



40 DAYS OF LENT

A SEASON OF PREPARATION

Covenant
CHURCH

**OUR HOPE IS THAT YOU
WILL USE THIS DEVOTIONAL
TO DRAW CLOSER TO GOD
AND EACH OTHER. AS A CHURCH,
WE WILL JOURNEY TOGETHER TO
GROW IN OUR UNDERSTANDING
OF GOD'S GRACE, REPENTANCE,
DEVOTION TO GOD, NEW LIFE IN
CHRIST, AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR.**

EXAMINE YOUR HEART

“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:8

FEB
19

JORDAN SHEETS
Women's
Ministry
Director

The word “Lent” simply means “spring”. When we think about the season of spring, we think about new life. In Eastern North Carolina, daffodils spring up across yards for the first time since the previous year serving as an important reminder... *before there can be new life, there must first be death.* As believers, the season of Lent is an opportunity to journey with Jesus to the cross where death comes before the glorious resurrection. When we are willing to go on this reflective and intimate journey, the new life of resurrection will be powerfully experienced and demonstrated in our lives.

When I read Philippians 2:5-11, I'm always blown away by the way Christ makes Himself the lowest of all people. Being fully God, Jesus takes on the price of sin and dies on a Roman cross... the lowest and most humiliating punishment imaginable during Jesus' time. It makes me reflect on my own willingness and heart to “empty” myself for the sake of becoming like Christ. Christ's humility and obedience pointed the world to the glory and power of God. *I want that, too!*

Over the next forty days, we will journey together as a church growing in our understanding of God's grace, repentance, devotion to God, new life in Christ, and loving our neighbor. On this first day, I want to encourage you to pray this prayer.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on me, Lord, so that I may have the same mindset as Christ in being obedient to God. I surrender to your work in me, Holy Spirit.

“The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts.” Proverbs 20:27

FEB
20

MIKE CRUSER
Executive
Pastor

In the past, the idea of setting time aside to examine my own spiritual condition would have felt like a burden. I assumed I would find something I didn't want to see, or that God was simply waiting to point out another disappointment. While that isn't true of God, it can still feel that way.

As I've grown in my relationship with God, I've begun to welcome these moments. I've learned that God, by His Spirit, is kind to reveal difficult things about me—things that don't benefit me, those around me, or my walk with Him. He does this because He wants to set me free, to make me a blessing to others, and to draw me closer to Himself. I've come to believe that God is the most trustworthy voice in my life, honest with me for my good, for the sake of our relationship, and for the sake of others. Now I find myself saying thank you: Thank you, God, for loving me enough to be truthful with me with such grace.

While there's nothing magical about Lent itself, it offers a meaningful opportunity to ask God to reveal what's within us—not out of duty, fear, or penitence, but because He loves us and desires to be close. We can ask Him: Am I running toward You or away from You? Do I believe You are for me or against me? What do You want me to see about myself, or even about what I truly believe about You? What is a truth you'd want to replace for a story I'm telling myself?

Each week of Lent, we'll invite you to reflect on different themes as we move toward Easter. Setting your heart and mind clearly will help make this season all the more rewarding. Additional verses: Hebrews 4:12; Philippians 2:13.



**BETHANY
WATERS**
Covenant
Member

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:8

When God extends the miraculous gift of His grace to us in salvation, that is not the end of the gift. It is not a “rip it open, use it twice, and it breaks” type of gift. Rather, it is merely the introduction of grace as our constant and comprehensive companion in our journey of faith. Not only is grace the gift we open, cherish, and rely upon, but it then continues to grow rather than fading or failing as other gifts do. Indeed, the Bible makes clear that by grace we are not only saved from our death in sin but to our life in Christ. Such a life can seem overwhelming and impossible without relying on grace, and we can easily fall into the habit of tucking our gift away in the closet. If we do not see grace as a necessary prerequisite, our sinful hearts tempt us toward one of two extremes: legalism or lawlessness. Paul wrestles with this exact issue in the early church in Romans 2-6 and Galatians 3-4. If we are to walk faithfully and abundantly in the life God calls us to, we must begin with, continue by, and finish in grace.

In the collection of Puritan prayers entitled *The Valley of Vision*, the author beseeches God: “Return again with the showers of converting grace to a poor gospel-abusing sinner. Help my soul to breathe after holiness, after a constant devotedness to thee, after growth in grace more abundantly every day.”

May our souls pursue grace, and God will make it abound.



**LAURIE
STEWART**
Covenant
Washington
Member

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 5:10-11

Our family is walking through a season of suffering—marked by grief and loss, illness, and uncertainty. Some in our family who do not have a relationship with Jesus understandably ask why they should consider following Him when this is what their Christian family members are facing.

During this season, I’ve spent time reading and reflecting on suffering, and in the process I’ve learned much about grace. Out of curiosity, I even asked Artificial Intelligence, “What is the Bible’s correlation between suffering and God’s grace?” The response was striking:

- Grace transforms suffering into formation.
- The cross is the ultimate link between suffering and grace.
- Grace doesn’t waste pain. It reshapes it—not instantly, and not neatly, but purposefully.

Scripture is clear that suffering creates space for deeper intimacy with the One who suffered greatly in our place. Jesus—God’s perfect and blameless Son—endured undeserved ridicule, rejection, humiliation, despair, and ultimately a brutal death so that our sins could be covered and we could be spared eternal separation from God. That is grace: a gift we could never earn or deserve.

Dan McCartney writes, “Christ learned humanhood from His suffering, and therefore we learn Christhood from our suffering.”

Are you enduring a trial? Be encouraged. Jesus Christ endured profound suffering so that He could meet you in yours. In doing so, He revealed His fierce love for us—through grace. Count it all joy...

GRACE

FEB
25

**FRANK
BROWN**
Covenant
Washington
Member

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:8-10

God’s grace is not something we earn, it is something we receive. The world measures worth by appearance, performance, success, or perfection. God offers us a gift that stands apart - undeserved, unconditional love. Scripture reminds us that *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Our need for grace begins with recognizing that we cannot save ourselves. We fall short, make mistakes, and carry burdens we cannot fix on our own. God meets us right where we are, not with condemnation, but with mercy and grace.

Receiving grace requires us to humble ourselves, trust in God, and admit we need help. Sometimes we resist grace because we feel unworthy, but grace exists precisely because we are unworthy. When we accept God’s grace, we experience forgiveness, freedom, and peace. We are no longer defined by our past failures but by God’s love and purpose for us.

Grace is never meant to stop with us. When God’s grace transforms us, it naturally begins to overflow to others. We become more patient, more willing to forgive, and more compassionate toward those who hurt us. The grace we receive becomes the grace we give. Our words become kinder, our patience grows, and our compassion deepens.

Today, come to God just as you are. Receive His grace freely and fully. Let it change your heart, shape your words, and guide your actions.

FEB
26

**AVERY
JOHNSON**
Covenant
Member

“About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). Matthew 27:46

As someone who has walked through more than eleven years of infertility and the uncertainty of waiting as a hopeful adoptive parent, there have been many times I have felt forgotten. I want so badly to face the unknowns of my circumstances with dignity and grace — but my humanity cries out to be free from it.

During our first adoption wait, I would pray to God during my thirty-minute commute to work. One particular day, I was so tired, disenchanted, and disappointed with how our journey was unfolding that no words came — I just began to cry. As the miles passed, my sadness turned to anger. I felt there was nothing left to ask, say, or request, and still my prayers felt unanswered. At my wits’ end, I finally yelled out loud, *“You have forgotten me, and You do not love me enough to help me.”* A few moments later, I was overwhelmed by a deep, steady sense of peace. I heard a quiet voice in my heart say, *“I am here. I love you. I see you.”*

God displayed His ultimate grace by sending Jesus to earth to become fully human. Jesus felt joy, but we also know He experienced the depths of human pain. He experienced betrayal from a trusted friend. And in the height of His suffering on the cross, He cried out, asking if He had been forsaken.

This is how I bring my own disappointments, trials, unanswered prayers, and waiting before God. I do not always understand what He is doing, but I know I can come to Him honestly — because Jesus did. And isn't that one of the most beautiful pictures of grace?

If you're walking through something that feels unbearable, bring it to your Father exactly as it is. Don't polish the words. Don't soften the feelings. Pray with honesty. Pray with vulnerability. He is near, He loves you, and He sees you. His grace is for you!

“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

Growing up, I was your classic goody-two-shoes: rarely grounded, never once written up in school, and I always made sure my parents knew when my brothers were misbehaving. I knew I needed grace, but if I'm being honest, I probably thought of it more as a safety net than a daily necessity.

Parenting has a way of revealing what's really in our hearts. One season in particular stands out. My youngest was a newborn (who fought sleep with everything she had) and my oldest had just turned three. My husband, Josh, went out to play basketball with friends and came back with three torn ligaments in his knee.

I wanted to have a servant's heart through it, to care for my family with joy and sacrificial love. I tried to be selfless and compassionate as Josh recovered from surgery. But the truth was, I was annoyed! I found myself resentful of my husband who got to lie around all day while I carried the weight of everything else. I didn't like what surfaced in my heart: selfishness, impatience, and bitterness.

That season, among many others, opened my eyes to how desperately I need God's grace, not just in obvious failure, but in the quiet, hidden places of my heart. Thank God we don't have to earn His approval or save ourselves by being good enough. God's grace is immeasurable and sufficient, covering not only what I see and confess, but even the sin I'm blind to. Long before I recognize my need, His grace is already there—lavishly poured out, patiently at work, and more than enough.

Ask God today to reveal the places where you need His grace, and receive it without shame!



MICHELLE HALL
Covenant
Kids
Director

NOTES

REPENTANCE

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” Acts 3:19

I've been a Christian nearly all my life, comfortable in my “good Christian” activities. But, that comfort became dangerous. I was doing the right things on the outside while quietly drifting in the wrong direction on the inside. Repentance felt distant, unnecessary. I'd become as comfortable in a certain sin as I was in my faith. Thankfully, a sermon stirred my heart, and I met with my pastor's wife to talk through what God was revealing to me.

She showed me in the Word to repent before God first, since my sin was first against Him. Yes! I could do that from my bedroom. But then she rocked my world, advising me from Scripture to next confess to the one I had wronged. Goodbye, comfort. Hello, fear. Face-to-face confession felt vulnerable, terrifying. But God's best work isn't done in our comfort zone.

Armed with prayer and God's promise that the truth will set me free, He faithfully created the time and gave me the words. The moment I obeyed, a weight lifted, one I'd stopped noticing. Only then did I realize how heavy it had been.

We convince ourselves we're fine, until the Holy Spirit exposes our sin and leads us to repentance. Then we discover what we'd been missing: true freedom. Repentance isn't something to fear. It's how we experience holy refreshing.

Is your comfort costing you your freedom?

“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” Psalm 119:97

While many worship songs focus on God's grace, faithfulness, or love, you would have to search hard to find a song rejoicing in God's law the way Psalm 119 does. Most of us grow up trying to avoid as many rules as possible. Rules keep us from doing what we want to do. Few people love the rules and even fewer can sing about how they love the rules for 176 verses. How am I supposed to love God's law like that?

When I am in dark times, I go over my problems with my mentor. I want him to shine a bright light of inspiration, like a lighthouse in a storm or an uplifting worship song about God's love for me. But, he usually starts by asking a question. “Do you need to repent of anything?” Sometimes, I must confess something that I'd rather keep to myself. Sometimes, I find that I've been holding back parts of my heart that I didn't want to surrender to God.

Instruments need to be tuned properly before they can be played properly. Hurry and worry can make me blind to what God has laid in front of me. It is only through repentance that the scales over our eyes are removed and we can see clearly enough to play the song as intended. Repentance allows God's law to tune me like an instrument, until I can sing my song of praise in the harshest of circumstances. Even for 176 verses.

Father, tune my heart to rejoice in your instruction. Create in me a heart that can sing your praise in my highest and my lowest moments.



**MYRA
HOUSER**
Covenant
Washington
Member



**CHRIS
SHEETS**
Covenant
Member

REPENTANCE

MAR
04

**HOLLY
SALGADO**
Covenant
Member

“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” 2 Corinthians 7:10

I can still hear my mom’s words in the back of my head from when I was a child: “Are you truly sorry for what you did, or are you just sorry you got caught?”

Little did I know then how much truth was poised in that simple question.

I can have regret over something I have done without having a true change of heart. I can feel grieved over the consequences of my actions

and even feel bad about what I did — yet still not be repentant. This is worldly grief. Worldly grief

brings me down, makes me feel worthless, and leaves me stuck in chains.

To be truly sorry — to be truly repentant over my sin — I need the conviction that comes from God Himself. I need to know that my sin broke His heart. Like David prayed when confessing his sin of adultery: “Against You, You only, have I sinned.” Being confronted about our sin is never fun, but it is loving and kind and brings about a change in us. God loves us too much to let us stay stuck in the chains of sin. Jesus wants to free us, and so He gives us repentance that leads to life and freedom. Acts 11:18 says, “God granted them repentance that leads to life.” True, godly grief can only be felt when it comes straight from the One who loves us most. That’s why we can pray:

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts.
See if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*
— Psalm 139:23-24

This kind of repentance brings joy, feeling clean before the Lord, and true freedom. So ask yourself the hard but honest question: *Am I truly sorry for what I’ve done, or am I just sorry I got caught? Then invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart and change your ways. He will.*

MAR
05

**GORDON
DOUGLAS**
Covenant
Member

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts! See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalms 139:23-24

It can be a sobering reality to hear what others see in us that we ourselves can’t see. If it happens once, we might think that what that one person says is not true. We can make an excuse and say that one person just misunderstands us. But, don’t be so quick to discount someone’s thoughts. Don’t be so quick to decide that they are wrong. Sometimes we have areas

in our lives that are blind spots to us. The Lord will use others to show us what we might be missing. It happened for sure to King David when God used the prophet Nathan. It happened to me recently. At first I was defensive and certain that it couldn’t be true. But, it happened again. Hello! How many times was it going to take?

When you pray the prayer in Psalm 139:23-24, God will point out to you those areas that He wants you to see for what they really are. The good news is, our God is gentle and loving in Spirit. He speaks softly to those who will listen and hear His voice.

Father, show us those things in our lives that do not reflect who you are. Be bold enough to ask the Lord to point some things out to you. Then repent and ask Him to help you change.

DEVOTION TO GOD

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

Growing up, my family would spend one week each summer in the Outer Banks. We would drive down Highway 12 to the end of the island, faces glued to the windows, singing songs and counting license plates from each state. Our big agenda was fishing, which often involved hours of driving to find the “perfect spot” (which I am now convinced is anywhere except where we are) and camping out all day on the beach.

Hatteras remains one of my most treasured places, and I’ve realized it’s not because of what we did and what we saw, but who I was sharing it with. What I remember most are the laughs and smiles, and the general sense of peace and joy my family shared on those trips.

One word sums up that feeling: delight.

Lent serves as an annual reminder and invitation to surrender fully and deepen our relationship with God, to lay down our will and receive His. I believe that dedication to God goes beyond efforts of loving and knowing Him deeply and striving to keep His will. Our Father desires for us to delight in Him. To look forward to spending time with Him. Not for what He can give us, but so that we can align our will with His and find contentment in resting in Him.

Lately, I’ve been asking myself how I can enjoy my time with God more. There is so much beauty in the disciplines of reading your Bible and praying each morning, but for me, it’s easy for those practices to become a routine task, which isn’t what I hope to give to God. I strive to give Him my excitement, joy, and full attention—how we show up when we genuinely love spending time with someone.

This week, where might God be inviting you to move from routine to delight as you devote yourself more fully to Him?

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” Mark 12:29-30

The Shema, which Jesus is quoting from (Deut 6:4-5), was Israel’s original kind of our ‘Lord’s Prayer’, a little blurb of scripture everyone knew and kept close to heart. It’s the central verse of faith. Who is the God we are devoted to? The triune Godhead who is One. His greatest commandment for His people is to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The totality of our being prepared as the perfect offering to the Lord, as Paul says in Romans. It is the invitation to have God be the animating force of our lives. That which drives our heart to beat faster, our soul to delight, our mind to ponder, and our body to act.

It is never a question of whether you are devoted to something or not, but rather what thing/person is the object of your devotion. What perks your ears to hear what is discussed in the break room? What gets you excited to talk about most? What can you go on, and on, and on about?

That is your devotion.

He is our Lord, Father, Friend, Counselor, and Savior. As we reflect on His salvific work this Lent, let’s realign our devotion. To remember our first love and burn with zeal for the Christ who died and rose again.

MAR
09

LAUREN
HOCUM
Covenant
Member

MAR
10

CHRISTIAN
ELLINGTON
Covenant
Member

DEVOTION TO GOD

MAR
11

**LAURA
PITTMAN**

Covenant
Member

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Deuteronomy 6:5

I often find myself driven to do more and sometimes devotion to God can feel like a list of actions I need to carry out. But when I return to the root of what I believe devotion is, I'm reminded it flows out of love and grows in relationship. When I approach it that way, spending time with God is restorative rather than performative. I find myself walking in step with Jesus rather than parallel to God, and I am able to ground myself in truth and let His will be revealed rather than striving to figure things out on my own.

Years ago on a retreat I was put into a crowded room with several of my peers from our college's religion department. The leader told us that all the people before us crammed into that room represented something in our daily lives: stress, money, relationships, work, temptations, etc. The people before us were each talking loudly into the air and would occasionally turn towards us and try to interact.

We were asked to listen to the noise and then consider how to find God's voice in the midst of it. How do you wade through those sounds, those things that pull at you, and keep following the guiding light of Christ? When my mind is spinning and I feel lost, I know I can find my compass in that relationship with the Lord. I think the more time we spend with Him, the clearer His voice feels in the chaos.

Give yourself time to just be with God and experience the joy of devotion that is born of love.

MAR
12

**AARON
DICKEN**

Covenant
Student

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” John 15:4

The number one rule in cross-country is: no matter what, don't stop running. Trust me, when you are on a 5-mile run, there is nothing you want more than to stop and walk. So I tried to distract myself. I started saying simple prayers while running: “Lord, my legs are killing me.” “Give me the strength to finish.” As Colossians 3:2 states: Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. *The more I focused on God, the less I focused on how tired my legs were.* I repeated Scripture over and over, and because I had turned my runs into time with God, I began to look forward to them. They became so much easier because I could feel that *God was right there with me.*

Abiding isn't a specific action; it's a heart posture. Abiding is the continual choice to be in close relation with God. What if you treated every part of your life as time with God? Lord, help us abide in You and treat everything we do today as time with You, Amen.

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezekiel 36:26 NIV

When I think of new life, what comes to mind is Ezekiel 36:26. Every time I come across this verse, I can feel my heart fill with a renewed sense of hope as soon as I read the words “new heart” and “new spirit.” If I am honest, there have been a few seasons in life where my heart felt a bit like stone – heavy and hardened. There have been circumstances where I have certainly had to wrestle with my faith because my heart felt lifeless, either through hopelessness, bitterness, or grief. When I read this verse, an image always comes to mind of God so kindly stepping towards me holding a heart that is beating and full of life ready to trade me for the heavy stone I am carrying in my chest. More than just a new heart, what I love is this verse talks about a new spirit. Immediately, it makes me think of the Holy Spirit and the access that I have to Jesus through his death and resurrection. So, much more than just giving me a new spirit of my own, God is offering me HIS Spirit.

In Acts 2, we are told that we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit through our repentance, and, truly, in those moments where my heart feels hardened and heavy like a stone, the Spirit is that gift that brings a renewed sense of life every time as I cling to Jesus.

What are the places in your heart the Lord wants to soften today?

“‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.”
1 Corinthians 10:23-24 NIV

I remember being a kid growing up in Main Street Methodist Church in Virginia. The farthest thing from my mind was doing and giving my “best” for the Lord. When Lent came around I felt guilty for not giving up something... so I decided to give up chewing gum. No problem, *I did not like chewing gum!*

Today, now that I am a follower of Christ, I believe this same attitude too often exists. As we grow in Christ and become more mature, we have indeed given up many things through the years; some just plain sinful, and others as Paul says may be permissible, but not “profitable” for me as a believer.

The Lenten Season reminds me of the great freedom I have in my Lord, but also the great responsibility that accompanies this grace – *to be wise in how I choose to live*. What to give up (all year!) and what to replace it with if needed. So today, there are things I can give up that I like more than chewing gum. I also believe it is meaningful to give up personal time to do things like play with grandkids, listen to a friend’s words, help a friend when I may rather just stay home and work in the shop. So Lent can mean giving, as well as giving up something. But both, if for the Lord, are great!

Lord, you gave it all for me. Let me have the same heart in surrendering all of myself to you and your ways. Give me eyes to see what is beneficial to others and a heart ready to seek the good of others.

MAR
16

**MAGGIE
RAINS**
Covenant
Member

MAR
17

**ED
COULBOURN**
Covenant
Washington
Member

NEW LIFE

MAR
18

**CINDY
NICHOLSON**

Covenant
Member

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV

There is something special about slipping on a brand-new pair of running shoes. The excitement, the comfort, and the anticipation of new adventures make it hard to wait—I want to wear them straight out of the box! The old shoes, worn and uncomfortable, are quickly retired because they no longer serve me well. They’ve carried me through many miles, but now they only bring pain if I try to run in them.

This is what happens when we embrace a new life in Jesus. Just as we leave behind old shoes that no longer fit, we are instructed to take off our old selves, the habits, attitudes, and ways of living that once defined us, and put on a new self. Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Just as Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose again to new life, we too are given a new heart and a fresh start when we choose to follow Him. The journey may not always be easy, but with each step, we grow stronger and more confident in the life He has given us.

So, let’s leave behind what no longer fits and run forward with confidence, embracing the abundant life Jesus provides. Just as new shoes support us for the road ahead, the new life in Christ equips us for every challenge and opportunity. Keep running toward Him, and discover the joy and freedom of living as a new creation.

Are you ready to step into your new life? Take a moment to reflect on what you need to leave behind. Embrace the transformation Jesus offers, and commit to running toward Him every day. Let His love and purpose guide your steps, and share that hope with others. The journey is yours—lace up, and start running in the new life He provides!

MAR
19

**KATHERINE
EDWARDS**

Covenant
Member

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:4 NIV

Who else is ready for warmer weather?! More specifically... springtime? We’ve experienced a brutally cold winter (at least for us North Carolinians). I remember thinking, as most of us probably were on days when temperatures were in the teens, how I couldn’t wait for spring – for that transformation of cold to warm, old to new, when once barren branches have new, green shoots appear. New life is being born, and new flowers are blooming.

The spring transformation reminds me of our spiritual transformation. When we receive the gift of salvation, our old self dies and we are born as a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Just as leaves and flowers die so that new ones can appear, our sinful life, or our life apart from God, has to die so that our new life in Christ can thrive. When we put to death our old selves, it makes way for the Holy Spirit to transform us from the inside out and produce Godly fruit in our lives. Putting to death the ways of our old self is critical to living as a new creation in Christ (Eph 4:22-24).

During this reflective season, where do you see the evidence of new life? Praise God for His work in you through the Holy Spirit.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.” 1 Timothy 2:1

Hurry was setting my pace as I rushed down the grocery aisles. At the register, I felt the Lord’s gentle prompting to ask the cashier how her day was going. I didn’t have much time to talk, but I asked anyway. To my surprise she told me why it had been awful. The Lord put it on my heart to pray for her, and two thoughts came to mind: What if no one prayed for her? And I almost missed an opportunity to slow down and listen.

The Lord assures us He hears our prayers (1 John 5:14). We might not always feel like prayer warriors, but we know it’s not the eloquence of our words but the power of His name that makes those prayers powerful. We’re also called to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). Praying for someone is an act of love and an offering of your time with eternal value. So, let’s do so for those around us... and always. Let’s lift up the person in the ambulance speeding by...the teenager at the movie ticket counter...the person waiting at the stoplight beside you. Pray each person makes Jesus their Lord and Savior. Maybe it’s a short burst of prayers right then. The Lord tells us to love our neighbor, and in praying for others, you’ll be covering your community with God’s love everywhere you go.

MAR
23

**PATTIE
FOOTE**
Covenant
Member

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Philippians 2:3-4

I remember the twinkling fireflies of the bonfire, flying higher, as they burned the paper I had just thrown in. Written on that small slip, were these two words: Pride, and Encouragement. The first represented what I was burning from my life. Pride. The latter represented what I was fanning the flames for. Encouragement. This was at a retreat a couple years ago, yet the smoke from that fire still billows to this day. To me, encouragement didn’t just mean a “good job” after a game, but it symbolized loving my neighbor. Recently, I read Philippians 2:3-4. It stood out to me—it reminded me of how it felt, when others put my interest above their own. It reminded me of the sweet joy I felt when someone went out of their way to talk to me, to encourage me, to love me. They put my interest above their own. From that point on, I made it my goal to put others before myself, just like others had done for me, and just like Jesus had done for me on the cross. One way I found to love others was this: I would think of my friends, and think, “What about them shines Jesus’s love and goodness?” “What do I admire about them?” Then, once I thought of something, I would simply go tell them. I would tell them what I admired about them, and encourage them to keep on doing it.

MAR
24

**NATHAN
TONEY**
Covenant
Student

That’s just one way to love others. I’ve come up with a formula: think about what makes you feel loved, encouraged, and overjoyed when someone does it to you. Whatever that is, I challenge you to do it to others. Value others above yourself and make a commitment to loving your neighbor!

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

MAR
25

**JOHN
SAVAGE**

Covenant
Member

“Jesus answered, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Luke 10:27

As a child growing up in a small Baptist church, I heard this verse in sermons and Sunday school lessons more times than I can remember. At that time, I thought it was an easy thing to do... although I was doing neither. I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus and only got along with those in my community who liked me. It was only after I completely surrendered my life to Jesus that I understood I was to love everyone He puts in my path. Through understanding His Word, God showed me that no man or woman is better or worse than I am – we are all God's children, made in the image of God, and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ (Gen 1:27).

Matthew 5:43-47 tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. How in the world could I wrap my head around this? People who had hurt me should at least be “ghosted,” right? But Jesus tells me to forgive those who have wronged me. This command has required as much prayer as anything in my life – prayer for my own heart and for those I believe have done me wrong.

Thirty-three years ago, before I knew Jesus, alcohol carried me to a place where I didn't care if I lived or died. I came to know Jesus as my personal Savior and He delivered from addiction using a 12-step program in Alcoholics Anonymous. During these steps, I forgave those who hurt me and made amends with those I had hurt. “Enemies” became people I loved as “neighbors” – many of whom I've journeyed alongside as they get sober and come to know Jesus.

What experience might the Lord be using in your life to help you love those around you?

MAR
26

**MARGARET
MANGUM**

Covenant
Member

“Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35.

In 2003, my son-in-law fell out of a cherry picker. He spent the next twelve weeks in the intensive care unit battling for his life. My niece Jessica came from Florida to support our daughter. Shortly after going home, Jessica called us to say that she wanted what we had... *she and her husband had given their lives to the Lord.* I didn't remember smiling when Jessica visited, so I asked what she meant. She replied, “You may not have smiled but you never stopped loving, and I watched every day as the weight you were carrying was shared by Christians who loved you. They visited, prayed, provided meals, and babysat.”

Later that year, we learned that my stepmother was dying. Betty had been abused as a child and grew up in foster homes. Still, she loved her grandchildren unconditionally. When we learned Betty's death was imminent, we prayed God would let her live until we arrived. I wanted to share the gospel with her one more time. When we arrived, Betty's face was radiant. We learned that Jessica led Betty to Christ an hour before we arrived! Later, while Jessica's children sang “Jesus Loves Me”, Betty went peacefully to be with Jesus and finally experienced God's sacrificial and unconditional love.

In what ways do you reflect God's love to our dying world?

HOLY WEEK

Palm Sunday

RECEIVE

“Hosanna” is a plea meaning, “rescue us!” We can be prone to seeking rescue from our problems in the things of this world instead of Jesus, our true Rescuer. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any areas of your life where you may be seeking refuge on your own accord instead of coming to Jesus for His rescue.

REFLECT

Jesus doesn’t just rescue us from difficult circumstances, He goes to the very core of our problem: our hearts. We are not the “rescuers,” rather, we point people to the only one who can meet their deepest need. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you boldness in pointing people to Jesus on this most special week.





“When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. ‘It is written,’ he said to them, ‘My house will be a house of prayer; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” Luke 19:45-46

When we first read this passage, we may be inclined to see Jesus as aggressive or angry. Yet this moment was not a fit of rage. It was intentional and took place early in His final week before the cross. Jesus confronted injustice that stood between God and His people. Those selling in the temple were exploiting worshipers, and Jesus would not allow anything to obstruct communion with the Father.

As we look toward Jesus’s crucifixion, we see Him making a way for this same work to begin in us. On the cross, Jesus removed the barrier of sin, setting us apart as holy, calling us the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). Yet being set apart does not mean we are perfect. Through His sacrifice, Jesus invites us into a lifelong work of healing and transformation, removing things in our heart that rob us of him.

In my own life, I still have things that steal from my ability to connect with God. Some days it’s another episode on Netflix, other days it’s being too busy. Take a moment and ask Jesus if there is something in your life that is stealing from your ability to connect with him.



AARON MITCHELL
Washington
Campus
Pastor

“Jesus looked directly at them and asked, ‘Then what is the meaning of that which is written: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?’” Luke 20:17

In Luke chapter 20, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day ask Jesus on whose authority he teaches and performs miracles. On the surface, this seems like a fair question. In fact, this is the question all of the disciples seem to wrestle with as they spend more and more time with Jesus. It’s after miracles like Jesus walking on the water where their confidence in Jesus’ identity as the Son of God is proclaimed (Matt. 14:33).

But the religious leaders in this chapter are not approaching Jesus with good intent. They are not drawing near to attempt to learn, but to dismantle. They are not open to their perceptions about Jesus being proven wrong, they are seeking to prove Jesus wrong. And Jesus responds by looking directly at them and states that He is the Cornerstone (Luke 20:17). Jesus then says, everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed. Jesus makes it clear that there are only two options when it comes to the Son of God: *Either you embrace him as the Son of God, and allow Him to change your perspective, faith, and convictions (you are broken), or you reject the Son of God and refuse to change your perspective (you are crushed).*

What is your heart posture when you approach Jesus? Do you only tell him what you would like changed in your life, or do you allow him to change your life as He sees fit? If Jesus truly is the son of God, then all He does He does with the full authority as the King of Heaven.



SOLOMON TARTAGLIA
Covenant
Students
Director

HOLY WEEK

APR
01

JOE
COX
Care
Pastor

“How much will you pay me to betray Jesus to you?” Matthew 26:15 NLT

Perhaps the most heart-wrenching moment of Holy Week is contemplating Judas’ betrayal. He journeyed with Jesus, saw miracles unfold, absorbed wisdom, and shared in friendship. What more could anyone desire? Yet, beneath the surface of his discipleship, a shadow crept in, quietly unraveling his loyalty.

Judas had made an agreement.

Those familiar with the story might say the agreement took place between Judas and the temple priest. That Judas would arrange a time for Jesus to be arrested in a way that would not provoke a public spectacle until trial (Luke 22:2). In reality, Judas had already made an agreement before he approached the priest.

This secret pact comes to light when Judas asks the priests, “What will you give me?” (Matthew 26:15). He stands at the threshold of a choice already settled, looking for someone to finalize his betrayal. In his heart, the cold weight of silver has tipped the scales against the warmth of Jesus’ friendship. Now, he is simply hunting for a buyer. |But the real partner in this dark bargain is Satan. (Luke 22:3)

Reflecting on my own path, I see how many stumbles began with a silent agreement, a faint whisper from the shadows. I now know that voice belongs to Satan. Each time we hover on the edge of a reckless decision, he is there, spinning lies, waiting for our agreement.

As we move through Holy Week, may we boldly invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate the hidden corners of our hearts and give us the courage to shatter the secret pacts we have made with darkness.

APR
02

CALEB
POUSH
Connections
Director

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” Matthew 26:26-28

There are multiple names to describe the sacrament of communion. It is called the Lord’s Supper to commemorate the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples during the Passover Feast before he was betrayed and crucified. It is called Eucharist (from the Greek word meaning “thanksgiving”) because in it we thank God as we reflect on what Christ did for us. Most commonly, we call it communion, because through partaking the bread and juice, we commune with God and other believers.

Biblical scholar Robert Karris noted in his study of Luke’s Gospel that Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal. The table was a focal point for Jesus’ ministry. It’s no wonder Jesus used the elements of bread and wine as symbols for us to remember what He did for us.

In Matthew 11 it says, “the Son of Man came eating and drinking” in contrast to John the Baptist’s asceticism. The religious leaders condemned them both, but it is significant that

“eating and drinking” was such a staple of Jesus’ ministry. Perhaps this is a clue for us to also take part in this simple act of quiet hospitality to build fellowship with others the way Jesus did.

Is there someone in your community (a neighbor, a co-worker, or a friend going through a hard time) who you could invite in and share a meal with? Invite the Lord to impress someone on your heart and decide to have them over for dinner to practice hospitality in the name of Jesus.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:5

God’s holiness demanded a price be paid for the sins of humanity, and in His great grace, He sent His one and only Son to pay the price we could never pay ourselves. This is the great convergence of God’s holiness and grace. We did not receive what we deserved (*mercy*), and instead, received what we never deserved (*grace*). We received a reconciled relationship with God the Father!

Good Friday is truly the darkest day in human history because on Good Friday the perfect and spotless Lamb died for the dirty and appalling sins of humanity. On no other day has the sin of humanity been more exposed than the day Jesus gave Himself. This is why they called it “good”. Humanity didn’t just receive a second chance, but a new standing. Those who would believe upon the name of Jesus might be called forgiven, righteous, holy, justified, and children of God.

Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”* By his wounds, you are healed - it is a free gift for your receiving if you will believe and accept. This Good Friday, it is okay to sit in the sobering reality of what Christ did for us on the cross. It’s okay to sit still in silence and feel the sting of death because from it, you’ll also feel the depth of love Jesus has for you and every person.

You are loved. You are forgiven in Christ. You are a son/daughter. Allow the grace of Jesus’ sacrifice wash over you today as you worship Him with the giving of your life to Him.



ROBBY SHEETS
Men’s and
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NOTES

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