

Weekly Lenten Devotional



Ash Wednesday (February 22)

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

—Romans 6:5-11, NIV

We often hear a lot of questions pertaining to Ash Wednesday as the season of Lent approaches. "Why do we observe Ash Wednesday?" "Isn't Ash Wednesday a Catholic thing?" "What does Ash Wednesday even mean?"

We heard a recent story of a woman never having participated in an Ash Wednesday service until she was in college. She couldn't recall whether she noticed in high school that anyone came to school with ashes smudges on their foreheads. But she did remember conversations about Lent and generally grumbling about giving something up, but that was only in passing. She had grown up in a non-religious household so the meaning behind Lent was lost at the time.

She said she starkly remembered in college seeing a peer pass one Ash Wednesday, thinking "do they know they have dirt on their forehead?" When one became two, became ten, became more than a dozen, she started thinking there had to be something she just didn't understand. What was going on with the dirty foreheads?

Her roommate at the time was Catholic, so she tagged along with her to that evening's Ash Wednesday mass. During the service, she heard the words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you will return," as someone smeared ashes on her forehead. As she heard those words spoken, she started her journey of understanding the meaning of Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent.

These words remind us of our humanity. We came from dust and will return to dust. Our physical bodies all have an expiration date. This is our journey. Yet we aren't journeying alone. We are one Church, one family under God. Jesus entered this same journey alongside us and sanctified it. Our material bodies can become filled with God and made holy. Our hope for eternal life ends with the end of our Lenten journey and the Resurrection of Christ. We must die, both now and later, to be born again in Him. This is a journey we take together.

Prayer: Walk with us on this Lenten journey, Lord. Give us eyes to see the path you would have us take. Give us ears to hear the truth you would speak to us. Give us the wisdom to store our treasure with you, so that our hearts may abide in your perfect peace.

Weekly Reading Plan

February 22
Romans 6:5-11

February 23
Matthew 1-3

February 24
Matthew 4-6

February 25
Matthew 7-9

February 26
Matthew 10-12

February 27
Matthew 13-14

February 28
Matthew 15-16

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Repentance (March 1)

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

—Romans 6:1-4, NIV

Lent is a time of particular focus on repentance. Repentance is our response to the truth that Jesus made atonement for our sins and bore our shame on the cross. What we all need to understand as Christ followers is that repentance is not a one-time choice; it is a constant act, one requiring the heart and mind to work toward holiness. Repentance is the work of the Spirit in our lives that moves us to such an act of obedience. As we move closer to Easter, may we seek a clear understanding of what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom. Take some time this week to meditate on this prayer below. Record your thoughts. Listen to the Lord's leading in your own life. Is there anything the Spirit is calling you to repent and turn away from? How are you working toward holiness in your everyday life?

Prayer: Why are we prone to wander Lord? Our sins you have forgiven. Our lives you have redeemed. In Christ we are made new. And yet, we are guilty, Father: of hating evil too little; of clinging too weakly to the good; of indulging sin; as if it cost you nothing. And so we ask, let us grow sick and weary of every worthless moment, of every thoughtless word, of every false belief. Make us joyful for your grace and hunger to be near you.

Weekly Reading Plan

March 1

Romans 6:1-14

March 2

Matthew 17-18

March 3

Matthew 19-20

March 4

Matthew 21-22

March 5

Matthew 23-24

March 6

Matthew 25-26

March 7

Matthew 27-28

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Humility (March 8)

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

—Philippians 2:7-8, NIV

From beginning to end, Jesus' life on earth was marked by humility. How amazing that the Son of God gave up his seat at the right hand of the Father for a place at the table with sinners and tax collectors, ultimately to take on God's judgment of sin in the world. In everything Christ does, He points back to the will of the Father. We see the true humility of Christ in His obedience to the Father's will.

We all desire the virtue of humility in our lives, but when we step into that reality, we are quickly reminded of how contrary it is to our thinking. Everything around us screams for us to prove our worth, impress people, build ourselves up, strive to be noticed and honored. That we even hope to be recognized for our humility at times is ironic. Think about these words Christ uttered to the Father: "Not my will, but Yours be done."

There is a lot of weight to this statement. In order for us to even begin to understand the meaning of saying these words, our proud selves must be broken. We must give up our rights. We must give up our own way. As difficult as this may be at times, I am encouraged by the fact that not even once did Christ give himself to the approval of men, but always entrusted himself to the Father. May we continue to follow Christ's example, and truly humble ourselves before the Lord so that He may shine His light into the dark corners of our lives. I leave you to reflect on this quote from one of the great mentors in my life, Dan Boone:

"We make good creatures, but lousy gods. We are meant to be full of something, but when we are proud, there's no room for anything but egomania. When we elevate ourselves, we destroy people, places, and things. When we refuse to humble ourselves before our Maker, we saw off the branch that holds us up. We unplug our own resuscitator. We tie a knot in the feeding tube that nourishes our life. God loves us too much to ignore our pride. God can bring us down from our lofty pride perches—if he wishes. It seems though, that God has taken a different approach to our human pride. Rather than powering up on us, God has powered down. Rather than sending a holy watcher with a chain saw, God has come in the flesh. Born of a humble peasant girl he comes to us. He takes up carpentry. He stays poor, washes feet, values the lowly. He sides with the weak, the rejected, and the powerless. He refuses to grasp for the divine equality that theology says is his. God does not pound us from above but serves us from below. Only when we bow down, does God lift us up! And when he does, we boast of being graced by such a humble Savior. The God who could have met us in terrifying nightmares has chosen to meet us in the humble Jesus."

Prayer: Lord, thank you for sending your Son to us to show us the way. Thank you for sending Jesus to us to show us how to walk humbly in Your will. Help us reflect on our lives this season and find ways to humble ourselves so that we may see You more clearly.

Weekly Reading Plan

March 8

Philippians 2:7-8

March 9

Mark 1-3

March 10

Mark 4-6

March 11

Mark 7-9

March 12

Mark 10-12

March 13

Mark 13-14

March 14

Mark 15-16

Weekly Lenten Devotional



Suffering (March 15)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

—James 1:2-4, NIV

As we continue to journey through the season of Lent, we remember Jesus' suffering and anticipate his resurrection. Unlike repentance and humility that happens in and through us, suffering and persecution simply happen to us. Repentance and humility are responses of faith to the grace of God at work. To endure suffering requires a response of faith in the goodness of God, even when it seems he's not at work.

Making sense of suffering is hard. On one hand, our sufferings may seem insignificant compared to what we see around us, but at the same time, we can't deny that we have, in some way, experienced sickness, death, pain, loss, injustice, sadness. No matter how we have experienced suffering, we still feel burdened in these circumstances.

So, what is the relationship between our faith and suffering? Some would say Jesus suffered so that we don't have to, but a truthful look at suffering is that no one escapes from it in a fallen world. Jesus' death does not take away our suffering, but it gives deep meaning and purpose to it. James 1:2-4 says that we should rejoice in our suffering for two reasons. First, it provides a context for our faith to mature. When our body, mind, and emotions are tested, we have a choice to cling to the God, or turn away. We realize our finiteness in times when our well-being is threatened, and our reliance can be on the One who holds us close and sees past what is currently in front of us. James also urges us to find joy in our suffering because it focuses our hope on the final goal: that one day every tear will be wiped away from our eyes and death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more.

Christ was made perfect through His suffering (Hebrews 2:10). We are justified by Christ's suffering and are being sanctified by ours. May we be reminded that in our suffering, God doesn't ask us to explain it. He simply asks us to rejoice in it and endure it.

Prayer: Help us to fix our eyes on the promise set before us. May we be led by suffering to the heart of God, revealed most clearly on a cross, where God came to us on the ash heap and there died in our place. Amen.

Weekly Reading Plan

March 15
James 1:2-4

March 16
Luke 1-3

March 17
Luke 4-6

March 18
Luke 7-9

March 19
Luke 10-12

March 20
Luke 13-14

March 21
Luke 15-16

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Lament (March 22)

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
—Lamentations 3:21-26, NIV

If you think about the season of Advent, we intentionally use words throughout that season like: expectancy, hope, joy, love, and peace. The season of Lent takes quite a different turn. The Lenten season is a more sorrowful time as we journey to the cross. More than usual, we are aware of the fallen and broken condition of our world, including ourselves. As we reflect throughout this season, we are mindful of the widespread effects sin can have: distraction, deception, disorder, despair, death. These wounds go deep.

We often think being a Christian means we should always be happy, and sweep our grief under the rug. I love the good news we find in Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Not only does God hear and understand our pain, He is particularly prone to those who are hurting. He desires to enter into our pain. In Romans 8:26, we read, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

Throughout scripture, we see time and time again the laments of God's people. Many of the psalms we read are laments. Jesus himself lamented over Jerusalem. Scripture teaches us to lament and mourn to the God who draws near to us in our brokenness. To lament is not simply to complain. Lamenting is a form of prayer, which transforms our cries into worship. I love that, as Christians, we have the ability to talk to God about our condition and ask him to change it because of our relationship with Him. We can be completely honest before a God whom our faith tells us we can trust. Lament throughout the Word affirms that suffering is real and spiritually significant, but not hopeless. I am thankful that we serve a God who is merciful, and holds us close in the times when we desperately need it.

Prayer: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Habakkuk 3:17-18, NIV)

Weekly Reading Plan

March 22

Lamentations 3:21-26

March 23

Luke 17-18

March 24

Luke 19-20

March 25

Luke 21-22

March 26

Luke 23-24

March 27

John 1-2

March 28

John 3-4

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Sacrifice (March 29)

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
—Ephesians 5:1-2, NIV

We look at Christ's life and see that from the very beginning, it was marked by sacrifice. Not only was it a sacrifice for the Son of God to take on human flesh, but throughout His time on earth, Jesus was walking toward the ultimate sacrifice of death on the cross, giving up His rights and giving himself for the sake of others along the way. As we continue to look at the life of Christ as our example of how we are to live, the model of sacrifice in our own lives cannot be ignored.

If we think about our human relationships with each other, and what it takes to reconcile our differences, sacrifice is always part of that process. If I hurt you in some way, in order to reconcile our relationship, you will have to sacrifice. Forgiveness costs you something because you let go of the pain of the offense against you. You sacrifice your right to be angry in order to move forward in a relationship through forgiveness. We must also sacrifice pride as we move forward in a relationship through confession and repentance. Without sacrifice, there can't be reconciliation. Our relationship with God works in a very similar way. We must sacrifice in order to move toward God with confession and repentance. God has already made the first move in making the ultimate sacrifice for us in His plan for redemption.

As we continue journeying through this season, may we remember the overwhelming cost of redemption that has been paid. All of the curses of the Fall —our sin and resulting death—were placed on Christ. The cost is beyond our ability to pay, yet He paid it for us. His sacrifice makes our reconciliation with God possible. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Help us be attentive to Your Spirit, O God, as we meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Prepare our minds to hear your Word. Move our hearts to accept what we hear. Purify our will to obey in joy and faith. We pray this through Christ, our Savior. Amen

Weekly Reading Plan

March 29
Ephesians 5:1-2

March 30
John 5-6

March 31
John 7-8

April 1
John 9-10

April 2
John 11-12

April 3
John 13-14

April 4
John 15-16

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Death (April 5)

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.
—John 12:24, NIV

Few things carry a more negative connotation than the word, “death.” Death is the end of something—the end of life, and all of us want to avoid it at all costs. It’s interesting, though, the biblical perspective on death. 1 Corinthians 15:36 says, “How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.” In John 12:24 we read, “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

Every year, we physically see seasons around us. As the season of fall approaches, leaves change, flowers shrivel up, and the cold grasp of death takes them once again. Old things have to die in order to bring new life. It’s an odd cycle as we go through mourning and rejoicing in life. Death brings life, or at least has the potential to.

The journey of Lent is similar in many ways. We move from death to life. Just as the food we eat must first die in order to sustain our life, we must die to our old selves daily in order to give birth to our new self in Christ. We deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. Death brings life.

Death is a scary thing. But we are thankful for the love of God through Christ that shows we don’t need to be afraid of death and what it will cost us. God held nothing back—he gave up His only Son for us. When we truly grasp the death of Jesus, and the truth and beauty of all that He gave up for us sinks in, we should joyfully give up all we have to follow him.

Prayer: Lord, help me to die unto myself so I can be reborn in You. As we reflect on the death of Jesus and His sacrifice for us this season, I pray we can count our blessings and rejoice in our hearts that You have sacrificed for us. Thank you, Lord, for your loving-kindness. Amen.

Weekly Reading Plan

April 5

John 12:24

April 6

John 17-18

April 7

John 19-20

April 8

John 21

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Resurrection (Easter Sunday, April 9)

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

—Luke 24:1-6, NIV

Rejoice! Christ is risen!

Several years ago, a group was able to travel to Israel to visit the Holy Land. One of the most memorable experiences for many on that trip was touring Jerusalem. There, the group visited the Garden Tomb—the spot believed by many to be the actual burial place of Jesus. The opening to the tomb was very small, and many had to duck down a bit as they walked inside. It's very dark inside, but once your eyes adjust, you see two chambers. Visitors stand in the mourners chamber, and a wrought iron fence protects the chamber where Christ's body was laid. You can see faint markings of other Christians who had been there centuries earlier. There was no body for which the tomb was intended; it was empty, and was clear that it had been for a long time. As you exit the tomb, and walk back into the sunlight, there is a wooden sign that reads, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, for he is risen, as he said."

On this Easter Sunday, let us repeat those ancient words yet again. The empty tomb really is empty because Jesus Christ, our Savior, really did rise from the dead. Let us rejoice today, and continue to live into what this means for us. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

Prayer: Living Lord Jesus, be born anew in our hearts today. Lead us to the empty tomb. May we hear the angel's voice declare, "He is not here, for he is risen, as he said." Let faith rise to banish our fears. May those who doubt, doubt no more. May Easter joy fill our hearts today. Through Him and to Him who is the resurrection and the life, Amen.