

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF FALLING SPRING

# Sacred Questions

2026 Lenten Devotional for the Journey to Easter

Lent is not a season of easy answers.

It is a season of honest reflection, holy curiosity, and courageous faith. For centuries, Christians have used these forty days to slow down, to examine their lives, and to listen more closely for the voice of God. Lent invites us to sit with the questions that shape us, and we will examine questions Jesus Himself asked (or were asked about Him)...

- What are you looking for?
- Who do you say that I am?
- Do you want to be made well?
- Why are you afraid?
- Do you love Me?
- Who is this?

These are not questions meant to trap or test us, but to open us.

This devotional, Sacred Questions, is a companion for your Lenten journey—one shaped by Scripture, prayer, and the shared voices of our church community. Each reflection is written by someone walking the same roads of faith, doubt, hope, and trust that we all travel. Together, they remind us that God often does some of the deepest work in us not through certainty, but through attentiveness.

Each week will contain 2-3 entries, and you are encouraged to engage with them slowly and thoughtfully. Please also feel free to reach out to the writers if you are so moved.

May this season draw you closer to Christ—the One Who meets us in our seeking, Who calls us by name, and Who leads us from the questions of Lent into the hope of Easter morning.

---

## WEEK OF FEB. 15 - "What Are You Looking For?" (2 entries)

---

Theme: Desire, seeking, spiritual beginnings.

### One Thing I Ask

Brad Hill

Scripture: Psalm 27:4

*"One 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."*

"One thing I ask." Have you ever been in a season where your prayers centered around one thing? I can think of several such times in my life.

During my first year of college, a back surgery scheduled for the following summer loomed over everything, drawing closer each month. I prayed hard and often for miraculous healing without surgery. It was my one thing. Many years later, Laura and I were in a long and difficult season of waiting to have children—a rollercoaster of hope and disappointment. Asking for a child became the one thing we prayed for most.

David knew something about hard seasons. After being anointed king, he spent years as a fugitive while Saul hunted him. As king, he fought constant wars. His sons rebelled—Absalom even tried to overthrow him. His children died far too young, leaving him grief-stricken. In Psalm 27, David cries out about enemies advancing against him, besieging him, surrounding him.

There were so many "one things" David could have asked for: safety, protection from enemies, peace in his family and nation. Yet none of those are his one thing. Instead, he asks "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."

What was David after? In whatever he was facing, his deepest desire was to draw near to the Lord—to be captivated by God's beauty, sweetness, graciousness, goodness. It's tempting to direct our prayers toward requests that make our lives easier. But David reminds us of something that matters more than comfort: living in close relationship with God.

*Continued...*

My prayer for miraculous healing wasn't answered the way I'd hoped. God provided healing through surgery instead. That summer, followed by a year of recovery, was incredibly painful and difficult. Yet God built things in me through that experience I wouldn't have gained any other way. Our season of waiting for children was agonizing for Laura and me, but it deepened our joy as we welcomed Gretta and Annabel into our family. It also prepared us to remember daily that they are gifts from God.

I'm learning to ask David's question: What am I really looking for? Not just relief or resolution, but God himself—even in the waiting, even in the pain. Maybe especially there.

**For your reflection:** Where have you experienced God's presence in a season when your prayers weren't answered the way you hoped? What would it look like this week to seek God's beauty and nearness, even while continuing to pray for what you need?

---

## Where is Your Treasure?

Cheri Kearney

Scripture: Matthew 6:19–21 (Amplified Version)

*“Do not gather and heap up and store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust and worm consume and destroy, and where thieves break through and steal. But gather and heap up and store for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust nor worm consume and destroy, and where thieves do not break through and steal. **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**”*

Although this passage tends to bring to mind the image of collecting too much stuff, the passage is addressing what we treasure. Years ago, Bill and I were blessed to attend a parenting workshop led by Clayton Barbeau, a psychologist specializing in family, marriages and children. The workshop, How to Raise Parents, left us with one key reminder which Bill and I would keep on our fridge and use often to break through the chaos of work, schedules, and commitments. The reminder: “Where you put your time, you place your treasure and where you place your treasure, you give your heart.”

To us, this was a reminder of Matthew 6:19-21, for where we place our time is demonstrating what we treasure at the moment. When we felt either of us was getting pulled into culture chaos, we would simply say, where is our time and heart going?

Soon, Maggie and Patrick were aware of this and we all reminded each other to refocus when we would become too distracted by outside obligations.

As you approach commitments each day, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where am I putting my time?
2. Am I using my time to show my love for God?
3. Am I using my time to show love for others and myself?

**Prayer:** Dear God, we thank you for the abundance of time and opportunity in our lives, and ask for your guiding love to show us how to use these gifts to build your loving Kingdom here on earth. How to best use our time seems to trip us up Lord, yet your words show us the way. Let our gifts honor you and help one another each and every day. We ask you to work in and through us to show others your glory and to continue blessing our journey with your love and forgiveness. We ask these things through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

---

## WEEK OF FEB. 22 - "Who Do You Say That I Am?" (3 entries)

---

Theme: Identity of Christ, personal confession.

### The Good Shepherd

Emily Baile

Scripture: John 10:11–15

This past summer, I was given the opportunity to travel to 22 states in 23 days with 80 other teens, all while being disconnected and without distractions. For many in my generation, myself included, this can be a little uncomfortable. The usual music, connections, and business were no longer at my fingertips; but somewhere along the way, the silence from this gap stopped feeling empty and I started to feel restored.

One moment along my journey stuck with me: The Chapel of the Transfiguration in the Grand Tetons, WY. It was a simple wooden structure with an open window at the back looking out onto the mountains. Right in the center stood a cross. I remember sitting there, taking in the moment of the sights of towering mountains I got the

privilege to see. The cross framed in the center set a reminder of the same God who suffered to create all that I am witnessing and who I get to exist with.

In John 10, Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd. He states that he knows his sheep and lays down his life for them. That dedication to have a relationship with God's children is what I felt sitting in that chapel. Without a distraction in sight by the teens, I was not just thinking about Jesus. Rather, I felt that he truly knew me, as I am a sheep of Jesus. The only thing that existed within the chapel was presence; no pressure or performance to appear a certain way.

Going without everyday distractions for over three weeks made me aware of my lack of listening. The day-to-day noise of busy schedules, constant notifications, and standards to meet were washed away by the presence of God. What I came to realize is Jesus does not compete for our attention. He is a shepherd, and waits patiently by guiding us towards his presence. He knows our true self even with our daily distractions.

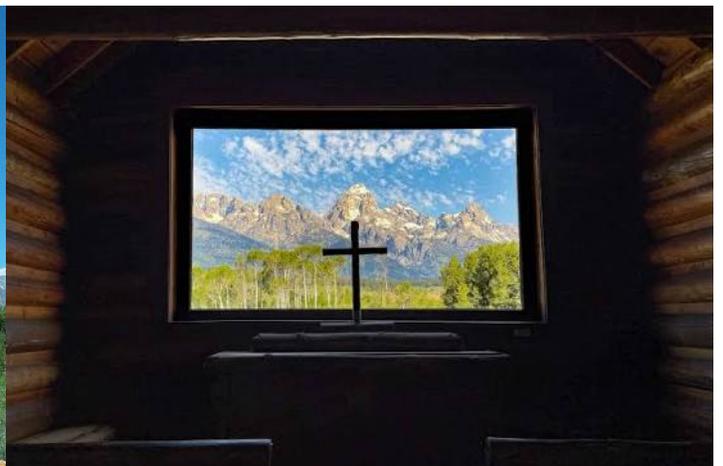
An area I continue to work on is carrying my newfound awareness into daily life. While my trip was life-changing, it was once in a lifetime, and my shift in viewpoints needed to change. What question remains is realizing the shepherd's voice acts in small ways throughout my life: continuing to lead his presence in my lifestyle, despite the daily noise.

**Prayer:** Good shepherd, thank you for allowing me to be aware of your presence in the silence. Help me to listen to your voice in the business of life. Guide me and remind me of your continued love. Amen.

**For your reflection:** Where in your life is God inviting you to be aware and embrace his presence?



Outside the Chapel



Window from the inside

## Held Together in Christ

Meagan Boozer

Scripture: Colossians 1:15–20

This is one of my favorite passages in the whole Bible! I love the truth and the promise declared in verse 17. “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” In Jesus, all things hold together.

The apostle Paul was presenting his case to false teachers of the time who did not believe that Jesus was truly God. But with the words, “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,” Paul is making his closing argument. Jesus is not only the creator of the universe, but also the sustainer of it. He creates all things. He sustains all things. One part of the cosmos that he created is dependent on another part, and that part is dependent on another part. Jesus Christ upholds every element, fiber, force, and law of nature. Without His continual care and providence, the cosmos with all its parts would cease to exist. Jesus created it all to be independently dependent. Just like you and me. We were created to be independently dependent on the Lord, and independently dependent on each other.

Having grown up in a home with divorced parents whose relationship with one another was volatile to say the least, in my teenage years I yearned for something/ someone to hold me together. Through the ministry of the church, I found not just the comfort of Jesus through the salvation of my soul and the awakening of the Holy Spirit within me, but I also found the comfort his people provide. In my dad’s absence, God provided men like Eldon Nuernberger, Alex Beattie, John Sharpe, Bob Frey, Jack Good, Doc Strickler, and others who showed me a Christ-empowered steady faith and a faithful presence that helped to put and hold me together. It was God’s providence, I know, but it was/is also God’s grace and goodness.

Can you see how God has held you together in tough times? He is the image of the invisible God – a God whose love for you knows no bounds. Come to him. Run to him. He holds all things together, he holds you and me together, with his righteous right hand.

**Prayer:** Good and gracious God, thank you for holding me together. Thank you for carrying me through days, weeks, months, and even years when I did not know your voice or could not hear it. Please help me stay close to you and show me ways I can extend your unfailing comfort to others. Amen.

## Seeing Jesus Through His People

Melanie Keath

Scripture: Matthew 16:13–17

*“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”*

Peter knew who Jesus truly was because he had been with Him, walked with Him, eaten and stayed with Him. Peter had seen Him at work, seen Him walk on the water and do miracles of healing and provision, and he had listened to Him preach about the Kingdom. But I’m sure he got to know Jesus’ character by being around Him as a companion, a teacher and friend — by experiencing His kindness and love firsthand.

Through the ups and downs of life, God has shown Himself to me in a variety of ways: sometimes through grand and miraculous provision at just the right time, sometimes through a word in a book or from the front of the church, spoken as though it was crafted specifically for me on that very day.

But one of the most beautiful and personal ways I’ve seen Jesus is through the expressed kindness and love of other Christ-followers. When brothers and sisters are present and ready to meet me in my pain, my need, my doubt or in my joy, they are Jesus’ hands and feet and heart to me on Earth. The same way Peter grew to know and understand Jesus through being in his presence, I have grown to understand Jesus more as I’ve been loved and cared for by Christians who love Him and live like Him.

Dear friends have revealed Jesus’ character to me as they’ve met physical needs the way He does, such as offering meals or running errands during a health crisis or family transition. They’ve met emotional needs the way He does, by being curious and choosing to know me, asking great questions, or even just being a welcoming presence, offering belonging in a new situation. And they’ve met spiritual needs the way He does, being ready to listen deeply, offer wisdom, and pray.

When I am struggling with circumstances, doubts, or fears, I sometimes have a tendency to isolate and pull away from community. But when I do this, I’m not only

robbing myself of the blessings God gives in the company of other Christians — I'm robbing myself of the opportunity to experience Jesus in a more personal way. Maybe you struggle with this too. What are some steps we can take stay connected to the Body of Christ, so we can have regular, personal experience of His love and kindness?

**Prayer:** God, thank you for Peter's example to us as one who walked daily with You — He is a witness to Your days on Earth and we can believe His testimony that You are the Messiah, Son of the living God. Help us to walk daily with You as well, by seeking You in the Word and by remaining in community with our brothers and sisters, so we can all be Your hands and feet and hearts to one another.

---

## WEEK OF MARCH 1 - "Do You Want to Be Made Well?" (3 entries)

---

Theme: Healing, willingness, transformation.

### **Brave Enough to Be Seen**

James Wright

Scripture: Psalm 139:23–24

*"Search me, oh God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

If there is one thing in my faith journey that I have learned to this point it is that you need to be careful what you ask or pray for because you likely will receive it. It might not come in the way you specifically asked or imagined, but it will come in God's way and in His perfect timing.

For David to be vulnerable enough to ask/pray this question of God, knowing the things that the Bible tells us, gives me great hope that I am also worthy of God's grace. However, being worthy of something does not mean it will happen automatically. This is where my struggles start. David was a man of God who was imperfect but he was with God. He had a true connection or relationship with Him. God knew where David's heart was. Being in connection with God (in my understanding) means, I first have to let go of all the shame. This is a paradigm shift for me, because it is the ultimate fear of disconnection that gives rise to shame.

In Genesis chapter 3, the Lord God called out to Adam and asked “Where are you?” Adam's response was completely understandable to me. He said “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and because I was naked, I was afraid.” I think another way of looking at that, he could have said. “I know you are always present but because I was vulnerable, I didn't want to be seen.” Adam’s vulnerability did not come by choice but rather consequence, and shame followed. Shame is the wall that separates us from embracing our place in God’s plan for us. So how do we “get over it” (pun intended)? We pray as David did.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I pray for the courage to accept my imperfections, I pray for the compassion I need to be kind to myself, and I pray for the ability to be authentic so that I might have genuine connection with you. Amen.

---

## **Bartimaeus’ Bold Request**

Cale Jones

Scripture: Mark 10:46–52

I don’t think of my prayer life as full of bold asks like the one we see from Bartimaeus. It feels slower, quieter, and more about discernment and small asks for God’s presence. I still pray over the major life events or mountains before me. But those are conversations that draw out over time about how to navigate those mountains. I don’t remember the last time I asked God to just move the mountain.

As I sit with this passage, I keep focusing on the beginning to verse 48: “Many warned him to keep quiet, but he was crying out all the more, ‘Have mercy on me, Son of David!’” Thankfully, I don’t have people in my life directing me away from bold prayer, but it makes me wonder what is warning me to keep quiet before God. I’ve always wrestled with God for control; I’ve struggled to let go when I couldn’t see where His plan led. I’ve grown tremendously over the years in this regard, but I wonder if that’s partly directed me to my prayer life of small asks. Baby steps.

The passage shows that it’s Bartimaeus’ faith that overcomes and gains Jesus’ attention, and it’s his faith that saves him. I do find comfort in knowing there are people in my life that can encourage me the way that Bartimaeus was encouraged when Jesus

calls. So is it just a lack of faith that's keeping me quiet? Or is it fear of what happens when God responds and does move the mountain? I don't have the answers to those questions, and I'm not sure I'm ready to confront them. But the scripture shows how God can respond to bold requests. I find it inspiring that after Bartimaeus' request is granted, he immediately follows Jesus. If I'm afraid of what it looks like when God moves a mountain, and what parts of my life it may upend, there's hope in knowing that there may be nothing left to do afterwards but follow Him completely.

**Prayer:** Lord, surround us with Your encouraging presence to embolden us to ask for what we need from You. Please let our faith in You overcome whoever or whatever keeps us quiet before You.

---

## **A New Heart.**

Jenn Smith

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:25-27

A New Heart. There are people out there with serious heart problems who are hoping for this very thing. Praying that they will receive a call some day that a new heart is available to them. Their old heart will be taken out and a new, functional heart will be put in.

But don't we all have heart problems? Shouldn't we all be wanting a new heart. A heart that's full of love instead of judgment, joy instead of anxiety, acceptance instead of envy? A heart focused on eternity rather than the things of this world? A heart dedicated to following the Spirit and doing what He tells us?

I love "The Message" translation of Ezekiel 36:25-27 which states "**I'll give** you a new heart, put a new spirit in you. **I'll remove** the stone heart from your body and **replace it** with a heart that's God-willed, not self-willed. **I'll put** my Spirit in you and **make it possible** for you to do what I tell you and live by my commands." (Bold added)

I'll give, I'll remove, I'll replace, I'll put, I'll make it possible. Nowhere in those verses does it say that we have to do anything. God does it for us. We just have to open our heart to Him and *He* will change it.

I'm not gonna lie, this is hard and something that is challenging for me. I like to be in control and know why things are happening. I don't like to ask others for help and too often think that I can handle things on my own. If I finally find just the right devotional, I'll be more intentional in my Bible reading and grow more in my faith journey. If I find just the right planner, I'll be able to get my days laid out perfectly that I'll find peace. If I finally get my house decluttered and clean, I'll have joy every time I walk through the door. But the problem is, all those things depend on me. And I'm a bit of a mess. I can't do it. Not on my own. I've tried over and over, fallen into the same patterns, but *I* can't change my heart. Only God can do that. It's only when I fully release and open my heart to Him that I'll be able to follow the path He has laid out for me. It's not easy. I've tried and failed before, but the good news is, God doesn't give up on us. Join me. Open your heart, like I've vowed to open mine, and let's follow what He has in store for us.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, Help us to surrender our own desires, our own wants, our own habits and to open our hearts fully to you. You have amazing things waiting for us when we choose to listen and follow you. Amen.

---

## WEEK OF MARCH 8 - "Why Are You Afraid?" (3 entries)

---

Theme: Fear, trust, storms, God's presence.

### Be Still

Stella Bennett (5<sup>th</sup> grade)

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-3, 10

What are some things that make you feel worried, scared, or overwhelmed?

- I feel that way with sickness or the dark.

When you feel that way, how do you know God is with you?

- I know because I always get better.

What do you think it means to "be still" with God?

- I think it means to walk with him and follow him. I also think it means to not forget him, to always pray with him and he will answer your prayers.

*Continued...*

Can you tell a story about a time when stopping, praying, or being quiet helped you feel calmer?

- When I am sick I sometimes pray and when I do that I feel better sooner.

Where do you feel closest to God- at home, at church, outside, or somewhere else?

- At church, especially singing.
- 

## **Louder Than Fear**

Sam Ray

Scripture: Isaiah 41:10

Fear has a voice. It narrates whole situations in my life. It speaks when I'm alone with my thoughts and late at night. It speaks when something I care about deeply is threatened. If I'm honest, fear doesn't just speak... it yells.

Most of the time, I treat fear like the enemy—like it's something I should defeat or pray away. But Scripture doesn't point to fear being shameful. And God doesn't look at me when I'm fearful and say, "Do better." No, He looks at me and says, "I am with you." That's very different.

Isaiah 41:10 doesn't tell me to not feel afraid. Rather it tells me, do not fear because God is with you.

So maybe being afraid isn't the problem. Maybe the problem is when fear becomes the loudest voice in my life. Fear tells me things like: you're on your own, you're going to fail, you're not enough, you're going to lose something you can't get back.

God doesn't try to yell louder than my fear. He answers not with words, but with his presence. He reminds me, "I am with you. I will strengthen you. I will hold on to you." When fear tries to isolate me, God steps closer.

When I really think about it, the scariest moments in my life haven't just been hard... they were often quiet. Those moments when I couldn't hear God clearly, didn't feel strong, or didn't know what was going to happen next. In those quiet moments, fear

yelled loudest. But just because God feels quiet doesn't mean He's gone. And just because fear is loudest doesn't mean it's true.

In those moments when my husband lost his job suddenly, when my 3 year old son had his first seizure, when a friend was in the hospital on life support — fear wasn't just speaking in the quiet — it was drowning out every other voice.

My fear was not proof that I didn't trust God. Actually it was proof that I cared deeply about others. The real danger wasn't that I felt afraid in those moments. The real danger was when I started believing that I was alone.

So maybe the better question for me isn't, "why am I afraid?" But "who am I listening to?" Fear will always speak loudly, but God is with me before fear speaks a single word. When God is present with me, when He is close and holding me up, fear doesn't hold any power over me.

**For your reflection:** Where has fear been doing the talking in my life lately, and what would it look like to let God answer it?

---

## Jesus on the Water

Gretta Hill

Scripture: Matthew 14:22–33

Have you ever experienced a call from God? Maybe you felt the nudge to reach out to someone, to check in and see how they're doing. Maybe you felt God calling you to a specific location. Perhaps you felt God asking you to let go of something. A call from God can be as simple as choosing to do what is right when tempted by sin.

I bet anyone who has ever received a call from the Lord can agree on one thing. It's hard! It's hard to keep our eyes on Jesus when we don't know all the details, when we're forced to let go of our own agendas, and when we must ignore the sinful nature that resides in all of our hearts. It's hard to focus on Jesus and not the storm that constantly rages around us.

We see this in Matthew, chapter fourteen, when Jesus calls Peter out onto the water. Initially, Peter steps out of the boat, confidently walking towards Jesus. I think this is

often the case for many of us. When we feel a call, or a nudge from God, we often initially respond with confidence. “Yes! I want to obey you God! This is an amazing opportunity!”

However, our focus often gets pulled away from God by the storm. We start to think of all the things that could go wrong. All the ways we could mess up. All the uncertainties, the “what ifs.” And then we begin to sink, and don’t really want to continue to follow God’s call anymore. The truth is, we can’t handle the storm by ourselves, just like Peter couldn’t. When he moved his focus away from Jesus, he started to sink, crying out for help.

But immediately, Jesus reached out and caught him. This is my favorite part. Jesus didn’t wait and let Peter try to save himself first. He didn’t punish him for doubting. No, Jesus immediately responded to Peter’s cry for help. We can’t handle the storms that come with stepping out in faith. But God can. Not only can he handle our storms, but he reaches out to catch us when we sink. All we have to do is ask.

So I encourage you to keep your focus on Jesus, and not the storm. But when the storm does steal your focus, surrender all your fears, doubts, and temptations to Jesus. Cry out to Him for help, and He will hold you afloat, keeping you from sinking.

---

## WEEK OF MARCH 15 - “Do You Love Me?” (3 entries)

---

Theme: Restoration, calling, love in action.

### God’s Compassion After Failure

Trish Thomas

Scripture: Psalm 103:8–14

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch?” I am notoriously guilty of counting those chickens. I find myself so overwhelmed with excitement that I’m not only counting, I’m naming and purchasing accessories and planning a photo shoot for those unborn chickens.

A few years ago, I interviewed for a job. It was meant for me. The interview was just a formality. I was approached by my boss and asked to apply for the job because she was so confident I was the best one for it. I reluctantly agreed at first, but as time passed, I became more and more excited for the opportunity. I started telling people that I was changing jobs. I started planning for it. I visualized what life would be like, and how the increased pay would benefit my family. The interview came and I absolutely nailed it. Then the call came the next day to tell me that I didn't get the job. I was devastated. I went through all of the emotions. I was confused, sad and then angry.

My dad came to my house a few days later and handed me a gift bag. My dad is not a gift giver. I opened it up to find a beautiful necklace he had purchased for me. I jokingly said, "If this is how you respond when I don't get the job, what will you do when I do?" I didn't do anything to deserve that necklace. I had failed and then became angry and bitter about it. But my dad saw something different and loved me through it.

This leads me to think, if my earthly father loves me this much, how much more does my heavenly father love me? Verse 14 of this passage says he knows how weak we are. He remembers we are dust. He didn't just observe this. He actually experienced it when he took human form. Yet knowing how flawed we are, he paid our debts of the past and the future.

When I read verse 12 and visualize the distance between the east and the west, I feel that endless mercy and compassion. If you travel north, you will eventually reach the north pole and if you continue to travel you will be heading south. But if you travel east, you can go on forever and lap the earth and never go west. It goes on forever. That's how far removed we are from our sins. That's the greatness of his love and forgiveness.

**Prayer:** In the midst of my imperfections, my lack of patience and multitude of mistakes, God, I pray that I find the strength to run to you. Help me to run into your arms and feel that welcoming mercy and unconditional love that is given so freely.

**For your reflection:** God's forgiveness is for us, but it is also for us to share with others. Once you have been forgiven by God you are free to forgive others around you. How are you sharing God's mercy?

## When Humility Meets Grace

Lee Harter

Scripture: Luke 7:36–50

There are several extraordinary moments in this passage from Luke 7. I am going to focus on two: The woman's expression of love and Jesus's rebuke of the Pharisee.

In this story, "A woman in the town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume" (7:37). Understanding her need for forgiveness, this woman did a remarkable thing. Uninvited, she intentionally placed herself near both Jesus and the Pharisee - the Savior and one who represents the judgment of society. The boldness of her actions is impressive. Certainly, she was aware that her reputation would create discomfort or conflict, whether expressed directly or in the hearts and minds of those present. Not only did she defy the social norms, but also, she placed herself close to Jesus where she expressed her love by washing his feet with her tears and generously covering his feet with perfume. Her love for Jesus and her need for grace was unspoken by the woman, yet Jesus "heard" her plea for forgiveness, looked beyond her transgressions, and declared, "Your sins are forgiven (7:48)...Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (7:50). The woman's boldness and humility changed her life.

In contrast, you have the Pharisee who judges both the woman and Jesus when he says to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner" (7:39). This spiritual leader shows none of the love and humility modeled by the woman. Jesus draws attention to the Pharisee's judgment and lack of hospitality in a quietly powerful way. He physically turns away from the Pharisee and toward the woman. While Jesus is addressing the Pharisee, He is looking at and speaking to the woman. Jesus's words and physical positioning simultaneously honor the woman's faith and expose the Pharisee's lack of compassion.

As my mother often asked in her sermons, "So what does all of this mean as I'm waiting in line at the grocery store?" For me, three principles emerge:

- Jesus knows you fully and loves you still.
- Grace is available to all who seek it...it's never out of reach.
- Be bold in love and faith; it will change your life.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, teach us to come to you like the woman in this passage – honestly, humbly, and with a desire to receive your grace. During this Lenten season, help us feel your mercy and love in a special way so that we can in turn share that love with others."

## What Love Requires

Laura Sponseller

Scripture: Micah 6:8

*“Act justly. Love mercy. And walk humbly with your God.”*

When I was a teenager, everyone started rocking nylon wristbands with woven letters W.W.J.D - “What Would Jesus Do”. It stuck with me through the years and I ponder it often when I am facing a challenge, a situation requiring me to act but most frequently when I need to seek forgiveness!

This verse in Micah, reminds me of that adage ... WWJD... What Would Jesus Do? Let's thread the needle this Lenten season and think about what DID he do?

Jesus acted JUSTLY. Jesus was fair and kind to everyone he met, including his enemies. He advocated for the poor, sick, oppressed, elderly, widows, orphans, everyone (but I believe he had a special heart for the underdogs). His actions were restorative, rather than punitive.

Jesus loved MERCY. Apparent through his compassion, healing and forgiveness. From his Sermon on the Mount, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”.

And during his time on this earth, Jesus walked HUMBLY with God the Father. The King of the World, our Savior, born into the most humble arrival — a barn manger. Jesus lived a simple and gracious life. He LOVED people with all of our flaws. His mercy covered a multitude of sins. ALL sins, to be exact, when He took our place and hung them on the cross of forgiveness. Thank you, Jesus!

Preparing for this, my first devotional assignment, I struggled. I prayed about it. I drafted paragraphs of ideas. Perhaps this is my first real experience with wrestling with the Word of God? I was not short on ideas but lacking direction. I mean, WHAT LOVE REQUIRES? That can go a million different ways. And, it does everyday. Today, it was easy to see the message has been there all along. It's simple, like the son of a carpenter, **love is best when it's given and received through Jesus.**

Footnote: Did you know that WWJD has been around since the early 1900s?! It gained popularity after the 1896 novel, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* by Charles Sheldon. I'm putting this one on my reading list now!

**For your reflection:** How can we better reflect Jesus to others in our daily lives? WWJD?

---

## WEEK OF MARCH 22 - "Who Is This?" (3 entries)

---

Theme: Expectations, misunderstanding, humility.

### The Humble King We Can Trust

Ben Landon

Scripture: Zechariah 9:9

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

Jesus Christ never deviated from his primary purpose—to obey the will of the Father. His strength is found in his humility. His leadership is manifest in his obedience. Christ not only fulfilled prophecy from Daniel and Psalms as He rode a prearranged donkey, but his arrival through a gate in Jerusalem corresponded with the Jewish calendar, the 10th of Nisan, which is the precise day the priests "inspected" the lambs for Passover. He offered HIMSELF for inspection. His commitment to us cost him everything and us nothing. Obedience unto death.

How do we respond to him? 1 Cor 4:1 reads "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." Are we "bondservants" as Paul identifies himself? Can we hope to live out the obedience and preparedness described throughout Ephesians 6? How can we detach ourselves from the worldly norms as they pertain to power, success, security, direction and identity?

Napoleon marveled at how Jesus could "lead" men who never saw him, who lived 18 centuries after his "death," who would gladly die for their Lord. What could possibly explain it? Philippians 3:8 states "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ." As the Holy Spirit draws us into obedience to Christ, we are transformed into new life with new strength. The power of God manifests in us, and we become heirs to all that was promised Abraham. (Gal 3:29) That guarantee provides a pathway by which we can follow the Lord as we abandon our flesh. What can man ever do to us? What could possibly compete with the fullness and richness of God's glory? (the answers are nothing & nothing)

Romans 8:37 emphatically proclaims we “overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” From my own experience, those victories are as numerous as they were impossible for me to see past. I had no answers and no capacity to fix things. Alcoholism. A marriage I couldn’t find joy in. Twin daughters whose pain I couldn’t fix. The list goes on. Yet, as I trusted HIM to do for me what I could not for myself, He made a way where there was no way. Thank God HE is faithful. HE is loving. HE is worthy.

We are only as strong as that which sustains and leads us. We can no sooner serve two masters than walk in two directions at the same time. Do we see Christ as a trustworthy leader? Each day the Lord will ask, “do YOU trust ME?” The steps we take toward his voice make all the difference.

---

## **The Mind of Christ**

Sue Bodner

Scripture: Philippians 2:5–11

Philippians 2:5 says “in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” That’s a pretty hefty command to “have the same mindset as Jesus.” Jesus’ mindset included humbling himself by being obedient to His father (v8) by coming to earth as a human man, giving up His deity, and dying a criminal’s death on a cross. Because Jesus was obedient, God the Father gave Him the name above every name (v9). The name that one day every tongue will proclaim “Jesus Christ is Lord” (v11).

Here is an example of a time I had to be humble and obedient. Six years ago, I was asked to serve on Session. My immediate thought was—why would I be asked? I have no college degree. I’m not a born leader. What did I have to offer to this church serving as an Elder? Prayerfully considering my answer, I was led to read the story of Moses who was told by God that he would lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Moses asked “Who am I?” God’s answer, “I will be with you, and I AM WHO I AM.” This was the answer for the question I asked. It wasn’t about me and my abilities. It was about Him and that He would equip me.

Humble in the Merriam-Webster dictionary means not proud or haughty. Ranking low in a hierarchy or scale. Obedience synonyms include submission and surrender. If I’m

being honest, I was so intimidated by my own insecurities that I didn't want to serve on Session. However, God's clear answer forced my obedience, and caused me to surrender my own pride. The rewards were great: 1. I grew spiritually and gained knowledge I would not have if I'd been disobedient. 2. I served with amazing people. 3. I love my congregation more now than I did 6yrs ago.

**Prayer:** Abba, in preparation for Lent, please reveal where I am disobedient due to pride. Replace my pride with humility. Forgive me when I disobey you. Give me the desire to be obedient. Show me what I must release that is causing disobedience. Thank you for Jesus' example of giving up everything to bring You glory. In the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

---

## **Surrendering Our Plans**

Andrew Leeper

Scripture: Luke 19:41–44

During my freshman year at Messiah College, I met an incredibly kind and outgoing student named Ben. His personality earned him somewhat of a “celebrity status” on campus as he was not afraid to introduce himself to anyone he met. Over the years, we became close friends, and I was blessed to hear his testimony. When Ben was in middle school, he was hit by a car while crossing the street. He underwent emergency surgery and remained in a coma for over a month. Ben's survival was nothing short of a miracle, though the accident left him with permanent physical and intellectual disabilities. He told me, “The coma felt like less than a minute. I saw the car coming and then everything went black. I opened my eyes and saw Jesus reaching down to hold my hand. He comforted me and told me about heaven. Then he said he wants me to return to the world because he has more planned for me.”

I still get chills when I think of Ben's story. We will likely never understand the full plan that God has for Ben's life, but I do believe that at least part of it was to reach other believers like myself. My relationship with Ben has helped to strengthen my own faith. So many times in my life, I've tried to make and rely on my own plans, settling for “fitting God in” where I see fit. Ben's story reminds me that we are all ultimately here not for our own worldly reasons, but for God's higher purpose. Our plans can change in

the blink of an eye. Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also” (John 12:25-26).

I often struggle with letting go and trusting in God's plan for my life. But when I think of Ben - who woke from a coma to a completely changed life yet continues to serve God with joy - I'm reminded that surrendering control isn't losing something, but gaining everything that truly matters.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you so much for the ways you bless my life. Please give me the courage to trust in your plans for my life.

**Reflection Question:** When has there been a time in your life when you felt God was inviting you to trust in his plans vs your own?

---

## WEEK OF MARCH 29 (3 entries)

---

Theme: Surrender, sacrifice, resurrection hope.

### Led to Serve

Alice Hyatt

Scripture: John 13:1–15

There are individuals who have the gifts to speak or write with clarity. My first concern on sharing a devotional was “am I worthy and capable of this assignment”? The trials and various circumstances have many times been daunting. Praying for God’s wisdom and opening for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in any endeavor brings peace. Acknowledging that God leads me in words or deeds brings a worthy, humble servant-heart.

This Holy Week, there are insights from John 13:1-15. Jesus washing the feet of his disciples had me reflect upon my faithful journey as a follower of Jesus being led to serve others. There was outreach to various projects in serving for some of the most vulnerable youth and adults in need of caring assistance. Also as a business owner, maintaining a leadership role with employees and customers on a day-to-day basis was required. Relationship-building was and is for me to live the deep love of Jesus to others. Leadership is being a servant. Pride has no factor in this love of Christ when giving or sharing. Many times I needed to ask for forgiveness from others and to forgive others when there were challenges. Spiritual Christ-like growth became very evident for me when serving others with grace and mercy.

This scripture lesson defined for me the humility of Jesus. Transformation and illumination through humility is a journey toward holiness.

Here is a quote by Thomas Aquinas to reflect on this Holy Week: “If you are looking for an example of humility, look at the cross.”

May each of us humbly surrender all to Jesus, to serve and love as he taught us.

## The Suffering Servant

Pete Zimmerman

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1–6

*“But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.”  
(Isaiah 53:5)*

The book of Isaiah is the first of the writings of the Prophets. God called Isaiah to be His mouthpiece to his people. He foretold of a coming judgment, but also a sign of hope – the coming Messiah! He describes the Messiah as both a suffering servant and a sovereign Lord. The Messiah, Jesus, would be the Holy One to save His unholy people.

Only because of Jesus can we have total assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. He is the Servant who was completely obedient in order to experience God’s judgment in our place. Because of Him, we will never be exiled from God’s presence.

Isaiah was a strong and courageous man of God, fearlessly proclaiming God’s word. His prophecy was written approximately 700 years before the birth of Christ. Can you imagine if we were still waiting, 2,700 years later, for his prophecy to be fulfilled? Would we still have the faith to believe that it would?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, words are not adequate to describe the blessing of your gift of the fulfillment of the Messiah. Thank you for your “Amazing Grace – God’s Redemption At Christ’s Expense”!

---

## He Calls My Name

Pat Schweitzer

Scripture: John 20:11–18

I am contemplating the risen Jesus’s first words in verse 15 — “WHY are you crying?” Not “I have overcome the world”, not “I am the resurrection and the life” not “I am the light of the world” but “why are you crying?” His first concern was for the heart of someone like me. Jesus, who had the power to miraculously rise from the dead and forever break Satan’s hold over believers’ souls, first cared about a woman with a grieving heart. The questions that I ponder are, WHY does He love me so deeply? WHY

does He care about the things that grieve my heart? WHY would He endure the cross to prove His love? And WHY do I ever doubt His love?

Then, in verse 16, Jesus calls Mary's name. His intimate, gentle, and compassionate voice that she knew and followed throughout His earth ministry, was her turning point from grief to joy. When Mary heard the familiar voice of Jesus, she turned and recognized His presence. He still speaks. He speaks to me through His Holy Word. It is only when I open the Bible and recognize His presence that I can "be still and know" my Savior lives. He calls my name and He will turn my mourning into dancing when I turn to Him.

Finally, in verse 17, Jesus gives Mary instruction; go and tell the others about the fulfillment of the promise. She obeyed. I also must obey His command to take the truth of the living Jesus to others. That is the challenge for me this Lenten season; will I choose to obey and share the good news, the best news, the salvation news, so others will know and have an opportunity to choose to believe?

**Prayer:** Gracious, loving, Triune God; throughout the span of time, You have shown Your compassion, grace and mercy to Your children. In full confidence of who You are, living among us and in us; we ask You to continue to open our hearts, to hear Your voice, and to feel Your presence. We ask for the Holy Spirit to empower us to share the truth of Your awesome salvation plan so others can know Jesus and spend Eternity with You. In all our efforts Lord, may You alone receive all the glory. We pray these requests in the matchless name of Jesus. Amen.