

Lent

an invitation to follow

Week One – Thursday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Luke 24:13-34

...two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?" They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days."

"What things?" Jesus asked. "The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

"Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said."

Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter."

Reflect & Respond:

We, like the disciples, rely on God's revelation that opens our blind eyes. **What is God revealing to you about Himself that He's wanting you to finally understand?**

What does it take for you to "believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures"?

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Week One – Friday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Isaiah 55:1-9

(The LORD says...) "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk—it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food.

"Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David. See how I used him to display my power among the peoples. I made him a leader among the nations. You also will command nations you do not know, and peoples unknown to you will come running to obey, because I, the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, have made you glorious."

Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.

"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

Reflect & Respond:

All of us thirst. **From our reading who can come to the Lord? What do you think is so incredible about this offer?**

God's ways are so foreign to us. **Can you discover the comfort in this thought? Will you choose to trust God and follow before you fully understand?**

Week One – Saturday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

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"Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man." For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Reflect & Respond:

Simon and his friends dropped the biggest catch of their lives and followed Jesus to catch what is of much greater value. **Will you follow Jesus – exchanging something good for what is eternal?**

In following Jesus, is there something He is wanting you to let go of? Talk with Him about it.

Week Two – Sunday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Matthew 14:22-32

Immediately after (*the miraculous feeding of over 5,000 people*), Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.

Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o'clock in the morning [b] Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!"

Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."

"Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. Then the disciples worshiped him. "You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

Reflect & Respond:

Think back over your life. **Were there times when God called you out upon unknown waters? In those moments, did fear or faith rule?**

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Why is it good to confess our need and trust Jesus as we worship Him? How can this help build our faith when we express our thoughts through our words?

Week Two – Monday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Psalm 27

A psalm of David.

The LORD is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble? When evil people come to devour me, when my enemies and foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident.

The one thing I ask of the LORD —the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, delighting in the LORD's perfections and meditating in his Temple. For he will conceal me there when troubles come. He will hide me in his sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock. Then I will hold my head high above my enemies who surround me. At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy, singing and praising the LORD with music.

Hear me as I pray, O LORD. Be merciful and answer me! My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "LORD, I am coming." Do not turn your back on me. Do not reject your servant in anger. You have always been my helper. Don't leave me now. Don't abandon me, O God of my salvation! Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close.

Teach me how to live, O LORD. Lead me along the right path, for my enemies are waiting for me. Do not let me fall into their hands. For they accuse me of things I've never done; with every breath they threaten me with violence. Yet I am confident I will see the LORD's goodness while I am here in the land of the living.

Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.

Reflect & Respond:

List what this poem reveals about what God does for us in his great love.

How does choosing to believe what is revealed to us about what God is and what He does help us with our fears?

Week Two – Tuesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

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Mark 4:1-20

Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died. Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant. He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.'"

Then Jesus said to them, "If you can't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? The farmer plants seed by taking God's word to others. The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

Reflect & Respond:

Are you good soil for his seed to fall onto? How can you tell?

Our heart's condition is vital to God producing something wonderful in your life. **Are you willing to have him create fertile soil for his Word to grow in you?** If so, take a moment and talk to Him about it.

Week Two – Wednesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

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In Jesus' name, amen.*

Matthew 4:23-5:16

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

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"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

"God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

"God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

Reflect & Respond:

Living in this world we will find ourselves in all sorts of situations. Jesus presents His Kingdom as a place where He meets us in each broken situation and blesses us right there. **What from this reading makes sense? What stretches you?**

What happens when we allow God to make us salt and light in this world?

Will you surrender and allow His Kingdom to invade your life in this way?

Week Two – Thursday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!

"My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Reflect & Respond:

Children trust before they have it all figured out and the older you get the more we tend to burden our lives down with things we were never meant to carry. **Would you like to live a life that's free and light with the One who created you and loves you?** Spend some time talking with Jesus about this. If you've accepted this invitation, thank Him. If you haven't then talk to Him about the barriers that keep you from this childlike trust.

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Week Two – Friday

Our Lenten Prayer:

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In Jesus' name, amen.*

Mark 8:27-38

Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets."

Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah." But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Reflect & Respond:

Jesus denied Himself so that we can have life. **In what way is Jesus inviting you to deny yourself?**

Why is this struggle so hard? Jesus' Kingdom is unlike anything else and we can really struggle with some of the things Jesus says. Talk to Him about it whenever those struggles come. He is here! Bring all of those things to Him and talk to Him about it.

Week Two – Saturday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Philippians 2:1-11

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

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Don't be selfish. Don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges. He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Reflect & Respond:

What does following Jesus' example in this passage look like in your life today?

How difficult is it to think of others as better than yourself? If we really lived this passage out in our lives it could change the world. Talk to Jesus about he can do these things in and through you!

Week Three – Sunday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Mark 9:14-29

When *Jesus, Peter, James, & John* returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him.

"What is all this arguing about?" Jesus asked. One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it."

Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth.

"How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can."

"What do you mean, 'if I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"

When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him.

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The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up. Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?" Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer."

Reflect & Respond:

What was the struggle facing this boy's father? Jesus' disciples?

Have you ever prayed something similar, like, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief? What happened?

Re-read this passage noticing whose power is at work. **Why would that be important to consider?**

Spend some time talking to Jesus about growing in trusting Him more as you follow.

Week Three – Monday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Luke 10:25-37

One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" The man answered, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

"Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'

"Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

Reflect & Respond:

Can doing "religious duties" actually get in the way of seeing what Jesus wants us to see?

How can following Jesus help us not miss the people He's calling us to serve? Who does He want you to show mercy to today?

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Week Three – Tuesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

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In Jesus' name, amen.*

Matthew 5:38-48

"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Reflect & Respond:

Jesus begins by showing us how to live free on the inside no matter what situation you find yourself in. **Are you living finding freedom and peace on the inside no matter your circumstances?** If not, talk to Jesus about why.

Loving our enemies is not what our "dirt man" wants to do. **Are you willing to trust God with your broken relationships and live life His way?**

Week Three – Wednesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Isaiah 42:1-9

"Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or raise his voice in public. He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth. Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait for his instruction."

God, the LORD, created the heavens and stretched them out. He created the earth and everything in it. He gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth. And it is he who says, "I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. I will take you by the hand and guard you, and I will give you to my people, Israel, as a symbol of my covenant with them. And you will be a light to guide the nations. You will open the eyes of the blind. You will free the captives from prison, releasing those who sit in dark dungeons.

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"I am the LORD. That is my name! I will not give my glory to anyone else, nor share my praise with carved idols. Everything I prophesied has come true, and now I will prophesy again. I will tell you the future before it happens."

Reflect & Respond:

This prophecy about Jesus was written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. **What are the miraculous things it says Jesus will do?**

As someone who desires to follow Jesus, how can you let his light shine through you today?

Week Three – Thursday

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In Jesus' name, amen.*

John 4:1-30; 39-42

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime.

Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?" Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman replied. Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?" Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews."

Lent

an invitation to follow

But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus told her, "I am the Messiah!"

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him...

...Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world."

Reflect & Respond:

The worship of God was changing to our response to Jesus and the Holy Spirit springing up from the inside out. "Where" we worship no longer matters because worship happens wherever Jesus' followers are. **Where is your favorite place to worship Jesus?**

Is Jesus changing you on the inside as you follow Him? Let the praise flow and share it! God will use what you share to draw people to Himself!

Week Three – Friday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Mark 9:30-37

Leaving that region, they traveled through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know he was there, for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples and teach them. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead." They didn't understand what he was saying, however, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you discussing out on the road?" But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, "Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."

Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me."

Reflect & Respond:

Jesus' followers were afraid. **Have you ever been afraid to ask Jesus when you didn't understand?**

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an invitation to follow

What is the most difficult thing about serving others? Who is Jesus wanting you to serve today?

Week Three – Saturday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Psalm 31:1-5

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

O LORD, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be disgraced. Save me, for you do what is right. Turn your ear to listen to me; rescue me quickly.

Be my rock of protection, a fortress where I will be safe. You are my rock and my fortress. For the honor of your name, lead me out of this danger. Pull me from the trap my enemies set for me, for I find protection in you alone.

I entrust my spirit into your hand. Rescue me, LORD, for you are a faithful God.

Reflect & Respond:

This Psalm begins with David crying out to the Lord. **Have you ever tried to let God have everything pent-up inside?**

Try being as real with God as you can and spend some time putting everything on the table with Him. He has big shoulders and can take it. You'll be surprised by what He begins to reveal to you!

Week Four – Sunday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Luke 13:10-17

One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Dear woman, you are healed of your sickness!" Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised God!

But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. "There are six days of the week for working," he said to the crowd. "Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath." But the Lord replied, "You hypocrites! Each of you works on the Sabbath day! Don't you untie your ox or your donkey from its stall on the Sabbath and lead it out for water? This dear woman, a daughter of Abraham, has been held in bondage by Satan for eighteen years. Isn't it right that she be released, even on the Sabbath?" This shamed his enemies, but all the people rejoiced at the wonderful things he did.

Lent

an invitation to follow

Reflect & Respond:

Religious people lacking relationship will often try to put God in a box and at times it can look just plain silly. **From this story, what really matters to God?**

How did the people respond? How will you respond when God moves outside "the rules"?

Week Four – Monday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Luke 18:9-14

Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Reflect & Respond:

God desires our hearts more than our sacrifice. (see: Psalm 51:17) **Have you ever been tempted to just go through the motions in your prayer to God or have you been tempted to compare your spiritual journey to others?**

Why do you think humility is so important in our relationships with God and each other? As you pray today, ask God to break your heart for what breaks His.

Week Four – Tuesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Mark 2:13-17

Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) But when the teachers of religious law who were

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an invitation to follow

Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?" When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

Reflect & Respond:

Consider, for a moment, how simple Jesus made these invitations to follow. **Are you aware of your great need?** If not, ask God to open your eyes to see the work He would like to do in and through you.

Who has Jesus come for? Does this stretch you? Make you uncomfortable? Thankful?

Week Four – Wednesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Isaiah 35:3-10

With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you."

And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the wasteland. The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived.

And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. Evil-minded people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's ways; fools will never walk there. Lions will not lurk along its course, nor any other ferocious beasts. There will be no other dangers. Only the redeemed will walk on it.

Those who have been ransomed by the LORD will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness.

Reflect & Respond:

Isaiah gives us prophesy in this passage about Jesus' coming deeds and a future that awaits those who follow Him. **What are the things you notice that Jesus does? What is ahead for all who walk in God's ways?**

Isaiah paints a picture of complete safety with the Lord. Take a moment and give God thanks and praise that the sadness and separation in this life are only temporary for we serve the One who has power over death!

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an invitation to follow

Week Four – Thursday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Matthew 6:1-18

Jesus teaching from the mountainside said, "Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do —blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity!

I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

"And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."

Reflect & Respond:

What does the Father see? Why do think people are drawn into the temptation to put on a show?

How can believing this truth: "your Father knows exactly what you need before you even ask it" help ease our tendency to worry about saying the wrong thing or not having enough?

Week Four – Friday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Lent

an invitation to follow

Psalm 95:1-7

Come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come to him with thanksgiving. Let us sing psalms of praise to him. For the LORD is a great God, a great King above all gods. He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the mightiest mountains. The sea belongs to him, for he made it. His hands formed the dry land, too.

Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today!

Reflect & Respond:

In this poem the author lists so many things our mighty God has done. **What are some things you have noticed that you can thank Him for?**

Read this through again and as you read listen for His voice... today! **What does God want you to see, hear and do?**

Week Four – Saturday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Colossians 1:15-22

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

Reflect & Respond:

This is a poem helps us discover Jesus as the Author and King of creation who brings about a new creation! Re-read this passage through and every time the Holy Spirit prompts you, stop and thank Jesus for all He has done and is doing in us.

Week Five – Sunday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Lent

an invitation to follow

Luke 17:11-19

As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, crying out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" He looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy.

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, "Praise God!" He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And Jesus said to the man, "Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you."

Reflect & Respond:

Notice God's mercy in this passage - all ten were healed. **When you think about your day today, did you miss something you could have been thankful for?**

Ask Jesus to open your eyes to be more like the one grateful leper than the nine oblivious ones. Lord, help us be people who see Your hand at work and are thankful!

Week Five – Monday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus said, "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work.

"At nine o'clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o'clock he did the same thing.

"At five o'clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, 'Why haven't you been working today?'

"They replied, 'Because no one hired us.' The landowner told them, 'Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.'

"That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. When those hired at five o'clock were paid, each received a full day's wage. When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day's wage.

"When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, 'Those people worked only one hour, and yet you've paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.' He answered one of them, 'Friend, I haven't been unfair! Didn't you agree to work all day for the usual wage? Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?'

"So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last."

Lent

an invitation to follow

Reflect & Respond:

Jesus wouldn't describe His kingdom in terms of "fair" but rather "generous". **What is your reaction when someone else is blessed generously?**

How does this parable challenge you in the area of jealousy? Talk to Jesus about what He reveals in your heart.

Week Five – Tuesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Matthew 6:19-34

Jesus teaching from the mountainside said, "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

"Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Reflect & Respond:

Jesus tells us not to worry in this passage which means we have power over worry. **Why do you think we tend to worry about the day to day things in life?**

Jesus said we're to seek the kingdom of God above all else and the Father knows what you need. **How can this help us fight this temptation to worry?**

Lent

an invitation to follow

Week Five – Wednesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:14-23

"The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the LORD.

"But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the LORD. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the LORD. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins..."

...They went off to the city and found everything just as Jesus had said, and they prepared the Passover meal there. When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table. Jesus said, "I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."

Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come." He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you. But here at this table, sitting among us as a friend, is the man who will betray me. For it has been determined that the Son of Man must die. But what sorrow awaits the one who betrays him."

The disciples began to ask each other which of them would ever do such a thing.

Reflect & Respond:

Is it difficult for you to accept that you need this sacrifice for you?

Why do you think it's important that this new agreement (covenant) begins deep inside? Take some time to thank Jesus for His immeasurable and grace filled gift!

Week Five – Thursday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Lent

an invitation to follow

John 15:1-8

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father."

Reflect & Respond:

Why is it so important to stay connected to Jesus?

What are some practical ways to stay connected and growing in a relationship with Jesus? Try memorizing Jesus' words from today's reading: "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." - John 15:5 (NLT)

Week Five – Friday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Mark 10:32-45

They were now on the way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with awe, and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus once more began to describe everything that was about to happen to him. "Listen," he said, "we're going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. They will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again."

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do us a favor."

"What is your request?" he asked. They replied, "When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left." But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?"

"Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" Then Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen."

When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Lent

an invitation to follow

Reflect & Respond:

Jesus talks to His followers about his coming sacrifice again. **However, what is concerning their hearts the most?**

Jesus is our Creator God who deserves so much honor, glory, majesty and praise. In the midst of bickering over who's the greatest follower, he shares the truth that did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life to buy back you and me. **What is one way you can follow Jesus by serving others ahead of yourself today?**

Week Five – Saturday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Psalm 13

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever?

How long will you look the other way?

How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day?

How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

Turn and answer me, O LORD my God!

Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.

Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!"

Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.

But I trust in your unfailing love.

I will rejoice because you have rescued me.

I will sing to the LORD because he is good to me.

Reflect & Respond:

David is amazing in his raw honesty as he writes. **Have you ever been this open with God about your fears and broken relationships?** Give it a try!

David's poem hinges on trust in God's goodness in spite of his present circumstances. **What attribute of God (like goodness) do you hold onto when life gets hard?** Need help? Look up Psalm 103:8-12 to get you started.

Week Six – Sunday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

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an invitation to follow

Mark 10:46-52

Then they reached Jericho, and as Jesus and his disciples left town, a large crowd followed him. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

"Be quiet!" many of the people yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, "Tell him to come here." So they called the blind man. "Cheer up," they said. "Come on, he's calling you!" Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked. "My Rabbi," the blind man said, "I want to see!" And Jesus said to him, "Go, for your faith has healed you." Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road.

Reflect & Respond:

Have you ever persistently sought the Lord out in prayer no matter what others may say?

When you realize that God has done the miraculous in your life does it move you to follow him more?

Week Six – Monday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

John 10:1-21

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

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an invitation to follow

When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. Some said, "He's demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?" Others said, "This doesn't sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Reflect & Respond:

People have lots of opinions about who Jesus is. **As you have grown to know him more through these readings, who is Jesus to you?**

Have you been listening for Jesus' voice as you've been reading? Hear His voice and follow! His purpose is to give us, His sheep, a rich and satisfying life... why don't you let Him?

Week Six – Tuesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Romans 11:33-12:2

Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! For who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory.

All glory to him forever! Amen.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Reflect & Respond:

Read this passage through about three more times... slowly. Chew on them for a while. Let these incredible words sink deep into your soul. **What do you learn about God from this passage? What does God want to change in you?** Go ahead and ask him!

Week Six – Wednesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Luke 15:1-2; 11-32

Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

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an invitation to follow

...Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

"A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

"When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."'"

"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.' But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.'

"The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!'

"His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'"

Reflect & Respond:

The father finds reason to celebrate... shouldn't we? **Why can rejoicing with someone be difficult? What are ways we can be more like the compassionate father in this story?**

Week Six – Thursday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'"

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an invitation to follow

"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God."

Then Peter began to speak up. "We've given up everything to follow you," he said. "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then."

Reflect & Respond:

Not all of the people that Jesus invited to follow Him accepted the invitation. Have you?

It was common for people to see a rich person as blessed and obviously closer to God. However wealth can be a huge barrier between us and the Lord. **Why do you think it is so difficult to follow Jesus when you're rich?**

Wealth may not be your hang-up but I bet you know what is. Take a moment to talk with God about barriers He is revealing to you that need to come down.

Week Six – Friday

Our Lenten Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!
In Jesus' name, amen.*

John 14:15-29

"If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them."

Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple with that name) said to him, "Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world at large?" Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

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an invitation to follow

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe.

Reflect & Respond:

This is a conversation Jesus has with his closest followers right before his arrest. **List all of the promises He makes in this passage:**

Which promise from Jesus matters the most to you today? Why?

What do you learn about the Holy Spirit in this chapter?

Week Six – Saturday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I accept your invitation to follow you through this Lenten season, please guide my heart as we move through the coming weeks together. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. Everything is on the table!

In Jesus' name, amen.

John 11:1-45

A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters, Mary and Martha. This is the Mary who later poured the expensive perfume on the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Her brother, Lazarus, was sick. So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick."

But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days. Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea." But his disciples objected. "Rabbi," they said, "only a few days ago the people in Judea were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?"

Jesus replied, "There are twelve hours of daylight every day. During the day people can walk safely. They can see because they have the light of this world. But at night there is danger of stumbling because they have no light." Then he said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up." The disciples said, "Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!" They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died. So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And for your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there, for now you will really believe. Come, let's go see him."

Thomas, nicknamed the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus."

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

"Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"

"Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world

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an invitation to follow

from God." Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, "The Teacher is here and wants to see you." So Mary immediately went to him.

Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus's grave to weep. So they followed her there. When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. "Where have you put him?" he asked them.

They told him, "Lord, come and see." Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, "See how much he loved him!" But some said, "This man healed a blind man. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?"

Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man's sister, protested, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible." Jesus responded, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?"

So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me." Then Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!"

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen.

Reflect & Respond:

Have you ever doubted God's timing? What did you learn from that situation? How could trusting God's timing change your thoughts and attitudes about your circumstance?

"Jesus told her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?'" **Do you believe this? If so, why? If not, what keeps you from believing what Jesus?**

Holy Week – Palm Sunday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we begin the Holy Week together that leads to your great sacrifice and resurrection, please guide my heart. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. You are my humble King and I trust your leading and follow you in obedience. In Your powerful name and with open hands, amen.

John 12:12-18; Luke 19:41-44

The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him.

They shouted, "Hosanna! (*Which means "save now!"*) Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!"

Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: "Don't be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey's colt." His disciples didn't understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.

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an invitation to follow

Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign...as *Jesus* came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep.

"How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you."

Reflect & Respond:

Why did people come out to meet Jesus? What did they see Him do? If you saw Jesus do something miraculous in your life or in your community how would you respond?

What brought Jesus to tears as he approached Jerusalem? Does your heart break for what breaks God's heart? Spend some time and talk with Jesus about this.

Holy Week - Monday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we continue Holy Week together, please guide my heart. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. You are my humble King and I trust your leading and follow you in obedience. In Your powerful name and a desire to follow in obedience, amen.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

Reflect & Respond:

Part of the journey following Jesus is persistence. **What barriers have you had to push through to grow in your relationship with Jesus? Will you persist even in the midst of doubt and step forward in faith?**

Why did Jesus come? Why is it important for us to know this?

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an invitation to follow

Holy Week - Tuesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we continue Holy Week together, please guide my heart. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. You are my humble King and I trust your leading and follow you in obedience. In Your powerful name and a desire to follow in obedience, amen.

Luke 20:9-19

Now Jesus turned to the people again and told them this story: "A man planted a vineyard, leased it to tenant farmers, and moved to another country to live for several years. At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. But the farmers attacked the servant, beat him up, and sent him back empty-handed. So the owner sent another servant, but they also insulted him, beat him up, and sent him away empty-handed. A third man was sent, and they wounded him and chased him away.

"'What will I do?' the owner asked himself. 'I know! I'll send my cherished son. Surely they will respect him.' But when the tenant farmers saw his son, they said to each other, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' So they dragged him out of the vineyard and murdered him.

"What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do to them?" Jesus asked. "I'll tell you—he will come and kill those farmers and lease the vineyard to others."

"How terrible that such a thing should ever happen," his listeners protested. Jesus looked at them and said, "Then what does this Scripture mean?"

'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.'
Everyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on."

The teachers of religious law and the leading priests wanted to arrest Jesus immediately because they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. But they were afraid of the people's reaction.

Reflect & Respond:

What was it about this story that made these religious leaders so angry that they wanted to arrest Jesus?

Jesus is either a stone in your life that you keep tripping on and trying to ignore until it crushes you or is he will be the foundational stone you build your life on. **Which is He for you?**

Holy Week - Wednesday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we continue Holy Week together, please guide my heart. I believe your word and its power to speak truth in my life. Help me to hear your Spirit speak to my heart and give me the humility and courage to do whatever it is you desire. You are my humble King and I trust your leading and follow you in obedience. In Your powerful name and a desire to follow in obedience, amen.

Mark 14:1-11

It was now two days before Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and the teachers of religious law were still looking for an opportunity to capture Jesus secretly and kill him. "But not during the Passover celebration," they agreed, "or the people may riot."

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an invitation to follow

Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head. Some of those at the table were indignant. "Why waste such expensive perfume?" they asked. "It could have been sold for a year's wages and the money given to the poor!" So they scolded her harshly.

But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why criticize her for doing such a good thing to me? You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the leading priests to arrange to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted when they heard why he had come, and they promised to give him money. So he began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

Reflect & Respond:

Have you ever been tempted to judge another person's expression of worship? Why do you think we fall so easily into that trap?

What is your response when you think something is foolish but God reveals to you that He thinks it is good? Have you surrendered your definition of "good and evil" to Jesus in exchange for His?

Holy Week - Thursday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we enter the last moments of your life, help our hearts understand your humble and glorious sacrifice. Guide us to live our life in a way that puts others above ourselves as we follow our Servant King. Break our hearts for all that breaks yours and teach us how to walk the path of self-sacrifice as you did... for your kingdom, glory, and in your name, amen.

Matthew 26:17-30

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?"

"As you go into the city," he told them, "you will see a certain man. Tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time has come, and I will eat the Passover meal with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus told them and prepared the Passover meal there.

When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table with the Twelve. While they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one, Lord?" He replied, "One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me. For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!"

Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked, "Rabbi, am I the one?" And Jesus told him, "You have said it."

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."

And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Lent

an invitation to follow

Reflect & Respond:

As Jesus broke the loaf of bread and drank the cups of wine that formed part of this festive Passover meal, He invested them with new and deeper significance. They symbolized His body that would be broken and blood shed for the forgiveness of the sins of all humanity. When we take part in the Lord's Supper we are remembering this New Covenant we can now have with God through Jesus. **Why do you think it's so important to remember what God has done?**

Why do you think it is important to use something physical (bread, wine) to help us understand something spiritually significant? Spend a moment and thank Jesus for His incredible gift to us... life!

Holy Week - Good Friday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we enter the last moments of your life, help our hearts understand your humble and glorious sacrifice. Guide us to live our life in a way that puts others above ourselves as we follow our Servant King. Break our hearts for all that breaks yours and teach us how to walk the path of self-sacrifice as you did... for your kingdom, glory, and in your name, amen.

Mark 14:43-15:47

And immediately, even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders. The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss. Then you can take him away under guard." As soon as they arrived, Judas walked up to Jesus. "Rabbi!" he exclaimed, and gave him the kiss. Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest's slave, slashing off his ear. Jesus asked them, "Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there among you teaching every day. But these things are happening to fulfill what the Scriptures say about me."

Then all his disciples deserted him and ran away. One young man following behind was clothed only in a long linen shirt. When the mob tried to grab him, he slipped out of his shirt and ran away naked.

They took Jesus to the high priest's home where the leading priests, the elders, and the teachers of religious law had gathered. Meanwhile, Peter followed him at a distance and went right into the high priest's courtyard. There he sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire.

Inside, the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find evidence against Jesus, so they could put him to death. But they couldn't find any. Many false witnesses spoke against him, but they contradicted each other. Finally, some men stood up and gave this false testimony: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.'" But even then they didn't get their stories straight!

Then the high priest stood up before the others and asked Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?" But Jesus was silent and made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?"

"Guilty!" they all cried. "He deserves to die!" Then some of them began to spit at him, and they blindfolded him and beat him with their fists. "Prophecy to us," they jeered. And the guards slapped him as they took him away.

Meanwhile, Peter was in the courtyard below. One of the servant girls who worked for the high priest came by and noticed Peter warming himself at the fire. She looked at him closely and said, "You were one of those with Jesus of Nazareth." But Peter denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, and he went out into the entryway. Just then,

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an invitation to follow

a rooster crowed. When the servant girl saw him standing there, she began telling the others, "This man is definitely one of them!" But Peter denied it again.

A little later some of the other bystanders confronted Peter and said, "You must be one of them, because you are a Galilean." Peter swore, "A curse on me if I'm lying—I don't know this man you're talking about!" And immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me." And he broke down and wept.

Very early in the morning the leading priests, the elders, and the teachers of religious law—the entire high council—met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "You have said it." Then the leading priests kept accusing him of many crimes, and Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer them? What about all these charges they are bringing against you?" But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise.

Now it was the governor's custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner—anyone the people requested. ⁷ One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, a revolutionary who had committed murder in an uprising. ⁸ The crowd went to Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner as usual.

"Would you like me to release to you this 'King of the Jews?'" Pilate asked. (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) But at this point the leading priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. Pilate asked them, "Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!"

"Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?" But the mob roared even louder, "Crucify him!" So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

The soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard of the governor's headquarters (called the Praetorium) and called out the entire regiment. They dressed him in a purple robe, and they wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head. Then they saluted him and taunted, "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they struck him on the head with a reed stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.) And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it.

Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. A sign announced the charge against him. It read, "The King of the Jews." Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!" The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" Even the men who were crucified with Jesus ridiculed him.

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. Then at three o'clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. "Wait!" he said. "Let's see whether Elijah comes to take him down!"

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an invitation to follow

Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last.

And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

Some women were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome. They had been followers of Jesus and had cared for him while he was in Galilee. Many other women who had come with him to Jerusalem were also there.

This all happened on Friday, the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath. As evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea took a risk and went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. (Joseph was an honored member of the high council, and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come.) Pilate couldn't believe that Jesus was already dead, so he called for the Roman officer and asked if he had died yet. The officer confirmed that Jesus was dead, so Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. Joseph bought a long sheet of linen cloth. Then he took Jesus' body down from the cross, wrapped it in the cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone in front of the entrance. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where Jesus' body was laid.

Reflect & Respond:

Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten, sentenced, put to death, and buried all over one night and day. **What comes to mind as you read the story of Jesus' final hours?**

Spend a moment talking to God about what you've read and respond to what He's revealing to you. Allow God to move in and through you tonight by participating in our Good Friday service at 7 pm. Let's worship Jesus, the Son of God together!

Holy Week - Saturday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, there are times where you are silent and we don't understand why. Help us in this dark Saturday to remember the words you said and the hope of Sunday's resurrection. May we not just hear your words but give us the courage to obey and in our obedience show we love you. Thank you for loving us first through your death on the cross. In Jesus' name, amen.

Romans 8:31-39

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.")

No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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an invitation to follow

Reflect & Respond:

Take a moment and write below some of the awesome truths found in this powerful passage.

How does God reveal His love to us? During this season, How have you gotten to know Jesus better? Take some time and praise Him for it!

Easter Sunday

Our Lenten Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we celebrate your incredible resurrection today! Help us today to share this wonderful hope and life that we find in you with whomever we meet. Thank you for the supernatural life You have so graciously given us where we find freedom, peace and power in you alone! We worship you today with all that is in us for you are our risen King! Amen.

John 20:1-18

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead.

Then they went home.

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying.

"Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her. "Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him." She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary!" Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher"). "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

Reflect & Respond:

This morning give Jesus praise for giving us a way when there was none, truth in a world full of deception and confusion, and an abundant supernatural life!

We have services at 9:00 and 10:30 am, so come and celebrate the risen Jesus with us at Real Life Church!