

FROM
DUST
TO
DAWN

2021 LENT GUIDE

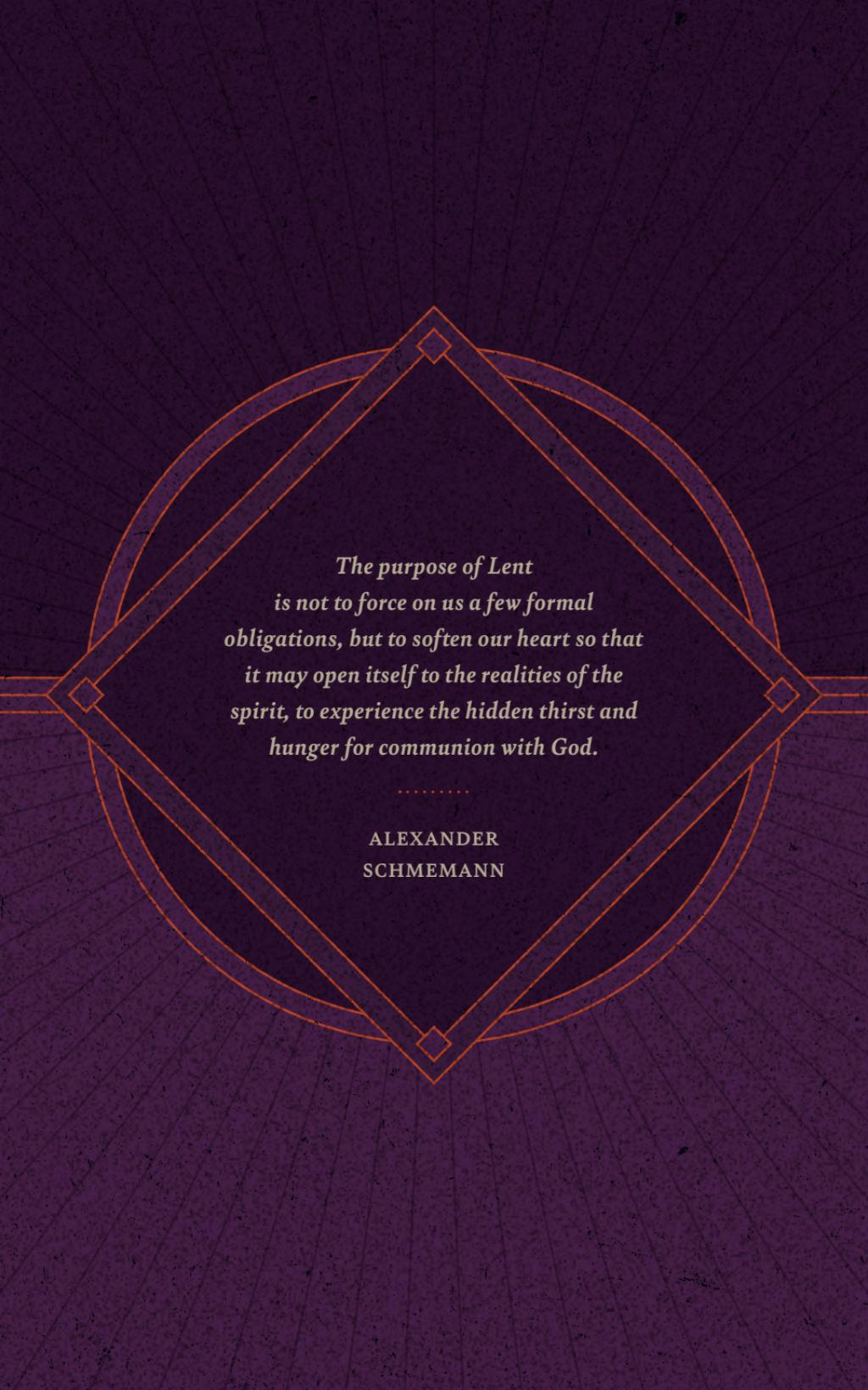
*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*



PSALM 139:23-24

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	5
<i>Learning the Story to Live the Story</i>	5
<i>Embodied Discipleship</i>	6
<i>The Purpose of Lent</i>	7
<i>Experiencing Lent</i>	9
<i>Fasting</i>	11
<i>Devotionals</i>	12
Week 1	
<i>From Dust To Body</i>	14
Week 2	
<i>From Darkness To Direction</i>	18
Week 3	
<i>From Doubt To Movement</i>	22
Week 4	
<i>From Departure To Return</i>	26
Week 5	
<i>From Distance To Perseverance</i>	30
Week 6	
<i>From Division To Fellowship</i>	34
Week 7	
<i>From Dusk To Dawn</i>	38
Resources.....	42



*The purpose of Lent
is not to force on us a few formal
obligations, but to soften our heart so that
it may open itself to the realities of the
spirit, to experience the hidden thirst and
hunger for communion with God.*

ALEXANDER
SCHMEMANN

INTRODUCTION



Learning the Story to Live the Story

"My sheep hear my voice," Jesus said. "I know them, and they follow me." These simple words contain within them a lifelong process of pursuit and obedience that Christians refer to as discipleship. Our journey from death to life occurs through the work of our good shepherd, in whom we find our fulfillment, our flourishing, and our future.

While there are doctrines to learn and truths to uncover in this life of discipleship, the call to hear Jesus and follow him is no mere intellectual ascent. It's a fully embodied process of conformity that stretches through every day we get on this earth. Jesus comes to bring us life in fullness – heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Of course this kind of fully encompassing transformation does not occur overnight, as much as we wish it did. Every day brings its own challenges, ones that often find us succumbing to temptation and forsaking the life we're called to. Again and again we turn to the savior and his story of redemption.

Though our failures continue, the incredible thing about the Gospel is that it does not grow stale. It gets richer. In the darkness of sin's pervasive allure, the light of redemption only gets brighter for us. We stumble, but as Christ lifts us we discover new depths to this salvation story. We see the cross from a different vantage. We witness the empty tomb with fresh perspective.

In this life of following the savior's footsteps we are learning the story to live the story. We study and reflect on Christ's life to follow not just his path but his example as well. We want more than his words on a page. We want to speak like he speaks. We want to live like he lives. In other words, we want more than knowing about Jesus, as theologian Alexander Schmemann says. We want to know him, to the deepest depths of who we are.



Embodied Discipleship

Discipleship requires our constant return, from our travels and travails in the world and from our sinful wanderings too. So we build wise practices of care and constraint into our lives. *We read the Word and pray and gather together so the Gospel can slowly wear grooves into us as it erodes the stone of our hearts.* And each time we draw near to God in repentance and gratitude He faithfully chisels and shapes us, for His glory and our good. Over a lifetime of following, our second nature becomes our first.

One of the most fundamental aspects of effective discipleship is order. It isn't enough to pray only when we feel like it, for as anyone who does pray can attest, the more you do it the deeper the experience becomes. We are discipled with intentionality and regularity. We order practices of returning to the Gospel over the time we're given. On particular days, we will set hours to read scripture and pray, providing an anchor to draw back our wandering hearts before they ever get too far.

Each time we draw near to God in repentance and gratitude He faithfully chisels and shapes us, for His glory and our good. Over a lifetime of following, our second nature becomes our first.

Perhaps the most obvious example is how we order our weeks toward discipleship. Every Sunday, we gather together in corporate worship, not only to practice the activities of our ongoing transformation – like praying, receiving and interpreting the Word, ministering to one another, and yes, singing – but also to once again hear the story of the Gospel. Every service we don't just listen to the Gospel spoken. We walk through it together. This is embodied discipleship, an intentional approach to learning that involves every part of us.

So we don't just hear about the cross and resurrection life. We once again participate in the journey of salvation. Just like we did when the Spirit first moved us to God, we respond to God's call to worship him with songs and shouts of adoration. We lift up holy cries of praise, and in the limited but growing knowledge of who God is, we are confronted by the distance between His holiness and our sinfulness. We engage in confession, and in the moments that seem low or bring us to our knees, we are reminded of the power of grace and the assurance we have of our faith in Christ, whose saving work provides the unshakable foundation of our lives. *We can now receive the Word, and as the Spirit floods the dry places of our hearts, we leave with a song in our lungs and gratitude on our lips.*

For some, this description of what we do every Sunday, as we represent and participate in the living story of the Gospel, might sound new or even difficult to square with long-held expectations and perspectives. But this is, in truth, what the Church has always done. *If the responsibility of the body of Christ was to write its own story week after week, reinventing the wheel for a constantly changing audience, our faith would have died out a long time ago.* When we realize that salvation is less a momentary exchange and more an invitation taken into a lifetime of saving grace, the Gospel's eternal power becomes clear. Though the world constantly changes – and we often do with it – the need for mercy on this side of eternity remains set, for unbeliever and baptized alike. As we continue to receive sanctifying grace, the Gospel does not become dull or desaturated. Rather we realize that, like an oxygen tank to a diver, it's the only thing preventing us from losing color and fading away.

The Purpose of Lent

It's easy to see the value of Sunday mornings, which are already baked into most of our weekly rhythms. Every seven days we get the vivid reminder that we can never wander too far from God and our need of His grace. But it isn't just our weeks that offer us an opportunity to walk through the Gospel in renewing our faith and rekindling the fire of our first love. Since its beginning, the Church has also utilized the calendar of the year to dive deeper into the story of Jesus and his people.

Like zooming into a high-resolution photo, stretching the Gospel narrative over the course of the year allows us to see the story's finer details, to spend more time in the contours of Christ's steps, and to focus deeper on the movement of grace in our lives. While most of us recognize the great significance of Christmas and Easter, what we're actually describing here is less two points on a calendar and more an annual journey between them.

We know a good story isn't just a beginning and a climax, and the Gospel is no different. We see the light of grace grow as we are drawn to it, and this period between our journey's beginning – salvation – and its end – eternity – is one full of joyful experience and heavy challenges. The temptation might be to try and skip steps on this redemption road, but Jesus tells us that each step is critical, that there is no arrival without following. Jesus calls himself the beginning and the end, sure, but he also calls himself The Way.

The Gospel is about a new beginning, a hopeful end, and the journey in between. Every part of this movement matters to God, so it should matter to us. The celebration of a Sunday does not stand alone, but rather occupies the summit of our schedules. We begin each week ready to journey to it, wading through the waters of temptations and triumphs as we look to the gathering of our family just ahead. Monday through Saturday are not their own time, separate from the holy day of Sunday. These are the days of mission and movement, a time set apart for the preparation of our praise.

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If you were to look at the calendar of a church's year, Easter represents the Sunday of all Sundays, the pinnacle of an annual journey to proclaim the hope of the Gospel with deepest passion and fullest joy. And just like our weekdays help us prepare spiritually for Sunday, through our disciplines and our service, the season before Easter is set aside for the same purpose, only on a much larger scale.

Throughout the history of the Church this season has been known as Lent, and though you might not be accustomed to marking it on your calendar, generations of believers across diverse denominations have found within its unique focus and practices an invitation to deeper surrender and ultimately, greater joy. Lent is a season where we zero in on Christ's journey to the cross, where we realize in each of his steps the path carved out for us to follow. Though we are a confessing people, Lent is a time where we work especially hard to identify and cast out distractions as we open our eyes to the reality of sin. *Together we let go of the things that hold us as we expose our deep need for a savior, knowing that it is in remembering Christ that we receive him.* This is a season for mourning sin, for crying out for our redeemer, and ultimately, for finding and appreciating the comfort of his grace.

Experiencing Lent

As we mentioned here at the beginning of this introduction, this season doesn't offer a mere mental process for us to simply think about sin and death and Jesus and resurrection. Just like Easter represents a spiritual, mental, and physical feast of celebration, where we gather together to reflect on the work of Christ with the body of Christ, *Lent offers us a full experience of confession and renewal through our engagement of three specific disciplines: prayer, fasting, and giving.*

These three disciplines have become the foundation of Lent following the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, where he teaches about their importance to a fully embodied life of faith. Prayer as he explains is an expression of our spiritual communion with God, a way for us to speak to and hear from "Our Father" as we turn to His way and pursue His will. Most of us are intimately acquainted with this discipline, especially in seasons of struggle or hardship. Prayer feels most powerful when it feels most urgent.

Finding that urgency can be a difficult thing, though. Our need for grace is a daily reality, but it's one we often suppress in the busyness of schedules, the numbing consistency of bad habits, or sinful excursions borne of private struggles. Even though we know in our minds that we always need a present Father, our words and our actions routinely betray a life apart from Him.

Lent is a season where we move from going to God as our general practitioner to seeking instead the surgical care of a specialist, and the difference between the two is usually a matter of diagnosis. When the situation is dire, you need more concentrated expertise and care. *The point of the cross is that there is nothing more fatal for us than sin, no condition more harmful to life than choosing the prison of our flesh.*

Something must be done to shake us from the complacency the old Adam loves. It is here, when fasting combines with prayer that the body joins the mind and spirit in pursuing the will of the Father. The reality of spiritual dependence moves from the arena of contemplation to the experience of the full person. All of us now hungers for the Word and the Way.

Jesus himself fasted, embracing physical weakness in his triumph over temptation as he prepared for the ultimate victory of death's defeat at the cross. He practiced as he preached, and following him through the story of the Gospel means doing the same. It means living a faith that is fully present in the work the Father is calling us to. And to partner with what God is doing means letting go and making room.

It's here, where concentrated prayer and fasting begin to clear minds and hearts and hands and schedules, that the third discipline, giving, becomes so important. Jesus came and died and rose again for the life of the world, and following after him means accepting his invitation to make his mission our own. *You and I cannot participate in that glorious work of redemption with a divided spirit or a wandering heart.* We can't do the work God establishes for our hands if they're filled with lesser things.

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.....

So we pray that God would grow our faith and strengthen our dependence on Him. We fast to deepen our longing for what only He can provide. And finally, we follow Him into His Kingdom to a life of sacrifice and joy. With the space made through prayer and fasting, we engage in ministry with renewed passion and focus.



Fasting

If you're familiar with Lent, you might have heard the season reduced to one question. What are you giving up? We tend to isolate the discipline of fasting as we walk through this time of preparation for Easter. And while it's true that biblically fasting precedes feasting, we do our growth a disservice when we separate or elevate this discipline above its partners in prayer and charity.

While we need to avoid making too much of fasting in this way, we also need to avoid making too little of it. *Fasting is more than simply giving something up. Fasting is intentionally taking up what we cannot do on our own so that we might become what we cannot be on our own. What we give up has to be the kind of thing we need prayer and the Spirit to help us keep at bay.*

Historically fasting involves food, as it is a discipline identified with physical experience, but today there is freedom to choose something in your life that is "consumed" in a broader sense. For some of us, it might be meals or sweets or alcohol. For others, it might be television or social media or personal spending. To help you as you pray about what God might be inviting you to let go of, we offer three simple criteria for selecting what to give up. *To be spiritually effective, your fast must be costly, challenging, and consistent.* These three criteria will help you get the most out of your Lent journey.

- ◆ A *costly fast* is one that gives something noticeable up. Letting go of what you identify as a hindrance to your discipleship will mean a change in schedule or routine or even relationships. You will feel a significant shift in the course of your days and weeks during this season.
- ◆ A *challenging fast* is one that you cannot do on your own. If you can let go of something under your own power and without dependence on the Spirit's encouragement, it will not be a great choice for a fast. Expect to struggle, because while slipping is not necessarily encouraged, the walk from failure to repentance only deepens our faith. And that is what the season of Lent is all about.
- ◆ A *consistent fast* is one that you return to regularly. It stretches across the season and not through mere portions of it. So as you walk through Lent, you carry the fast with you, and your hunger deepens as the feast of Easter grows closer.



Devotionals

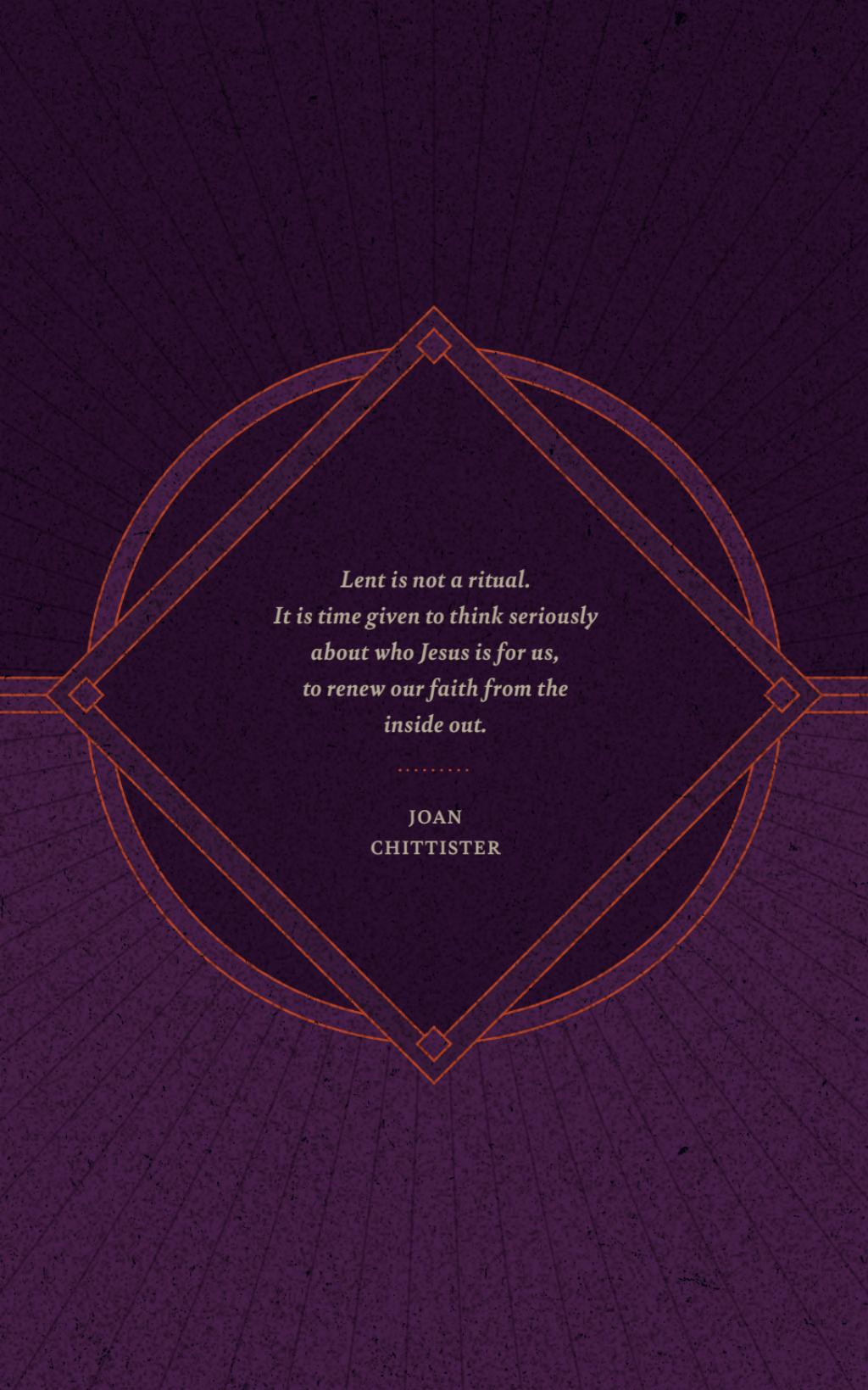
To help you through this Lenten season, we've put together seven weeks of devotionals, stretching from the short first week that begins with Ash Wednesday and moving finally through Holy Week to Easter Sunday. Each week is presented through the language of a journey, where we identify where we stand, where we want to go, and the thing we need to embrace to get there.

The three disciplines of prayer, fasting, and giving figure prominently throughout this guide. Every week begins with a passage of scripture to read and invites you to reflect upon its truths through an accompanying devotional. For each of these entries, we have written a prayer to bring before God throughout the week and questions to consider and respond to as you engage in the work of confession, release, and ministry. Finally, Lenten activities are included in each devotional that offer the opportunity to practice together what it means to follow Christ.

At the back of your booklet, we've also listed additional resources, including books to read about the Christian year, selections for daily Lent devotionals if you want to go into a deeper study rhythm, and even a Spotify playlist of songs inspired by the season. The guide concludes with a visual summary of the story of the Gospel spread over the calendar of a year, which will be helpful as we approach future seasons together in the life of our church.

Our goal with this guide is ultimately to foster a sense of true progress in following Christ. We are after him and his Kingdom, and getting there has always meant casting aside the world's expectations and motivations to see things in a new way, as they were meant to be seen. This is heavy work, but it's worthy work. And by the grace of Jesus it's work we get to do together. The Gospel story is not yours or mine. It's ours. It belongs to the body of Christ that follows after him.

So we step forward now into this season and its story as one church ready to encourage and intercede for one another along the way. It is our prayer that when we come to experience the joy and celebration of Easter at this journey's end, we find that our eyes have widened to see the beauty of God's community and that our hearts have opened to receive the fullness of His joy. Let's take this first step together.



*Lent is not a ritual.
It is time given to think seriously
about who Jesus is for us,
to renew our faith from the
inside out.*

.....
JOAN
CHITTISTER

FROM DUST TO BODY



SPIRIT

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

Psalm 103: 13-18 (ESV)

There's nothing quite like the smell of fresh baked bread. It's the kind of aroma that can transform a moment, recalling memories of meals with loved ones and drawing us to imagine meals ahead. In an instant, smell joins to taste and touch and even sound, as we think about breaking into crust and indulging our sudden, acutely felt hunger. It is immediately recognizable and deeply invitational. If you have ever gone on a diet from carbs, you might know from experience that this smell is powerful enough to make even burnt bread a delight to the senses.

Bread is a central image and metaphor throughout scripture. In times of great need, God has provided it to His people. It fell from heaven for the wandering Israelites as a sign of His steadfast love for them, even despite their disobedience. In the tabernacle, it was fresh, warm bread in the light of the Holy of Holies that reminded the Israelites of God's care for them as a present Father and not simply a sovereign vending machine. In bread, the people saw that God's provision was invitation too.

It's Jesus that ties all these images and meanings together for us. Bread is one of Jesus' most beloved descriptions for his identity and mission. "I am the bread of life," he says. "He who comes to me will never hunger." **Jesus comes as our great provision, as the fullest image of the provider, and as the invitation to sit at the table and enjoy the only meal that can quench our eternal longings.**

Because he knows we need the grace of emphasis and reminder, Jesus also institutes one of Christianity's core practices in the breaking of bread at the Last Supper, inviting believers to remember his life and in gratitude receive it as their own. In this last image we find in something as simple as a loaf of bread a profound reminder of God's care throughout time and the encouragement to depend on him as we approach time's end.

There's a clear sense of journeying that emerges here. We were made to abide with Christ, but to get there we have to follow him. **We are invited not simply to feast but to walk with Jesus through fast and death to receive this meal our hearts crave.**

Speaking to young believers awaiting communion, St. Augustine elaborated on the bread as a metaphor of faith. Before any loaf hits a table, he noted, it is first grains, pulled from fields and crushed and pounded into flour.

In receiving water, this dusty mass begins to take shape, and in the fire it is complete. This is the life Jesus illustrates and calls us to, a path of humility and testing, one that would end abruptly for us were it not for the transforming power of living water and the fiery breath of the Spirit. In speaking of the communion bread before these believers, Augustine brings the analogy home in his characteristic wit. "It was by means of these things that the Lord Christ wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins. If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive."

In other words, you are what you eat.

Without water and heat, flour is simply a mess. It is grain dead and crushed beyond recognition, all potential but also all waste. This is the state of man without the living water of Christ and the breath of his Spirit. This is you and me left to ourselves in the brutal reality of our fallen humanity.

But Jesus comes because God knows. God remembers, as scripture says. "He knows our frame," as this week's passage says. "He remembers that we are dust." When the Bible says God remembers it isn't because he discovers something He had forgotten. God isn't finding his lost keys or guessing a password before He gets locked out of an account.

No, when God remembers it means He sees and He acts. He turns to face a situation and to respond to it according to His wisdom and power and mercy.

God remembers we are dust, the powder of a pummeled sinful humanity, and in remembering He turns to us and gives us His son.

Our role in this work is simple but costly: we have to remember too. We have to remember that without living water and the fresh fire of the Spirit, death and dust will be the end of our story. Without God we exist merely as mess, destined for the dustbin of history.

Lent is a season where we remember as scripture tells us to remember. We open our eyes and hold them open, and as the dust of our sin is kicked in we renew our

desperation for a savior who clears our vision and sets us right. See, in God's remembrance of us He turns to our sorrowful state to offer grace and mercy. In our remembrance of Him we turn too, facing in repentance and need this unearned gift and its sovereign giver.

Living water comes to dust, but if we're not careful all of our routines and numbing activities will lead us away from the fount of every blessing. Today we begin by plunging to the depths of sorrow over sin in us and the world to rekindle the dormant flames of our first love and light the road ahead. As we journey to Easter together, the steps of our path will leave us covered in dirt, but we need not fear where we stand. There's a table ahead where we are washed clean, where bread is broken and served before us, where we who have died in Christ and received the Spirit are fully and finally made whole again.

PRAYER

Father how difficult it is for me in this world of distraction and stimulation to feel the weight of the sin that so easily stifles my walk and tempts me to other paths. Despite my wandering you continue to offer me the resurrection life of your Son. Lord I want to receive and cherish that every day I walk with you. Forgive me for chasing life in other places and people and activities. Open my eyes to the depths of my sin that I might see the heights of your grace. I am dust without you. Gather me together for your glory and set me on your path today.

RESPONSE

Start each day this week reading and reflecting on Psalm 103 and reciting the prayer above. David begins this psalm urging his soul to remember the blessings of a present, providing God. How has God shown you in your life the things David describes? How has He been merciful to you? What has he healed? How has He satisfied the longings of your heart? Sometimes these things are difficult to see until they are in the rear view. Asking God for open eyes, how do you see Him forgiving, healing, and providing for you even now?

Psalm 103 also tells us that the steadfast love of the Lord endures for those who fear Him by keeping with the commands of the gracious covenant relationship He invites us into. God has turned to us in our brokenness. What do you need to leave behind to turn to Him? Ask the Lord for the wisdom to see sin as He does and the strength to flee from it.

FAST

How has your fasting this week opened you up to receive the breath of life?

ACTIVITY

This week find a day to get your family or friends together and bake some bread from scratch. Assign different tasks around the ingredients and use each baking step to discuss how it can reflect the life of Christ and the life of faith that follows after him. Take time throughout to lean into the tactile experience, feeling the weightlessness of the flour, noting the change in texture as wet ingredients are added. Describe the aroma as the bread bakes. When the whole process is done, listen to the crust as it's broken for serving and share it together or with a neighbor.

FROM DARKNESS TO DIRECTION



CONFESSION

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:1-3 (ESV)

A good optician will tell you that the onset of blindness can often be detected in a patient's difficulty to see in the dark. That might seem obvious to anyone with normal vision, but for someone suffering from retinal deterioration, it is in conditions of low light where they begin to discover that things aren't as they should be. In the sunshine or the brightness of indoor fluorescents, weakening eyesight is difficult to detect. Being surrounded by all that light compensates for incremental but progressive loss in vision. It's in the dark, where light is scarce and more focused than spread, that weaknesses are discovered and symptoms are observed.

This might sound like a rare circumstance, but for one in every 4,000 people this describes the experience of learning you have retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic eye disorder that admittedly sounds more like a Harry Potter spell than a medical diagnosis. The odds are probably slim that you know someone physically affected by this, but the image of someone realizing their weakness in the dark is a powerful one for us as we continue this walk through the Lent season.

Pharisees enjoyed glorified status among Jewish culture, basking in the light of their own piety as they exercised power over a cowering faithful.

This group was one of Jesus' favorite targets of correction, and he often posed difficult questions to them as he provoked their rage over his flouting of custom and his breaking of new religious ground. In John chapter three, we see a prominent member of this proud social class engage Jesus in conversation. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, elevated among the Pharisees to a position of governing authority, and the implication of this encounter with Christ is that of all people, Nicodemus should have been able to question and receive all that Jesus shared. If status were an effective predictor of this interaction, we might expect a conversation between two teachers.

This is of course not at all how the scene plays out. Both this Pharisee and Jesus respond in a way otherwise unique among similar encounters in the Gospels. Jesus, though direct, does not denounce Nicodemus with the same fervor he does other Pharisees. He corrects Nicodemus' misunderstandings regarding spiritual rebirth and the divine nature of Jesus, but he never reveals righteous anger toward Nicodemus or any other Sanhedrin who might have been present.

Reading the text, the key difference seems to be Nicodemus' approach. Of the four Gospels, John's is unique in its use of metaphor and poetic description, and this moment highlights John's descriptive power for us well.

See, we are told that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and this is no small detail in the hands of a good storyteller. Nicodemus was someone surrounded at all times by the brightness of his social standing. In the rarified air of his authority people looked up to him, as one might a symbol of great power or a beacon guiding the path ahead.

But left to himself, surrounded instead by the reality of darkness, Nicodemus discovered weakness. For all his experience, for all his knowledge, for all his power, he was incapable of navigating the great questions at the heart of his belief.

Nicodemus longed for a greater Kingdom, and he knew that getting to it through this world of darkness would require the light of a teacher much wiser than himself.

It is tempting in the busyness of life and the onslaught of our constant distractions to avoid coming to terms with our weakness. Though we might not be in a social status like Nicodemus', we can certainly identify with what it's like to come to the end of ourselves. Perhaps for you this looks like seasons of loss or grief, where the illusion of control is shattered before the reality of heartache. Or maybe you have found that even successful plans and upward mobility in your career or relationships has not offered the fulfillment or flourishing you expected.

The truth is though we carry the light of Christ, each of us spends seasons in valleys, whether led to them by tragic circumstance or the consequences of our actions. In moments like these, we realize in profound ways what we sometimes miss on the mountains: we have no path forward but Christ. The Christ who is our Way through death to resurrection. The Christ who shepherds us from our wanderings back to the path. The Christ who walks beside us as our closest friend.

Lent is a season where we acknowledge the darkness around us and the darkness within us. It's a time for letting go of the crutches we have made of our jobs and our routines, our possessions and our relationships. **When these false lights fade the true light shines brighter, and in the middle of our weakness we find in Christ the strength to stand and step forward.** As Psalm 112 says, "Light dawns in the darkness for the upright." We invite you this week to confess that weakness and cry out for the redemption light that shines to the Kingdom.

PRAYER

This prayer from St. Patrick is one that has encouraged many believers on their journey with Christ. Consider this week the hope of these words and the great need that makes them real. Make them your daily reminder in prayer with God.

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

RESPONSE

Confession might feel like a foreign practice to you, but it is an incredibly powerful component of a life of faithful discipleship. Though we often think of confession only in terms of a personal acknowledgement of sin, it is important to understand that confession also has positive and corporate expressions. We confess sin, but we also confess faith at the same time. We trust this God who hears us and sees us, believing that in confession we are expressing hope in Him only. And just as the need for a Savior belongs to all humanity, so is his gift of his life shared by all who receive him. Confession belongs to the whole body of Christ.

To assist you this week in making confession a regular feature of your relationship with God, listen to the lyrics of “In Your Hands” and consider making them a part of your prayers throughout this week. The verses consider confession from all the angles of brokenness—personal and communal, sin-affected but faith-directed. Remember it is God who invites you first to Him and that in responding with humility and trust you experience all that He has for you.

FAST

How has fasting this week produced healthy confession before God and other believers?

ACTIVITY

The stars and moon are a beautiful reminder of light in the darkness, of faithfulness even at midnight. This week take a drive outside of town and stop to look at the beauty of the stars. You can take turns trying to find different constellations, or even making your own shapes with the stars. For added fun, download the free app “Sky View Lite” to get a more in-depth look at the constellations and planets. Spend time reflecting on how weak our eyes are, and how the light pollution of the city keeps us from seeing the true beauty of the sky.

FROM DOUBT TO MOVEMENT



S U B M I S S I O N

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.

Hebrews 12:22-25a (ESV)

If you've ever visited another city and made a stop at a large, popular tourist location, like a mall or a theme park or a museum, you probably remember consulting a map. If the place was new to you and your group, there was a big risk of getting lost. Without some sense of direction, you could easily waste half a day going in circles or walking right past what you came to see. You needed a plan, and that required knowing where everything was, which direction to follow, what route to take. But while all those things were important, they would have been useless without the big red dot. On any big map in a place like this, one marker sticks out more than all the others. It draws your attention, and it brings a real sense of comfort as you read the words around it.

"You are here."

There's no greater feeling when you're lost than recognizing something. A building, a billboard, a street sign – what matters to you in that moment isn't so much what you see but where it places you. **Knowing where we stand always brings peace.** And not just physically. It's great to know where you're walking, so you can get home. It's also great to know where you stand in a relationship. The air is less awkward. The conversations are more comfortable. Even when restlessness or adventure pushes us out, we try to keep home in sight. When we become disoriented, when the path gets lost in the fog, it is natural to panic. We might try to retrace our steps or consult a map, but without knowing where we are we can't figure out how to get where we will be.

We often treat the Word of God like a good map. It's there in our bags or on our shelves. Some of it is even hidden in our hearts. We have located it, it is in our possession, yet it isn't enough to have access to it. There are times when in a panic we turn to its pages and see no clearer. "God where are You?" we demand. This is a natural question, one we've all asked at least once in our lives. We're waiting for God to show up. If we're being really honest, we might admit we're waiting for Him to prove Himself. God where are You in this?

God does answer, but not usually in the way we'd prefer. We want Him to show up and take the script we've given Him, tidy up all the loose ends, and blow the fog away so we can start walking again. That kind of answer is fitting, but it's not what we need. It doesn't really answer our question. Think about a time you've been lost enough to ask for directions and stood nodding your head, as a stranger pointed and talked, while inside you only grew more confused. Without any recognizable references, you might as well have been talking to yourself. This is direction without location. God doesn't answer us like that.

Consider Job, someone like we often are, disoriented by the circumstances of life. He is weary and confused, and he wants to know where God is in all this. Job is bold enough to ask God directly, and in Job 38, God is more than happy to speak. Only He doesn't offer an answer.

God returns Job's question with a question: Who are you? God asks Job this and goes on to speak of His power in creation and sovereignty over all things. In the question, Job finds a command: Locate yourself.

In her Lent book *I Am With You*, Kathryn Greene-McCreight writes, "This is God's response to Job out of the whirlwind, a response that is a question: Who are you in relation to me? The implied answer God would have Job give is: I am yours. And God would agree: You are not your own. You are mine."

When we find ourselves in the kind of circumstances that lead us to question God as Job did, we want a shortcut to avoid what's in front of us. But **what we actually need is for God to ground us**, to remind us where are, to locate ourselves in the

dirt we stand on. It isn't enough to have a map in your pocket. You have to know where you are in the map.

The benefit of having a God bigger than us is that He sees and understands what we can't. When we stop to ask God where are You in this? He wants us to reverse the question. God where is this in You?

Standing humbled before the presence of the Almighty, it's so much more comforting to learn that everything is in His hands and not ours. When we're lost and afraid, a map isn't enough. We need to hear God's voice first: You are here.

PRAYER

God, ground me today. Show me where I am. In my fears and in my doubts, help me to ask the right question. Remind me that everything is in the hands of a great and powerful God who loves and cares for me. Lead me on Your path. Let no step I take be aimless or thankless or by my own strength or leading. When I feel lost or disoriented, teach me to trust. I know You speak. Don't let me turn away when You do.

RESPONSE

How do you approach reading your Bible? Are you looking to fit the words you read into your life? Or are you looking to find your life in the Word of God? The difference might sound subtle, but your approach changes everything. Today as you read the passage above and pray, posture your heart away from “God show me what to do” and more toward “God show me what You do.” We can’t walk the path ahead of us until we realize worship is more about God’s character and power and action than it is about ours.

FAST

How has fasting this week created a dependence and submission to God's Word and Rule in your life?

ACTIVITY

Get your friends or family together and go on a walk somewhere you don't normally go. Pick a trail at a local park or a route downtown and stop routinely to check your progress. You can use a location-based app, but for added fun have someone create a map with periodic markers for you to stop and observe your surroundings and discuss how much distance you have remaining on your walk. As you do this, consider what it means to follow Jesus as your guide, pausing where he pauses and following where he leads.

FROM DEPARTURE TO RETURN



HUMILITY

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”

Luke 15:17-20 (NIV)

Do you remember your first sleepover as a kid? Your friend asked you to spend the night, with promises of forts as high as the sky and sugar for miles and the appeal of freedom from the watchful eye of your parents; a dream come true. Your parents dropped you off, pillow and bag in hand, telling you to obey Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so and that you could call if you needed to come home. The last comment was almost offensive, because of course this would be the best night of your life and you would never want to come home. The evening goes just as planned: you eat dinner and play hide and seek in the backyard and you down all the chips and soda your friend's family can provide, topping it all off with the latest Disney movie. Everyone starts to wind down, lights turn off, everyone finds their way to their bed. But as you settle into the quiet, an aching panic for your own home, your own room, your own parents creeps in slowly. A few minutes later your friend's mom is on the phone with yours and by 11pm you are tucked into your own bed, more grateful than ever before to be at home, to have a home.

Jesus said that the kingdom of God belongs to the children. He tells us that we must learn to be like them if we are ever to receive any of His Goodness. While that comes in many forms, this week and this season we must learn to long for home as children. **The season of Lent gently whispers to us to return home no matter how far the last year has taken us from Christ.**

Luke 15 tells the story of a man with two sons, one of whom decides he would like his inheritance early, recklessly spending it on what the Bible calls “wild living.” The kid spends every last dime without flinching, and it is not until he is living in squalor and famine in a foreign country that he realizes he needs to return to his father. It is not until the party is over, the lights are turned off, and the silence encroaches on him that he understands how deeply he longs for home.

Humility means to be free from pride or arrogance. The son departed from the father in his pride, but he returns repentant. And somewhere in between, God used the holy humiliation of his own failure to do a good work in him. Many of us are the impoverished son. We are like a child awake at her friend’s home, knowing we long for something different, and yet we become paralyzed by our pride.

Our self-importance becomes a stumbling block to running back to the Father's arms, to the presence of God whom we know is our true home.

The humility of a child who needs her dad, someone to provide for her, someone to hold her, to celebrate her and sit with her when she’s heartbroken: this is the heart we are not only asked to come to God with, but that creates a freedom within us to approach without pretense. You can come to God whether or not you actually stuck to your Bible reading plan, you can come to him when you’ve had great victories and you can crawl to him when your world feels shattered. This parable teaches us that while we are far off, the Father comes running to us, overflowing with compassion and love we can never fully understand.

Humility gives us the freedom to receive this kind of love, unencumbered by the pride that told us to leave and the shame that kept us there.

If the gospels give stories to show us the love of God, the psalms give us the poetry of his love just the same. Psalm 139 reminds us that God in heaven knows every thought before we think it, every moment before we live it.

It tells us that no matter where we go
He is there, and it beckons us into the
safety of laying our hearts bare before
Him. Our rebellion does not diminish
His longing to be gracious to us. Did
you know that God delights in you?
**He is ready to run with compassion
towards you, if only you would
humble yourself before him; if only
you would hear His voice.**

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, I need You to work in my heart. I need You to rid me of pride and shame as I approach the Throne of Grace. Fix my eyes on the cross of Jesus, where perfect humility was put on display for the world to see and let me not lose hope for myself. You long to be gracious to me. You long to show me who You say I am in light of all of Your glory. Father, teach me to be like a child who is unashamed of running to you. Teach me to need you; teach me to entrust you with my all in all.

PSALM 139: 1-12

.....
*O Lord, you have searched
me and known me!*

*You know when I sit down
and when I rise up; you
discern my thoughts
from afar.*

*You search out my path
and my lying down and are
acquainted with all my ways.*

*Even before a word is on my
tongue, behold, O LORD, you
know it altogether.*

*You hem me in, behind and
before, and lay your hand
upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too
wonderful for me; it is high; I
cannot attain it.*

*Where shall I go from your
Spirit? Or where shall I flee
from your presence?*

*If I ascend to heaven, you
are there! If I make my bed in
Sheol, you are there!*

*If I take the wings of the
morning and dwell in the
uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall
lead me, and your right hand
shall hold me.*

*If I say, "Surely the darkness
shall cover me, and the light
about me be night," even
the darkness is not dark to
you; the night is bright as the
day, for darkness is as light
with you.*

RESPONSE

At the beginning of this week, read the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and write down what you think the text is saying about the character of God. Then, begin praying and asking God to show you how you fit into this story and what He wants to teach you specifically. Ask God to show you where you have failed to come to Him with humility this past year. Then, slowly read Psalm 139 each morning for the rest of the week, resting in the truth of a God who holds you in His hands and who knows more about you than you know of yourself. Where have you departed from His presence and truth? How can you begin to return?

FAST

How has fasting this week cultivated a humble heart in you?

ACTIVITY

As you walk through the story of the Prodigal Son this week, host a friend in (or outside) your house, making a “home” for them the same way God invites us back home to his presence. You can cook a special dinner, sit on the back porch or around a fire, play games, or watch a movie. Whatever it is, do everything you can to not just set a pretty table, but include this person as a part of the family, remembering that God invites us close, showers us in abundance, and crowns us with His joy.

FROM DISTANCE TO PERSEVERANCE



WEAKNESS

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. / He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. / He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. / Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. / You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. / You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. / Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 23 (NIV)

If you grew up in public school, you probably had to read some version of Homer's 'The Odyssey' for one of your classes. College courses on Greek mythology teach the classic tale of a king's journey home after the Trojan war, facing mythical creatures and angry gods and relentless suitors trying to take his throne. It is an epic poem, and while it is not founded on any spiritual truth, there is a particular visual that might prove helpful for us this week.

The hero, Odysseus, is warned of the Island of Sirens, monsters masquerading as beautiful women with alluring voices that prove a fatal trap to each sailor who allows himself to be enticed to his death. However, if Odysseus and his men will plug their ears and tie themselves to the ship that is taking them home, they have a chance to survive, unable to hear the lies being sung and unable to move toward the voices uttering them.

So, with his men's ears stuffed with wax and himself tied faithfully to the mast of the ship, the men endure temptation. From a Christian perspective, the poem allows us to see the struggle of sin, the temptation of that which evil leads us to, and how only with God do we overcome it.

It would be naïve to think that this year has not brought its own versions of temptations and sirens calls to our doorsteps. The weight of isolation, illness, fear, division, death, and loneliness are just a small list of ways you might have felt reason to drift from God. **People and politics and possessions promise us a happier way, a steadier foundation, a place to belong and be loved; the problem is, they can't keep their promises any better than a cup with holes can keep holding water.** In the face of prayers that have not been answered yet, illness that makes no sense, children who have wandered, spouses who have shut us out, or loss that feels so aching we don't know how we'll make it to tomorrow, it is so easy to drift toward the songs of life that promise fulfillment apart from God. Band-aid after band-aid, we believe the deceitful song the sirens sing, and it becomes our demise.

Psalm 23 is one of the most famous passages in all the Bible. It is short and succinct, and yet it gives us a broad and beautiful picture of the scope of God's love and care for us. It begins: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." 'Shepherd' denotes authority, protection, and care. This announcement of His character gives way to the rest of the song, teaching us that because **He is our shepherd, He is faithful to lead us into rest, to guide us on right paths, to shield us in dark times, to correct us when we need it.**

But God is not only a Shepherd that leads us to still waters. He is also a Shepherd who is with us in dark valleys, who provides for us amongst our enemies. He does not say we will never feel the darkness encroach, nor does he say we will never have to face enemies. Instead he says that all of the things that are true of him will anchor us in the midst of both scenarios. We need not fear; because He is with us, our cup overflows.

In the midst of dark valleys, or deserts of the soul that feel never ending, when the enemies of self-hatred or insecurity keep inviting themselves to our table, we must hold both hurt and hope in our hands, trusting Jesus to shepherd us faithfully.

For while we wonder and wander, Christ remains near, never causing shame about either heart condition and inviting us deeper into perseverance and trust.

Honesty about our distance from the home of His presence, a vulnerability to come to him weak and broken, and singing the truth of his authority over our lives are

the only ways to persevere into true joy. So we remind ourselves of this truth, that surely his goodness and love will follow us all the days of our lives, if only we will continue to call him shepherd. He is the means of travel and the safe destination. He is equally the way and the how. He is both the boat that holds us to truth and the wax that stops our ears from hearing lies.

PRAYER

You are a Good Shepherd. You have sought me when I was lost and kept me when I am found. You see every part of me and yet love me all the same. I lack nothing. You invite me to rest and you invite me to depth. Every valley is only an opportunity to see more of your grace and power. I know in my head that your word is true, but God I am asking you this week to make it true in my heart. Remind me that your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and that I can be content to dwell in your beautiful house of grace forever and ever.

RESPONSE

This week, read Psalm 23 each morning before your day begins and at the end of each day before you go to sleep. Ask God to help you pinpoint what ways you have wandered towards the song of the world this year, and ask Him to shepherd you Home.

In addition, spend time reflecting on these lyrics, utilizing the story of the Odyssey to point us to the Cross of Christ in whatever season or song we might find ourselves in.

Trouble has beset my ways and wicked winds have blown / Sirens call my name; they say they'll ease my pain, then break me on the stones / But true love is the burden that will carry me back home / Carry me with the memories of the beauty I have known/ I'm sailing home to you; I won't be long / By the light of moon I will press on / So tie me to the mast of this old ship and point me home.

"Ulysses," Josh Garrels

FAST

How has fasting this week taught you about your own weakness and Christ's strength?

ACTIVITY

As both the story and the psalm above show, life is never short of obstacles to navigate. This week's activity will allow us to act this out in a very tangible way! All you need is a blindfold, an egg, a spoon, a voice, and a distraction. One person will put on the blindfold and be handed the spoon with the egg in it. Another person will be in charge of directing them with their voice alone towards an end goal in the room or backyard. All other participants will make as much noise and distraction as possible while the guide is trying to articulate where the blindfolded person should go. If you have no other participants, try blasting music or TV for distraction! As you complete this, talk about how difficult it is to hear the right voice and how much trust and patience it takes to follow it accurately.

FROM DIVISION TO FELLOWSHIP



FORGIVENESS

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... Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

Psalm 51:1-4, 12-13 (NIV)

The 1986 Los Angeles Central Library Fire is known as the largest library fire in the history of the US. The Library was worth close to 70 million dollars, full of a variety of books and films and musical scores and maps and photographs and manuals and thousands upon thousands of other treasures. It was a collection of beauty and history, and it served the local community day in and day out as both a resource for the mind, and even as a shelter for the body. Prior to and during 1986, the library had racked up years' worth of fire code violations: blocked exits, exposed light bulbs, frayed electrical cords, overcrowded rooms and stacks. Over and over again library officials were warned of the hazards if these damages went unattended, yet other things kept coming up. The list fell by the wayside.

The day of the fire, the fire alarms went off, and no one batted an eye. People haphazardly left their belongings in the library, believing the alarm system had gone array just like it always did. Fire trucks showed up and checked the building once, claiming it was clear, and only went back in a second time because the alarms refused to reset; they kept blaring "SOMETHING IS ON FIRE." When the firefighters reached the fiction stacks on their second round, they saw a light smoke weaving through the stacks. And then suddenly, the temperature in the room jumped from 70 degrees to 450 degrees to 900 degrees Fahrenheit as the perfect storm of conditions created a fire like none they had ever seen. The fire was so hot, some firefighters said it lacked any color at all, burning clear like glass. Water was just evaporating, doing nothing to tame the fire's harsh tongues.

The library burned on April 29, 1986 for 7 hours and 38 minutes. Hundreds of thousands of books and resources were lost, and it took over 350 firefighters to suppress the flames into ashes.

Ashes and ruins surround David as we read Psalm 51. **He was a king who had everything, and yet in small decisions every day he allowed division, first in his heart, and then in his kingdom.**

A quick glance at 2 Samuel 11 makes us wonder why he wasn't at war with his men, why he failed to live up to the duties and honor assigned him as king. And the mistakes begin escalating as he sleeps with a woman who is married to one of his soldiers, Uriah; as a baby is conceived from this sin, as he manipulates Uriah for his own gain; as he gives the orders that will kill Uriah, the faithful husband and soldier, when all other sin fails to save David from the chaos he created. **David's fire code violations of apathy, pride, and selfishness erupted into flames of murder, adultery, and deceit, consuming everything in their path.** It is only when David is confronted by Nathan and convicted by God himself that he says, "I have sinned against the Lord," (2 Samuel 12:13).

David realizes that all of the violations, all of the sins, all of the flames and destruction and chaos point to one thing: his deviation from the love of God.

This is the same man who slayed a giant. This undignified ruler was also the shepherd boy who played the harp and did not seek the death of Saul though Saul sought his life. This was a man after God's own heart, but for an entire chapter of text we see not one hint of his relationship with God.

And so, with the fragments of a life-taking fire staring him down, he does not first announce to the world his sins, he does not continue to displace blame, nor does he try to bandage everything up and send gift cards and flowers to those he's hurt. **David repents to God, the Holy and Awesome King of all Kings who is to be feared as much as He is to be loved.**

His divided heart is purified and brought back into fellowship with God because David knows God's forgiveness is never ending. Here God begins to weave beauty from

ashes. In verse 13 we learn that our salvation does not stop at unity with God, but that it naturally develops into forgiveness and unity with one another.

At the end of 2 Samuel 12, we see David assume his rightful position in leading his army into battle against the Ammonites. In his restoration with God, God restores his relationships with his people as well. Today, we ask for the same restoration, that our hearts would be bent low at the altar of God and ready to love those alongside us because of how deeply loved and forgiven we know we are.

PRAYER

Teach me how true your mercy is, God. Reveal the ways in which my heart has wandered far from your love, where I've filled my days with divided devotions. God give me courage, strength, and trust in you to ask hard questions, to have open eyes to what Your Spirit is telling me. Give me the courage to lay my failures and flaws at your feet. God, you delight in me bringing You all of me, with my laundry list of fire code violations gone ignored in the corridors of my soul. You still want me. You still love me. And I know you will be faithful to restore me to joy, to life, and to the community you have given me. Help me to humble myself before you and rest there today.

RESPONSE

As we journey closer towards Holy Week, we're going to learn from God moving in and through David's story. At the beginning of the week, read 2 Samuel 11 + 12, taking notes about what you think the text is saying about David, about God's character, and about you. Then, take time to rest in Psalm 51 each morning, asking God to show you yourself in David's story. In the library of your life, what violations keep popping up that you don't want to deal with? What ways have you compromised and learned to live with a divided heart, bent towards the wrong ends?

FAST

How has fasting this week allowed you to receive forgiveness from God and pursue forgiveness with others?

ACTIVITY

This week's activity involves a little bit of science and a whole lot of fun. You'll need: one empty plastic bottle, one tablespoon dry yeast, three tablespoon warm water, one squirt of liquid dish soap, a half cup of hydrogen peroxide, and three to four drops of food coloring. Pour the peroxide into the bottle, and then add the dish soap and a few drops of food coloring. Swirl gently to mix. In a separate bowl, mix together the yeast and warm water, stirring for thirty seconds. Pour this mixture into the bottle and step back, watching the reaction that forms before your eyes!

The addition of various materials seemed harmless until all combined, which caused a huge (and fun!) reaction. Often this is what happens with our sin. We begin with small ingredients like white lies, bitterness, or fear, and when we do not deal with them appropriately, they explode into a giant unexpected mess. Talk about a time this resembled sin in your life and how you can return to God for forgiveness so that it does not happen again.

FROM DUSK TO DAWN



THE CROSS

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

Romans 6:8-11 (ESV)

"Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." The famous philosopher Loretta Lynn said that, and perhaps no truer words have ever been uttered.

We come now to the final week of our Lent journey, a march together through the paths less traveled, walks through confession and loss, grief and death. Through these days of prayer and fasting we have accepted the difficult work of taking stock of our lives and releasing what isn't essential. The image that comes to mind is of a sinking ship, with many miles home to go, deciding what to cast off to earn a few more days on the waves.

But that image, though perhaps accurate in its description of desperation, isn't quite right for us as we walk together toward the celebration of Easter. We know that it's joy ahead of us, not panic, and this often painful journey of exposing sin and confessing weakness is not simply a means of survival. It's inspiration for hope. We are preparing now for the fullness ahead.

There is work to be done while we wait. Here, now. Before Easter comes Good Friday. Before resurrection comes death in all its ugliness.

We encounter death much differently today than how it was experienced decades and centuries ago. Have you ever passed by an older church, for example, maybe one in a smaller town, and seen a cemetery right next to it, on the same property? This wasn't simply an arrangement of convenience, for pastors to avoid a motorcade through town to facilitate funerals. **No, the church was where death was acknowledged in grief and where life was celebrated in joy.**

Imagine walking up to church on a Sunday morning and seeing gravestones beside you. We might consider this today a morbid thought, but then think about the songs you might sing after you entered the sanctuary. "Now by this I'll overcome, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Now by this I'll reach my home, nothing but the blood of Jesus." Or maybe a modern selection is better for this hypothetical: "Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free. Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me."

The church was never a place for death to be ignored. It was acknowledged as present there, but ultimately defeated. The church is where death is buried.

We understand this in our heads, but the reality of our end is something we feel more comfortable keeping from our hearts. After all, Jesus brings resurrection life, so why would we spend any energy focusing on death?

Believing in the resurrection life Christ welcomes us into does not erase the reality of our suffering or the inevitability of our deaths. No, Christ comes to inhabit and experience both of these with us that we might see them through his perspective – no longer as main characters in the tragic narrative of our humanity but now instead the vanquished villains of his Gospel story. Lent is a season where we do not turn away from death but stare at it in confidence, prepared for our passage through it in the strength of Jesus. Death has lost its power but gained a purpose. As Alexander Schmemann writes:

"In this world there shall be tribulation. Whether reduced to a minimum by man himself, or given some relief by the religious promise of a reward in the "other world," suffering remains here, it remains awfully "normal." And yet Christ says, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Through his own suffering, not only has all suffering acquired a meaning but it has been given the power to become itself the sign, the sacrament, the proclamation, the "coming" of that victory; the defeat of man, his very dying, has become a way of Life."

We all long for heaven, but there is no arrival without journey. We long to abide with Christ in his Kingdom, but death is the doorway.

Death to the world. Death to our flesh. Death to our distractions.

Death to our idols. Death to us. We travel light and arrive lighter.

This is “folly” to the world, as scripture says. **It is the backwards call of an enemy lifestyle, a shock to the systems of greed and entertainment. But it’s medicine to the world, too.**

The world needs a teacher. It needs guidance. It needs Jesus. And in his wisdom and his grace, Jesus spoke in the language that humanity best understands. He spoke through death the words of life.

This is how God is heard, how he speaks to us and through us. Isaiah 30:20 says, “And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher

will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.”

In the end, all of our searching and fasting and confessing and praying leads to this. In taking up our cross we become like Christ. In dying we receive his resurrection. And just as he gave himself for the life of the world, we are now transformed into his body to do the same. We have let go, we have made room, we have emptied ourselves of ourselves so that Jesus might come and have his way in us, through us, for us.

The world longs for heaven, and we know how to get there. **But the only way to show others the path of hope is to walk it faithfully, step by step behind our Savior, through death to life.**

PRAYER

Jesus thank you for the gift of new life that I could never have earned or secured on my own. You heard my cry. You knew my despair. And you met every need and mended every wound in my heart. You carried every tear and every pain on your cross, and on the other side of resurrection, I know you carry my joy there too. Thank you that your love for me never wavered, that it pressed on unto death. I’m here because of you. You are my joy and my strength. Help me to proclaim that loudly, to show the world that death is no longer a prison but now a passage to your Kingdom. Give me the strength to take up my cross and follow after you.

RESPONSE

Lent is a season of self-examination. As we wrap this movement through Holy Week and the turn from Good Friday to Easter, do not skip death on the way to resurrection. How do you pick up your cross? What must be nailed to it in your life? Many of these questions have been provoked in our journey together, but as we conclude this week, and as you make the prayer above your own, consider how you might mark these changes in your life in remembrance of Christ's victory over your sins and the world's. In scripture, the people of God made monuments to commemorate God's faithfulness. What have you changed about your schedule or habits or relationships during Lent that cleared the way for a fresh understanding of God's work in your life? How might you continue to live beyond this season in a way that brings this to your mind and your heart?

FAST

How has your fast this week led you to embrace the cross? How has what you let go of shown the world what you cling to?

ACTIVITY

Take some time this week to serve your neighbor from the margin your fast has carved out. In a previous week we invited you to welcome someone into your home. This week the emphasis is on bringing "home" to others out of the overflow of sacrifice. Go out of your normal, pre-Lent way to serve someone else this week, as you turn your fasting and prayer to self-giving, just as Christ did for us.

RESOURCES

BOOKS ABOUT LENT AND THE CHURCH YEAR

- ◆ Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*
- ◆ Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year: The Spiraling Adventure of the Spiritual Life*
- ◆ Bobby Gross, *Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God*
- ◆ Alexander Schmemann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*
- ◆ Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church*
- ◆ Robert F. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*

DAILY DEVOTIONALS FOR THE LENT SEASON

- ◆ ACCAscending.com (a daily devotional developed by Alamo Community Church in 2018)
- ◆ Walter Brueggemann, *A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions for Lent*
- ◆ Paul David Tripp, *Journey to the Cross: A 40-Day Lenten Devotional*
- ◆ Various, *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter*

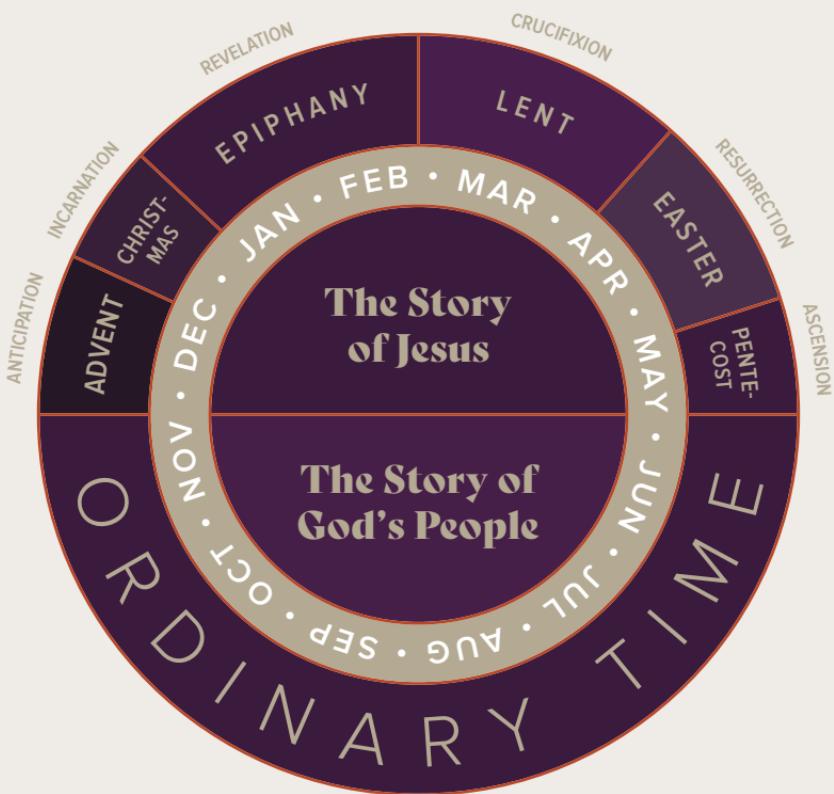
SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

A collection of songs for reflection and contemplation is available on Spotify to coincide with the days of this devotional. Search “*From Dust to Dawn*” to add it to your app today.

CONTRIBUTORS

From Dust to Dawn was developed and written by Alamo Community Church’s Pastor of Worship, Caleb Saenz and Director of Young Adults, Hannah Adkison.

Art design was created by Rylie Pankratz.



Whenever we remember and practice the Gospel narrative, we're formed into the body of Christ as a living witness to the Kingdom and its path to flourishing. We know this is true of our worship each Sunday, but it can be true of our worship over the course of a year as well. Each season of this calendar witnesses to a part of Christian history and invites the Church to practice and embody what these seasons reveal about God's character and His plan. Together we receive and steward the gift of time to minister to a world drifting painfully from God's purpose. As you continue to worship with us this year, consider how these seasons might invite you to a greater appreciation of the power of the Gospel.



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