BEAUTY FROM ASHES ALENTEN DEVOTIONAL

INTRODUCTION TO BEAUTY FROM ASHES: A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Forty days is a pretty long time. Long enough to think carefully about the death of Christ and the days leading up to it. Long enough even to develop some rhythms of spiritual discipline common to the season of Lent. "Lent" comes from the Old English word *lengten* (lengthen), referring to the season of spring, where the days "lengthen" and new life is reborn. Historically, Lent is the forty days in which we look toward the victorious light and life of Christ over the darkness of our sin and death. This guide is meant to assist you on your Lenten pilgrimage which starts on Ash Wednesday and culminates on Easter weekend. These daily devotions are meant to help you establish a rhythm of reflection that ultimately reminds you of Jesus' death and resurrection.

A year is also quite a long time. And 2020, with COVID and our quarantine, made it that much longer. But it was not without its times of reflection and expression. You will find in this devotional a variety of artwork that was created by members of the Trinity family. These beautiful images represent the reflections of our fellow Christ-followers who were able to make art or capture nature during their COVID-time. May they add to your own thoughts and devotions as you prayerfully use this guide throughout Lent.



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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Ash Wednesday

Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me. Then I will be blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:13-14

We often think of Lent as a time of personal purification. "What will I give I up for Lent?" has traditionally been the question for many, especially in denominational churches. In my family, my sister was usually the most genuine, often giving up chocolate or listening to her favorite music group. I usually went the route of giving up Brussel sprouts or homework. Not a real serious Lenten pilgrim, this one.

The psalmist writes to his God of his desire to be protected from "willful sins." On close examination you see that he is praying for a strong inner will. The ability to choose to say "no" to particular temptations. Temptations and sins have the power to enslave me ("don't let them rule me") and manifest my tendency to rebel against the Lord and his will for my life ("cleansed from this blatant rebellion"). Instead of simply searching for the strength or schemes to avoid those nagging sins, why not start this Lent by asking the Lord to give you the will and the spiritual power to not even desire to do them. Don't be general, be specific (name those sins that occupy your mind). Don't be shy-be bold and ask believingly.

Dear Father, I no longer want to pretend when it comes to my life before you. I know that you know the sins I commit, those I willfully choose and even enjoy. I am sorry. Please give me a new and Christ-pleasing will. And may I begin to choose actions and thoughts and words that are acceptable to you.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way. Psalm 139:23-24

We have called the theme of this week "examen." This is a time-tested practice among Christians which involved a daily inner reflection on one's thoughts and deeds as well as an intentional seeking of God's hand throughout one's day.

I would highly recommend you practice this daily during Lent. Who knows? It may become a regular rhythm in your life. Praying an "examen" prayer similar to that of the psalmist will enable you to:

- 1. Become aware of God's presence.
- 2. Review your day with gratitude.
- 3. Pay attention to your emotions.
- 4. Choose one personal area of concern and pray for it.
- 5. Look toward tomorrow.

Lord, I desire to be known by you more completely than ever. And, in being known, please help me to know your presence and see your hand throughout my day.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19

And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ.

Philippians 1:9-10

Here we find a timely prayer for Christ-followers for all time, especially in these days, especially during Lent. A prayer not for "stuff" but for internal growth. First, for love. Can we pray that for ourselves and for others this season? They will know we are Christ-followers by our love. This is not a sappy, sentimental love but one based in reality and resulting in personal conduct. Read those words above to the Philippians again, very slowly. As you gradually go past "love," chew on "knowledge," "discernment," "things that are superior," and "pure and blameless" for a while. May this Lent produce in us this kind of love, this kind of character.

Father, I long to be ready for the return of your Son. May my life now be as pleasing and blameless as it will be on that day. May my life exhibit a love that the world hasn't seen or experienced since Christ was here the first time.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 20 & 21

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:1-2

Preparing for Sunday worship is a common rhythm for most Christ-followers. It has been adjusted a bit during COVID, though, including for some who livestream by gathering the family around the laptop and putting the coffeepot on. But as we read from the words above, the life of worship is more than a Sunday morning occasion. It is a whole-body experience. What happens on Sunday is meant to model and equip the believer to live worshipfully 24/7.

So too, Lent, a forty-day season of commitment and reflection, is meant to provide the tools and disciplines to carry the Christian person throughout the year. And as we read above, this reflection is meant to identify where we might be squeezing into the world's mold. How do we avoid that? By "renewing" our minds. Reading this devotional daily, following a plan of Scripture reading, and following some good and spiritual blogs or podcasts are all good ingredients for mind renewal. And who knows, they could become rhythms for the rest of the year.

Dear Father, remind me of the privilege it is to worship you. A privilege I share with other believers. A privilege I only have because of your mercies and the grace and work of Christ. May my body become an instrument of your will and peace in the world. May my mind become filled with the words and thoughts of Christ.



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown. So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27

In fasting, we say "no." It is a no that has a plan and a purpose to it. Talk to any athlete and you will hear that they not only train, but they have a training plan. In the same way, part of the spiritual benefit in fasting is in the development of the plan-developing a mindset, schedule, and plan of when you are going to say no to something, how you will say no, and the duration of the fast. Preparation is part of the formation.

You are taking some first steps in having a plan by walking through this devotional, since it will be a daily routine. Now consider a plan to fast. Think about the preparation: what you will fast from and for how long. Think about the frequency of when you will fast. This is all building a mindset and developing the muscle of saying "no."

Father, today I ask you to create in me a renewed desire to train my heart, mind, and soul toward loving you more. By your grace, may I experience joy in the steps I take in preparing to say "no" to things in order to know you more. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23

So he got up, ate, and drank. Then on the strength from that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

1 Kings 19:8

When we fast, we not only practice exercising restraint and the removal of something, but we also celebrate by bringing back into our life that thing from which we refrained. The "breaking" of a fast is a time to celebrate. Those things which you have withheld from yourself you are now able enjoy once again. When you do this, seek to appreciate those things in new ways and with fresh gratitude to God for his good gifts.

Lord, I pray that through the practice of fasting, I may gain a deeper appreciation and understanding for all the good gifts you have given me. Even today, may I enjoy your gifts more through a better understanding of the depth of your goodness.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Do not deprive one another–except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 1 Corinthians 7:5

When we give something up in fasting, we are only doing it for a season. We then use that season to seek to give ourselves more fully and deliberately to our knowledge of and walk with Jesus. Fasting is never about withholding in order to punish. There is a sense in which fasting is not withholding delight but seeking to help refocus our delight in God's Word. Richard Foster writes, "In experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting!"

Father, as I break into a fast for a season of time, may it be a time in which I am able to feast and be nourished by your word. Renew in me the joy of my salvation and the power of your word. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. There is a private nature to our fasting. The goal is not to keep it a secret but rather to make sure that our fasts are not done in order to receive others' admiration for our spirituality. Jesus' words here are a powerful reminder– even pursuits in our spiritual lives can be corrupted by our brokenness if we are not careful! As you seek to develop spiritual practices, we must make sure to know and inspect our hearts to ensure that our motives are for the knowledge of God, not the praise of others.

Lord, may the spiritual practices I seek to put in place during Lent be for you alone. Receive them as an act of worship and honor them by deepening my knowledge of you. Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Isn't this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to ignore your own flesh and blood? Isaiah 58:6-7



How can fasting accomplish this? Only through transforming our hearts. It is important to remember that ultimately the purpose of fasting, along with all spiritual disciplines, is that we might be transformed. If we fast on a weekly basis but still are unkind, perpetually angry, and miserable to be around then we are missing the point. We do this in order to be transformed from the inside out, which means that as we grow, we will begin to see the outward working of what God has been doing in us internally. May you see this fruit and glorify God for his transforming work in your life!

Lord, change me from the inside out. As I do the slow work of spiritual discipline, I ask that with each step you show me how you are changing me. May I see how I am being transformed into a more Spirit-filled person. I ask this for Jesus sake, and in his name. Amen.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27 & 28

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart."

1 Samuel 16:7

That "the LORD looks on the heart" is a double-edged sword. Often we hear this with an awareness that the pride, greed, lust, and other internal attitudes we are able to conceal from others is visible to God. This is true and causes us to run and cling to grace. Yet this statement was given as good news for David. So if it can be good news for David, it can also be good news for us. We may not have the outward qualities the world often elevates, and even when we do, those qualities will fade with time. But time can be a friend to spiritual formation. As time marches on, we can grow and increase in a heart that is inclined toward God. May that be true of your heart!

Lord, may I be able to see myself as you see me. Open my eyes to areas I need change. Remind me of your love for me and the satisfaction you find in me as I seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of you. Amen.



MONDAY, MARCH 1

When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Mark 10:47

Lent provides us the opportunity to recall Christ and his work in our life. It is a time for us to slow down and take a moment to turn our often-busy eyes and hearts toward him.

A loud and boisterous crowd surrounded Jesus as he left Jericho. We are told that as he is leaving Jericho, there is a solitary person who gains the Savior's attention. In all the noise and hustle, from within the crowd, a man cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Bartimeaus is blind and yet, when the crowd draws near, he knows that this man is the promised King. We, like Bartimeaus, are blind and unable to save ourselves, but like him, we cry out, placing our hope and dependence in him.



Father, I acknowledge that I am unable to help myself and that my only hope is you. There are times that perhaps I am blinded by the busyness and hustle in this life. Open my eyes that I might see you clearly. I cry out to you, my Lord and Savior: Have mercy on me. Help me, as I cannot help myself!

TUESDAY, MARCH 2

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

This is one of the most beloved and memorized passages of all Scripture. If we reckon our sin in the same way that the Lord does and confess our sins to him, then he will be faithful to remove and cleanse all unrighteousness from us. Is this not a beautiful truth? We know we are powerless to save ourselves, and yet we have a God to whom we are free to cry out in prayer, confess our trespasses, and know that he will do the rest on our behalf. Christ is our advocate, our atonement, and our hope. As we continue in this season of Lent, let us remember that we are in need of an advocate and atonement. Let's pray, confess our sins to him, and know that he is faithful to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

Lord, I have sinned against you. All my sins and trespasses I confess them to you. Reveal to me those sins which I have tried to hide from myself and those I have also tried to hide from you. Forgive me and help me to live as you have called me to.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way. Psalm 139:23-24

The true faith is a treasure and endures every trial. This passage is a prayer that the Lord would search the Psalmist's heart. It is a prayer of self-examination and a hope to be acquainted with his own heart. This is not something that comes easily. We have those places in out hearts that



are tender points, ones we hope to avoid. But at Christians we have nothing to fear because we know that the Lord is with us to help us through these difficult places in our hearts. Our faith helps us endure every trial–even the trial of self-examination. With the Lord's help, we can live in the way he calls us.

Heavenly Father, you knew me before time began and you know me now. You know me far better than I know myself. Lord, search me and reveal to me my own heart. Help me to see the ways in which I follow my own desires and not yours. Direct me to follow the path which you have laid before me.

THURSDAY, MARCH 4

Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:6

Worry and anxiety do little more than weigh us down. They follow us, laying on our shoulders like a heavy pack carried for miles on end. This is something we can all identify with. Yet for those in Christ they are a burden that we can freely hand over to Him. Through prayer we can be relieved of our anxiety and worry. While the culture in which we live may celebrate those who worry most, we are called as Christians to let all of our fears, anxieties, burdens, and worries be known to God through prayer. He wishes us to cast our cares on him so that he might help us carry the heavy load of our lives.

Lord, thank you for all that you have done. My life, my family, and all that I have are blessings from you. Father, you know the worries of my heart, and you care for me as your child. Help me to carry the worries and anxieties of this life so that by your grace I will be prepared for the work you have for me to do.

PRAY AT ALL TIM

FRIDAY, MARCH 5

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18

Life is difficult. As a church, our concern is not merely for ourselves but for all the saints. As we go through Lent, we have an opportunity to look outside ourselves and to think about those around us whom we know carry many of our same struggles. Like good soldiers in battle, we stand shoulder to shoulder, alert and bearing one another's burdens with love and perseverance. Prayer helps us overcome the discouragement, fatigue, and hardships of completing with boldness our commission to be witnesses to the world. When we become a Christ-follower, we have a new family–our brothers and sisters in Christ– which means we have a responsibility to pray for them also.

Heavenly Father, I pray now for those who are my family in Christ. You know each of them and you are aware of their needs, their concerns, and their trials. Help them, Lord, as you help me, to carry the difficulties of this life.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 6 & 7

Jesus answered, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." John 14:23

As Christians, we come to learn that love is our primary motivation for everything. It is the overflowing of our love for Christ that leads to our obedience. Obedience without love is only an effort toward self-righteousness. We cannot truly love Jesus if we do not obey him. This love drives us to follow Christ's commands wherever they might take us, even unto the hardest places. The empowering love and help from the Lord allow us to accomplish the task of this obedience. Genuine love cannot be self-centered. As we love him, we obey him and desire his will above our own. Our confidence is in Jesus' love for us; he has shown us that love through his death and resurrection. His love defines us as individuals and as a church.

Father, thank you for the love you have shown me throughout my life. Teach me to love you more fully and help me to obey you in love. Lord, I pray that I might learn to seek your will above my own so that the world may know you through my love for you and for others.

MONDAY, MARCH 8

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying. Mark 1:35

Mark's Gospel begins at a much more rapid pace and then continues in a compressed fashion when compared with the other Gospels. By the time we get to verse 35 of chapter 1, Jesus has been baptized, began his ministry, called his first disciples, and "healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons" (v. 34). So, in typical Mark style, he only gives us a momentary pause to see Jesus escape from the noise and the crowds to pray before Simon finds him and gets him "back to work."

But this momentary pause is important both for Jesus and for us. We are reminded that even Jesus, God in the flesh, needed time to reconnect with the Father. Here he gives us an example to follow: no matter how busy our lives are, we have to make time for solitude. Clearly, Jesus did not "have" the time and people were constantly seeking him out even in the midst of his solitude, but for him, he found that early in the morning, apart from the crowds, was the best time for him to get away. May we all make the time even when we think we do not have it. Jesus, thank you for showing us the importance of getting away and quiet. Thank you for being patient with us when we do not take the time to be with you and thank you for always being there when we meet you in the quiet. Empower us with your Holy Spirit to learn to quiet our bodies, hearts, and minds and meet you in the stillness. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 9

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" Psalm 46:10

Get out your Bible and read the rest of the Psalm 46, then continue with this devotional. As you can see, this Psalm is full of turmoil: "though the earth gives way;" "the mountains quake;" "nations in uproar;" "kingdoms fall." It is in the midst of all this that the Psalmist writes, "Be still, and know that I am God." There is a recognition here of the wild and restless world we live in, but there is also a reminder that our God is above that world.

Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message* translation of the Bible, translates verse 10 this way: "Step out of traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God." Consider today what types of "traffic" you find yourself in. Where does the earth give way in your life? Where is the turmoil? Take this moment to and take that long, loving look at your High God. "The Lord Almighty is with us" ends the Psalm. Be still for a moment and know that God is with you in whatever turmoil or busyness you have in your life.

God, I am sorry for letting the busyness of life distract me from you too often. I am so caught up in my life and my problems that I sometimes forget to come to the God who is always with me. In this still moment, please help me remember your presence, provision, and protection. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6

This instruction comes in the middle of Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says these words because many religious leaders in the day would say long, wordy prayers to try to impress people in public with how religious they could be, but instead Jesus calls them hypocrites. Yes, prayer should be done in public, whether just with your family or with larger groups, but the real rewards from prayer come in the secret.

Jesus continues here by letting us know that we also do not need to babble on in our prayers with the hope that if we just use enough words it will be the magic formula to get God to hear us. Do you ever do that? It is easy to think (probably because it has been modeled for us at some point) that we have to say a lot of words to have a proper prayer. Instead, Jesus says we only need to keep our prayers simple in secret because the Father already knows what we are going to be praying about anyway. In verse 9, Jesus gives us a model for prayer. Pray that prayer today.

Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 11

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. Galatians 2:20

Sometimes, the practice of solitude causes us to encounter things about ourselves that we would rather ignore—

bad habits, wrong attitudes, past or present sins, or even the way we treat those closest to us. As hard as it is to look at ourselves through such a lens, it is really one of the gifts of solitude because it allows us to then deal with those ugly parts of ourselves with God.

Here in Galatians, Paul is thoroughly convinced that the old parts of him have died, and it is now the Spirit of Christ that reigns in his life. Does this mean that he no longer struggles with sin? Of course not! But he knows that he lives a life that is no longer controlled by sin. We who trust in Jesus live this same life! We now live by faith, trusting in God to sustain us and help us in our struggle with sin.

God, as I approach you in this quiet moment, help me to see the depths of the sin you have saved me from. Forgive me for the times that my life continues to fall short and remind me that my old self has died, and it is now Christ who lives in me. Thank you for your forgiveness and mercy as I continue to live by faith in the power of Christ. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 12

He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while." For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. Mark 6:31



Time and space. This might be the secret to any meaningful relationship, and it is certainly true of our relationship with God. Jesus' instructions to his disciples here refer to both a time—"a while"—and a space—"a remote place." The word for "remote" here is also translated "desert" or "wilderness." So, Jesus is making it clear that he wants to bring his followers far from the noise of the world. Without a specific time and place for us to sit and listen to God, we find ourselves in the same place as the disciples—so busy we don't even have time to eat.

Note that Jesus says this to them after commissioning them (6:7-13) to go out and preach repentance. The gift of solitude is not meant as a place for us to remain; it is a place of temporary escape to hear the voice of God but then to return to do the work he has called us to do. Don Whitney says this about solitude: "We all need time to unstring the bow of our routine stresses and enjoy the restoration that retreat can provide for our bodies and souls."

God, I am so tired. My body is tired, my heart is tired, my mind is tired, my soul is tired. Allow this moment of solitude to restore and refresh part of me and give me what I need to carry out my responsibilities and the work you have called me to do. Thank you for your soul-calming work when I escape the noise and find peace and rest in you. Amen.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 13 & 14

He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3:30

Have you ever met someone you thought was truly great? Perhaps someone who excels in your field, like a popular musician or a sports star. When you are in their presence, it becomes more obvious where your deficiencies lie. No amateur ball player would ever even think of comparing their abilities to LeBron's because they know that would be absurd, no matter how good they think they are. In this scene, John the Baptist's followers question him about his ministry versus Jesus', but he has no time or

A POEM ABOUT 2020 Katie Stone

I look around, I see a world in pain Disease, disaster and war Sometimes it feels like You won't stop the rain Will You send your healing once more?

I look back, I know You were there When I was sinking, You rescued me Through the midst of this chaos, I know You are here But yet You seem far away, So God help me see

Sadness, frustration, isolation, let me just be real Division, selfishness, and lies My heart cries out won't You please just heal? My head asks a million whys Why are there disasters everywhere? Why is this pandemic still here?

I know You said You would always be there But I need to know that Your spirit is still near In the quietness, I hear You say Draw near to Me, and I'll draw near to you So God I pray show me the way Show me what to do

So many voices, so many lies Who is speaking the truth, who is pouring out lies? Where are the ones who are wise Who is honest, merciful, and speaks in love?

I look around, but there's no one like You The one and only, the way, the life, the truth No one compares to You You're the strong tower No human can compare to Your power

Even though I know that You care And I know that You're there I do not understand what You are doing So please God help me see Your purpose, Your way patience for this line of questioning. He knows his place because he has been with Jesus.

In the same way, solitude helps us to know our place. The more time we get away from the noise of the world and see Jesus for who he is, the less we have time and space for pride. Even in our best moments, the one most important attitude for us to have is that of humility as modeled by John. In our solitude, Jesus tells us who we really are–sinners chosen by him and saved by his perfect love, forgiven and set free from our sin. Sinners who will one day stand in perfection, seeing Jesus face to face.

Jesus, please continue to teach me to be humble. Help my picture of all that you are continually increase. Show me how to give you the glory in all things so that as I decrease, you increase. Let those around me see you in my life. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 15

I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content– whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. Philippians 4:11-12

In many ways, the letter to the Philippians is a thank you letter, written by Paul for the provisions they sent him. In the final section, while he is thanking them, he reminds them that he is most grateful for their fellowship and partnership with him, even more than the gift itself. He reminds them he has learned to be content in a variety of circumstances: contentment in plenty and in lack. In our lives, we will go through times where we must learn the secret of contentment in each of these phases. Which phase do you think you are in now? How will you learn the secret of contentment where you are?

Lord, whether in abundance or in need, teach me joy. May I learn as the apostle Paul learned the secret of contentment. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 16

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8

When Jesus speaks of the pure in heart, he is saying this in contrast to those who may be ceremonially clean but lack devotion of heart toward God. It is not those who follow the ritualistic cleansing patterns that will grow in their knowledge of God but those who seek him with their heart. Craig Blomberg writes that the pure in heart "exhibit a single-minded devotion to God that stems from the internal cleansing created by following Jesus."

Lord, I pray the words of Psalm 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17

Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

Those raised in the 90s will remember the popular song by The Notorious B.I.G., "Mo Money Mo Problems." There is some truth to that statement. In ancient times, the wealthy might seek to secure their wealth through investments like precious metals and cloth. And yet, in acquiring those things, which they seek to eliminate worry, worry can naturally increase. Now they had to fight against rust and moths in order to keep your investment secure. We too, in our modern world, understand how investments always come with risk and are susceptible to loss. This admonition by Jesus is not to avoid making future financial investments, but rather it is a reminder of the only fully secure investment: the ones we make towards his kingdom, which can never be lost. God, help me to be a wise steward of all you have entrusted me with. May I use my resources, my time, my abilities, and all that I am toward those things which matter most. In Jesus' name, amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 18

Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Mark 10:21

It is significant to notice that this instruction from Jesus to the young man was prefaced by the statement that Jesus loved him. His desire to see this man sell his possessions was not because he was angry at the man or wanted to punish him. He loved the man and knew he would find greater joy and satisfaction if he would take the steps to free himself from the things he thought were bringing him satisfaction and security. The call for us to move toward simplicity is not a call to punishment or affliction. It is a call that comes from Jesus' great love for us.

Jesus, thank you for your love for me. As I seek to lay down and cast aside good things that may be hindering trust or closeness to you, remind me of the riches I have in knowing you. Amen.



FRIDAY, MARCH 19

The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart–not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

The context of this verse is flowing from 2 Corinthians 8:8-14. This is related to a matter of collections that were going on for Christians in Jerusalem. The Corinthian church had begun to help in this (8:10), but it seems some had waned in giving, potentially afraid that they might come up in want. Paul reminds them that their contribution to the collection is not a command (8:8), but rather it is for their good to be generous. Therefore, this is not a matter of someone giving out of their low means; instead, the Corinthian church had resources but was hesitant to share for fear what the future may hold. Paul's encouragement to them is that it is for their good to be generous where they can and that in sowing generously, they can know that they will also reap generously.

As you determine in your heart (9:7) where and how to be generous, what are some of the anxieties that come to your mind that may hinder you?



Lord, we thank you that you are able to make every grace overflow to us, so that in every way, always having everything we need, we may excel in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, MARCH 20 & 21

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. Hebrews 12:1-3

Races cause weariness. Yet we are reminded to keep running and to run with endurance. How? We must lay aside all those things that hinder us from running well. We focus on Jesus. Verse 3 tells us that as we seek to run our race, we ought to consider what Jesus endured on our behalf. Take time to consider Jesus: his endurance on the cross and his present rule at the right hand of the Father. Run your race today as a response to this.

Jesus, while I am often weary of running the race well, may I fix my eyes on you, the author and perfector of my faith. May I remember your place now at the right hand of the Father and the victory over sin which you extend to me. In your name I pray, amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 22

He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37-39

Jesus says that all of the law and the prophets hang on these two commands. Here he takes something very

complex-the entirety of the law-and makes it appear simple. All we have to do is love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and love our neighbors as ourselves. Seems simple enough, right?

Jesus best showed his love by becoming a servant (Philippians 7) and he asks nothing less than the same of us: become the servant of all. It is certainly not an easy task to love God or others in the incredible way he asks us to, but he sent us his Spirit to empower us to do that very thing. Serving is still a discipline, a muscle that we need to continually exercise, but with God's help we can better love and serve him and those around us.

God, I need your help to better love you and to better love my neighbors. It is so easy to get caught up in the things of this world, to allow distractions to get in the way of me loving you with everything that I have. Please help remove the distractions and empower me by your Spirit to see you more clearly and to love you better. Then, show me how to best love those around me that they may see you in all that I do. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 23

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27

Think of someone you know who has fostered or adopted children. Perhaps you know people who check in on the widows or widowers. Those people are basically James 1:27 heroes. However, this is not the only application of this verse. James calls believers to serve those the world tends to forget about, to love the helpless and the needy, the broken and the mourning. Our church supports the efforts of the forgotten in places like India and Italy, helps Hannah's Home minister to single moms, and has served with many orphans in Mexico.

Take a moment and think about the orphans and widows, the broken and forgotten in your life. How can you be a part of bringing the love and compassion of Christ to

a small corner of your world? It might be a phone call; it might be a meal. It might be something seemingly insignificant, but it could mean the world to one person. When our focus is outside of ourselves, it helps keep our mind on the things that truly matter and keep us from "the stain of the world."

Jesus, just as you sought after the poor and broken and loved those the world had rejected, I know that you call me to do the same. Please open my eyes to the needs around me so that I may see how I may best bring your peace, love, and compassion to those you have called me to love. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted



themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. Acts 2:44-47

Sometimes serving looks like going to a soup kitchen or teaching children during church, but many times, serving is simply seeing a need around you and working to help that need. That is the picture we see here with the early church. Their life-together example did not remain part of the church for very long, nor have many practiced this level of life-sharing since, but the example remains as one for us to follow even today.

It is a joy to be a part of a generous church. People at Trinity have a long history of being generous with their time, money, and possessions. Frequently, we see people within our body who have their needs met by others, and it is a reminder of the example of the early believers in Acts. Of course, we all miss opportunities to serve every day, but God will help us continually cultivate a spirit of service and giving in our hearts.

God, I know it is a magnificent and delightful thing to serve those around me. Thank you for giving me many opportunities to serve throughout my life. Please keep me ever attentive to the needs of those around me and how I can worship you by serving others. Also, allow me to be open and receptive to others that want to serve and help me in my time of need.

THURSDAY, MARCH 25

If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

John 12:26

In these verses, John describes what a true disciple (servant) of Jesus looks like. The servant of Christ follows him. The context around this verse gives us a few clues as to what this looks like. First, in verse 25, Jesus says that the way to eternal life is to "hate his life." In other words, the servant of Jesus must reject the things of the world to serve him. In the following verses, Jesus predicts his death. This is both a reminder that he has come to serve and die for his people but also a subtle hint that following him also means giving up everything.

However, Jesus gives us this amazing note of encouragement amidst the strong commands: the Father will honor those who serve him. What an amazing reward! Jesus does not give any indication of what that honor looks like here, but we know that all promises from God are true, whether in this life or the next.

Jesus, thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve you, to be one of your disciples. It is hard to let go of this world, so please help me to continue to separate myself from my own sinful longings, and pursue after a closer relationship with you. Even in the hardest trials, let me follow after you, knowing you are with me everywhere I go. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 26

Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God. **Micah 6:8**

Please read Micah 6:1-8 before continuing. This is a passage about worship. God is building his case against his own people. In verses 3-5 he reminds them of what he has done and in verses 6-7 he looks at Israel's worship practices. Today we no longer worship God through burnt offerings, calves, rams, or oil like the Israelites did. Our formal worship looks much different, but those things only matter to God when they come from a heart after his own heart.

Verse 8 is the apex of this argument: act justly, love faithfulness (mercy), and walk humbly with your God. This is what God truly requires. Even in the Old Testament, God did not design the sacrificial system to earn his love but to be an outpouring of a people who love God. God does not care about our songs or our prayers when they are empty like the worship in Micah's day. He wants our worship coming from hearts that serve him by serving others through justice, mercy, and a humble walk with God.

God, it can be too easy sometimes to go through the motions of worshipping you through church attendance, singing songs, reading my Bible, and praying. I know what you ask of me is to have a heart for justice and mercy for the world, just like you. Show me what it means to walk humbly with you and open my eyes to better serve the world. Amen.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, MARCH 27 & 28

Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Matthew 4:10

Jesus says these words to Satan after his third and final temptation in the wilderness. Satan's temptation here was that if Jesus would just worship him, he would give him all the kingdoms of the world. This seems like the silliest of the three temptations since what Satan offers Jesus is rule over a kingdom that is already his! Jesus responds for a third time by quoting Scripture: worship God and serve only him.

For us, it is important to consider in our lives when we might be bowing down and serving other gods. The promises of status, glory, money, and power in this world are real. Sometimes, we may even find ourselves in a position to forsake God (even for a moment) in order to achieve temporary earthly success. In the midst of this, our response should be the same as Jesus'-we will worship and serve God alone.

God, the temptation to follow after lesser idols is real and strong. There are so many things in this world that we easily turn into ultimate things when we know that you are the only ultimate thing. Help me follow the example of Jesus and reject the temptation of those idols and follow after you alone. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 29

So, we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:18

I remember when my eye surgeon asked me to look at the clock on the distant wall and tell him what time it is. He had just completed Lasik surgery on my eyes. I used to be as blind as a bat! I can't focus on anything that far away. Oh, wait–yes, I can! After the work was finished on my eyes, I could see things clearly.

During this season of Lent, we have been praying and spiritually "exercising" in such a manner that we may see life better and focus on the things that really matter. In the first week we asked God to search our hearts. But he already knew what was there. Oh, that we may see our own hearts along with motives and egos and selfcenteredness. And as we allow him (his Spirit and Word) to do a work on our hearts, we will begin to focus better on life and purpose and others-eternal things. The things we cannot see.

That is not only the model of our Jesus who, during Holy Week, looked only to the cross and the ultimate purpose for which he came. It is also the provision of Jesus. His dying for our sins and rising again opened the Way of the Eternal for us. May we ever focus on that.

Father, help me to see things as you do. Help to focus on the eternal, unseen things in me and in others. Help me to see the image of God in everyone I meet.

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and soberminded for prayer. **1 Peter 4:7**



As we near the end of the Lenten season, we are reminded that all things will come to an end in their due time. We should therefore be alert and watchful of all within our hearts and minds. We should not be a people distracted by or chasing after the wonders of the world. Our calling and the fashion of our lives are to be different from the world. We as Christians are sober-minded, with eyes fixed on Christ and what he has accomplished for us so we might see the Lord's will be done in and through our lives. While there are struggles and troubling times ahead, we know that in Christ all these things are temporary. The troubles of this world will eventually pass by. So then we keep watch and allow ourselves to focus on Christ as we go to him in prayer daily.

Father, I am often caught up in the concerns of this world. Help me to set my heart and mind on things that matter. Lead me in doing your will and set my mind on caring more for things which are eternal.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31

How delightfully good when brothers live together in harmony (unity)! Psalm 133:1

If our country could claim a life verse...this would be it. During Holy Week, we are reading about unity and harmony because that was God's intention all along: that his rebellious creation become reconciled to him and have a way to live in unity with their holy Creator. And that he builds for himself a people who are unified with each other and him. That people is the Church, a family wherein "brothers [and sisters] live together in harmony." On Friday, Christ bought that family with his blood. On Sunday, he rose from the dead to give them power to live the way life was meant to be lived—in hope and harmony with all creation.

If that sounds strange, like something you've never really experienced in church or out of it but would love to try...I get it. Let's go and be the brothers and sisters who indeed live in harmony!

Dear Lord, how I long to live in harmony with you. Thank you for the forgiveness and reconciliation that is mine in Christ. Help me to apply that to those around me in these days.

THURSDAY, APRIL 1

"So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." John 13:14

Christian lives are inherently focused outward. While the flesh is naturally self-serving, we follow Christ's model of a life lived counter to the world around us. Jesus, although he was God, humbled himself even to the point of washing his disciples' feet. What an example of humility and service that we too often forget to model in our own lives. We often grasp for recognition or influence when our Lord has given us an example of guite the opposite. Let us learn to model our lives after Christ's-to take the more difficult road of humility and service just as our Lord Jesus did. In this way, we may live in the manner to which we are called and serve in the manner to which we have been commissioned. Our love for one another is the greatest witness we have of who our God is. Our love and service to each other comes from a humble heart. As the end of this Lenten season draws near, may we pray that the Lord removes from us our heart of pride and

builds within us a heart modeled after his: one of humility and service that seeks the flourishing of others before ourselves.

Heavenly Father, you search my heart, and you know me. I have a heart of pride that seeks its own will. Lord, remove from me my selfish pride and, through your Spirit, build in me a heart that seeks to love and to serve. Teach me and mold me into one who is humble so that I too may wash the feet of others.

FRIDAY, APRIL 2

Good Friday

It is finished!

Those were the Savior's dying words on the cross. After a betrayal. And a kangaroo court. And a rigged trial. And abandonment from most friends. And cruel taunting and beatings and floggings and physical and mental abuses. And a horrendous crucifixion.

"It is finished."

I am done? Sort of, but not completely.

The words also convey the meaning of a debt that is paid. "Paid in full," it could be rendered. What is paid in full? My sin debt, of course. Spiritually speaking, the time for my crime was done by Christ. It is finished indeed. My alienation from God-finished. The weight of my guilt-finished. The randomness and purposeless of my lifefinished.

Lord Jesus, thank for your amazing love! My sins and selfishness sent you to your cross. Thank you for finishing the work of my life and redemption.

IT IS FINISHED...

