

Loved All The Way to the Cross



LENT 2017

Introduction and Devotional Guide

Mt. Pisgah African Methodist Episcopal Church

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Our Lenten Journey

What is Lent?

Lent is the 40 day period prior to Easter, and it represents the 40 Days that Jesus was in the wilderness when he endured temptation by Satan. The period is also symbolic of Jesus' long journey to the cross. It gives believers an opportunity to set worldly cares aside and, through personal self denial and self examination, identify (and be identified with) the experience of Jesus. As we set self aside, we walk with Jesus. If we walk with Jesus to the cross, we will experience the full extent of His love for us, and also be able to fully celebrate being raised with Him at Resurrection.

The number of "40 days" does not include Sundays, because Sundays are by definition celebrations of the Resurrection (Mark 16:2, Acts 20:7). (We, however, will continue our journey of sacrifice and self-examination *through the Sundays* until Resurrection.) The days in the wilderness were Jesus' time of preparation for ministry. During the Lenten Season we spend our time journeying with Jesus, and experiencing the transformative power of sacrifice in our lives.

The Lenten Season is a wonderful opportunity for us to grow spiritually. This guide contains elements that are being used in our Episcopal District's Lenten Program, prepared by our Spiritual Formation Committee (Rev. Dr. Jessica Ingram and Rev. Dr. Silvester Beaman, co-chairs). We are encouraging the members of Mt. Pisgah to focus on *The Love of Christ* so that we can walk a new way...a way more aligned with the character of Christ. When Resurrection Sunday comes, we each want to be able to celebrate the inner transformations that have taken place, and to manifest them in our outward behavior.

How will the believer consecrate him(her)self during Lent?

A. Prayer and Meditation : The most important element of Lent is SEEKING the Lord. Many people sacrifice and deny themselves of things WITHOUT seeking the Lord (i.e., just "giving up something" for Lent). THIS IS USELESS. God wants us to SEEK HIM (Luke 11:9, James 4:8). Prayer is TWO-WAY communication. We ask You to do the following during lent:

1. Establish a quiet time each day (at least 15 minutes). Have your meditation at the same time each day (it can be morning, noon, or evening).
 - a) Bring your Bible, something to write on, and perhaps some praise music that ministers to your soul to your time of meditation
 - b) Quiet yourself by sitting quietly, perhaps listening to your music. You may want to write in order to get yourself in the right frame of mind.
 - c) Review the daily scripture from our church school lesson.
 - d) What may God be saying to you through it? Perhaps write your thoughts or action steps in a journal.
2. Participate in our **Episcopal District's Prayer Conference Call** every **Monday at 6 a.m.** A brief reflection will be given, then prayer will begin. The Conference Call dial in number is **(712) 775-7031**. The **Access Code is 658 487 982#**.
3. Join the **Mt. Pisgah Prayer Conference Call** every Monday at **9:30 p.m.** and pray with brothers and sisters from this local body of Christ and beyond. The Conference Call dial in number is **(641) 715-3580**. The Access Code is **316 885#**

B. Self-Examination: After listening to God, it's time to look at YOU. This must be an honest, searching look that uses God's Word (not our preferences) for evaluation. (2 Cor. 13:5-6)

C. Repentance: We must be WILLING to walk a new way. True repentance involves (a) a sense of sorrow for sin (Psalm 51:4-10), (b) An appreciation of God's mercy in Christ (Psalm 130:4), (c) A hatred of sin (Psalm 119:128), (d) willingness to do what it takes to avoid sin (Matthew 5:27-30)

D. Purposeful Self Denial / Fasting: We are once again asking the members of Mt. Pisgah to FAST during this period.

1. What is Fasting?
 - a) Biblical fasting is refraining from food for a spiritual purpose. The point of fasting is to apply the time and attention that you would give to eating to activities that will make your relationship with God more intimate (i.e., prayer, Bible Study, meditation, Spirit led service).
 - b) Fasting is a way to conquer the physical and open the door to the supernatural in your life.

- c) Scripture readings: Esther 4:16, Daniel 10:3, Jonah 3:5, Matthew 4:2 (Jesus fasted), Matthew 6:16-18
- d) Scripture References for Corporate Fasting: 1 Samuel 7:5-6; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 9:1-3; Joel 2:15-16; Jonah 3:5-10; Acts 27:33-37
2. During Lent, we will primarily focus on **The Daniel Fast**. However there are other options for those who are either on medication or do not feel capable of doing a full 40 day Daniel Fast.
- Level One – The Daniel Fast (see section entitled Daniel Fast Guidelines)
 - Level Two – Partial Daniel Fast: The same as the Daniel Fast, but from 6 a. m. to 6 p. m.
 - Level Three – A Partial Fast that eliminates sweets, including candy, cookies, soda, and desserts
 - Level Four – A non-food-related Fast, such as avoiding television or social media during Lent. Consider anything that would change your routine so that you can focus more on God
3. Start with a clear personal goal, such as a need for direction, healing, financial breakthrough, and/or restoration of relationship. Commit to the church's collective goals. Prepare spiritually by confessing your sins to God and asking forgiveness.
4. Pray often!
5. Do not be too legalistic! The point is not to show how strong or dedicated you are, but to increase your dependence on God and to give you a way to prioritize God in your life. If you blow it, just continue where you left off and keep trying! Conquering the flesh is difficult, but God will give you the strength if you faint not!!
6. Please keep in mind that fasting is designed to be a sacrifice. If it is not a challenge, it does not require faith, and thus is not really fasting.

E. Physical

1. Commit to some sort of movement regimen.
2. Avoid sitting for more than 30 minutes at a time. Get up and move!

F. Financial: Making a sacrifice from your substance is integral to any journey with Jesus. God has always required sacrifices from the belongings of God's people as part of their worship. In the Old Testament, worshippers had to always bring some

form of sacrifice unto the Lord, regardless of their level of means. Please consider the following during this period:

1. TITHE during this period. (**TRY IT** (Malachi 3:10-12))
2. Put aside a dollar a day as a special sacrificial offering on Resurrection Sunday in addition to Your regular tithe and offerings

Food Guideline for a Daniel Fast

Foods You May Eat

Whole Grains: Brown Rice, Oats, Barley

Legumes: All peas, lentils, and beans

Fruits: Apples, Apricots, Bananas, Blackberries, Blueberries, Boysenberries, Cantaloupe, Cherries, Cranberries, Oats, Figs, Grapefruit, Grapes, Guava, Honeydew Melon, Kiwi, Lemons, Limes, Mangoes, Nectarines, Papayas, Peaches, Pears, Pineapples, Plums, Prunes, Raisins, Raspberries, Strawberries, Tangelos, Tangerines, Watermelon

Vegetables: Artichokes, Asparagus, Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Chili Peppers, Corn, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Garlic, Gingerroot, Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Mushrooms, Mustard Greens, Okra, Onions, Parsley, Potatoes, Radishes, Rutabagas, Scallions, Spinach, Sprouts, Squashes, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes, Turnips, Watercress, Yams, Zucchini, Veggie burgers

Liquids: Spring Water, Distilled Water, 100% All-Natural Fruit Juices, 100% All Natural Vegetable Juices. You may also drink protein drinks. (In all, please read labels and watch for added sugar)

Others: Seeds, Nuts, Sprouts

Foods to Avoid

Meat, White Rice, Fried Foods, Caffeine, Carbonated Beverages, Foods Containing Preservatives or Additives, Dairy, Refined Sugar, Sugar Substitutes, Honey, Syrup, White Flour and All Products Using It, Margarine, Shortening, High Fat Products

Lenten Reflections

Many of these scriptures are lifted from our daily Church School readings for the Lenten period in our church school book: The Standard Lesson Commentary. The prayers are original, except for the Sunday prayers (which come from the church school book). Please read and reflect on the scriptures and say the prayers aloud in your quiet time with the Lord. You will have the opportunity for additional insights on them on Sunday Mornings in Church School.

Day 1: Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Believe in Jesus; Love One Another Read 1 John 3:18-24

Loving God: As we launch out on this journey toward the cross, our heart's desire is to experience Your love in a richer, more profound, and more authentic way. We do recognize however that the experience of Your love cannot be contained in a feeling, because feelings can be fickle. Help us to remember that Your love for us is as real during times "when our hearts condemn us" (i.e., when we feel guilty, inadequate or otherwise bad about ourselves) as when we feel especially close to You. We know this because Your love is grounded in Your character, and Your ACTS of kindness and grace. Help us to trust Your unfailing love toward us, and help us to express that love to others in concrete ways. In the Name of Jesus, whose love is unceasing, Amen.

Day 2: Thursday, March 2, 2017

The Spirit of God Confesses Jesus Read 1 John 4:1-6

Almighty God: We see so many expressions that people try to pass off as love. John's letter teaches us however that the spirits motivating many of these expressions are false and not worthy of our trust. These spirits will lead us astray into behaviors, actions, and habits that will compromise our moral and spiritual values. Often people will ask us (or we will be tempted) to do things that either blur the lines of, or clearly violate principles in Your Word in the name of friendship, convenience, popularity or profit. Help us to identify and follow the One Spirit, the Spirit that confesses Jesus and operates in concert with His teachings and character. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 3: Friday, March 3, 2017

Loving God and Brothers and Sisters Read 1 John 4:20-5:5

Dear Jesus: We love You. Because we love You, we must love what YOU love, and those who You shed Your blood for. Help us to recognize our brothers and sisters in Christ as the objects of Your love. If we were honest, we would confess that there were times when we couldn't be bothered with "church folks," with all of their attitudes, brokenness, selfishness, and drama. However, Your Word teaches us that "while WE

were YET sinners, You died for US. That means when we were at our most negligent, self-centered, uncooperative point, THAT is PRECISELY when You chose to die in our place. Help us Lord to recognize that we all have our issues and idiosyncrasies, and to be patient with our sisters and brothers as You are with us. We thank You that You have called us unto Yourself BOTH as individuals AND as A Body. I commit to praying for my brothers and sisters, particularly those who I am struggling to get along with. In Jesus Mighty Name, Amen.

Day 4: Saturday, March 4, 2017

Thankful for God's Steadfast Love Psalm 40:1-10

Dear Lord: I praise You that Your love is consistent and free flowing, regardless of whether I started this journey from the pit or from the penthouse. Your love is no respecter of persons – it is equally effective in lifting all people out of whatever mud and mire they have gotten themselves into. Whether it's the mud of debt, or guilt, or fear, or deception, or habits, Your faithful love can find us a firm place to stand and give us a reason to sing and rejoice. I pray that my testimony of You to others flows as consistently as Your love flows into my life. In Jesus Mighty Name, Amen!

CELEBRATION SUNDAY 1: March 5, 2017

Dwelling In God's Love Read 1 John 4:7-19

Holy God: You are ever loving, but at times we are the opposite. We are selfish, bitter, jealous, and petty. We are many things that would never be called "love." Teach us to be like you in loving others. Help us love even those friends and family who are very difficult to love. Make us more like you, the source and the goal of all our love. We pray this in the Name of the personification of Your love, Your Son Jesus Christ, Amen.

Day 5: Monday, March 6, 2017

God be Merciful to Us Sinners Read Luke 18:9-14

Merciful God: Please guard me from the tendency toward self-righteousness. I recognize that all goodness that is in me comes from You, and yet I still fall far short of Your righteous standards. Help me to remember that the distance between my goodness and Your glory is infinitely greater than the distance that distinguishes me from anybody else, so there are no grounds for arrogance or reasons to look down on people. Lord, forgive me for vain comparisons. We are ALL equally in need of the grace and mercy that You have supplied in the person of Jesus Christ. He is our righteousness! In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 6: Tuesday, March 7, 2017

Justified by Faith

Romans 3:21-31

Oh Merciful God: I thank You and praise You for justification, (i.e. being made right in Your sight) because of faith in the blood sacrifice of Jesus. The truth is that no matter how I try, I always find ways to disappoint You. My spiritual DNA, like every human being regardless of race, gender or background, was passed on to me fundamentally flawed. Help me to remember that no one group has a monopoly on salvation, and that that no matter where we come from, we all are given the same opportunity for acceptance by simply believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Help me to reach into unfamiliar places to share this fact with some poor soul who is trying to *earn* their way into Your good graces. Our faith in Christ fixes us! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 7: Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Christ Died for Sinners

Read Romans 5:6-11

Dear Jesus: Thank You so much for exemplifying what true love is about. You gave up Your place in heaven, came to earth, and gave Your life for a people who didn't deserve Your love. Humanity did not honor You, and for the most part did not even recognize You for who You are. Yet You chose the most undeserving souls, when they were acting the most undeserving, and gave them the most precious gift that You could give: Your Life. Help me to remember that even when I was at my most unworthy, You died for me. For this reason I must never to allow shame to make me hesitate to return to Your presence when I've fallen away or made mistakes. This is when You do Your BEST WORK! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 8: Thursday, March 9, 2017

Raised with Christ

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-25

Father: I thank You that all of my hopes hinge on the fact that You raised Jesus from the dead. Because I have been raised with You, I have no business setting my sights on things that keep me chained to low expectations. Deliver me from desires and efforts that aim at anything below Your elevated vision for my life. Sometimes the circumstances of life bring my spirits below my privilege. Lord lift me up each day so I can strive to live within Your lofty will for my life. I ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 9: Friday, March 10, 2017

Know the Love of Christ

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Lord Jesus: Your Word tells me that You love me more than I can even understand. It's hard for me to grasp the extent of Your love because the world teaches that a person must be deserving of love. You and I both know that there are times that I do,

think, and say things that show that I'm far from deserving of love. People often say that they love someone, but when that person shows a flaw, or does or says something that they don't like, they limit or withdraw their love. You stick around even though You see version of me that I don't want people to see. Even though I'm far from perfect, I believe that this kind of love can transform me into person that YOU imagined when You created me. By "the power at work in me," help me to feel secure in that love so that I can be "the best me" possible today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 10: Saturday, March 11, 2017

Live Worthy of Your Calling

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

Lord: You have called believers to demonstrate Your presence within and among us by "living worthy," or by living in a way that shows that we belong to You. However an individual doesn't demonstrate "living worthy" primarily through popularity, intellect, giftedness, or even productivity. A faith community doesn't demonstrate "living worthy" by our membership roll, our financial statements, or the size of our sanctuary. Our worthiness is demonstrated by how readily we receive Your love, and the extent to which that love brings us together and makes us one. Your love working within us ought to affect the way we interact with one another. Help me to commit today to being a part of what keeps us together, rather than a part of what drives us apart. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

CELEBRATION SUNDAY 2: MARCH 12, 2017

God's Overflowing Love

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

God of grace and life: We are humbled when we realize that our part in our salvation is to accept it. We are amazed when we stop and contemplate Your great love for us. We are excited when we anticipate Your plans for us, both as instruments of Your grace to others in this life and as participants in Your glories in the future. In Christ's powerful Name we pray all this. Amen.

Day 11: Monday, March 13, 2017

Restore Your Vine, O Lord

Read Psalm 80:8-19

O God Almighty: I praise You that You "transplanted me" from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of Light. When You saved me, You plucked me out of the enemy's hand and moved me to a place where I could grow. However sometimes deep down I expect this existence to be a sanctuary, a utopia, some sort of pristine place that's problem free. Rather, even in this new space, I sometimes find that walls

that I had hoped would protect me are broken down. I find places of exposure through which the elements of hurt and danger can get to me. I even find my own spiritual root system of security and love at times feels parched and in need of refreshment. Restore us, our Lord, where we've allowed fear, resentment, and darkness to hinder our spiritual growth. Pour out Your Spirit and feed us with Your non-toxic, unadulterated Word. Shine Your light on us so that we can bear fruit and reflect Your glory once again. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 12: Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Love: A New Commandment

Read John 13:31-35

Lord Jesus: As You were moving to the culmination of Your mission on earth, You wanted to ensure that Your disciples would not misrepresent You after You departed from them. So You told them that they would be identified as Your followers by how they loved one another. Lord, how easy it is to slip into the mindset that our church membership, the size of the cross around our necks, or how much scripture we can quote are the things that identify us as believers. While these are important and helpful, help me today to remember that the real measure of my walk with You is the degree to which Your love flows out of me to refresh my brothers and sisters. I commit make loving Your people my highest priority today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 13: Wednesday, March 15, 2017

Self-Discipline for Holy Living

Read 1 Peter 1:13-21

Father: I rejoice to call You both Savior and Lord. As Lord of my life, I submit to Your commands and guidance. However I acknowledge today that as a product of contemporary culture I often rebel against regimen or discipline that feels too restrictive of my freedoms. Help me to keep in mind that there is a joyous liberty that comes from disciplining myself to walk in holiness, and from making use of the tools for growth that You have provided. Help me to select Your way to growth and not my own by choosing to prioritize quiet time over telephone time, Your Word over social media, and Christian fellowship over entertainment. With a little cultivation, I believe that I will grow into the witness that You have called me to be. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 14: Thursday, March 16, 2017

Walking in Truth and Love

Read 2 John 4-11

Dear Lord: How easy it is to proclaim how much we love You when things are going well. But help me to remember today that my love for You is not only expressed by how many times I SAY "I love You Lord" or "Hallelujah, or "Praise The Lord" (especially when the Spirit is moving in the church). Help me to SHOW you how

much I love You by how I DO what You say when I leave the church, or when I get off of my knees, or when I close the Bible. I want You to SEE that I love You when I follow Your directions, even when no one else is looking. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 15: Friday, March 17, 2017

Becoming One in Christ

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

Dear Jesus: I thank You for dying on the cross to reconcile all people to You. I praise You that in a world in which there are so many barriers that cause people to be excluded, You came to destroy barriers and called us all, regardless of our differences and shortcomings, into one multifaceted Body of Christ. Your Word (the proclamations of the apostles and prophets) forms a foundation under which all distinctions and walls of exclusion crumble, leaving only Your truth supported by bonds of love and compassion standing. I commit today to allowing You to break down the biases and "isms" in my own heart that cause me to exclude other believers and push them away. I know in this way You will make me fruitful. Use me to be a part that multiplies instead of dividing. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 16: Saturday, March 18, 2017

Abiding in God's Love

Read 1 John 4:16b-19

Heavenly Father: I ask today that You teach me how to truly abide in Your Love. Help me to feel secure within its walls; it is a house where I can live and can never be evicted. But Lord, I pray that I would not allow myself to be a recluse in the house, but that You would enable me to keep the windows and doors open so that I can see the needs of other people and invite them in. Your love is not a private residence, it is a dwelling designed for many occupants. Help me to remember that if others are excluded, then it's not Your house. Lord, I will keep open my doors today, and love my brothers and sisters. In Jesus Name, Amen.

CELEBRATION SUNDAY 3: MARCH 19, 2017

Love One Another and Bear Fruit

Read John 15:1-17

Heavenly Father, may we produce fruit for You, fruit that is lasting, as we spread the message of Your Son to the unbelieving world. We pray this in the Name of the True Vine, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Day 17: Monday, MARCH 20, 2017

The Prophesied Day of the Lord Read Joel 2:1-11

Lord God Almighty: Your Word speaks of a day when great tribulation will come – a day when life as we know it will change. As I look around, with discord and oppression on the rise, I see signs of its advent even today. However as a believer in Jesus Christ You have not called me to fear that day, but rather to understand it as a day when all injustice will be shaken from its foundations. I pray that every day, starting “today,” might be a day of preparation for me, in which more of me stands on the side of Your justice and truth. Let my decisions today be in anticipation of a time when every falsehood is destroyed and hatred is totally overwhelmed. In Jesus Name, Amen

Day 18: Tuesday March 21, 2017

The People Called to Repent Read Joel 2:12-17

Almighty God: I come into Your presence in response to Your call to return to You with all of my heart. I commit during this season of Lent to humble myself through fasting, not for form or fashion, not so that I can appear holy or impress anyone, but so that my heart can be “torn” before You and that anything in it that is not like You can be removed. I weep for the areas of my life that are offensive to You. I praise and thank You that You are full of compassion and are able to take a broken heart and, at the end, turn it into a heart full of praise – a heart that is in line with Yours. I love You Lord! In Jesus' Name, AMEN

Day 19: Wednesday, March 22, 2017

God Restores Land and People Read Joel 2:20-27

Merciful God: We praise You that You are a restorer, one who brings healing out of tragedy. There is so much brokenness in the Land, and even in my own world. I know that You are able to bring something out of what I am going through, and enable life, hope and fruitfulness even to come out of what seems lifeless. Therefore Lord I shall not give up hope, but rather look for Your hand to move even amid that which people have declared dead. You are a God who has worked wonders. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 20: Thursday, March 23, 2017

Day of the Lord at Pentecost Read Acts 2:14-21

Almighty God: I thank You for the opportunity to live in a day in which You are pouring out Your Spirit. With all of the issues and problems that we are facing in our communities, our nation, and our world, we rejoice in knowing that You have not

forsaken us, but You are still pouring out Your Spirit upon us to empower us. You are pouring out Your Spirit on men and women to speak truth to power, to speak hope to the hurting, and speak life to families. Pour out Your Spirit upon ME, not so that I can impress people with my spirituality, not so I can be empowered to pursue my own personal gain, but so that I can make a difference in someone's life. I seek Your power to be a blessing. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 21: Friday, March 24, 2017

The Final Day of the Lord

Read 2 Peter 3:1-10

Oh Sovereign God: I praise You for Your patience through which You have reserved judgment. We acknowledge that sometimes we grow weary because some things never seem to change – violent crime continues to plague us, hateful and self-centered people seem to go on prospering, oppressed people seem to continue to be marginalized, and we regularly cry out, "How long?" Lord, help us to find hope in the fact that You are not restricted by our time parameters, and that Your promised fulfillment is not measured on our schedule. In every area in which we await Your intervention, we trust You to be true to Your promise. In the meantime, help me identify more aspects of me that need to turn to You in repentance. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 22: Saturday March 25, 2017

God Judges Nations: Proclaims Judah's Future

Read Joel 3:1-3, 18-21

God of the Universe: We delight to praise You for the wonderful ways in which You fulfill Your promises! You have promised to obliterate all that has "scattered" Your people, and to gather them together again. I find hope in the fact that You are able to re-gather that which is scattered, for at times I feel that the circumstances of life have scattered my hopes and neutralized my strength. Our community has been scattered by political agendas that rob us of opportunity through injustice. Even the body of Christ has been "scattered" by the enemy's attempts to divide and conquer us. However, we praise You that if we will fully turn to You, You are able to re-gather that which the enemy has scattered and bring us to fullness and abundance again. We praise You in advance for the blessing. In Jesus Name, Amen.

CELEBRATION SUNDAY 4: MARCH 26, 2017

Our Gracious and Merciful God

Read Joel 2:12, 13, 18, 19, 28-32

Heavenly Father, restore us where we are broken, love us when we are unlovable, rescue us when we have lost our way. We pray this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Day 23: Monday, March 27, 2017

God's People Seek a Resting Place Read Numbers 10:29-36

Almighty God: We praise You for being our guide. So often we find ourselves in desert places, or in the wilderness, or in other strange places in our lives. In many ways in our families, in our communities, in our nation, and even in the church, we are treading our way through territory that we have never encountered before, and confronting circumstances that we have never faced. Finding places and spaces of peace and security can be daunting and difficult. Help me today to listen to and trust the leading of Your Spirit: to go when Your Spirit says "Go" and to stop when Your Spirit says "Stop." If I allow You to be the guide, I can walk toward what You have for me with stamina and energy, confident that I am moving in the right direction. I trust Your guidance. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 24: Tuesday March 28, 2017

God the True Shepherd Read Ezekiel 34:11-16

Sovereign God: We praise You that You are the True Shepherd. We have seen so much in the way of flawed, self-interested leaders that take advantage of those they are supposed to be leading and protecting. But God, we are grateful that we can be secure in the fact that You lead with compassion, grace and care. What You lead us to will be good for us, will be sufficient for us, and will be customized to meet our needs. Help me to trust Your heart. I thank You for caring enough to pay personal attention! In Jesus Name. Amen.

Day 25: Wednesday, March 29, 2017

The Lord Brings the People Home Read Jeremiah 23:1-8

Lord of Righteousness: Our praise for You is not merely because you have brought Your people out of Egyptian slavery, but also out of the wilderness to their place of destiny. We thank You that You do not just SAVE us, but You also bring us to a place that You have designed for us – a place of peace and security. Lord, how tragic it is for us to be saved and be among those that are "Your people," but not be moving and growing in the direction that You have carved out for us. "Bringing us home" entails more than just getting us to heaven, but also moving us toward Christ likeness by working on our character. I commit to responding in obedience to the urgings of The Spirit and using the tools You have provided for the journey. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 26: Thursday, March 30, 2017

Jesus Sacrifices for the Flock Read John 10:11-18

Dear Jesus: We praise You for being the GOOD Shepherd, and that by your example

we can distinguish Your kind of leadership from those who are in it for themselves. Lord, we pray that whatever we do in service for Your people would not be just “a job” or “a task” to us, but that it might be truly an effort that comes from a place of willingness to give our all for You and Your Kingdom. When challenges come, help us to be willing to stand for You through them even at the risk of sacrifice. May I be willing to lay it down, knowing that in You I shall rise to something even greater. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 27: Friday, March 31, 2017

Shepherds in God’s Household Today Read Hebrews 13:17, 20, 21

Gracious and Eternal God: You have placed us all under authority, and required that we cooperate with those that You have placed over us. Lord, I acknowledge that this is difficult sometimes because we don’t always agree with their direction. Also, there are times when leaders let us down or violate our trust. However, I recognize that ultimately all leaders are responsible and accountable to You, and that You are able to deal with any leader that is moving in a direction contrary to Your will. Help me to trust You enough to cooperate with the direction that You are taking my leadership, so that I will not be a stumbling block for his or her obedience. Teach me to be vigilant so that I can look out for the interests of my leaders, so that You can take us all in the direction that we need to go. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Day 28: Saturday April 1, 2017

Tending the Flock of God Read 1 Peter 5:1-11

Dear Lord: I pray for our pastors and leaders. I pray that they may understand that the people that they are leading do not belong to them; they are YOUR people. I pray that they would model a different brand of leadership than the world offers: a brand that calls people to use their skills to build others up rather than seeking their own benefit. But Lord, help me also to realize that I too am a leader, and there are people who look to ME to be an example. Give me the heart to seek to build THEM up and to meet them with care and compassion every day. Help me to do this with everyone that I encounter. In Jesus Name I pray, Amen.

CELEBRATION SUNDAY 5: APRIL 2, 2017

A Caring Shepherd and Gracious Host Read Psalm 23

Heavenly Father, refresh our lives with Your Spirit as we gladly walk in the right paths You establish. Let us realize that those paths lead us to enter Your presence and dwell with You forever. We pray this in the Name of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Amen

Day 29: Monday, April 3, 2017

God's Salvation is for the World

Read John 3:17-21

God of Mercy: We praise You for not leaving a dying world to perish, but rather you sent a great light to save those lost in darkness. You saw those who You created and loved so much groping around in a world full of sin and brokenness, and you sent Jesus as the light to guide them to safety. I believe Your Light can save and I will shine it even in places where people are interested in keeping other folks in the dark for their own selfish reasons. Your true light will set oppressed people free and disturb oppressors. I pray that my light might in some way be a part of leading someone in the world to Your salvation. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 30: Tuesday, April 4, 2017

Don't Love the World's Things

Read 1 John 2:15-17

Almighty God: Help me to make the distinction between the world's *people* (which You loved enough to die for), and those motives, attitudes, and behaviors that are "worldly." The *ways* of the world are ways that are focused on self and consuming. These ways tend to take people captive and keep them from being and doing what You have created them to be and do. They consist of anything that takes a place in my heart (and on my list of priorities or desires) that only YOU should occupy. Help me to understand that just because something is popular or "the latest" doesn't mean it's for me. I will set my affections on You (and the things that You are passionate about) today, and offer all that I have to serve Your purposes. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 31: Wednesday, April 5, 2017

Nicodemus Pleads, "Give Jesus A Hearing"

Read John 7:45-52

Dear Jesus: Help me to HEAR YOU above all other things. There are times when there are so many voices to listen to. In fact, "divided opinions" are a perfect way to describe the polarized climate in which we live. Even in the church, we hear differing opinions about YOU and what it means to be Christian in these days and times. Lord in this moment, help me to let You to speak for Yourself. Help me to hear You:

- Through quiet times spent meditating on Your Word.
- Through reality and experience viewed through the lens of scripture.
- Through the proclamation of Spirit-filled preachers and teachers
- Through the behaviors of those who walk with You and who stand for justice and compassion and holiness.

Help me not to be satisfied with talk that is *about* You, but seek to hear from You for myself. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 32: Thursday, April 6, 2017

The Serpent in the Wilderness

Read Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-15

Almighty God: You show us in Your Word that You are able to heal the disease that comes from our own ungratefulness. As the snake (a symbol of sin) which is bronze (a symbol of judgment) is elevated, we are reminded of the way that Jesus (who became our sin bearer) was elevated so that our sin could be judged while it was on HIS shoulders, rather than our own. Help us to not allow ungratefulness and complaining to crucify Jesus afresh and anew, but rather to keep our hearts pure before You. When I allow bitterness in and start grumbling, help me to immediately look to Jesus so that his healing hand can touch my heart. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 33: Friday, April 7, 2017

Nicodemus Brings Spices for Burial

Read John 19:38-42

Gracious God: We praise You that at times You use our encounters to position us in ways that we don't understand in the moment. You took Nicodemus from a night time encounter with Jesus, to a place of openness to hearing Jesus, to a place of ministering to Jesus after the cross. I praise You that each time I encounter You, I see a little bit more of who You really are. Often I, as Nicodemus in John 3, try to fit You into my understanding of the world. Help me to remain open with each encounter as You continually reveal Yourself and Your truth, so that at the end of the story I too might find myself at the foot of Your cross serving You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 34: Saturday, April 8, 2017

Rebirth and Renewal by Water and Spirit

Read Titus 3:1-7

Blessed Savior: I praise You that by faith in You I have been given new life. Salvation has cleansed me from my sins, and given me new standing before God. When I think of where You brought me from, and where I could have ended up had it not been for Your salvation, I both shudder and cry out in joy! I may not be perfect, and human estimation may not count me worthy of saving. But I thank You that each day you are washing me clean of old habits and attitudes that are displeasing in Your sight, and by Your Spirit You are renewing and refashioning my inner being so that it conforms with Your will for my life. Thank You Lord for being the God of a second chance! In Jesus Name, Amen.

God's Saving Love in ChristRead John 3:1-16

God of unfathomable love, we thank You for Your unspeakable gift in Christ! We commit ourselves again to trust in Him and Him alone, now and forever. We pray this in His Name. Amen!

Day 35: Holy Monday, April 10, 2017**Jesus' Side Is Pierced**Read John 19:31-37

Lord Jesus: I praise You for what You suffered on my behalf. As Your body was pierced, what excruciating pain that You must have felt just to pay the penalty for my sins. It pains me to think that when I am disobedient to You that I'm actually piercing Your side again and again. However it is also in those moments that I am grateful to know that out of Your side comes a never ending flow of blood and water: blood to pay for my sins and living water to cleanse me and restore me to purpose. I praise You for bearing the piercing of Your side – it means that I can always remain by Your side to receive Your mercy and grace in times of need! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 36: Holy Tuesday, April 11, 2017**The Spirit, Water, and Blood Agree**Read 1 John 5:6-12

Almighty God: I praise You for the truth of my salvation. So many voices and influences around us attempt to make us doubt that it is real. So many raise questions about whether You actually died, whether You actually rose from the dead, or if it was all just a hoax. When I trusted Christ, however, You placed Your Spirit inside me to bear witness that Jesus is alive and that I am Your child. That, along with the "water witness" (that Jesus was baptized: You spoke at His baptism to confirmed Him as Your Son) and the "blood witness" (that he was crucified and truly died for my sins) are enough to stand against any argument, critic, or discouraging circumstance. I HAVE eternal life, and no accuser or "hater" can take it away! In Jesus Name, Amen.

Day 37: Holy Wednesday, April 12, 2017**The Lord Breaks No Bones**Read Psalm 34:15-20

Heavenly Father: I thank You for keeping Your eyes on the righteous (even those who are not naturally righteous but who have been washed and made that way by the blood of Jesus). I must admit Lord that it's hard to understand why we who belong to You seem to have to struggle so. One would think rather that coming into relationship with You would ensure a peaceful, trouble free existence. Help me to remember that it is when You allow me to go through times of challenge and pain that You draw

especially near, reassuring me of Your ownership of my life.. Help me to trust You in those moments when I feel broken, knowing that without brokenness I would not know healing. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 38: Maundy Thursday, Thursday April 13, 2017

Soldiers Cast Lots for Jesus' Clothing Read John 19:23-25a

Great and Mighty God: I praise You that You always have the final victory over Satan. In this final act of disrespect toward Your Son Jesus, these soldiers begin dividing up the garments as though they are the spoils of a Roman victory. But Lord, I have seen time and time again that even when it seems like the clock has run out and the final whistle has been blown, You always have one more move left. If I am honest many times I have declared something dead and started to clean up after it before You had finished with it. Help me never to begin dividing up the garments before You have declared that the contest is over. You are able to turn anything around! I trust in Your power to transform! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 39: Good Friday, Friday, April 14, 2017

Jesus' Final Words to His Mother Read John 19:26-27

Father God: I stand amazed that in spite of the agony of the cross, Jesus was selfless enough to take responsibility for His loved ones and ensure that they were cared for. Forgive me for the times when I am so consumed with my own issues that I am insensitive to the needs of those closest to me. Lord I pray for parents who are too self-absorbed that they miss the cries for attention of their children. I pray for siblings who are caught up in their own lives and don't take responsibility for the needs of aging parents. I pray for people who have lost loved ones and feel alone with no companionship. Help us, as The Spirit leads, to "step up to the plate" when there are those around us who have voids in their lives that need filling. Open our ears to hear Jesus' words from the cross. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Day 40: Saturday, April 15, 2017

The Women and Peter Were Amazed Read Luke 24:1-12

Almighty God: You continue to do amazing things! Sometimes we, like Peter and the other disciples, are slow to believe what You the accounts of what You have done, even when other believers testify about them. Often we can even see the evidence (the "empty tombs") and we are still tempted to try to figure things out with our logic, instead of trusting the testimony of Your power. We say, "the doctor must have missed something," or "somebody intervened for me" instead of believing that God actually did what God said God would do. When we are tempted to doubt, please

bring the promises in Your Word back to my remembrance, and teach me simply to *receive it* and *celebrate it!* YOU ARE ABLE and NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE! In Jesus Name, Amen.

RESURRECTION SUNDAY: APRIL 16, 2017

VICTORY OVER DEATH

Read John 20:1-10; 1 Peter 1:3-5, 8, 9

Lord: Though we face many hardships that put us to the test, we rejoice in the new life we have through Jesus. Guide us so that we can live lives that express His glory. We pray this in Jesus' Name. Amen

***In 2017, GO and Share The
Love of Jesus!***