidate Martha. He simply pointed from what is good to what is better.

I'm guessing your life is full of good stuff. A fulfilling career. A growing family. Sports teams. Rehearsals. House projects. Volunteer roles. But does filling your life up with what is good prevent you from experiencing what is better? Do you have time to sit at the feet of Jesus? Do you listen for His voice in prayer or in the Word? Do you experience the peace of His presence? This week, find a way to prioritize what is better. Block off a section of your calendar just for time with Jesus. Allow the good things to wait so the better things can take priority. In a world of seemingly endless choices, there's only one thing that's better than all the rest: Jesus.

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened up her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" The Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

- Luke 10:38-42

*Lord Jesus, help me to set aside what is good for the sake of what is better. Help me to prioritize my relationship with You by spending time with You: reading Your Word, praying to You, listening for Your voice, experiencing Your rest and peace. Help me not to get so caught up in activity that I don't take time for stillness. Help me choose what is better. In Your name I pray, amen.*



*"A record of the  
genealogy of  
Jesus Christ..."*

*- Matthew 1:1*

---

*Heavenly Father: Thank You  
for the rich lineage of faith  
with which You've blessed  
us. We pray that You would  
reveal Your plans to us so  
that we can move in Your  
will to accomplish Your  
purposes. Help us to  
pour our encouragement  
and wisdom into the  
next generation so that  
the family of God would  
continue to impact this  
world for Your glory.  
Amen.*

Matthew, a disciple, begins his Gospel account of Jesus' life by tracing His family history back to Abraham. In part, Matthew shares these details to legitimize Jesus to the Jewish people with whom he's sharing the gospel. But, as Christ followers, tracing the genealogy of Jesus gives us a rich understanding of the way God, our Father, chose to fulfill His promise of a Savior through people like you and me.

If you look closely, you'll recognize names, and, if you "know your Bible", you know that these people were deeply flawed. Tamar seduced her father-in-law to become pregnant; Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute before helping the Israelites; Ruth was a pagan until she married an Israelite. David seduced a married woman and sent her husband to the front lines of war to try to hide their sins.

Jesus, both God and man, entered the world through a human lineage to walk alongside us in our chaos and pain and to teach us how to navigate our relationships, trials, and temptations. Even better, through His perfect life, death, and resurrection, He is the atoning sacrifice which restores our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Every aspect of Jesus' life is a beautiful example of the extent to which God is willing to go to restore us into a close, loving relationship with Himself. When you think about the life of Jesus, consider the legacy of faith that came before Him. Don't lose sight of lessons we learn through His lineage: we will never be too flawed or far gone that we can't have a place in the family of God, and our past sins don't disqualify us from being able to be used by God for His plans and purposes!



As a native Houstonian who grew up not sleeping through hurricanes, this story of Jesus sleeping on a boat in a terrible storm has always stood out to me. How many times in our lives have we been awakened in our beds because of the terrible storm outside? Yet, in this story Jesus is on a boat in open water and sleeping through a storm that terrified the disciples. I imagine the boat must have been rocking, waves crashing and people shouting and running around doing all that they could to keep the boat afloat but still, Jesus slept.

Have you ever wondered how Jesus could sleep with something like this going on around him? I think the answer is quite simple: trust. Jesus trusted that God the Father would guard and protect Him, even amidst a terrible storm. The same is true for us. When we find ourselves surrounded by the storms in life, we can rest, trusting that God is with us and will protect us. Throughout life, we will experience times where we are terrified by the storms happening around us.

These may be literal storms filled with flooding, freezing, and strong winds or things happening in our lives that are out of our control in our families, at work, or in the world. Jesus' actions in this story show us a great example of how we can rest in him and trust that he will protect us through the storms of life.

There may be times where God quiets the storm, just as Jesus did in the boat, and we can respond with rejoicing and admiration. No matter what storms you find yourself in in life, I challenge you to rest, trusting that God will be with you and protect you even as the storm rages.

*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!"*

- Matthew 8:23-27

---

*God, help me to put my trust in You so that I can rest in your peace and presence amidst the storms in my life.*

*Help me remember that no matter what comes my way that You are with me and that I can always trust in You. Amen.*



*Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. - Mark 3:1-5*

---

*Jesus, thank You for being our healer. Thank You for seeing our most inward issues and complex pains. Nothing is too twisted or shriveled for You to restore. Help remind us of that daily through Your power and the presence Your spirit.*

*Let our brokenness be made whole for Your glory alone, Lord. Amen.*

I'm notoriously bad at stretching. I frequently jump out of bed and go out for a run within 5 minutes of my feet hitting the floor. Even at the spry age of 25, my body hasn't been very forgiving of this habit. While I understand its importance, I loathe the process of stretching. It's slow, painful, and feels like it's more trouble than it's worth. But my ankles would tell me otherwise, as they are a predictable pain point.

I've found I have some obvious pain points in my life as well - things I have ignored, neglected, or even kept hidden. In Mark 3, Jesus enters the synagogue on the Sabbath and spots a man with a shriveled hand. It doesn't say much about the man, but I imagine he was unassuming; quiet, to himself, maybe hiding his affliction in order not to offend anyone or draw attention. But Jesus sees him, calls him up in front of everyone, and gives him one simple command - "Stretch out your hand." Easier said than done for a man with a disability, right? Not to mention in front of a crowd of judgmental Pharisees. Nevertheless, the man obeys, and scripture tells us he was completely healed in that moment.

When Jesus asks us to stretch the shriveled parts of us, it can hurt. In our brokenness, we can believe whatever we are going through is too ugly, too dark, or too complicated for Him to fix. But Jesus is a healer. He heals neglected relationships, ignored sin struggles, hidden doubts and pain we're too embarrassed to show. Jesus sees us when no one else does. He relieves the tension of our afflictions and restores us with His love, grace, and mercy. Where does it hurt? Stretch out your hand to the ultimate healer.



*What an amazing thing it would be if some great King's son should go into a beggar's hut to nurse him in his illness, wash off his filth and do all the things which otherwise the beggar would have to do.*

*Surely all the world would gape with open mouths and would never think and talk enough about it! (Martin Luther)*

We have a God who has nothing to get and everything to give! Our God created us and designed us so that He would have creatures upon whom He could pour out His blessings. He loves us so much that His happiness comes from seeing us be the recipients of His many gifts. And He desires for us to receive His gifts in thankfulness and then allow ourselves to find happiness in the same way by giving and loving others.

However, all of this was ruined by our fall into sin. We now desire to get from others when we can and even push our spirituality and good works up to God, as if He somehow needs these things which we seek to offer!

Jesus declared, *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."* God becomes our servant. Like the King's Son, Jesus came to us to wash us clean and to demonstrate His Father's great love. He came, not to get, but to give His life as a ransom for us sinners. Not only did He become man, but He laid down His life as He humbled Himself to carry our afflictions and our sin, yes, the whole world's sin and death. God suffered and died for me! And this He did purely by grace, as a gift, for you and me. Can we ever think, praise or talk enough about it?

*Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done.*

*He came to serve not to be served - and then he gave away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage.*

- Matthew 20:28

---

*Thank You Lord, for taking my punishment upon Yourself.*

*Enable me to live my life as Your servant, blessed to be a blessing to others. Help me to serve with a loving, giving spirit.*

*Amen*



*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."*

- John 4:39-42

---

*Gracious Savior, help us to spend time with You. Bless us with a firm faith that trusts You to forgive the sins of our past, guide us in the present, and lead us to an eternal home with You for our forever future. Use us as Your powerful witnesses to our community. Thank You for your merciful love. In Jesus' saving name we pray, Amen.*

Imagine if a famous person came and visited your community for two days. Would you go and listen to her speak? Would you wait in line for his autograph or to take a selfie with him? Now, imagine that the famous person was believed to be an enemy to your country or people. How would you feel about spending extra time with that person then? Cue the Bible story of Jesus with the Samaritans in John 4.

In Bible times, Jews and Samaritans did not normally associate with one another (see John 4:9). The conflict between the two sides started way back in the Old Testament. One Bible commentator described it like this: *"The Jewish-Samaritan quarrel was more than 400 years old. But it smoldered as resentfully and as bitterly as ever"* (Barclay 151). Yet, Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman. Through one caring conversation, Jesus transformed her life from divorced and shame-filled outcast to powerful witness to her whole town. The Samaritans from Sychar were moved by the woman's testimony about Jesus. They went to see Him. They asked Him to hang around for a couple days. They fed Him. They secured a place for Him to stay. *"And because of his words many more became believers."* (John 4:41)

How do our lives connect with this story? Like the woman at the well, sometimes we question God and are ashamed of what we see in our past. Other times, however, we're like the people of Sychar who are curious about Jesus and come closer to see if what we've heard is true. May God bless us with a faith like those Samaritans who spent time with a Jew named Jesus and then declared: *"...we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."* (John 4:42)



There were so many times throughout Jesus' life and ministry that he was misunderstood! From the humility of His birth in a stable, to the lowly donkey He rode into Jerusalem—Jesus was not what people expected. Many were expecting the Messiah to be a conqueror to deliver them from oppression, not a rabbi from Nazareth.

As Jesus taught using metaphors and parables about God's love and our need to be saved from our sinfulness, crowds often left His sermons scratching their heads. Some of the Pharisees - men who had devoted their lives to learning the Scriptures - mistook Jesus' miracles as contradictions to God's Word.

When Jesus shared with His disciples that He would be betrayed, put to death, and rise again, His words left them confused, afraid, and asking questions among themselves. We see through their encounters with Jesus after His resurrection, that even his closest followers couldn't comprehend all that occurred.

How often do the circumstances of life leave us feeling lost and confused? Though we cling to the truth of Jesus' love and promises for us, it can be difficult to understand how He is working! I remember feeling this way as a child when my mom was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Doctors were honest that treatment would be harsh, have many side effects, and was not guaranteed to work. The chemo and radiation she received saved my mom's life, but took an extreme toll on her heart and body for the next 30 years. The bewilderment I felt at 9 years old, wondering why Jesus just didn't choose to fully heal my mom, is one I've felt at other times in life, too. It is comforting to know that Jesus' love is not dependent on our comprehension, and that its power does not waiver with our understanding!

*He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.*

- Mark 9:31-32

---

*Dear God, there are so many times in life that we long to understand Your ways, but our minds can't! We know Your ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours. Please give us wisdom to understand when You are trying to teach us. And when You are working in ways beyond our ability to understand, please give us Your grace and strength to trust You and Your love for us! Amen.*







Did Jesus scare people into following Him?  
Do we ever use fear when we share the gospel?  
Too often, Christians try to convince people to believe so they don't go to hell, or at best so they get to go to heaven some day. My 9-year-old heard this once and said to me, "If the point is to just get to heaven, then why don't Christians all commit suicide and go now?" Hmm...there must be a better gospel story than this! Look at Ephesians 2:10.

We were not created to avoid hell or to go to heaven. We were created to live in perfect relationships with one another and with God, to do meaningful work together for the benefit of all, to thrive in community without the weight of sin, pain, and sadness, and to worship God without restraint for all eternity.

That's a compelling message! We all want to live in a world like that. When we say, "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer, this is the kingdom Jesus was talking about. And He calls us to join Him in the work of imitating it, so that others get a taste of what life will be like when Jesus returns to redeem all things and his Kingdom fully comes.

If all we have is a weak gospel of hell-avoidance, then fear is an effective tool. But, if the kingdom of God on earth is a vision that we share with others, then we don't need fear. It's one they can already begin to experience here today. We just need to get busy doing the work that God created us for... loving our neighbors.

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

- Ephesians 2:10

---

*Jesus, You gave us the first glimpse of what Your eternal Kingdom will be like. You loved people, showed compassion, took care of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs and sacrificed everything to rescue and redeem us. Help us see the opportunities to do the good works You have prepared for us to do. We pray that others will see You when they look at us. Amen*



*I am the good shepherd.  
The good shepherd lays  
down his life for the sheep.*

- John 10:11

---

*Dear Heavenly Father,  
We thank You for watching  
over us and for being our  
Good Shepherd. Lead us  
to listen to Your voice.*

*We are sorry when we  
follow others and not  
You. Thank You for sending  
Jesus as our sacrifice.*

*In Jesus' name we pray,*

*Amen.*

*This devotion was written with the help of  
Mrs. Honeck's 3rd grade class.*

In John 10, Jesus is preaching to a crowd of people, revealing the truth of who He is. Jesus used the illustration of a shepherd as a reminder for us, the sheep, to follow Him.

Jesus warned the crowd that there were other people – “*thieves and robbers,*” (v. 8) who would come to “*steal and kill and destroy*” (v.10). He was warning the listeners of the false teachers, who were only worried about themselves. In verse 11, Jesus reassures the crowd - “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” Notice how Jesus says He is the “good” shepherd?

In this instance, the Greek translation for good, (kalos) means magnificent, to be excellent on all levels. Just like the shepherds were willing to lay down their lives for the sheep, our Good Shepherd not only was willing to lay down His life, but He actually did. He paid the ultimate price for our sins, because of His great love for us.



The entire story of Exodus rests on promises that God made to His people. True to its name, Exodus is about the departure of God's people from Egypt where they were slaves to Pharaoh. The book of Exodus showed God's promise of deliverance and His desire to "*dwell among them*" (Ex. 29:46). God rescued the Israelites in order to make Himself known through an ongoing covenant relationship based on His patience, grace, and forgiveness.

Even before Exodus, God promised Adam and Eve that He would send an even greater one who would come to "*crush evil's head*" (Gn. 3:15) and promised Abraham that He would give numerous descendants and love them with an everlasting love. Promises of deliverance and love has always been the way of the Lord. All of scripture rests on God's vow to redeem and restore His sinful, wayward people to Himself.

The grace God extends us is anchored in His promises of long ago and points us to how Jesus saves us now. He made a promise to rescue His people in ancient days, and He still makes that promise to us today. God promises to deliver us from our slavery to sin, to walk with us through the difficulties of this life, and He made a promise to bring us to our eternal home with Him one day.

*I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you out of the  
land of Egypt, out of the  
place of slavery.*

- Exodus 20:2

*He said to them, "This is what  
I told you while I was still  
with you: Everything must be  
fulfilled that is written about  
me in the Law of Moses, the  
Prophets and the Psalms."  
Then he opened their minds  
so they could understand the  
Scriptures.*

- Luke 24:44-45

---

*Lord God, we give You  
praise for Your unchanging  
nature and steadfast love  
that endures forever.  
Through the life, death  
and resurrection of Jesus,  
You fulfilled the promise  
to deliver us from our  
slavery to sin. Extend Your  
grace to us and forgive  
us when we wander away  
from You. Help us rest in  
Your promises of grace and  
forgiveness that are new  
each morning. Amen.*



*And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.*

*- Matthew 10:7-8*

---

*Gracious and All-Providing Father, Thank You for not only giving us all we need each day to sustain this life but You give us all we need to sustain eternal life. Through Your son Jesus, we have everything we need. We lack nothing. Help us to see everything we have as a gift to be used for Your kingdom work and may our lives reflect Your mission. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Have you ever wondered what the disciples were like? I imagine they must have been some pretty amazing speakers, resourceful with anything they came across, well-liked in the community, had a steady stream of income to support themselves, and certainly had a great understanding of Jesus' teachings. Actually, if you read any amount of the New Testament, you will quickly find that all of those things are false. In fact, most of the time, they are the complete opposite. In Matthew 10, Jesus has some powerful instructions on what they are to accomplish, how His disciples are to accomplish it, and what is at stake in their adventure. Their mission, verse 7 says, *"The kingdom of heaven is at hand."* What will they do? Verse 8 says, *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."* How will they accomplish it? Verse 20, *"For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."* I sometimes wonder why Jesus chose the team He did, to do the work they did. And then I'm quickly reminded of my own shortcomings, my own inabilities, my own mistakes. And Jesus still calls me!

Jesus invites us into the same mission, with the same instructions, with the same promise. Your life has been bought by the blood of Jesus' death and resurrection. There is nothing you cannot do because of His great love for you. You are free to sacrifice, give and care for those around you because no greater payment can be paid for your life. May this Lenten season be a reminder of all that Christ did for you and me, and the calling He has given to each of us to love the world around us.



In this passage, we find Jesus teaching of the coming kingdom in response to His disciples' questions.

He knows His own end is near and that something bad is going to happen. Though we cannot dwell on it, we also know that our lives can change in an instant. This passage cautions us to stay alert and be ready for whatever life may bring to us. We may find that we are sometimes unprepared for what comes our way. My first personal experience with grief brought this home to me. Accepting my father's death was difficult. The call came late at night on a Sunday. My father had an embolism and passed away. He had "gone home" in a different sense. I experienced anger, denial and an overwhelming sense of loss. My neighbor had lost her father earlier in the year and invited me to a grief group. Through her invitation, I learned to invite God into my grief.

Just as a loving parent takes care of her children, comforting them when they have worries, our God is always near as we struggle with the problems and concerns of daily life. When we are in crisis, we need reminders that God is near, and we may feel God's presence through a friend or group.

God was speaking so clearly to me though my dear friend and neighbor. Out of the darkness of deep loss came God's healing words and assurance... and it got me through it.

*"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So, you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

- Matthew 24:42-44

---

*Dear God, help us to remember that You are near, and open our eyes to feel Your presence and our hearts to help others through their deep sadness. During this holy season as we prepare for the sorrow and injustice of Good Friday, may we be prepared for receiving Your grace. Jesus, I trust in You.*

Amen



*And he said to her,  
'Your sins are forgiven.'  
Then those who were at  
the table with him began  
to say among themselves,  
'Who is this, who even  
forgives sins?' And he  
said to the woman,  
'Your faith has saved  
you; go in peace.*

- Luke 7:48-50

---

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank You for Your  
abundant love and  
forgiveness.*

*Thank You for forgiving  
all our sins, for sending  
Your Son to take on our  
punishment, so we can  
have a relationship with  
You here and be with You  
in Heaven. We love You but  
thank You for loving us so  
much more. Amen.*

The first Bible story I remember having an impact on me is the story of A Sinful Woman Forgiven. I remember little Emily sitting in Sunday school, and something about this story just clicked in me.

In Luke 7:36-50 (go ahead, read it first), Jesus was dining with Pharisees. While there, three significant cultural expectations for that time were ignored: Jesus' feet were not washed, He was not offered a kiss of greeting, and His head was not anointed with oil. Instead, the dinner took a shocking turn. A woman, who they referred to as a sinner, fell to Jesus' feet, washed His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with oil. Imagine the boldness it took for her to approach Jesus! She walked into a room, full of people who she knew would judge her and look down on her, to reach Jesus. It wasn't customary for high officials to talk to her, let alone touch her. We can see that her heart was truly repentant and overflowing with love for Jesus.

How often do we look down on others thinking, "at least I'm not that bad?" Sometimes we play a comparison game to feel better about ourselves. If we want to feel better about ourselves, we shouldn't look down on others for their sin. Instead, we should look at the terrible sinners we are, then look to how much God has forgiven us. Jesus' death and resurrection has covered the debt of our sin. We can now live knowing that we are forgiven, loved, and known fully by God. All of this comes from faith alone, not by actions or by "not being that bad." So, I'll leave you with Jesus' words in Luke 7:50, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."



Whenever I hear the hymn “Beautiful Savior”, a comforting, warm feeling washes over me. The melody takes me back to worship services I attended growing up with my family. It reminds me of the church, with the same name, where I was married and where I received my first call as a Lutheran school teacher.

Digging deeper, I ponder the words “beautiful” Savior. An explanation based on worldly standards totally misses the real meaning. In today’s society, beauty depends on things like an attractive face, being thin enough and curvy enough in the right places, having muscles or the perfect head of hair. It is valuing all these fleeting physical characteristics. Isaiah’s prophecy doesn’t describe Jesus that way at all. Jesus was plain, ordinary. He wouldn’t stand out or be someone we couldn’t keep our eyes off of if we saw him. We wouldn’t consider him one of People magazine’s ten most “beautiful” people.

So why do we use the word “beautiful”? Thankfully, we have the words of Paul in the Titus passage. “Beautiful” is a perfect description for God’s Son, who left heaven to live and die just to rescue us from the ugliness and pain of sin in our lives. He’s beautiful to us because He saved us from our biggest enemy. He is the only one who could do it. He did this because He wanted to do it. He chose to do it.

We didn’t deserve it. We can’t earn it. This gift of eternal life is why we look at Jesus, our Savior, our dearest friend, and see the beauty of His pure love.

*“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

- Titus 3:4-7

---

*Dear God, please help us to see through Your eyes. Help us to value the things that are real and eternal.*

*Jesus, thank You so much for being our Savior.*

*May we always see the beauty in Your love and sacrifice for us. In the name of our beautiful Savior, Amen.*



*Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die, Do you believe this?"*

- John 11: 25-26

---

*Lord, thank You that You care so deeply for us that You would weep with us in sorrow and give us the precious gift of eternity with You. May we hold fast to Your promise of life everlasting and share this Good News with all so they may receive abundant, resurrected life too.*

Amen

It wasn't something anyone expected. You can even say it was a scary situation when a dead man walked out of a tomb!

Martha and Mary were beside themselves. Lazarus was sick and not getting better. They were desperate. They sent for Jesus.

Jesus received a message that His friend Lazarus was not doing well and urged to come immediately. *"Lord, the one you love is sick."* Jesus did not come right away. He took a few days before He went to where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. When He arrived, Mary said, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* Jesus wept at the loss of His friend Lazarus. He felt it deeply. Then, Jesus replied with these crucial words, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*

Jesus asked the sisters to remove the stone from the tomb. He called Lazarus to come out. Lazarus came out. Jesus asked the people to remove Lazarus' grave clothes. He was alive again!

Jesus raised Lazarus to show that Jesus Christ has power over death, and that whoever believes in Him will receive everlasting life! Just as Lazarus eventually was called home to heaven, we also have the assurance of eternal life with Jesus yet to come.

To God be the glory!



This particular parable of Jesus gives such insight into the heart of God and continues to challenge me in my own thinking as a husband, father, pastor and follower of Jesus. It is the reminder to each one of us that Jesus never stops pursuing us. The power of the parable is in the ridiculous nature of the story. Who isn't satisfied with a ninety-nine percent? Any of you who are parents would be elated if your child came home with a ninety-nine percent on a test, assignment or report card. Any business would be beyond excited to know they held ninety-nine percent of the market. But we aren't talking about grades, and we aren't talking about market share. We are talking about people, and Jesus isn't satisfied with 99 out of 100 nor will He ever be. He is relentless.

That is the nature of His love. He will stop at nothing, including His own life, in order to make sure He is not separated from those He loves. The best part about that is the fact that you and I were once the ONE. He pursued you, and He pursued me. And now He gives us the opportunity to do the same as part of the 99. Sometimes I find I can fall into a mode of just being satisfied to be a part of the 99 and then I am reminded again how much ONE matters to Jesus. It matters so much to Him that He went to the cross.

My prayer for each of us during this season of reflection is to consider again who the ONE person is in your life who you are not certain where they are going to spend eternity if they were to die.

Invite them to coffee. Share Jesus.

*Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."*

- Luke 15:3-7

---

*Heavenly Father, during this season of Lent, we are reminded of the fact that there was a reason why You had to send Jesus to go to a cross for us. We are also reminded He went to the cross willingly because He loved us that much. Help us to see the ONES in our lives and pursue them with Your love so they may know the power of the resurrection and Your grace. Amen*



*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.*

- Matthew 8: 24-26

---

*Lord Jesus, we know in life we will have troubles. Storms sway us and cause fear. Help us to turn to you in these times, to trust that you want the best for us and are in control of all situations. Calm our fears, and strengthen our faith in you. Amen*

I grew up on Long Island, a 118-mile long by 23-mile wide, fish-shaped island off the coast of New York. Growing up a few miles from the water meant that boating, beach days, and waves were often a part of life. Some of my favorite Bible stories take place on or near the water. I teach kindergarten at Salem, and our recent Bible story was "Jesus Calms the Storm". This story amazes me, as I often wonder how tired Jesus had to be that He could sleep through a storm!

Have you ever watched a storm approach on water? It can be quite beautiful and scary at the same time. Some stir up suddenly, leaving little time to avoid them. Others, like hurricanes, give us several days warning. Storms in life are inevitable. At times we've all experienced events that seem to rock us. A diagnosis, a death, failing a test. Storms shake us to the core, until like the disciples, we call out "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" In the middle of a storm, it's hard to see beyond the next wave. We feel tossed around and fearful, eager to place our feet on solid ground. Like the disciples, we are short on faith and forgetting Someone is in control.

Being a Christian doesn't mean our life will be free of storms, but it does give us hope. We have a God who loves us enough that He sent his own son to die for our sins so that we could be forgiven. At times Jesus' words, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" could surely apply. During our storms we need to remember that our all-powerful God is in control. He loves us and wants us to trust Him, even in the storms.







*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened up her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" The Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

- Luke 10:38-42

*Dear Jesus, thank You for the story of Martha and Mary. There is so much we can learn from these sisters. Help us to prioritize You, to sit at Your feet in relationship with You. Remove the distractions all around us and give us the peace that only You can bring! We love You so much, Jesus.*

*Amen.*

This passage in Luke involving Mary and Martha has become one of my favorites, especially as I've gotten older. Martha is so "real" to me. She invites Jesus and his disciples over and wants to give them her best. She is clearly gifted in hospitality. I can easily visualize her frustration with Mary and her lack of assistance. After all, they are hosting pretty much the most important visitor ever! I'm the oldest in my family with three brothers, so I know a thing or two about sibling discord and the role birth order plays into our dynamics. I'm just saying, I'd be livid if I was running around making dinner and preparations all by myself with zero assistance from my siblings. And let me tell you, it still happens to this day. I have a couple brothers who are miraculously missing in action any time meal prep or dishes are involved. It's become a long-running joke in our family.

When I hear Martha essentially telling on her sister to Jesus, it hits home! Then, Jesus calmly and lovingly responds, "Mary has chosen what is better." Ouch. Mary chose to devote her time not to the preparations, but to the one who deserves our full time and attention. What Martha was doing in preparing for Jesus was important work, no doubt, but Mary's choice in sitting at Jesus' feet and gleaning wisdom was better. It's a shift in priorities.

I have to admit there are so many days when I opted to get sucked into the busyness of life, when Jesus is calling me to sit at his feet. Let's give our Savior our full attention, our best time, He calls us to be in relationship with Him and not distracted by the world.



Christians are taught to be good and nice. In fact, all people are taught to be good and nice.

When we hurt someone physically or emotionally, we are told to say, "I'm sorry!" But merely saying you are sorry doesn't make it better for the one who was hurt.

When you ask someone to "forgive you," it puts the power in the other person's hands. Forgiveness doesn't excuse the behavior. Forgiveness prevents their behavior from destroying your heart.

Many of us have had the need to forgive another person. It is as if they hold power over us because we are not willing to forgive.

Our lack of forgiveness destroys our hearts.

God is the great forgiver. Jesus displayed this truth on the cross. God has forgiven us and calls us to forgive others. We receive undeserved forgiveness and maybe it's time to share it with others.

*When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

*- Mark 2:5*

---

*Dear Lord, thank You for Your forgiveness. Thank You for not abandoning us, but for reaching out instead to bring us home. Help convict me of sin and help me accept Your mercy without shame. Thank You for the love You have poured out for me. Help me live out of that love today. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



*While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

- Matthew 9:10-13

---

*Heavenly Father,*

*Give us the courage to step outside of ourselves and be willing to share life with those whom You place along our paths. Help us to show Your love and mercy with genuine compassion, and give us the grace to learn more about You and ourselves through these God-ordained relationships.*

*Amen.*

Jesus' ministry on this earth was focused. The purpose of His life, death and resurrection was to seek and save the lost. I believe that's still His ministry today, and that His desire is to use us as instruments of His mercy.

Blogger, Denise Looock, writes about God desiring mercy over sacrifice: *"Jesus longs for us to move beyond the idea of sacrifice—what we feel obligated to give up to be perceived as religious. He wants us to get our hearts involved, tangled up with other people's lives, so the word sacrifice drops out of our vocabulary, so that all we know is the passion to love others as he loves us."*

I love that word picture - Jesus *"wants us to get our hearts involved, tangled up with other people's lives"* and give them love and acceptance in the middle of their messy, painful circumstances. He modeled that as He ate with the tax collectors and sinners, and that's what He's done for us. Loving mercy can soften hearts to receive the One who overcomes circumstances and brings peace beyond understanding. It can be difficult to be obedient to God's prompting to seek out those in need of restoration. He's not calling us to a one-and-done conversation; He's calling us into deeper relationships with people He places in our lives. There are few better ways to experience the love of God than sitting around a table sharing food and conversation, hearing and being heard, and modeling the life, love and mercy of Jesus to one another.

Is God calling you to walk more closely with someone in your life? Pray about being obedient to that calling. Allow your relationships to exemplify genuine love and mercy through the gift (not sacrifice) of your time and self.



Imagine being so dehydrated and thirsty (like after a hard run after a good workout, or being in the salty air in the sun all day at the beach) and not being able to have anything to drink. I remember one time in the heat of the summer my friend went to the beach. She got so hot that while she was walking, she collapsed to the ground from dehydration. She ended up on IV for fluids for three days. She said it was horrible.

This might have been how Jesus felt while on his way to Galilee and made a stop at Jacob's well. He asked a Samaritan woman to give him some water to drink. Now, imagine some stranger walking up to you and telling you that he has water to give you that will cause you to thirst no more. You would probably think it was a joke or that there is no such thing as everlasting water. Well, I am here to tell you that there is such a thing.

In this Scripture (John 4:13 & 14), Jesus tells the Samaritan woman "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

What an amazing promise from Jesus to know that we don't ever have to be thirsty again! He will provide eternal life for us. Jesus said in John 4, "The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship my father...The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." Jesus is coming back soon.

*Jesus said to her,  
"Everyone who drinks  
of this water will be  
thirsty again, but  
whoever drinks of the  
water that I will give  
him will never be thirsty  
again. The water that I  
will give him will become  
in him a spring of water  
welling up to eternal life."*

- John 4:13-14

---

*God, thank You for Your  
mercy and grace, and thank  
You for all Your promises.  
God, I ask that You show us  
the way to everlasting  
water, that You give us  
wisdom and understanding  
to meet with You and  
worship You in the Spirit.  
I know the hour is near,  
Lord. Guide us to teach  
others that You are the  
way, truth, and the life.  
We love You Lord.*

*In Your name, Amen.*



*"But he would  
withdraw to desolate  
places and pray."*

- Luke 5:16

---

*Lord, "O what peace we  
often forfeit, O what  
needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not  
carry everything to God in  
prayer"(Joseph M. Scriven).*

*Thank You for the gift of  
prayer and help us daily  
and abundantly take  
advantage of such a gift.*

*Amen*

The definition of a bare necessity according to Google is "a basic thing you need in order to survive." During his three years of ministry, Jesus clearly shows us how prayer is a bare necessity that brought him power, refuge, and peace against the forces of evil on this side of heaven.

Below is only a small list where Jesus shows us the necessity of prayer throughout the four Gospels.

- At his baptism (Luke 3:21)
- Through the night before choosing the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12)
- Before daybreak (Mark 1:35)
- Withdrawing to the wilderness/mountaintop alone (Luke 5:16) (Matthew 14:23)
- Blessing little children (Matthew 19:15)
- Before teaching the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1)
- Before raising Lazarus (John 11:41)
- At the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26)
- Three times before his arrest in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39,42,44)
- While on the cross (Luke 23:34) (Matthew 27:46)(Luke 23:46)
- Prayer for himself, his disciples and future believers (John 17:1-26)

Jesus teaches us how refuge is found in having a genuine prayer life. He teaches us to nurture our vital relationship with God and make it substantially rewarding. Jesus shows us to pray in the morning before the start of our day, to withdraw to quiet places with no distraction, to pray with trust, and to pray our will matches God's will. Prayer enables God to daily reveal Himself in the specific areas of our requests and equips us with strength in a world of "noise." Prayer was a bare necessity for Jesus Himself and is no less essential for us, too.



Do you ever wonder about the Pharisees? They are the villains of many Sunday School stories, but when we stop to think about them, they were doing what they thought was pleasing to God - following his Law. In their zealous obedience they missed the Messiah. When Jesus walked among them they only saw Him through the lens of the law and as a threat to how things were supposed to be done.

Several times in Scripture, the Pharisees approach Jesus, righteously indignant over nuanced applications of the law or to trap him in heresy. Here's where we turn our focus to Jesus and his response to them. He does not shut them down. He does not condemn them or disrespect them- after all, these men were respected leaders of the community. He deals with them with the same patience that he exercised when his own disciples need course correction.

When the Pharisees bring a woman before Jesus to have him condemn her, he quietly kneels and draws in the sand while they declare their case against her. He doesn't engage in their argument, he doesn't take sides. The law did say that adulterers should be stoned, but Jesus was bringing a new way of things. This was an opportunity for teaching. "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." One by one, they left. The older men leaving first, the wisdom of their years humbling them.

Jesus models how to deal with others in a life-giving way. In today's culture of canceling or shutting down what we disagree with, let's turn our eyes to Jesus and be reminded that he died for all. His love covers over their sin as it does my own.

*And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.*

- John 8:7-9

---

*Lord, in this season of Lent as we turn our hearts to what Your Son did for us through His death and resurrection, remind us daily that Your love is for all people. Work in our hearts to deal with the lost with patience, and those who frustrate and anger us with compassion because we know that they need You. Let others come to know You through our love and care for them. Amen.*



*Save us, we pray, O Lord!  
O Lord, we pray, give us  
success! Blessed is he who  
comes in the name of the  
Lord! We bless you from  
the house of the Lord.  
The Lord is God, and he  
has made his light to shine  
upon us. Bind the festal  
sacrifice with cords, up  
to the horns of the altar!  
You are my God, and I will  
give thanks to you; you are  
my God; I will exalt you.  
Oh give thanks to the  
Lord, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love  
endures forever!*

- Psalm 118

---

*Merciful God, strengthen  
us for our journey.*

*Continue to open our  
eyes and hearts to know  
Christ more clearly.*

*Infuse us with Your  
Spirit. Fortify us for  
mission to serve the  
world more passionately.  
Help us to get going!*

Amen.

I want to give Him my all. I want to be the kind of disciple who follows Jesus with my whole heart, but it's getting tough.

Luke 9 says, "when the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." He headed straight there. He knew what awaited Him - His death on the cross, His resurrection and His return to the Father. He didn't waver. The concentration of His teaching increased. Along the way from Galilee, He poured Himself into His disciples with the lessons they would need to carry on when He was gone. His teachings along the road focused on the importance and cost of following Him; because those who followed Him were also going to end up in Jerusalem, facing the reality of Jesus' arrest, trials and crucifixion.

The fact that Jesus taught all along the way to His death meant that He was all about discipleship. He was getting tough on His disciples - showing His frustration with their lack of understanding. He exploded in anger at the shameless commercialization and spiritual bankruptcy in the temple. The road wasn't easy, and Jerusalem was a lot worse.

Following Him can get tough. It would be easier to quit. There are many challenges along our daily road that could turn us away from following our Savior. When the going gets tough, we must keep the great commandment to love God and others as our abiding motivation and keep the great commission to take the gospel into all the world as our mission.

The Lord is good, His mercy and His love for us endure forever, and we'll see it all next week.



God sent his Son, Jesus, into a sinful world as a baby born in a manger and far from any earthly riches. Even growing into adulthood, Jesus was not "rich." The poverty and condemnation that Jesus Christ experienced through His death on the cross is beyond anything I can comprehend. Everything He endured was so that we can experience the eternal riches that only come through Him.

GRACE: God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

I learned this acronym in my 8th grade confirmation class and it has stuck with me. Grace is a gift from God. It cannot be earned. It's free for everyone - each and every one of us...sinners. God's grace allows me, a sinner, to wake up each day with a thankful heart, a desire to do better, and a purpose to love others. The sunrise in the morning, my children's voices (always cheerful, of course), smiles of students, time with friends and family - all of these are amazing blessings from God. But, the richness of heaven will not compare to any of the earthly blessings that I have today. It's only because of Jesus' death and resurrection - "Christ's expense" - that I wake up new each morning with a clean heart. Throughout the day, God blesses me with constant reminders of His goodness and mercy. What an amazing God we have!

I challenge you to face each day with the confidence that God's GRACE is yours and that by His grace, you have the power to share His love and tell others of this GRACE.

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

- 2 Corinthians 8:9

---

*Dear Heavenly Father,  
Thank You for the constant gift of Your grace. While I don't deserve any of it, I am comforted knowing that You died for me and have gifted me eternal life through You. Thank You for always loving me and never leaving my side. Help me to love others and to tell of the eternal riches that can only be found in You. In Your name I pray, Amen.*



*It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end...Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.*

- John 13:1, 3-5

---

*Lord Heavenly Father, we thank You for teaching us how to love others consistently, and selflessly; to love with humility and serve one another in love. Thank You for not only washing our feet but also cleansing our souls through Your broken body and Your precious blood. Father, thank You for showing us what love is. In Your precious name we pray, Amen.*

This story of Jesus has always been one that I find captivating. I am in awe of how the seemingly simple act of washing the disciples' feet can powerfully illustrate the love Jesus has for us, His humble service, and His cleansing of our sins. The master came to serve, not to be served. Jesus was able to serve in this way - a way that was usually performed by the lowest servants - because He intimately knew the Father's love.

Jesus knew He would be returning to His Father soon, and intentionally demonstrated to His closest friends, *"that you should do as I have done for you."* My family has been blessed to have experienced that type of love from our closest friends. I say friends, but honestly, we are more like a family that we got to choose. They each radiate such selflessness, kindness, generosity, and loyalty. We intentionally gather to celebrate milestones and holidays, and we truly enjoy each other's company. We've also walked together through the challenges of strained relationships, broken bones, severe illness, and the everyday life annoyances. Our friends have also taught us an important lesson in pride; that humility requires receiving, not just giving. When Jesus showed Himself to be a servant man, he left a vivid portrait of the kind of heart we should have for others.

The phrase, *"He loved them to the end"* tells us that Jesus loved His closest friends perfectly, unconditionally, and eternally. Jesus left us a wonderful example to follow on how to treat all people of all nations in this world. My prayer for each of you is that you live your life in service to others like Jesus did.



We all have troubles. Some of us more than others. Unfortunately, the challenges of life don't run on a time table, nor do they warn us when they are on their way. Troubles and challenges hit us when we least expect them and often stay way past their due date, leaving our lives with indelible marks of heartache, suffering, and unrest.

On the night before He died, Jesus met for one last time with his closest friends. Knowing what was to come and the trials they'd be facing, He gave them words of preparation and comfort, including the words found in John 16:33. There is a deep and intimate care in His words to them, a wisdom that wants to protect and reassure them that no matter what is ahead, He has it all handled. Within those words, we find warning, comfort, encouragement, and victory for all who call Jesus, Friend and Savior.

No one is guaranteed immunity from life's trials and troubles. In fact, Jesus says to expect them. What is guaranteed is His continual presence in our lives and the power of His Spirit within us. Believing in Jesus enables us to walk through all challenges with purpose and peace, trusting that His life, death and resurrection offer us a hope and peace that transcend our circumstances.

Today, the Prince of Peace stands ready to give each of us comfort and rest. Life may come at us full force, threatening to take us down, but we have a Savior who won the ultimate fight over sin and death.

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Find strength in Him to finish the race marked out for you.

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.*

*In this world you will have trouble. But, take heart! I have overcome the world.*

- John 16:33

---

*Amazing God, Beautiful Savior, Dearest Friend, thank You for Your words of comfort and hope. In times of trials and trouble, give my soul rest and peace. Keep my eyes fixed on You. Align my heart with Yours, so I always remember the deep love and care You have for me. Today, I cast all my cares and burdens on You, for You truly have conquered the world. This I pray in Jesus name. Amen.*



*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me: yet not my will, but Yours be done.*

- Luke 22:42

You may be familiar with the children's nursery rhyme, "We're Going on a Bear Hunt." Throughout the rhyme, children come across various obstacles in their search for a bear. When faced with a hurdle the rhyme repeats the phrase, "Can't get over it! Can't go under it! Got to go through it!"

This rhyme reminds us that we will have trials and suffering in this life. Sometimes God does not spare us from our trials, instead He provides us with the strength and endurance we need to get through them.

When our daughters were young, we were in a serious car accident. Our oldest daughter had a serious head injury and had to be life-flighted downtown for emergency surgery. We were covered in prayer and she came through surgery with no side effects. Three days after the accident, we were sent home for her to recuperate. Two days later, heavy rains came, and we had to evacuate while our home flooded.

We know that the only way we got through this difficult time was because God gave us the strength and endurance we needed.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He knew what was ahead - His death on the cross. He prayed that His father would "*take this cup of suffering from me*" but finished His prayer by saying, "*yet not my will, but Yours be done.*" In that moment, Jesus modeled to us the truth that, on our own, we will not be able to go over or under our trials. Like the children's rhyme reminds us, we have to go through them as His will is done in our lives.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for the promise that no matter what trials or obstacles we face in life You will give us the strength and endurance to get through them.*

*Amen.*







*When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."*

- John 19:30

In the midst of the crucifixion, the very climax of the story, the disciples hid away because, to them, the story seemed over. They feared Jesus wouldn't be the only one breathing his last that night. They were guilty by association; and that was enough to rob them of their lives... so they thought.

That absolute betrayal of hiding in fear was not unique to the disciples, however. Throughout the greatest love story ever told, time and time again Scripture records humans in hiding. I think all the way back to Adam and Eve after the fall. They shuddered in fear upon paradise lost. If only they could see the beautiful way God's rescue plan would eventually unfold.

We know that even though sin and death preside, and the enemy lurks in this world, nothing could ever separate us from the love of the Father. We are safe, guarded, fully covered by the blood. So why do we continue hiding as the disciples did? Why do we shade the light within us, so as not to offend the eyes of those around us? Should we keep our testimony to a low whisper, so as not to let others hear? Certainly not! We have the cure to the sin-sickness that so often robs us of true love, peace, and joy. That cure is to receive and then to live out an active, bold, outspoken faith- so that all may taste & see His goodness! So cast off those half-hearted hallelujahs and wholeheartedly declare victory!

Let us boldly declare association to our Savior! We should only be captivated by his unending grace for us. Let us sing of how we've been set free from the shackles of sin, death and condemnation!

---

*Lord of light, life, and salvation - You are so gracious! Your mercies arrive in new light each morning, in overwhelming abundance. We confess that, at times we hide behind the things of this world, rather than bursting forth in confidence of the gospel. Strengthen us to be bold by your Spirit, that all would feel the warmth of Your love-light and see the radiant beauty of Your creation. Amen!*



Curtains! I can't speak for you, but for me, it seems there are a lot of things that separate me from God. It may be bad weather that keeps me from church. It may be the scrutiny from co-workers that keeps me from praying before my lunch meal. It could be my own fear that keeps me from sharing my faith with a friend. Perhaps it's just the distractions of a busy life. For whatever reason, we put God in the back room of our life behind a curtain. Maybe we only visit Him once a year at Christmas.

You know, this sounds a bit like the way people treated God in the Old Testament. Some people were afraid to utter His name out loud. Some were too busy to make time for Him. Even the church only allowed one High Priest to enter the inner room of the temple once a year behind a curtain.

That all changed when Jesus came down from Heaven in human form. He came to us! He came to bring us peace and joy in our busy lives. He came to forgive our sins. He came to give us a purpose for living. He lived the perfect life we cannot. When He died on the cross, He tore that curtain from top to bottom so we will never be separated from God again. So whatever reason the devil, the world, or our own sinful self tries to put in between us and God, we remember that Jesus has already overcome it. He is with us always, wherever we go.

*With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."*

- Mark 15:37-38

---

*Dear Lord:*

*There are so many distractions in this world that separate me from You. Thank You for coming to me! Thank you for dying on the cross for all my sins and opening the gates of heaven for me. I want to live my life for You.*

*Thank You for always being with me.*

*Amen.*



# EASTER SERVICES AT SALEM

## ASH WEDNESDAY

February 22 at 7 pm

## PALM SUNDAY

April 2 at 8:30 & 11

## MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 6 at 7 pm (6 pm dinner)  
Outdoors

## GOOD FRIDAY

April 7 at 7 pm

## EASTER SUNDAY

April 9 at 8:30, 9:45 & 11



22601 LUTHERAN CHURCH ROAD  
TOMBALL, TX 77377

[salem4u.com](http://salem4u.com)