

# *Journey with God*

Lenten Reflections for 2021



*'Come near to God and he will come near to you.'*

*James 4:8a*

# Journey with God

## Lenten Reflections for 2021

The season of Lent is one that invites us into a period of self-examination and repentance as we journey towards Easter and the sacrifice of Jesus. It can offer us a wonderful opportunity to renew our dedication and focus as we think on Scripture and pray. However, it requires our daily attention if we are to make the most of this opportunity. In this booklet are readings for each day, beginning on Ash Wednesday and leading us through to Easter Sunday. They are merely a prompt, and we hope that you will take the opportunity to look at the passages mentioned as well as the reflections provided, and indeed that you would spend additional time in prayer each day.

After some initial reflections on the season of Lent, we will begin on the first Sunday of Lent by exploring some Spiritual disciplines that seek to encourage our relationship with God. Each week will focus on a different practice, and each Sunday we offer a small challenge to implement into your week. In her book 'Sensible Shoes', Sharon Garlough Brown writes, '*... Spiritual disciplines aren't laws or rules to follow. They're tools that help us create space in our lives so God can work within us. We can't transform ourselves. That's God's work, by God's grace. But disciplines help us cooperate with the work of the Spirit.*' As you journey through Lent this year, our prayer is that you will know yourself to be journeying in a close and deepening relationship with God. We offer these reflections on disciplines, as tools for growth, trusting in the grace of God to be at work in each of us.

As we then move to Holy Week, we will focus less on our own reflections, and rather spend time meditating and dwelling on the passages that lead us to the Cross.

May you experience God in a fresh and renewing way this Lent.

Rev Ken Connor, Rev Louise McKee & Rev Cheryl Patterson

*At the end of this devotional (page 50), you will find a few examples of spiritual practices for prayer and reading your bible.*

*These are here to aid you as you practice some of the Spiritual Disciplines suggested over this Lenten period.*

*Be patient.*

*Be persistent.*

*Enjoy this journey with God.*

**What is Lent?**

*'Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.'* (Joel 2:13)

Lent is the six-week period leading up to Easter. It is one of the most important times of year for many Christians around the world, held at a similar level of importance to Advent – the build up to Christmas. While Advent is a celebration and a time of great anticipation, Lent is more frequently seen as a time of solemn observance and preparation for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. From its start on Ash Wednesday until its conclusion on Easter Sunday, Lent has been a traditional time for fasting or giving something up. Just as we carefully prepare for events in our personal lives, such as a wedding, or birthday; Lent invites us to carefully prepare our hearts and minds ready for remembering Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The prophet Joel's appeal to Judah was for the people to repent of their sins. Joel says to the people, "So, rend your heart," and "return to the Lord your God." Repentance is a change in your direction: a turning away from your sin, and a turning towards the Lord. Repentance must occur in the heart, for we read in Joel 2:12 that God says, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Repentance, to be complete and genuine, must come from a whole heart: a heart of reverence for God, love for God; a heart influenced by the cross of Christ. Repentance is not to be just a ritual. For 'returning to the Lord' is a personal decision to leave sin behind and come to God. It is a decision of the heart, one productive of good fruit. It may be accompanied by some open expression, but the essence of the matter lies in that it comes from the heart. So, this Lent, will you return to God with your whole heart, a heart filled with repentance and overflowing with love.

*Heavenly Father be with me as I journey through this season of Lent, as I take time to prepare my hearts to celebrate the fulfilment of your promises on Easter Sunday. Amen*

***Lent is a time to listen.***

*'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.'* (John 10:27)

Today, we live in a culture that is full of noise, there is always something vying for our attention. Maybe it's the TV on in the background, the radio in the car, even in the supermarket there is music and announcements going on around us. Most people these days have a mobile phone which means they can be reached anywhere, so, it's a constant stream of phone calls, text messages and emails. I wonder, have you ever had to rewind a TV programme because, as much as you were watching and paying attention, you didn't hear what was said? Or have you had to read a paragraph in a book over and over because it's just not going in? It's hard to listen when surrounded by competing noise. With all this worldly noise, do we ever really stop to listen?

With all of what is going on around us, we remain surprised when we struggle to hear the voice of God speaking to us. We have maybe been praying about something, but it doesn't feel like we are getting an answer. Yet how can we expect to hear God's voice when there is already so much noise. We need to ask ourselves the important question, are we listening?

Lent presents us with the opportunity to stop and to listen, because God is listening and speaking to us. John uses the example of sheep and how they hear the voice of their master and they recognise it. They will not respond to anyone else, only to the voice of their shepherd and that is because they know him, and he knows each one of them. Over this Lenten season may we make time to escape from all of the noise that surrounds us and intentionally take time to listen for the voice of our shepherd.

*Lord, help me to learn to listen, may the sound of your still, quiet voice not be drowned out by the noise of the world around me. Amen*

***Lent is a time to change.***

*'Create in me a clean heart, O God...' (Psalm 51:10)*

When we read Psalm 51 it is so evident that this is a Psalm of repentance, asking God for renewal and forgiveness. For the background to this Psalm, we can look to 2 Samuel 11 & 12. There we discover that the prophet Nathan has confronted King David over his sinful actions with Bathsheba. The words of Psalm 51 flow from a broken and sinful heart that has realised the gravity of its sin before God. The words of this Psalm are beautiful in how they express a repenting heart and they have become familiar and much-loved words for this reason.

In the season of Lent, we are invited into a season of reflection and repentance as we journey towards the sacrifice of Christ. As we look inwardly at our lives, we can become aware of the sin that we find there. However, we, like David, know a God who meets us in forgiveness and is at work within us to bring change. This is a change that is for our good, and for our growth. Lent provides us with space to be intentional at saying, 'God, I want to know you more, and I want to become more like Christ... bring change in me.'

Today, why not spend time using Psalm 51 to help prompt your own confession and prayer. Be honest with God about your struggles and disappointments and lay them before him. And as you do, may God meet with you and speak renewal and forgiveness over your life as he calls you further into the likeness of Christ.

*Lord, create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.*

*Amen.*

*CP*

***Lent is a time to grow.***

*'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.'* (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

In this opening verse of Ecclesiastes 3, we have an introduction to a series of verses in which we see time viewed from a human perspective as an orderly concept.

So many verses in scripture come back to the foundational truth that God knows best and wants us to trust Him in all things, and at all times. So, there is an appointed time – or “season” – for everything. And there is a time for every activity or event – or as the KJV says, “purpose” – under the sun. Everything that happens on earth has an appointed time.

This verse is a simple, yet timely reminder, that we are to live by faith. It was King Solomon who made this observation that God had established specific times and predetermined seasons, which influence the affairs of our own individual lives and affects everything that takes place, down through the annals of history.

Lent is one of these seasons, a period of time, an opportunity to take the time out, to read, reflect, to be still, to pray and to prepare for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter.

A time for growth in our relationship with God. May this time and season be a fruitful one for you.

*Thank You, Father, that You know the end from the beginning and that everything under heaven is within Your authority. Thank You, that You are in control of all that is happening in my own individual life and the wider world in general. May I trust You through all the circumstances of life and as I seek Your face in prayer and praise, may I learn more and more to pray, "Thy will be done in my life and throughout the world."*

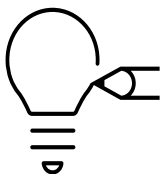
*In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

# Lent 1: The Practice of Scripture and Study

**SUNDAY 21 FEBRUARY**

On this first Sunday in Lent we begin by looking at the discipline of reading and studying scripture. Each day we will look to a verse that helps us to think around the importance and function of Scripture in our life. We encourage you to read not only the verse printed, but also the passages surrounding it. Scripture is an essential tool for us to get to know God and to be able to discern his voice and leading. It is vital that we spend time in reading and devotion. It is also important for us to study not only the text but also to consider other scholars and writers so we can learn and grow our minds and understanding. The discipline of studying scripture can at times feel like a great challenge, however, persevering in it leads us to a richness in our faith and understanding of God. There are so many available resources online that can help us to study and understand Scripture more fully. (Some examples are [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com); [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com); [www.ntwrightonline.org](http://www.ntwrightonline.org))

This week as we dwell on the place of scripture in our lives, your challenge is to carve out time each day to study it. For this next week try to:



Take at least 20 mins each day to sit and study the passage mentioned for that day. This might mean looking it up online or in a study bible. Find out some information about the book, for example: who wrote it, when it was written, who was it written too. All of this can help us to understand passages much more fully. Maybe take a notebook and record what you learn.

As you go through the week, can you build a picture of why we should study and dwell on Scripture?

*CP*



***Scripture is the source of all.***

*'...for gaining wisdom and instruction...The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom.'* (Proverbs 1:1-7)

Just as Jesus being the 'good shepherd' (John 10:11) enriches the reading of Psalm 23 for the Christian, so Jesus being one 'greater than Solomon' (Matthew 12:42) enriches our reading of the book of Proverbs. The call to live wisely in God's world is as significant today as it was in the Old Testament times, but for Christians it focuses on the person and the work of Jesus, who embodies wisdom in himself. The way of life that flows from the fear of the Lord is found in our following of Jesus, the one who makes it possible to walk in the path of wisdom in our everyday life.

To our ears the word 'fear' can suggest a sense of cringing terror or dread, but that is probably not intended here – though there is a level of 'fear and trembling' that is appropriate when faced with the presence of God. The English word 'awe' and 'reverence' perhaps come closest to what is implied in most uses of the word. If wisdom literature is concerned with living wisely in God's world, then the fear of the Lord is the first principle of such a life, where being wise finds its foundation in a relationship with, and a deep reverence of, the covenant of the Lord God, rather than being wise in one's own eyes (Proverbs 3:7).

This then shapes the decisions we make in everyday life and directs our prayers as we seek to grow in wisdom through God's word. As we read and digest the words of wisdom in Scripture, we find a source for wisdom and instruction that helps us to live well for the glory of God.

*Gracious God, as we journey through Lent, let your word be a lamp onto our feet to guide us, and to lead us to wisdom through your word. Amen.*

KC

**TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY**

***Scripture requires attentiveness.***

*'Ezra had devoted himself to study...' (Ezra 7:10)*

*In the verses that precede v10. We are reminded that Ezra was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses and that the king had granted him everything he asked, for the 'hand of the LORD his God was on him.' Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord. His desire had been to study the divine law—its principles, institutions, privileges, and requirements; and now from love and zeal, he devoted himself, as the business of his life, to the work of instructing, reforming, and enlightening others. For Ezra, the main purpose of his life was the study and the teaching of God's work. John 15:5 reminds us that in order to be fruitful, we must abide in Him: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Abiding in Christ, requires our attentiveness, and is enriched by our attention to Scripture.*

The challenge for us is how do we, like Ezra, prepare our own hearts to seek Gods word and to learn, to be inspired by it. Does the business of our lives distract us from being attentive to God's word? Is the word of God the driving force that it should be in our lives? Perhaps, we need to make some adjustments.

*Loving God, keep my mind focused on you, prepare my heart that I would be receptive to your teaching, and learn to rest and abide in you. Amen.*

KC

**WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY**

***Scripture keeps us in step.***

*'I have hidden your word in my heart...' (Psalm 119:11-12)*

Perhaps like me, you remember in Sunday School having to learn memory verses. One way of hiding God's word in our heart is to memorise verses, especially ones that have a special meaning to us. In this context though,

it is more than just memorising verses. The word “hidden” in this instance means “to store up” rather than simply “to hide.” It speaks of internalising God’s word. In other words, reading it, studying it, believing it, marinating in it, being filled with it, being shaped by it.

If you memorize the whole Bible but are not being transformed by it, then you are not hiding God’s word in your heart. Conversely, if you are allowing the truth of God to guide you, teach you, admonish you, and form you, then you are hiding it in your heart, even if you cannot perfectly quote dozens of biblical passages.

So, by all means, develop the discipline of memorizing Scripture. But, even more, develop the discipline of letting God’s word fill your heart, mould your character, direct your behaviour, and change your life!

*Father, thank you for your guiding words, may they fill my heart, and mould my character so that they may change my life. Amen.*

KC

## THURSDAY 25 FEBRUARY

### ***Scripture grows insight.***

*‘they... examined the scriptures every day’ (Acts 17:11)*

What was it about the people of Berea that made them more receptive? It was simply this, they not only heard Paul preach on the sabbath, but daily they searched the Scriptures, and compared what they read with the facts related to them. It was the Bereans’ eagerness to hear from God and respond to what they heard that made them noble. In other words, by looking at the scriptures daily they were able to confirm for themselves the gospel message.

The reality is that what we believe in Christ does not fear examination; in fact, advocates of the gospel, desire no more than that people will fully and fairly examine Scripture for themselves, searching for truth.

It is not sufficient to have a passing acquaintance with the scriptures. It is not enough to know the Bible second hand. If we in eager expectation search the scriptures and examines its content daily, with a deep desire to know the truth, we will be guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth - and you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

Spend some additional time today, immersing yourself in God's word.

*Loving Father, thank You for Your Word of truth and all that it contains. Help me to be a good steward of the Scriptures as I search its pages daily and teach me all that You would have me learn - and guide me into all truth I pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.*

KC

## FRIDAY 26 FEBRUARY

### ***Scripture equips and readies us.***

*'...so, the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped.'* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Paul ends this section on the sufficiency of Scripture by saying, "that everyone who belongs to God may be complete and equipped for every good work." In other words, we are - equipped by the Word of God and that the man, or woman of God is, and to paraphrase John Wesley a 'A person of one book'. These verses are key, as they remind us that all scripture is 'inspired by God. The testimony of God's Holy Word is that it is his breath and that it is everything to those who believe.

The book of Deuteronomy records that when Moses had finished writing the words of the law and had given it to the Levites to place beside the ark, that he said, "Take heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life". This set the standard for the proper regard for the Scriptures of the Old Covenant. And this is why the psalmist devoted the 176 verses of Psalm 119 to the celebration of the Scripture, by using the twenty-two letters of

the Hebrew alphabet as a structure. In effect, the Psalmist is saying that God's Word is everything from A to Z.

When Jesus began his ministry and was tempted by Satan, his knowledge of the Word enabled him to defeat the tempter with three deft quotations from Scripture. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, leaned on the sufficiency of Scripture in his hour of need. Indeed, his summary response to the tempter was like a bookend to Moses' declaration that the Scriptures are "your life," for Jesus insisted that they are the soul's essential food. If Jesus stood on the power of Scripture, how much more must we hear the call to know and stand on that same power for the challenges that life brings our way today.

*Lord help us remember that It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'. Amen.*

KC

## **SATURDAY 27 FEBRUARY**

***Scripture reveals all things.***

*'For the word of God is alive and active.'* (Hebrews 4:12-13)

In this passage the author highlights the power of God's 'word'. He does not simply mean the word of scripture, but the word that can come to us, among other ways, as the Holy Spirit brings the words of Scripture to life in a way that targets and speaks into our own hearts. Such a word is powerful, alive, even cutting, and 'piercing' through all our defences to our very core. Although the images here are fearsome: 'sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divided the soul from spirit, joints from marrow; we also know that God searches out only to bring us greater freedom from sin and death.

The design of verses is to show us that we do not escape the notice of God; and that since our hearts are perfectly open before him, we should be sincere and should not attempt to deceive him.

The author of Hebrews seeks to impress us, the reader, of the real opportunity that lies before those who will take God at his word, and in obedience move forward to lay hold of his promise of rest.

God is not casual in assessing our spiritual condition. The imagery used here helps us to see that the truth of God is all-penetrating and searching, and that the real thoughts and intents of the heart will be brought to light. Rather than dealing with externals, such as religious observance, the penetrating word “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” His word cut deeply to the darkest corners of the inner life and lays bare spiritual realities that one might wish to keep hidden.

Accepting our vulnerability to God’s living word, now, rather than hardening our hearts, will serve us best when we must render our account (v13). Nothing is hidden as we stand before God, we must trust in the leading of scripture in our lives as God is revealed to us through it.

*God, I thank you that your word is alive and active. Thank you that you do not miss a thing. I pray that you would come and speak to each of us through your word. That we would be able to hear you and know more of who you are. We invite you to come and speak. Amen.*

KC

*As you reflect over this past week, what has struck you the most about the role of Scripture in your life? Are there any changes you want to make?*

## Lent 2: The Practice of Meditation

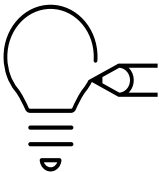
**SUNDAY 28 FEBRUARY**

As we head in to this second week of Lent, we come to dwell on the discipline of meditation. Meditation has become a word associated with many different spiritual practices, many of which would not be founded in a Christian understanding. Such a reality can sometimes become an obstacle for us to then understand meditation as a discipline, or practice, in our spiritual journey. As we consider meditation this week, it is less about an emptying of our mind, and more about a focusing of our mind on Christ. Such an exercise can bring a stillness to our storms as our eyes become fixed on the One who walked upon the storms.

Richard Foster writes on this discipline and says, 'Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ. This comes right to the heart of our faith. The life that pleases God is not a set of religious duties; it is to hear His voice and obey his word.' (*The Celebration of Discipline.*)

As we look at meditation this week, we will see that the role of Scripture is often key in this practice. However, rather than a study of Scripture, it invites a dwelling with Scripture asking the Spirit of God to speak to us through it.

So, this week, we invite you to intentionally create and protect time to be still and focus your mind on God, that you might hear his word.



Why not set an alarm on your phone, or appoint a period of time each day this week to be still with God? Make sure to turn off the TV and leave the phone and the emails out of the way. Take a favourite passage of Scripture, or a Psalm, and pray, read, and sit still with the passage. Perhaps God will prompt you in a new way, or perhaps the practice of simply being still in the presence of God, will bring a peace to your soul.

CP

***Meditation invites intention.***

*'...who meditate on his laws day and night...' (Psalm 1:2)*

One of the ways in which we can connect with God and experience the amazing life and joy he desires for us is through something most Christians are very suspicious of . . . meditation or contemplation. Yet the Psalmist in this verse tells us to meditate on his law's day and night. In fact, it says, 'blessed is the one' who does these things.

Christian meditation is simply the ability to hear God's voice and obey His Word. It is no more complicated than that. It requires no secret knowledge, no mysteries, no mantras, and no mental gymnastics, however, it does require one thing... practice. So often our lives are caught up in busyness and muchness, that we don't know how we can honestly take the time to slow down. Yet, if we could...that is exactly what we would want to do! So, what can we do when life seems out of control, and all we think we can do is just hang on? We come to God... in quietness and in trust.

It is important that we set aside a specific time each day, finding a place that is quiet and free from interruption. Somewhere we can be comfortable and relax. Reading small portions of scripture can help us to concentrate our minds and to listen for what God has to say. Returning to Psalm 1, it encourages us that those who spend time with God and his word, will be like a 'tree planted by streams of water, which yields fruit in season.' So, making that time to be still with God, well, it is crucial for our very being.

*Lord, help me to find that still quiet place today and help me to concentrate on your word and on your voice. Amen*

LM



***Meditation invites intimacy.***

*'God spoke to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.'* (Exodus 33:11)

Meditation allows us to connect ourselves to God with our minds (what we are thinking about), our hearts (what we are feeling), and our souls (what we are concerned about). Meditation is connecting to God with our whole self and holding nothing back.

Another way of describing meditation is to call it contemplative prayer. It is a calming of our minds and hearts so that God's voice can be clearly heard. Our God is alive and is constantly seeking us out to have a relationship. Meditation calms us so that we can do just that, have a relationship with God. It is an inward fellowship that will transform us to be more Christlike. It is connecting with the Holy Spirit who took up residence in you on the day you said, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ!"

In this verse of scripture, we are reminded of the relationship that God had with Moses. Moses was said to be God's friend just as Abraham was. They had a special intimate relationship. When you think of the most intimate relationship you have, it may be with a spouse, a partner, a sibling, or a friend. It is a special relationship, different to an acquaintance or someone you might speak to in passing. It could be said that you know each other inside out. That is the kind of relationship God had with Moses. Moses dwelt in his presence and when he came down from the mountain, he was so full of radiance that he had to cover his face because it shone so brightly after having been in God's presence. God desires such a relationship with you also. So alike Moses, spend time alone dwelling in the presence of God, that he might transform you, and be seen through you.

*Lord, help me to dwell in your presence and like Moses, may I know you so well that your radiance shines from my face showing Christ to all. Amen*

LM

## WEDNESDAY 3 MARCH

### ***Meditation invites security.***

*'meditate on it day and night...' (Joshua 1:8)*

In meditation we create an emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to build an inner sanctuary in our hearts. In that wonderful passage from Revelation 3:20, Jesus stands at the door and knocks, wanting to come in and eat with us, and in a sense, "meditation opens the door and, although we engage in specific mediation exercises at specific times, the aim is to bring this living reality into all of life. It is a portable sanctuary that is brought into all we are and do."

Joshua was charged to meditate on the word day and night, that he might understand it and have it ready in him for all occasions that he might have that sanctuary and security within him. In Ephesians 6:10-20, we are told to put on the full armour of God. Through meditation and spending time in, and with God, we can mentally and spiritually put on the armour of God. Such a practice gives us the security of the belt or truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes prepared with peace, the shield of faith for protection, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit. May we too meditate on God's word day and night that we, like Joshua might be prepared in all circumstances.

*Lord, today I put on your armour piece by piece in preparation for the day ahead. Amen*

LM

## THURSDAY 4 MARCH

### ***Meditation invites insight.***

*'Peter went up to the rooftop to pray...' (Acts 10:9-20)*

Insight is defined as 'having the capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of someone or something'. Today's scripture comes from a passage in Acts that I'm sure we are familiar with. We read here about the vision, or deep insight, which Peter receives from God having gone up to

the rooftop to pray. The vision highlights that Christ came for all, Jew, and Gentile, and so changes life forever for new converts from Judaism.

Peter was one of three disciples who were closest to Jesus. He had been in the inner circle, yet we know that he was anything but perfect. So, what was it that brought him to the point of receiving this vision from God? Peter had a strong connection with Christ when he was on earth and he was intentional on keeping that connection after Christ had ascended. He took time apart to speak with God through prayer, he chewed on the words Christ had left with him, but probably most importantly he was open to hearing the voice God. Peter was open to receiving this insight and therefore God was able to use Peter as the vessel of this hugely important message.

If we continue to prioritise meditation and work on our relationship and connection with God, then we will become attuned to his voice and ways of communicating with us individually, he will begin to reveal himself to us more and more.

*Lord, I thank you that you want to communicate with me, help me to become attuned to your voice and give me the patience I need to listen.*

*Amen*

LM

## FRIDAY 5 MARCH

### ***Meditation invites perspective.***

*'...Consider the birds of the air.' (Matthew 6:26-30)*

Another way of describing meditation is to call it connecting to God. There are so many things in this life that make us feel detached or disconnected, however meditation can help us connect in a new way. And that way might be different for everyone. God made us all unique, and so the same thing that works for you may not work for your best friend or even your spouse or partner.

In our reading we hear Christ describing how God has supplied all in, and for, his creation bringing a new perspective, and reminding us of God's greatness in all things.

Perhaps you would enjoy meditating on creation, getting outside, and seeing God's glory in the beauty of his creation. Psalm 19:1 tell us plainly that the earth shows God's handiwork and creative power. At times focusing on this can give us a renewed perspective on challenges and bring us closer to the Lord. We must quiet ourselves to be able to listen to God in his creation.

Another different way to meditate is to spend time meditating on events. To take time to sit with the bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. This gives us an opportunity to reflect on what is happening in our world, to intercede and to consider how we can be 'salt and light' to those around us. Seeing issues across the world and even in our own communities can also bring us a new perspective on how God is working and remind us that he is in control.

*Lord, reveal yourself to me and let me see the world through your eyes  
and hear through your ears today. Amen.*

LM

## SATURDAY 6 MARCH

### ***Meditation invites growth.***

*'...dwell on these things...' (Philippians 4:8)*

Sometimes when we are uncomfortable with something, or maybe even just don't see the point in it because there appears to be no tangible results, well... sometimes we just must sit with it anyway. Even through the discomfort and through the uncertainty.

The point of meditation is to connect with God, so that we can be obedient to God as we listen to what his desire is for our lives. It's almost that simple, yet there is something about meditation that can feel unnerving. It is not

as concrete as we might like. It is not like reading the Bible, where you can hold the book in your hands. Meditation is about you and God . . . and maybe that in and of itself is the most unnerving part. We come face to face with God . . . alone. Just you and Him.

Meditation brings us into the living presence of God, isn't that what we long for? In Psalm 27:4-5(NIV) we read the words, "4One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.5For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock."

If it is our desire to dwell in God and gaze on his beauty, then meditation will bring us a little step closer.

*Lord, strengthen my desire to dwell in your house and may I gaze on your beauty forever. Amen.*

LM

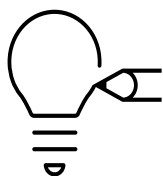
*As you reflect over this past week, what has struck you about the practice of meditation? Are there any changes you want to make?*

## Lent 3: The Practice of Prayer

**SUNDAY 7 MARCH**

Martin Luther said, 'To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.' Prayer must be our daily practice and conversation with God. It is indeed an incredible gift of grace to us, and a gift that we can offer for others. On this third week of Lent, we dwell on prayer and the necessity of it in our lives, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of others. In prayer we must remember that it is a conversation, and so we should not just speak, but also be ready to listen. As we develop a rhythm of prayer in our lives, we deepen our knowledge and understanding of God. Through prayer we come to know his heart for this world. Often, we create obstacles for ourselves in prayer. We feel like we need to have the right words or be in the right frame of mind. However, God invites us to come as we are, that means using whatever words we have to offer, and expressing whatever emotions are within us. God wants to hear the honesty of our hearts. Likewise, God wants to speak into the woundedness of our spirits.

This week set aside your obstacles to prayer, and intentionally build a practice of talking to God with ease and honesty. Try to make a time to pray that doesn't feel rushed, but that affords time for you to listen as well as speak. As you pray, think about your posture and how it can add expression to your prayers (for example, as you listen, perhaps you want to hold your hands open as a sign of receiving from God).



This week be intentional at making a time for prayer. Begin by being still and ask God to quieten the distractions swirling in your mind. Then talk to God about the things on your heart, or the people you are concerned for. Then spend time being still and invite God to speak by his Spirit, to prompt you and assure you of his presence. Perhaps start a prayer journal making a note of what you pray for, something that you can look back on to praise God for being a God who answers prayer.

*CP*

22

***Prayer is provision.***

*'Lord, teach us to pray.'* (Luke 11:1-4)

As we come to this passage in Luke's gospel, we see the disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray. As I imagine this scene, I imagine that the disciples have been watching Jesus and seeing the rhythms of prayer that he practices. They too have seen the power that comes in Jesus and perhaps they make a connection between this power and prayer and want to experience it for themselves.

The disciples were not unfamiliar with prayer. Prayer was a taught rhythm within Judaism, yet they knew there was something different about the prayer that Jesus practiced. The prayer that Jesus taught them is one that we have become all too familiar with. We say it regularly in worship, and perhaps daily in our homes too? Within it is a wealth of teaching. It draws us into relationship and understanding of who God is. It teaches us our need for, and need to show, forgiveness. It reveals our need for protection and for provision. We say this prayer so quickly, yet within it is a profound teaching, as we are invited into a relationship of trust with God. A trust that says, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Seven words that seem simple yet, say before God that we trust that he is our provider and sustainer. That he is all we need. These seven words invite provision and provoke trust.

As you set out on this new week, may you be reminded as you read this passage, that your Father God is both holy and good, and that this Father God will provide for all you need, so place your trust in him.

*Holy God, may we place our trust in you this day, knowing that you are our provider and that you never fail us. Amen.*

*CP*

***Prayer is partnership.***

*'If my people, who are called by my name...' (2 Chronicles 7:14)*

Today our reading takes us to the Old Testament and to the time of King Solomon who has finished, and is dedicating, the Temple of the Lord. As God speaks to Solomon, he is saying that he will come and dwell in that temple, and that it will be a place where God's people can come and be heard as they pray to God. This verse in 2 Chronicles 7:14 has become a familiar one at calling God's people to pray. And I imagine over this past year, many have heard it as an encouragement to intercede and pray for God's healing in this land from COVID.

There is something in this call to pray that we should note, and that is its corporate emphasis. The people are called to unite in prayer and repentance. So often in life we are inclined to think in individualistic terms, however there is such a vital part in faith that understands our need for community. Prayer is no exception. Frequently we are invited in scripture to have an understanding of togetherness in prayer, praying in one mind with one purpose. Prayer invites us into partnership with each other to see God's Kingdom come. Likewise, prayer invites us into a partnership with God, where our prayers come in line with his Kingdom.

As we journey with prayer this week, our hearts should be encouraged to know that we are united together in praying for our land and praying for God's kingdom to come. Such a picture of togetherness should increase our courage and strengthen our reserve for the days ahead.

*Lord, unite us in one heart and one mind as we pray: Let your Kingdom come. Amen.*

CP



## WEDNESDAY 10 MARCH

### ***Prayer is faith.***

*'Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it.'* (Mark 11:24-25)

Once again in this passage, Jesus is teaching his disciples about prayer, urging them to have faith in God and to believe that as they ask, they will receive. Prayer beckons us to faith. Faith that we are certain in a God who listens and a God who is able to answer. If faith and confidence does not underpin our prayers, then why pray! Prayer itself is an expression of faith, and such faith brings us back time and time again to prayer even when we cannot see how God is at work, or do not yet understand his answers. But let's be honest, prayer can be hard at times. We can feel like we plead with God over particular things, yet nothing changes, and that leaves us feeling confused and sometimes disappointed. Often the ways of God are beyond what we can understand, and so we are invited to trust, and to call to mind the truths of God, revealed in Scripture, that cause our hearts to have hope. We must remember that prayer is not about us telling God how we want him to fix the world but, bringing things to him and trusting that he knows best, and that he will be at work for the good of his creation. As we pray in faith and confidence, even amid disappointment and confusion, we invite God to bring our prayers in line with his heart. So today, do not be discouraged with prayer, rather return to prayer with confidence and with faith, because the God we know is good.

*Lord, help me to have faith as I come to you in prayer. Help me to speak with boldness, trusting in your goodness and mercy. Amen*

CP

## THURSDAY 11 MARCH

### ***Prayer is Intercession.***

*'... pray to the Lord for it...'* (Jeremiah 29:7)

In Jeremiah 29 there is recorded a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to those Israelites who had been exiled to Babylon due to the Babylonian

invasion of Judah. The people are discouraged, they are living in a foreign land and life is not as they want it to be. They want circumstances to change, and to change quickly! Yet, Jeremiah is sent to tell them they will have a long wait in Exile. As he writes to the exiles, he encourages them to make their homes, to settle down and 'to seek the welfare of the city... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.'

This idea of praying 'on its behalf' leads us to intercession which is the type of prayer that calls us to pray for the needs of others. Intercession invites us to stand in the gap between a person (or situation) and God and to plead for them for God's intervention. Richard Foster writes, 'Intercessory prayer is selfless prayer... in the ongoing Kingdom of God nothing is more important than intercessory prayer. People today are desperately in need of the help that we can give them.' Foster views intercession as a gift and a privilege in which we can pray on behalf of others, offering words for them that they cannot yet offer for themselves. In a sense, intercession is where we do spiritual battle for others who are in need of additional strength. Such is both a privilege and a responsibility. We must actively and persistently pursue intercession, doing battle on behalf of others, and seeking the welfare of both our city and all who live in it.

As you think on intercession, who, or what, is coming to mind. Stop and pray about these things, calling on our mighty God to be at work.

*Lord, give me a heart for intercession, that I may be ready to do battle in prayer on behalf of others. Use me in this work of your Kingdom. Amen.*

*CP*

## **FRIDAY 12 MARCH**

### ***Prayer is confidence.***

*'...in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...' (Philippians 4:6)*

Paul writes to the church in Philippi, 'Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' As someone who is quite the worrier, I read this

verse with a bit of a shrug at times because I think to myself, 'How can I not worry!' There is so much around us on a daily basis that causes us to worry or to be fearful. Yet, the truth is that worrying rarely changes circumstances, despite the fact it is often our first response. Paul's verse perhaps encourages us to develop a different pattern. Instead of jumping straight to the worry, Paul invites us to turn to prayer... a prayer that pleads yet holds to thankfulness. Wouldn't many of our days be different if our first response was to prayer rather than to fear? One of my most favourite quotes that I have found on fear is from E. Stanley Jones. He says, 'I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt, and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath – these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely... we are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality.'

I live better by faith and confidence than by fear... how true that statement is! God has designed us to be people of confidence. This confidence is found in our faith and knowledge of him, knowing that he is a God for whom all things are possible. As we pray, we invite God to renew our confidence in him, such confidence then strengthens us to live and breathe freely in the challenges of life.

*Lord, I know you to be a great and incredible God. More than that, I know you to be with me. Strengthen me in confidence and faith today. Amen.*

CP

## SATURDAY 13 MARCH

### **Prayer is power.**

*'the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.'* (James 5:16)

Karl Barth says, 'To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.' Our prayers are not empty words

thrown out into the atmosphere, they are words that, when in line with the heart of God, speak power and healing into being. In James 5:13-20, we read about power and prayer. Just after the verse mentioned above, he uses the example of Elijah to illustrate to his readers what the prayers of a righteous person looks like. I encourage you to go to 1 Kings 17 & 18 to read for yourself the story of Elijah, and how his prayers displayed the glory and power of God. It's an incredible story, and it's easy to see why James used this example to encourage his readers to have confidence in their prayers, and to believe in the power that comes from God as we join with him in prayer. As we read this today, we are invited to acknowledge that our prayers can be powerful and effective. This is not out of any strength of our own, of course, but from the hand of God. But doesn't something about this truth of powerful prayer bubble up inside you a feeling of hope. Hope that the circumstances around us, the struggle and pain and hurt, well, these circumstances can change as we come to God in prayer.

Again, I say this week, do not become weary or discouraged in prayer. Keep persisting, keep pursuing, keep believing in the goodness and power of God. And may God awaken us to his will and his ways as we meet with him in prayer, and may we be in awe, absolute awe, as he is revealed to us more fully with each day.

*Lord, hear my prayers, and bring your power to answer. Amen.*

CP

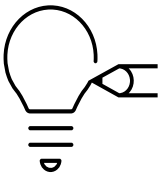
*As you reflect over this past week, what has struck you about the practice of prayer? Are there any changes you want to make?*

# Lent 4: The Practice of Silence & Solitude

**SUNDAY 14 MARCH**

Amid an often busy and clattered world, the practice of silence and solitude can seem an alien concept to achieve. Equally, we often equate solitude and silence with loneliness, and so we dare not engage in case it might enlarge the sense of loneliness that life can attach to us. Henri Nouwen noted that 'without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.' His understanding was that solitude freed us from our bondage to other people and our compulsions to our inner selves and therefore freed us to love God and learn his compassion from others. Another way to consider it may be, that solitude and silence allow us to reset ourselves from often overwhelming demands and allows us space to discern God anew. It is not therefore, a sense of loneliness, but rather in being alone we find a great sense of communion and community with God. Solitude is a state of mind and heart rather than necessarily a place... it takes commitment and discipline to achieve.

I always enjoy the story of Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley (and their 8 other siblings). Finding a place to be alone in a house full of 10 children was not an easy challenge, but she was determined that intentional time spent in prayer and worship was essential to her day. To achieve such time, she would place her apron over her head, providing for herself a tent of meeting! All the children knew that if mother was under her apron, she was not to be disturbed for she was busy in the company of God. In such company with God, Susanna would study her bible, pray, and intercede for others. She created a precious solitude even amid busyness. Her practice and discipline is surely a challenge to us all.



This week try to create a space of solitude each day. Maybe it means being creative in your approach and throwing an apron over your head! Whatever works! Create a space free from distraction. Be still and silent in that space and invite God to minister to your soul. This takes practice, so persevere, until you discover the richness of time alone with God.

*CP*

**MONDAY 15 MARCH**

***Silence leads us to peace.***

*'Be still and know that I am God.'* (Psalm 46:10)

When was the last time you were completely still?

And no, sleeping doesn't count!

I think if we are honest, the thought of complete stillness can make us a little uncomfortable. We do not want to be left alone with our own thoughts. Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested, "We are so afraid of the silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror."

There is great value in silence and being in solitude. Jesus used solitude much during His life and ministry. He did not go away by himself to get away from people, rather I think to hear the Divine whisper much better. When we are surrounded by the buzz of life it can be easy to get caught up in it. We allow our anxieties to increase, and stress levels to become higher until maybe, just maybe, the hulk is released when it gets too much! God invites us to come away metaphorically, to be still to rest in his presence, breathing in the spirit until his peace takes over. The more often we choose to do that, the easier and more natural it will be for his peace to be the dominant feature in our life.

*Lord, help me to find that quiet place in my heart where we can meet.*

*Amen.*

LM

**TUESDAY 16 MARCH**

***Silence leads us to healing.***

*'how long, O Lord...'* (Psalm 13)

In our passage today the Psalmist is crying out to God, how long will you forget me? How long will you hide your face? How long are you going to leave me with my own thoughts?

30

He has been left alone in silence, struggling with being left alone in his own head, perhaps experiencing what has been called 'the dark night of the soul'. He has sought God but is now left in a state of uncertainty, maybe even a little apprehensive.

Yet in that darkness, in that silence and in that solitude, God is drawing the Psalmist closer to him, he has him in his grasp and is pulling him to himself. By the time we reach the end of the Psalm we see that the Psalmist has come through darkness, in the silence and solitude his heart and soul have been healed through God's love and he is able to praise God once more. We find that in the silence and solitude God can commune with us, working in our hearts and souls in ways that we cannot even imagine or understand. We should not fear the silence or indeed the darkness, as in searching for God, he will draw near to us and bring us through to the healing light.

*Lord, take away my fear of silence and of the darkness, draw close to me and heal my heart and soul. Amen.*

LM

## **WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH**

### ***Silence leads us to restoration.***

*'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.'* (Luke 5:16)

In this world we get bumped, bruised, and battered. Jesus had the daily pressures too – that were wearing him down – pressing in on Him – so he sought solitude with God. He knew that an intimate relationship with the Father would restore Him spiritually – and so he sought out time to seek God in solitude. And he invites us to do the same.

In Mark 6:31, we hear Jesus say, "Come away with me by yourselves to a quiet place and rest a while". Jesus still offers this invitation. Jesus still says to us, "Come". And as we come, he stills the storms of life and gently heals. Did you notice in this verse that He invites us to go into solitude with him? He wants to spend time alone with each of us. In Matthew 11:28 it says: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

Our rest is in Jesus – our hope is in Jesus – our healing is in Jesus.

I believe that Jesus' invitation still stands and is open to you today. You have the opportunity each day to accept his invitation to come away with him. In that silent and solitude place, Jesus wants to meet with you, he wants to assure you that you can place our trust in him. As we spend time together, we deepen our intimate relationship with God. This helps us to express our faith, and it will help us during those times when we need our spirits restored. Don't run away from silence, or avoid the solitude, for inwardly we yearn for it. The Psalmist in Psalm 27 declares, 'My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me." And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."'

*Lord, I want to accept your invitation, help me to know your rest in my heart and soul. Amen.*

LM

## THURSDAY 18 MARCH

### ***Silence leads us to trust.***

*'The Lord will fight for you; you need only be silent.'* (Exodus 14:14)

When there is something going on in our lives, or in the lives of our loved ones, something that is unusual or causing stress, often, our initial reaction is that we want to fix it. We don't like when things aren't 'normal,' and we don't like to see our friends or family struggling. The hardest thing to do is often to do nothing.

In the piece of scripture, we are looking at today, the Israelites have just fled from Egypt, led by Moses and Aaron under God's instruction. They came to the Red Sea and were terrified because they looked back to see the Egyptians close on their tail. And what does Moses say to them, 'the Lord will fight for you, you need only be silent', or as the Message puts it ever so slightly less politely, 'God will fight the battle for you. And you? Keep your mouths shut!' I would hazard a guess at saying that's the last thing they expected Moses to instruct them to do.



But in their silence, God spoke to Moses explaining their next step through the Red Sea. It's hard to remember that often when we are silent and we think that God is silent too, that he is actually still at work, we just maybe can't see it yet, but we can trust that he will reveal the next step when the time is right. So just be still. Just be silent. God is at work. Trust in him.

*Lord, help me to continue to trust you in the silence, wrap me in your arms as I wait on you. Amen.*

LM

## FRIDAY 19 MARCH

### ***Silence leads us to grieve.***

*'Jesus withdrew...' (Matthew 14:13)*

In our passage today, Jesus had just heard about the death of his cousin, John the Baptist. The first thing he did was to withdraw from the crowds, even taking a boat to find somewhere solitary to be alone. I don't know about you but sometimes I find myself slipping into the way of thinking that Jesus is almost emotionless. But he was not. He was human just like you and me and he experienced the same range of emotions we do. Happiness, humour, anger, sadness, and grief. Here Jesus was grieving for John and chose to do that in solitude. This solitude meant an absence of people however, it was in the presence of his Father. Whilst talking together and resting in his Father's presence, he grieved the death of John and all that that meant for his own future. With all the thoughts that could have been going through his mind, and all the responsibilities that vied for his attention, he still allowed himself that space to grieve, to acknowledge his loss.

When we experience loss, or disappointment, we are brought into a season of grief. Sometimes we welcome silence, for we have no words to offer. Other times, the silence frightens us, for we do not know whether we can bear the pain it might bring. Yet, silence and solitude are often a crucial part of our grieving. It is where we must honestly acknowledge our pain and disappointment. However, this silence and solitude is not actually

about being alone but being alone in the presence of our loving heavenly Father. In that silence we can allow our hearts to connect with God and allow all our emotions, thoughts, and feelings to flow through to him, for he knows, and he cares. He meets us with compassion and tenderness, and in his presence, he restores our soul. Make time to be still and honest in the presence of God, do not fear it, but follow the example of Jesus and find refuge with the Father.

*Lord, help me to allow my heart to connect with yours in the quietness and in the stillness. Hear my loss and disappointment, and gently restore my soul. Amen.*

LM

## SATURDAY 20 MARCH

### ***Silence leads us to awe.***

*'... there was silence in heaven.'* (Rev 8:1)

When was the last time you were left dumbstruck, or found yourself to be speechless? It's normally by something that doesn't happen every day, isn't it? Maybe it was when your spouse proposed, when your first child was born, when someone gave you a completely unexpected gift or perhaps, something tragic you had seen on the news or experienced first-hand. Now I want you to think when was the last time you were left speechless by God? Is that a harder question? Or are you good at seeing the awesome work of God around you each day?

We read in Revelation that the opening of the seventh seal caused there to be silence in heaven for half an hour. The image portrayed here is of awe and reverence at a powerful and mighty God. Silence is a characteristic of heaven, as all is paused and still in the presence of a Holy and mysterious God. In this instance, the silence heightens the anticipation of what is going on, and booms of a God who is sovereign overall and so worthy of our worship.

Sometimes I wonder, was there silence in heaven as Christ gave up his life on the cross? Silence, born from grief, for the pain that he had suffered. Silence, in awe that he would do such a thing for love, love of the world that he had helped to create.

Do we still stand in awe of our God who created us individually and uniquely but in his image? Do we stand in awe of our God who created this beautiful earth and can make a giant oak tree grow from a tiny acorn? Do we stand in awe of our God who created elephants and lions but who also created ants and hummingbirds?

In Silence, we can stop. We can wonder. We can worship. For great is our God, and worthy of our praise. May we never lose the wonder of that truth.

*Lord, may I delight in your wonder today and stand amazed by all that you have done for me. Amen.*

LM

*As you reflect over this past week, what has struck you about the practice of silence and solitude? Are there any changes you want to make?*

# Lent 5: The Practice of Stewardship & Service

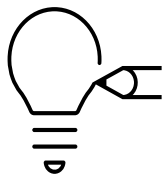
**SUNDAY 21 MARCH**

Stewardship, or service, is perhaps a practice that many of us are fairly familiar with. It is the giving of oneself for the sake of others, and for the glory of God's kingdom. As we look at Stewardship this week, we will look to different ways in which we can offer ourselves to God's service. These will include the offering of our time, our gifts, our money, our efforts.

As we journey with this discipline this week, we are reminded that service must be heart and not habit. We too are urged to see that true service is not about the size of the offering, therefore, no act of service, no matter how small, is any less valuable than the grandest act of giving.

Service, as a spiritual exercise, should be life-giving. Yes, at times, we might feel our lives pulled to exhaustion because of service, but when we get to the root of our actions, we should see God at work there. However, service and stewardship can easily move into habit, and even turn into resentment. We should always have a discerning ear, listening for God's leading in the steps we take, and checking ourselves on our own inclination towards pride and power.

Remember, 'true service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings.' (Foster)



This week as you read and discern what God might be prompting in you, make a point to do something each day that blesses someone else. It can be a simple act of kindness, done in a quiet whisper. Something that whispers to another, 'You are loved.'

*CP*

***Stewards of one another.***

*'...now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'*  
*(John 13:1-17)*

In this passage we see the example of the Servant-King. Jesus humbles himself, and to the astonishment of those present, takes the place of a servant, a slave, and washes the disciple's feet. Peter protests, 'You will never wash my feet', but Jesus answers, 'Unless I wash you, you will have no share with me' (v8). After this, Jesus says to the disciples, 'So, if I, your Lord, and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.' Teachers were meant to be imitated and masters obeyed, and here Jesus is explaining that following and obeying him requires self-giving and loyal service. Perhaps this can be also summed up in 1 John 4:10-11, 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.' Without a life-consuming experience of God's love for us, we will be ill-equipped to love anyone else.

This is what often characterizes the lives of people who have given themselves to profound acts of Christian service around the world. The story of their journey begins with an overwhelming encounter with God's goodness, which never fades for them. This is precisely what Jesus has done. He has given his disciples a concrete image — a concrete experience, no less — of what it means to be loved. This transforming experience of God's grace is precisely what fueled the missionary work of the apostle Paul. He served because he had been served. Paul writes, in Galatians 2: 20, 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' The motivating force behind Paul's life was not the law or a desire to promote his Jewish religiosity. Paul realised that he had been washed by Christ, that God had given himself to him; therefore, he can now freely and joyfully give himself to others.

To serve as Jesus served requires humility. It requires sacrifice. It means taking up the “lesser role” for the benefit of someone else.

*Dear heavenly Father, what a beautiful example the Lord Jesus Christ gave of how we should live our lives. May my life be one that is lived out in love, truth, humility, and grace, so that Christ may be seen in me as I die to self and live for Him – in Whose name I pray, Amen.*

KC

## **TUESDAY 23 MARCH**

### ***Stewards of creation.***

*‘The Lord took the man and put him in the garden...’ (Genesis 2:15)*

Above all other verses in the creation account, these verses show why God created man. Very simply stated, God wants to live with a being who freely chooses to live with Him. In this one verse we see that Man is seen to *be highly intelligent and physically strong*. He is made responsible for thinking, planning, and cultivating the Garden – to till and keep it. The word till means to tend and the word “*keep*” means to watch over, to guard, to look after, and to take care of. God created humankind in his image: <sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (Gen 1) So, in essence man’s responsibility was to keep paradise as paradise. God had created the Garden, the most perfect, beautiful, and bountiful paradise imaginable; it was up to man to *diligently* keep the Garden perfect, beautiful, and bountiful.

He has given humankind purpose. God still calls us to be stewards of his creation, to ‘serve and to guard’ his creation just as Adam did. Jesus is creator and Lord over the earth, and we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to what he has made. In the world we live today we face many challenges: global warming, erosion of forests, and poverty. However, Jesus is reconciling all things to himself including all of

creation, thereby signalling creation's eternal importance. We are also commanded to care for the poor and oppressed, the 'least of these' (Matthew 25).

Caring for all of creation is a relational act, intimately connected to our relationship with God and our relationships with others and our responsibilities in the shared ministry of reconciling all things to Christ. What does being a good steward of creation mean to you? Take some time today to think about what God has given us. Give thanks and pray about how you can share them with others.

*Creator God, we thank you for the beauty of creation that surrounds us.  
Show us how to tend and keep your creation. Amen.*

KC

## WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH

### ***Stewards of money.***

*'Honour the Lord with your wealth.'* (Proverbs 3:9)

The Israelites were commanded to give the first of their crops to the Lord out of gratitude for his bountiful provisions. They were also commanded to tithe: to give a tenth of their wealth to the Lord (Numbers 18:21–24). This was part of the idea of sacrifice, giving back to God. It is about honouring God with our possessions in recognition that God gave them to us. The idea of giving a portion of our income to God's work is a good start to our giving. You may be familiar with the verse that is usually printed on Free Will Offering Envelopes: 1 Corinthians 16:2, 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him...' This verse is Paul's call to the early church in Corinth to encourage them to develop the habit of 'setting aside' for the needs of others as a regular practice, for the work of the church.

We are also reminded that the Lord deems the heart of the giver of greater value than the gift. When Jesus saw a poor widow deposit two small copper coins into the temple's treasury, He commended her, saying, "She out of

her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:44)

We were made to have a relationship with God, and it starts with a thankful heart. Because God has given so much, we must respond in giving back to Him.

*Gracious God and loving Father, thank you for every good and perfect gift you have given me. Please accept the offering of my heart which I freely give to you. Soften it and make it gracious and generous like you. I commit to give you, and your work in the world, my first and best.  
In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

KC

## THURSDAY 25 MARCH

### ***Stewards of our time.***

*'whatever you do, work heartedly, as for the Lord and not for men.'*  
(Colossians 3:23)

This verse, although originally given as an instruction for bondservants or slaves, is given in such a general way as to apply to all believers. It is a simple message, for all those we work for, we are to serve them as if serving God himself. The reason for this is given in the next verse (v.24). Our ultimate rewards are with God.

Christian conduct should extend to all aspects of life, not just a small set of rules. The word "whatever" includes any and all contexts. Christians of all kinds are to work "heartily, meaning "from the soul." This implies the ideas of enthusiasm and passion. Demonstrating that a good-work attitude makes a tremendous difference in one's personal life and in our influence on others. Paul's words remind us that, regardless of our station in life, God is the one ultimately judging all we do, so all of our service is really for Him. From the most mistreated slave to the highest-paid leader, every person is called to work for God's honour. We do not work "for men" or simply earthly goals, but to glorify our heavenly Father.



If all that we do is for the glory of God, then that means that our time is very important. We ought to carefully consider how we spend it, and how we use it to serve, for our time is an offering to God.

*Father God, I ask for strength and focus today. Whatever tasks that lie before me, help me to focus and do them in such a way that you would be proud. Make me work as though I am working for you. For your glory, Amen.*

KC

## FRIDAY 26 MARCH

### ***Stewards of generosity***

*'Each one must give as he has decided in his heart.'* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

It seems that there is a recurring theme in the topic of Stewardship: giving of time, heart, money. Here again we see Paul urging the Corinthians to follow through on their previous commitment to give generously to meet the needs of Jerusalem Christians. Paul now begins to talk about why giving in this way matters so much, both for the givers and those who receive the gift. He begins by referencing Proverbs 11:24–26 to cite a general principle. This holds true both in the natural and spiritual worlds: larger harvests typically require larger planting. The one who sows less seed can expect to have less grain. The one who plants more seed will have a more bountiful harvest. (v6.)

Paul wants the Corinthians to catch the vision that their financial contributions to the needs of other believers can bring spiritual results. The more they can "plant" out of a heart of true love for their spiritual sisters and brothers, the more that love will bear fruit. Those results are not in money coming back to the Corinthians, but in the spiritual lives of the givers and those who receive their gifts. In that sense, money becomes more than just money. It becomes evidence of love given in the name of Christ.

God calls on everyone to decide in his or her heart and mind how much to give. They should then follow through on that conviction. It should never be more than one has. Giving to God should not be seen as a tax or an obligation, a gift of money or anything else is only called a *gift* when the giver is not obligated to hand it over.

Again, we are reminded that God loves cheerful givers. The opportunity to give to meet the needs of others should delight God's children. When it does, He is delighted in them.

*I pray that you will create in me a generous heart that gives freely, abundantly, and with joyful purpose! Please use me to be a blessing to someone else. I pray 2 Corinthians 9:6, over my life, so that I may walk in the favour and receive the blessings you have for me. Amen.*

KC

## **SATURDAY 27 MARCH**

### ***Stewards of grace***

*'Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.'* (1 Peter 4:10)

This verse reminds us that we all have received a gift from God, that we should use in the service of others. We do this because, as Peter writes earlier in 1 Peter 2:9, 'you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'

We are to be used for God's purpose, to be stewards of God's grace. To be fiercely committed to fulfilling the purpose of our lives in Christ, as we have been appointed. Our call is to faithfully administer our own particular gift - for each gift is a holy stewardship which we receive from the Lord. Some of us may not feel very gifted, we may not have a public gift or a sensational gift, but we do have a gift from God. If you are unsure of what your gift may be, then ask God to reveal it to you, and his purpose for your life. Perhaps talk to some Christian friends who may help you be able to discern.

The truth is, that every one of us has been given a gift from God, and that each of us are valuable in the body of Christ. None is without use or purpose, and that is why we have such great need of one another, for we are created to complement each other for the Kingdom of God. We have a responsibility to steward this gift within ourselves, for it has been given to us through grace and not because it has been earned. As we exercise the gifts of Christ within us, we encourage such gifts of grace to be birthed in others, so do not hide away, or hold yourself back. The body of Christ needs you.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit and for the spiritual gifts that I have been given by Your goodness and grace. I pray that I may be diligent to use the gifts and graces that have been given to me for the benefit of the body of Christ, and for Your greater praise and glory - this I ask in Jesus name, Amen.*

KC

*As you reflect over this past week, what has struck you about the practice of stewardship? Are there any changes you want to make?*

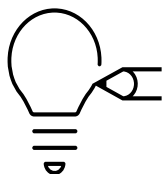
## **Lent 6: Holy Week** **Journey to the Cross**

As we begin the journey into Holy Week, we take a different approach to our daily reflections. For the next week, we want you to sit with the passages in John's Gospel that walk us through the final days of the life of Christ.

As you come to each day, begin with prayer, asking God to guide you by his Spirit, and to reveal to you anew and afresh this journey of Christ.

As you slowly read the passage, imagine yourself as a bystander to the scene. Think about the people present in the scene and ask the following questions:

- What is happening?
- What are the emotions of those present?
- Where is Jesus and what is he doing?
- Where would you find yourself in this passage?



Why not jot down some of your thoughts or questions as you pray and ask God to draw close to you this Holy Week. Pray that you might encounter Christ with greater richness this Easter.

Try not to rush this exercise, instead, set aside time to study, to meditate, to listen, be still, and to pray as you offer yourself back to God.

*CP*

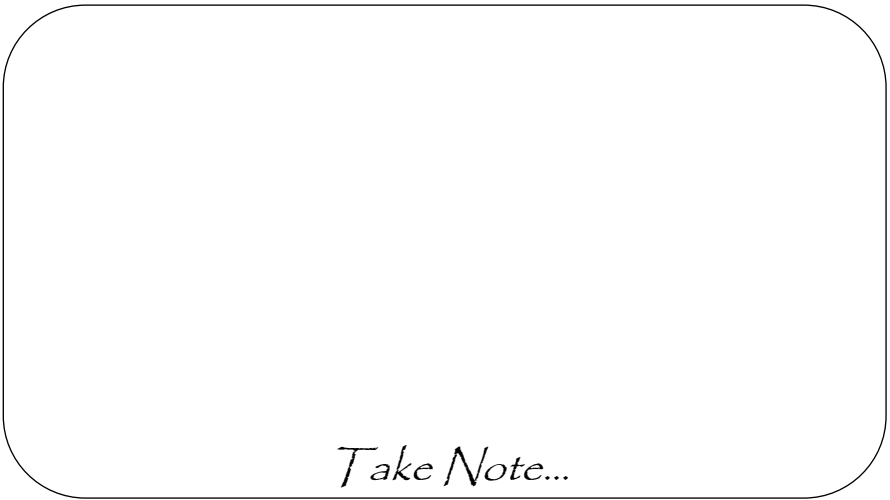
*This week look out for the online Holy Week devotions led by some of the local Methodist Ministers. These will be posted on the East Belfast Methodists YouTube and Facebook pages each morning.*

**SUNDAY 28 MARCH**

**PALM SUNDAY**

**Read:** John 12:12-19

*Entry into Jerusalem*

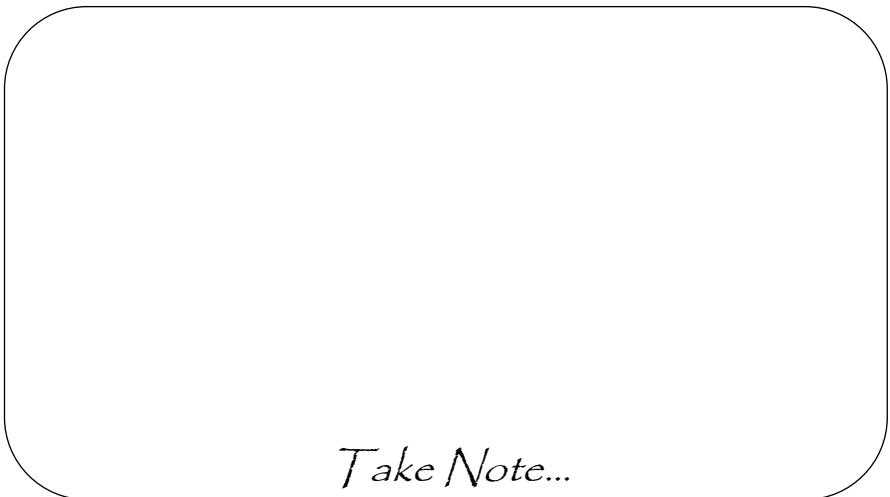


*Take Note...*

**MONDAY 29 MARCH**

**Read:** John 12:1-11

*Jesus anointed at Bethany*



*Take Note...*

**TUESDAY 30 MARCH**

**Read:** *John 12: 20-36*

*Jesus predicts his death*

*Take Note...*

**WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH**

**Read:** *John 13:21-32*

*Jesus predicts their denial*

*Take Note...*

**THURSDAY 1 APRIL**

**MAUNDY THURSDAY**

**Read:** *John 13:1-17; 31b-35* *Jesus washes the disciple's feet*

*Take Note...*

**FRIDAY 2 APRIL**

**GOOD FRIDAY**

**Read:** *John 18:1- 19:37* *Arrest & crucifixion*

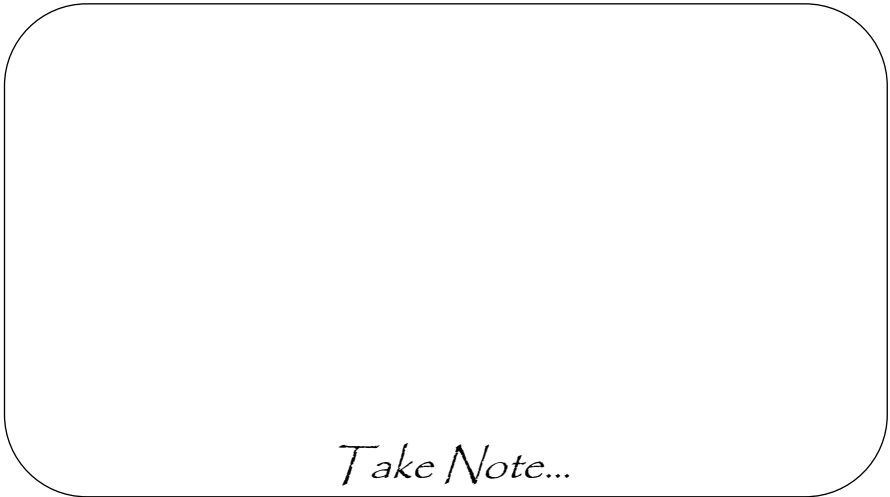
*Take Note...*

**SATURDAY 3 APRIL**

**HOLY SATURDAY**

**Read:** *John 19:38-42*

*The burial of Jesus*



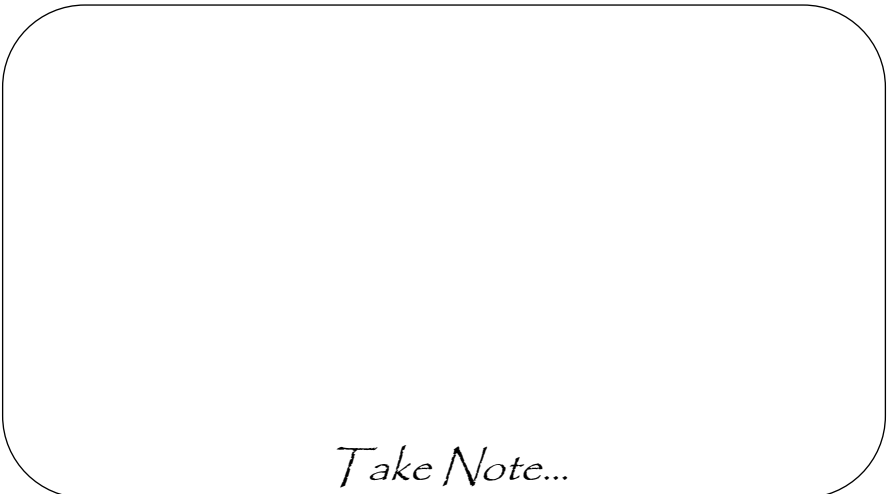
*Take Note...*

**SUNDAY 4 APRIL**

**EASTER SUNDAY**

**Read:** *John 20:1-18*

*The resurrection of Jesus*



*Take Note...*



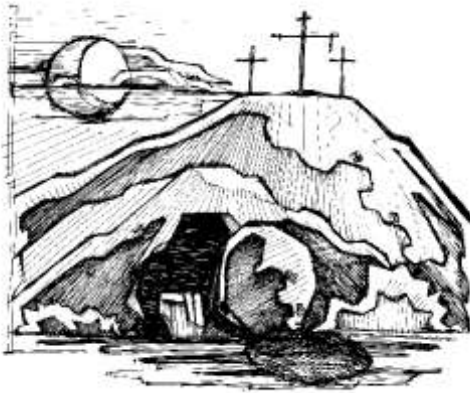
# ***A Prayer for Easter Sunday Morning***

*(Dave Broom)*

Jesus Christ, Lord of the morning,  
rising with the sun of the new day.  
In the garden still damp with early-morning dew  
We find an empty tomb – you are not here!  
You stand beside us risen and glorified.  
You have destroyed death.  
You have broken the chains of oppression.  
You have gone before us into the darkest places,  
and have made them holy.

Jesus Christ,  
the same yesterday, today and for ever,  
Yours is the victory.

In this place, we welcome you,  
Jesus Christ our guest.  
Be with us this day and for evermore.  
Amen.



# **Some examples of Spiritual Practices**



**Come to me, all who are weary,  
and carry heavy burdens,  
and I will give you rest.**

## THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

The Examen is a method of Ignatian Spirituality of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It is more an attitude than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps, which most people take, more or less, in order, and it usually takes 15 to 20 minutes per day. Here it is in a nutshell:

1. **Ask God for light.** I want to look at my day with God's eyes, not merely my own.
2. **Give thanks.** The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it.
3. **Review the day.** I carefully look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit.
4. **Face your shortcomings.** I face up to what is wrong—in my life and in me.
5. **Look toward the day to come.** I ask where I need God in the day to come.

## LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is a contemplative way of reading and praying the Bible. It dates back to early centuries of the Christian Church and was established as a monastic practice by Benedict in the 6th century. It is a way of praying the scriptures that leads us deeper into God's word. We slow down. We read a short passage more than once. We chew it over slowly and carefully. We savour it. Scripture begins to speak to us in a new way. Here are some steps to practicing Lectio Davina:

1. **Make sure you are sitting comfortably.** Breathe slowly and deeply and ask God to speak to you through the passage you are about to read. Be silent allowing God to speak and noticing the small nudges and whispers of his Spirit... also, be patient.
2. **First reading of the passage: Listen.** As you read the passage listen for a word or phrase that attracts you. Allow it to arise from the passage as if it is God's word for you today. Sit in silence repeating the word or phrase in your head. Then say the word or phrase aloud.
3. **Second reading of the passage: Ponder.** As you read the passage again ask how this word or phrase speaks to your life and why it has connected with you. Ponder it carefully. Don't worry if you get

distracted – it may be part of your response to offer it to God. Sit in silence and then frame a single sentence that begins to say aloud what this word or phrase says to you.

4. **Third reading of the passage: Pray.** As you read the passage for the last time ask what Christ is calling from you. What is it that you need to do or consider or relinquish or take on as a result of what God is saying to you in this word or phrase? In the silence that follows the reading pray for the grace of the Spirit to plant this word in your heart.

## **BREATH PRAYERS**

Breath prayers can be helpful ways at focusing our minds into a stillness or a silence, or simply to calm the rush within us. They are simple short prayers, usually of one sentence, that can be repeated as you concentrate on a breathing in and out deeply. As we breathe in, we ask God to fill us with all his goodness, and as we breathe out, we let go of the worries, anxieties, fear, and distractions. As we breathe deeply and offer these prayers, we are drawn into the presence of God. Here are some examples:

**Breathe in:** 'Lord Jesus Christ'

**Breathe out:** 'Have mercy on me, a sinner.'

**Breathe in:** 'Speak Lord'

**Breathe out:** 'Your servant is listening.'

**Breathe in:** 'Lord when I am afraid,'

**Breathe out:** 'I trust in you.'

**Breathe in:** 'Come, Lord Jesus.'

**Breathe out:** 'Come, Lord Jesus.'



## **Lent 2021**

Prepared for use in local congregations:

Cregagh, Glenburn, Mountpottinger & Donaghadee Methodist Churches