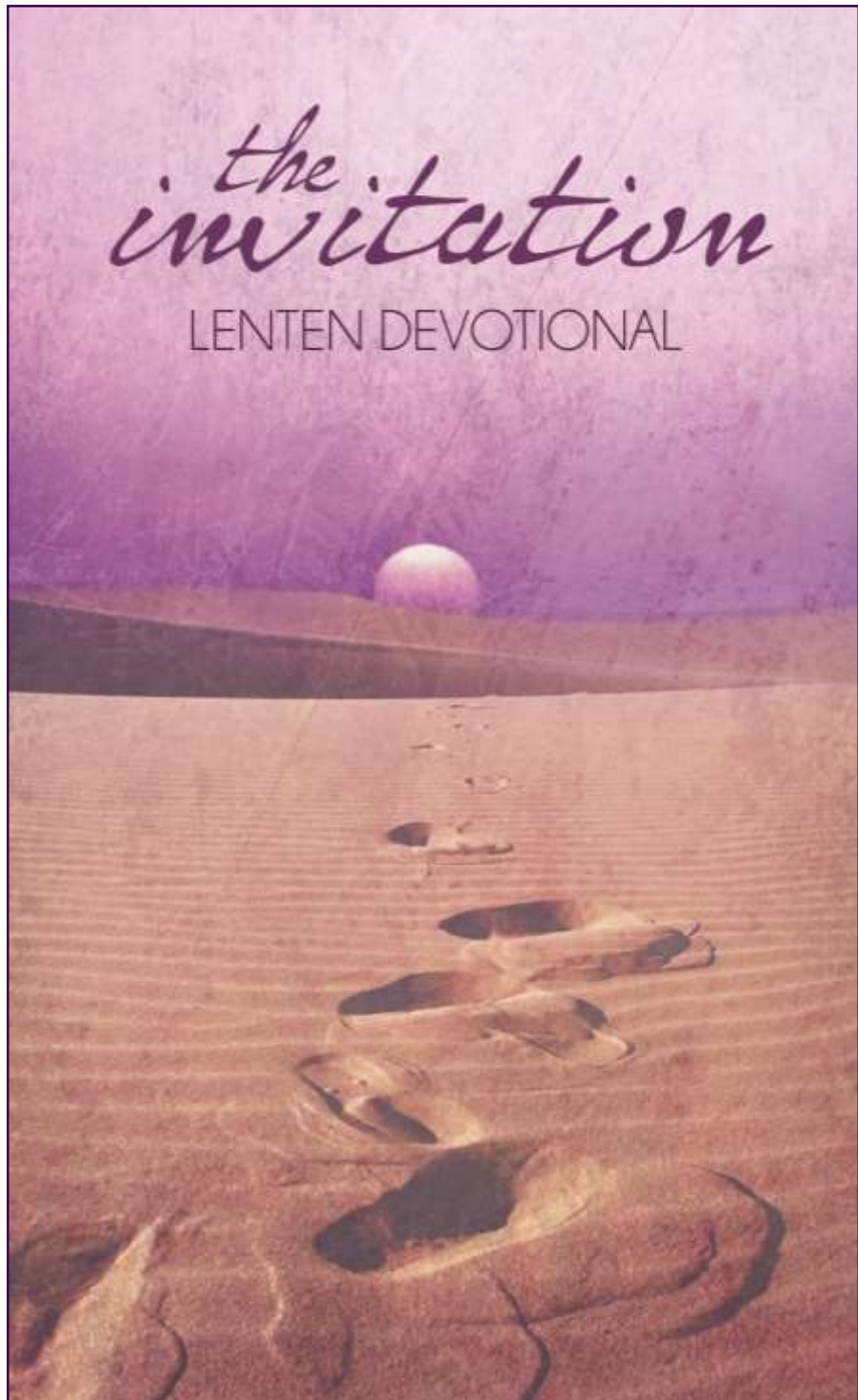


*the
invitation*

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



Introduction

It is often our habit during the Lenten season to give up physical things like a favorite food, social media, a video game, or television program. This Lenten season, make a commitment to intentionally cultivate your relationship with God by setting aside time to examine that relationship, your priorities and the state of your heart. Each week of Lent we will focus on one aspect of drawing closer to God in thought, word and deed. During Holy Week, this booklet includes one devotional each day, taking us through the final days of Jesus' earthly life and resurrection.

J. David Muyskens' book *"Sacred Breath: Forty Days of Centering Prayer"* provided topic and scripture references for several of these devotions.

Week 1 - February 10

A Time to Be Open to God

As our journey through Lent begins, do you find yourself in a time of overwhelming busyness or are you like the Psalmist in the scripture below, who earnestly seeks and longs for God? So often we fill our time and our hearts by pursuing approval, popularity, power and success. Let this season of Lent be a time to focus your attention on earnestly seeking God in all things and at all times. Open your heart to receive God's love and grace. Use this time of devotion to allow your relationship with God to grow in intimacy.

Read Psalm 63:1-8

"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me."

Meditation

- Tell God about the dry and parched places in your soul and open yourself to having God quench your thirst.
- Identify a time when you have seen God acting in your life and thank him for the love and grace you receive each day.

Week 2 - February 14

A Time to Confess

Unconfessed sin hinders our ability to heal old wounds and reconcile with those we have harmed. Our sins grieve God and hinder our relationship with the One who forgives. Scriptures teach us that lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride are terribly damaging to our relationships with God and other people. Confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness clears the way for us to draw closer in a reconciled relationship with our Creator.

Read Psalm 51:1-12

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

Meditation

Psalm 51 is known as David's Psalm of confession. In this Psalm David acknowledges that his terrible actions toward other people were sins against God. The Psalm reads like a prayer of confession and teaches us about the attitudes of repentance and humility we should demonstrate before God when we confess in our prayers.

If you are burdened by an unconfessed sin, pray through Psalm 51 just as King David did. Make a commitment to ask forgiveness from someone you have harmed.

Week 3 - February 21

A Time to Trust

Our American culture teaches us to admire qualities of self-reliance and independence. As a result, we try to control our lives, plans, and futures without asking God whether our hopes and plans are aligned with God's perfect plans for us. Do you find yourself trying to solve life's problems in your own strength? Do you charge ahead, set your own course, and then ask God to bless what you have already begun to do? This kind of "act now and ask for blessing later" strategy leaves us open to the possibility of doing what is easy and convenient instead of the more difficult and humbling tasks that God places before us. It is hard to give up control. It is hard to subordinate our own longing to be self-reliant in favor of being "God-reliant."

Read Psalm 62:5-12

"Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Surely the lowborn are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie. If weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath. Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them. One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: "Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love"; and, "You reward everyone according to what they have done.""

Meditation

The psalmist reminds us that our hope and rest come from God, and that we are to pour our hearts out to God and place our trust in his unfailing love. Is there a situation, problem, or relationship that you refuse to entrust to God? Pray for forgiveness for relying on your own strength and vain hopes. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you let go of whatever you have failed to trust to God.

Week 4 - February 28

A Time to Change

The season of Lent is a perfect time to dedicate yourself to cultivating godly qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. These are all attributes demonstrated by our Lord and Savior during his ministry on earth. We can develop these characteristics through constant prayer, persistent effort, honest self-evaluation, and in the company of fellow Christ-followers who love us enough to speak the truth and hold us accountable when we stray.

Read Colossians 3:12-17

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Meditation

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the example of Jesus of Nazareth. Select one godly quality that you struggle to embody.

- Ask a trusted brother or sister in Christ, or your Source Group or Sunday school class to gently admonish you when you fail to demonstrate that quality.
- For the remainder of the Lenten season, begin each day with a short prayer asking God to help you cultivate that quality until it becomes habitual.

Week 5 - March 6

A Time to Lose Myself

When we indulge our personal tendencies toward self-gratification, self-promotion, and self-centeredness we are usually seeking the approval of others rather than God's approval. Jesus taught us that we have to surrender or "lose" our lives in order to find everlasting life in Christ. These words from our Lord call on us to make a choice between the world's priorities and God's priorities. That choice can sometimes involve a radical reorientation of our lives. Jesus asks us to give up whatever keeps us from following him with single-minded devotion. He likens this to taking up a cross - just as he took up the cross to atone for our sins and provide a way for us to be reconciled to God. Our crosses don't involve nails in our hands and feet, but they do challenge us to sacrifice our old, comfortable ways in order to become authentic Christ-followers who bear witness to the Gospel.

Read Mark 8:34-38

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.""

Meditation

Pray for the courage and humility it takes to reprioritize your life if following Christ is not at the very top of your list. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to faithfully share the Gospel message with boldness. Lose yourself so that you may be found in Christ.

Week 6 - March 13

A Time to Respond

Contrary to popular misconceptions, God does not limit his call to clergy people or missionaries. We are all called according to God's purpose to be part of the ministry of all believers. It's difficult to discern what God calls us to do if we fail to make time to listen, or if we allow our fears of inadequacy to convince us that God wouldn't call us because we are not equipped to serve. When God called Moses to lead the people out of bondage in Egypt, Moses felt inadequate and unprepared, but God promised, "I will be with you." Many years later, our risen Lord commissioned his followers to "make disciples of all nations" and promised to be with them always to the end of the age.

Read Exodus 3:7-12

"The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.""

Read Matthew 28:16-20

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.""

HOLY WEEK

MONDAY

If God's plan was for the world to end on Good Friday, the last portrayal of humanity would be one of guilt, hopelessness, shame and defeat. It would include a portrait of humanity standing in abandonment before the Holy throne of God awaiting a final judgment whose verdict would have no redemption, only total condemnation. If this were indeed what God had planned, then you and I would end up in meaninglessness and despair. Our faith would be futile. We would still be in our sins and we would be known as the most miserable of human beings. In essence, the last word spoken would be death.

On the cross, Jesus Christ destroys our immoral life and by virtue of his incarnation, we are judged and pardoned. Through the cross we can live a new life in the power of the resurrection.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:17

"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

Meditation

- Take time today to think about what humanity would become if God indeed chose to abandon us because of our fallenness and life of sin.
- Reflect on what it means to live a life restored because of God's redemption through Jesus Christ.

TUESDAY

Those who look at Jesus Christ also see God and his creation, the world. They can no longer see God without seeing the world, nor the human without seeing God. In Christ, the reconciliation of the world took place. God chose not to overcome the world by destroying it; but instead through reconciliation. Not through actions, favors, good deeds, programs or even virtue, but by the perfect love of God. It is God's perfect love that meets a marred and destructive humanity and overcomes the death of the world. God's everlasting presence abides in all things.

Read Matthew 28:20

"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Meditation

- What do you see when you look at God's creation? How mighty is he, who has created all things?
- Think of what you do in order to be accepted by others. How can you reframe your actions with the knowledge that it is not because of anything you do or have done that God offers you His everlasting peace?

Notes and Reflection

WEDNESDAY

Easter, with the beginning of the coming spring and the happiness of the sun warming our hearts, has become a special reminder in our hearts along with memories from which we always wish to keep. Each day brings forth new and wonderful experiences. Who among us would ever wish to lose a single spring from our lives? To say that our entire life depends on Easter, that our very existence would be threatened if Easter did not exist, who among us could even fathom such a thing? That is exactly what the Apostle Paul did when he wrote, ***“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.”***

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:20-21

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.”

Meditation

Imagine you are in a room and you find yourself in the presence of the Lord. He looks at you and says, “My love for you was not a hoax.” What would that mean to you? You realize at that moment Jesus’ acts of love and everything he ever did as the Son of God reveal to you that God’s love for you was no hoax. What would that mean to you and your future?

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Jesus deliberately kept an important secret from his disciples and he planned to disclose his greater plan the night of the Last Supper. He had not left them in the dark about his road to suffering, but he still had not revealed to them the deepest secret. It was during that final hour of their fellowship over the Passover meal he chose to disclose to them the big picture: The Son of Man will be handed over into the hands of sinners—and it would come by means of 'betrayal.' The room became quiet when Jesus uttered the words, **"One of you will betray me."**

It is ironic that by themselves, his enemies cannot gain any power over him. It was up to a friend, a very close one, to hand Jesus over. It was one of his disciples who would betray him. The most painful betrayal does not happen from the outside, but from within. Jesus' path to "The Place of the Skull" (Golgotha) originates with a disciple's betrayal. While some slept that night in Gethsemane, another betrayed him. As troubling as it seems, in the end, "all disciples deserted him and fled."

Read: Matthew 26:20-25

"When the evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.' They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely not I, Lord?' Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.' Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, 'Surely not I, rabbi?'"

Matthew 26:48-50

"Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Friend, do what you came for.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him."

GOOD FRIDAY

Jesus prayed aloud, *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."* *"It is finished,"* and with that he bows his head and dies. It all happened the way it had to happen. The love of God appeared on earth in humiliation, shame and disgrace. On the cross the Son of God died for the wickedness of the world. The world's wickedness emerged in the form of nails holding Jesus on the cross. On Good Friday, let us not think right away about the fact that with Easter things were given a new direction. We want to take this moment to think about how with the death of Jesus the disciples saw all hope dashed. Scattered from each other, they brooded in hopeless sorrow about what had happened. Only when we can take the death of Jesus just as seriously as they did, will we rightly understand what the resurrection message brings.

"Good Friday, the day of God's overpowering acts in history, acts in which God's judgment and grace were revealed to all the world—is just around the corner. Judgment in those hours in which Jesus Christ, our Lord, hung on the cross; grace in that hour in which death was swallowed up in victory. It was not human beings who accomplished anything here; no, God alone did it. He came to him beings in infinite love. He judged what is human. And he granted grace beyond any merit."

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Read: Romans 11:1-6

"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!...God as not rejected his people whom he has chosen. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.' But what is the divine reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace."

HOLY SATURDAY

For believers the empty tomb is a sign of God that follows from the miracle of the resurrection and confirms it. Truth be known, many struggle with the historical truth of the empty tomb and we cannot scientifically prove the resurrection. It truly remains a puzzle. For believers, however, this puzzle transcends to our faith. It is a sign of the reality about which they already know, a mark of divine activity in history. Scholarship can neither prove nor disprove the resurrection of Jesus, for it truly is a miracle of God. But faith recognizes what God said would be true, is in fact, true. God continues to not only create life's puzzles; but solve them.

Read John 19:40-42

"They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish holiday of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there."

Meditation

- Think of a time when you had lost all hope. What did you do? What role did God play in helping resolve your situation?
- Imagine what was going through the minds of Mary and all of the disciples when Jesus' body was placed in the tomb. How did God lead them through this?

EASTER SUNDAY

Never forget, Easter is not a battle between darkness and light that ultimately must end in the victory of light. Darkness is actually a void, a nothing, because death is indeed already life. Easter is not a battle of winter and spring, or snow or sun. Rather, it is the battle of divine love against our guilty humanity. In this battle, God seems to be defeated on Good Friday, but in his very losing, wins the ultimate victory on Easter! Easter is not about immortality but about resurrection from a real death with all its frightfulness and horrors, resurrection from a death of the body and the soul, of the whole person, resurrection by the power of God's mighty act. This is indeed the Easter message.

Read John 20:18

"Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord!' and she told them that he had said these things to them."

Meditation

Reflect on what it means to know death cannot conquer love; love is stronger than death. Mary went to the tomb on Easter seeking to find the body of Jesus to anoint and cover with spices. What is it you seek?

Lent at St. Paul

Lenten Study on Wednesdays
February 17-March 23
6:30 p.m.

Join us for a season of spiritual growth and life-changing renewal during this Adam Hamilton series on the most deeply spiritual of the four gospels: "*John: The Gospel of Light and Life.*"

Palm Sunday | March 20
9 and 10:30 a.m.

Maundy Thursday | March 24
7 p.m.

Good Friday | March 25
7 p.m.

Easter Sunday | March 27
9 and 10:30 a.m.



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